DICKENS' CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DICKENS' NOVELS

AND THE LANGUAGE AND CONVENTIONS

OF THE CINEMA

by

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ABSTRACT

Dickens' imagination is strongly visual and the visual
art it most closely resembles is film. We find, in his work,
narrative techniques and methods of characterization which
actually anticipate the development of film aesthetics. Sergei
Eisenstein, the founder of the principles of film montage, was
the first to draw attention to this cinematic imagination which
Dickens possessed, in his essay "Dickens, Griffith and the Film
Today" in _Film_ _Form_. It is the function of the first chapter
of this thesis to document, more fully than Eisenstein, these
cinematic techniques.

D.W. Griffith, who has been called the creator of film
language, claimed that he was influenced by his reading of
Dickens' novels. His study, he said, allowed him to develop
the technique of parallel cut-back which is the basis of montage.
This claim is examined by a comparison of Dickens' novels and
Griffith's films. In the final chapter I have compared Dickens'
work to that of some contemporary film-makers whose concepts
of realism seem to resemble Dickens' own. It is hoped that
such a comparison will help to defend the novelist against
critics who have attacked his frequent refusal to conform
to another aesthetic convention--psychological realism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

It is the function of this thesis to venture some
notes towards a theory of the formal properties of Dickens'
novels. To undertake such a task by establishing strong links
with film aesthetics may appear curious or illogical. My
defense for taking such an unusual stance is grounded in a
survey which I undertook of the history of Dickens scholar-
ship. This study revealed, to my surprise, that while much
has been made of Dickens as a social critic, as an investigator
of the subconscious and much more, no critic has made a
systematic study of form. By this last, I mean structure,
style and techniques of narration and characterization.
J. Hillis Miller, in the 1950s, was the first critic to
produce a comprehensive theory of the novelist's thematic
preoccupations. Because the methodology from which he was
working was phenomenology, his book, <u>Charles Dickens</u>: <u>The</u>
<u>World</u> <u>of</u> <u>His</u> <u>Novels</u> (see Bibliography) does focus to some
extent on form. However, like the other, isolated appraisals
of technique, no <u>theory</u> was constructed.

Some time before the writing of this thesis I noticed
images in Dickens' novels which seemed particularly cinematic.
My attention was drawn to Sergei Eisenstein's seminal article
in <u>Film Form</u> (see Bibliography) on the influence of Dickens
on the 'creator' of film language, D.W. Griffith. Initially,
I intended to provide a more thorough documentation of Dickens'
cinematic techniques than had been taken before and this is

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represented by the first two chapters. During the research
for and writing of these chapters I became convinced that it
was not enough to posit the influence of Dickens on film.
If one reversed the process and applied theories of film to
Dickens' works, new concepts would emerge. Ultimately there
was insufficient time at my disposal to examine fully these
concepts, far less, to elaborate them into a theory. Thus
the thesis is constructed as 'notes towards' rather than by
a hypothesis, an argument and a conclusion.

Necessarily, work of this kind is speculative rather
than analytical in the conventional sense. Also, I have found
myself venturing into areas that may well be frowned upon by
many scholars. For example, I have made a break-down of an
entire section of Pickwick Papers as if it were a film script.
I have borrowed from the cinema terms like fade dissolve, pan
and tracking shot and applied them to portions of the text
without apology. Some interest in and knowledge of the cinema
is assumed in the reader but I have attempted to provide a
basic background to film theory where ideas expressed in the
thesis seem to demand it.

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Chapter One

Dickens and the Visual Aspect

In order to understand Dickens' relation to the aesthetics of the cinema, it is important to bear in mind that his imagination is strongly visual. While it is true that in novels like Great Expectations and David Copperfield he attempts an analysis of psychological motivation and, indeed, towards the middle of his career, can be seen to be looking closely at problems of the subconscious, it cannot be denied that a recurrent assumption behind the created universe of Dickens remains the notion that human beings are ultimately unknowable. Therefore, in his work, appearance--those signs and clues that people and objects throw out in order to reveal or conceal their true character and identity--acquires a special, even central significance. His examination of the structure of appearance often leaves him little time for that other virtue which later critical theory came to call 'psychological realism'.

What distinguishes Dickens from his contemporaries and successors is his ability to 'see'. Evidently the trait was always present in him and was sharpened by his early years as a journalist. In an attempt to analyze what he calls, in a chapter heading, "Amazing Powers of Visualization",[1] Stefan Zweig

draws attention to the portraits of the novelist himself:

> The powers of visualization are almost miraculous.
> Dickens was a visualizing genius. Look at the
> portraits we have of him in youth and, better still,
> as an elderly man. The whole countenance is dominated
> by those wonderful eyes. . . . They were steely as a
> safe within which a treasure is concealed, whence it
> cannot be stolen or lost, where neither fire nor air
> can penetrate to destroy; and this treasure consisted
> of all that he had observed once and put away,
> yesterday or many years ago--the sublimest side by
> side with the most trivial of items. . . . Nothing
> escaped those eyes; they were stronger than time;
> . . . Nothing dribbled away into forgetfulness,
> nothing became pale or blurred; . . . This visual
> memory of Dickens's was unparalleled. 2

As a parliamentary reporter, Dickens had been required to pay

the closest attention to detail. His mastery of shorthand

allowed him to produce _verbatim_ accounts of parliamentary

debates which were commended by his editors and envied by his

colleagues for their accuracy. The problem of reproducing

events visually before the advent of photo-journalism forced

him to exercise his literary imagination within the restrictive

bounds of factual reporting, a vigorous discipline which left

its mark on his art as a novelist.

As Graham Petrie points out, "Although we tend to think

of Dickens primarily as a novelist, his books have from the

beginning over-stepped the bounds of print. The title _Sketches_

by Boz (1836) indicates an appeal to the visual imagination. . . ."[3]

The unprecedented success of the _Sketches_ can be attributed to

the delight of its audience in Dickens' remarkable closeness

of observation, or, what a contemporary reviewer described as

the "graphic faculty of placing in the most whimsical and

amusing lights the follies and absurdities of human nature."[4]
Given this graphic quality to his writing, it is hardly
surprising that he was offered the opportunity to provide the
accompanying text to Robert Seymour's series of sporting
prints which were to become The Pickwick Papers.

Dickens' audacity at suggesting to the established
artist that the plates should be subordinated to the text
is hardly surprising. Because his style is so visually
specific--so detailed, so closely observed and so idiosyncratic
in its observation--Dickens found that Seymour's illustrations
and his own text simply contradicted each other. Indeed, later
in his career, when producing the illustrated numbers of his
novels, he always exercised the closest possible control over
the plates, giving detailed instructions to his best illustrator,
Hablot Browne, concerning the passage to be illustrated and
the way in which he wished his characters to be depicted and
placed within the picture-space.

In recent years, there has been a revival of critical
interest in the illustrations. William Blacklock, in a study
of these illustrations, points out that when editions of the
novels omit them, " they exclude something which the author
specifically wanted to be a part of the novel which he was
writing; Dickens wrote his novels with the effect of the
illustrations in mind. . . ."[5] The visual aspect of his novels
was always of great importance to Dickens' conception of the
work as a whole; the illustrations are not a separate dimension

of the text but an integral part of it and to read a Dickens
novel without the plates is to distort it, or even to miss
levels of meaning which exist in the conjunction of the image
and the word, just as reading a film-script is an aesthetically
different experience from seeing the film. Michael Steig
argues that the illustrated novel "may with justice be claimed
as a kind of Victorian subgenre,"[6] or an attempt to produce
mixed-media works, which increases its importance for the emergence
of film at the end of the century.

Q. D. Leavis demonstrates that the novels as both
literary and visual events were a product of a different
emphasis in sense perception. The illustrations of Cruikshank
and Browne were descendants of the satiric art of the eighteenth
century, notably, the work of Hogarth. One had, in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "a public which, even when
highly literate, was accustomed to a visual art going hand in
hand with the presentation of political ideas and their dis-
cussion and with the moralistic literature. . . . All were
accustomed to taking in ideas in a stylized form and had an
imagination formed by the tradition of moral satire independent
of literacy."[7] Mrs Leavis recognizes that at the roots of
Dickens' imagination is a literary tradition in which verbal
and visual components were inseparable:

> The suitability of Cruikshank and 'Phiz' for Dickens
> was not accidental; the principle of convergence that
> novelist and artists seem to exhibit so successfully
> is due to their all belonging to the tradition of
> visual-literary moralistic-satiric art with its roots
> in Pope and Hogarth.   [8]

Mrs Leavis goes on to speak of "Dickens's brilliantly

imaginative translation of Hogarth's visual art into his own."[9]

It should also be remembered that Dickens' unprecedented

popularity, due to the mass-availability created by cheap serial

publication as opposed to the half-guinea volume, allowed him

to reach a non-literate audience; his novels were not simply

read, but read aloud, in middle-class households by the head

of the house to an assembly of family and servants. In this way,

the consumption of Dickens' novels by the nineteenth-century

audience more closely resembled a performance, rendered more

theatrical by the visual element of the illustrations:

> . . .those who took their installments of fiction
> orally could fix those in their memories by the two
> or more full-page pictures that came with each, with
> the added help of the descriptive pictorial cover that
> Dickens always had drawn to summarize the plot and
> themes and show the leading characters in appropriate
> combinations and context , with the addition of the
> meaningful frontispiece and often a vignette on the
> title-page. . . .   10

It is worth pointing out here that the plates are not

single isolated images but in themselves form narrative links.

The single image is not so important as the relationship of

images to each other, as in a present day comic book, or the

way in which a scene in a film is composed of shots. In the

frontispiece to Dombey and Son there is a narrative line running

clockwise, charting the progress of the events. The frontis-

piece actually proposes the entire action of the novel, like

the dumb-shows or masques that often preceded sixteenth-century

plays. The illustrations provide a kind of sub-text by which the

illustrator can make points which are inherent in the writing but not specifically stated. Steig shows that by the use of parallels, Browne's illustrations could link together seemingly disparate aspects of the text. For example, in <u>Bleak House</u>, a parallel is drawn between Chadband and Turveydrop by showing each with an arm raised in the act of bestowing a blessing upon his followers with "a pair of true believers and a single doubter placed in a relatively similar position in each plate. . . ."[11] Steig argues that such a parallel is far from being an arbitrary accident:

> The significance of the parallels seems clear.
> Turveydrop and Chadband are two characters among many
> in the novel who embody the theme of false, quasi-
> religious belief; but they are linked especially by
> the blatancy of their own selfish desires. Yet without
> the parallel of the illustrations, one's impression
> may be that these two fat men are merely two among a
> whole series of miscellaneous grotesques who come off
> and on stage like a series of vaudeville performers.
> The thematic connections between Turveydrop and Chad-
> band were undoubtedly in Dickens' mind, but it is the
> illustrations, rather than either of the narrators,
> that make these connections explicit. [12]

The presence of paralleling in the illustrations reinforces Dickens' own use of imitative parallels (the device whereby different portions of the text are mirrored), as an important narrative technique. This device is at the heart of the concept of parallel cut-back which, as I shall show in the next chapter, D.W. Griffith borrowed from Dickens to lay the foundations of film montage.

Another interesting device which Browne adopted from the tradition of English graphic art was the choric detail. For

example, in Plate 25 of <u>Bleak House</u>,[13] which depicts the inter-

view between the predatory lawyer, Vholes, and his victim,

Richard Carstone, behind Vholes' chair a cat watches a mouse-

hole. Such minor details obviously provide a commentary on

the main 'action'. In Plate 28 of <u>Barnaby Rudge</u>,[14] Mr Chester

is depicted speaking to his son, prior to banishing him from

his house forever, and in the background is a painting of

Abraham sacrificing Isaac, with the father on the point of

plunging the dagger into the boy's breast. Blacklock suggests

that "To some extent the audience would have had a kind of

visual training and would know how to 'read' the details which

the artist included in the illustrations, and usually such

details would function as a comment, or an implied message or

moral, in the picture."[15] This, of course, stems from an

iconographic tradition in the visual arts which had systems of

representation which we can no longer readily interpret unless

we turn to the manuals that were published, like Cesare Ripa's

<u>Iconologia</u>, which Jonson drew on for his designs for triumphal

arches. These systems provided a visual language with fixed

meanings and perhaps a 'grammar'. Mrs Leavis notes that Hogarth

and Gilray provided a visual training for Dickens which

"implied a sharpening of the wits, a habit of visualizing

character and situation as types, and an instinctive practice

of moralizing a spectacle, with an expectation of wildly

exaggerated characteristics. . . ."[16] Thus although critics

have accused Dickens' characters of being 'one-dimensional'

or crudely portrayed, in fact, one could argue that they more truly belong to a complex tradition of representation in the visual arts.

Dickens' position in the nineteenth century is an interesting one. On the one hand, he was in possession of a legacy of both the narrative art and the conventions of iconography (it is worth remembering that Victorian painting took a highly narrative form). Linked together with his own extraordinary capacity for visualization, this tradition helped to produce novels which require of the reader an active engagement of the visual imagination. But Dickens was also living in the century which saw the birth of photography and the experiments which were to result in the first projection of moving pictures.

In A.D. 130, Ptolemy of Alexandria, studying optics, wrote of the phenomenon of the 'persistence of vision', that is: "The property possessed by the eye of retaining one image for a period of time after the light stimulus is removed, thus making it possible to eliminate visible discontinuity in the projection of film."[17] For centuries, the knowledge of this phenomenon provoked speculation and investigation amongst thinkers and scientists, but apart from the invention of the camera obscura in the eleventh century, much used by painters of the Renaissance, and the magic lantern in the seventeenth century--Pepys bought one some years before the first descrip-

tion of its use by Athanasius Kircher in 1671--no experiments
to fix the image received in the camera obscura had succeeded.

It was not until the nineteenth century that break-
throughs in photography came, beginning with Nicéphore Niepce's
work which commenced in France in 1814, his collaboration
with Daguerre in 1829, and the studies of the 'persistence of
vision' by Faraday and others in the 1820s. In the next decade,
Fox-Talbot in England and Daguerre in France each succeeded in
chemically fixing images. Evidently, Dickens was aware of these
experiments, and of their implications for art and for society,
for in Oliver Twist we find the following ironic aside:

> 'Ah!' said the old lady, 'painters always make ladies
> out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any
> custom, child. The man that invented the machine for
> taking likenesses might have known that would never
> succeed; it's a deal too honest. A deal,' said the
> old lady, laughing very heartily at her own acuteness. 18

The process referred to here is not photography, but helio-
graphy, in which the plate, after long exposure and development
in a solvent of lavender and white petroleum, produced a faint
image. One might expect that Dickens would have been
fascinated by a device which fulfilled mechanically what he
himself executed so brilliantly in prose--the detailed represent-
ation of the visible world.

The experiments to produce moving pictures continued
through the course of the century, occupying a period of about
sixty-five years and culminating in the commercial promotion of
the Cinématograph in 1895. Thus Dickens, writing in a tradition
emanating from the visual arts, was also a link between two

modes of visual perception. The extent to which Dickens was
directly influenced by these experiments is hardly relevant.
It was the social, philosophical, religious and scientific
condition of the nineteenth century which produced both Dickens
and these experiments in making dynamic the static image.

One needs only to examine the way in which Dickens
handles the street-scenes, the evocation of London life in
the Sketches, to see the direction his imagination would take.
The evolution of his style from the Sketches to the last novels
shows an increasing mastery of the visual image, and reveals
its implications for the act of perception. The digressions in
Pickwick Papers seem to owe their existence to theatrical
melodrama; while their structural value in the novel may be
contentious, they remain interesting exercises in narrative
techniques.

In the following section, I have made a detailed break-
down of Chapter III, "The Stroller's Tale". We can see here the
possibility of constructing something that more closely resembles
a film-script than the scenario for a play:

1. Series of short shots to make up an introductory sequence,
showing the actor in happier days and his eventual downfall:
the public house, being turned away by theatre managers.
(Cut to. . .)

2. Scene in the theatre, backstage. Medium shot of "a host
of shabby, poverty-stricken men hang about the stage of a large

establishment. . . ." Tracking shot of "ballet people,
procession men, tumblers, and so forth."[19] Pan to the actor
'taking the chair'. (Cut to. . .)

3. Dismissal. Cut to acts of borrowing. Cut to appearance
in minor theatre. (Cut to. . .)

4. Medium shot of the narrator crossing the stage; the actor
taps his shoulder. Medium close shot, zooming into the face of
the actor and then back: "His bloated body and shrunken legs--
their deformity enhanced a hundred fold by the fantastic
dress--the glassy eyes, contrasting fearfully with the thick
white paint with which the face was besmeared; the grotesquely
ornamented head, trembling with paralysis, and the long, skinny
hands, rubbed with white chalk. . . ."[20] Cut to medium-long
shot of the actor taking the narrator aside; his hollow
tremulous voice; the request for money; the narrator puts
money into his hand and turns away. Hears the roar of laughter
as the actor makes his entrance. (Cut to. . .)

5. At the theatre. Small boy goves the narrator a note. Cut
to the curtain falling. Cut to the narrator leaving the theatre.
(Cut to. . .)

6. Medium-long shot tracking the progress of the narrator through
the streets, panning in to the windows: "It was a dark cold
night, with a chill damp wind, which blew the rain heavily
against the windows and house fronts. Pools of water had
collected in the narrow and little frequented streets, and many
of the thinly-scattered oil-lamps had been blown out by the

violence of the wind. . . ."[21] Medium-close shot of oil-lamp guttering. (Cut to. . .)

7. Medium-long shot of the exterior of the house, "a coal shed with one story above it."[22] He enters the house. Cut to the stairs; the actor's wife. Cut to the room; she places a chair by the bedside. (Cut to. . .)

8. Medium shot of the bed, the curtains blowing in the draught. Pan to the fire; pan to the table and its contents; pan to the child sleeping on the bed on the floor with its mother by its side; pan up the walls to the shelves and the stage shoes and foils hanging beneath them; pan down to the floor and along to the corner with its heap of rags. Track back to the whole room. (Cut to. . .)

9. Medium shot of the bed with the feverish actor lying in it. Pan to a close-up of his face. Pan to his hand falling on the narrator's. Cut to close-up of his face. (Cut to. . .)

10. Dialogue between the actor and the narrator. Cut back and forth between close-ups or medium-close shots of their faces intercut with one shot of the wife's face. (Cut to. . .)

11. The narrator returns the following night. Close-up of the actor's face: "The last four-and-twenty hours had produced a frightful alteration The eyes, though deeply sunk and heavy, shone with a lustre frightful to behold. The lips were parched, and cracked in many places: the dry hard skin glowed with a burning heat, and there was an almost unearthly air of wild anxiety in the man's face, indicating even more strongly the

ravages of the disease."[23]   (Cut to. . .)

12. Flashback to the previous night in the theatre. "I saw the
wasted limbs, (cut to) which a few hours before had been dis-
torted for the amusement of a boisterous gallery, (cut to)
writhing under the tortures of a burning fever--(cut to) I
heard the clown's shrill laugh, (dissolve) blending with the
low murmurings of the dying man."[24]   (Cut to. . .)

13. The actor's incoherent ramblings about the theatre. Medium
close-shot of him 'acting'. "He rose in bed, drew up his
withered limbs, and rolled about in uncouth positions; he was
acting--he was at the theatre. A minute's silence and he murmured
the burden of some roaring song."[25]   (Dissolve to. . .)

14. Fantasy scene: "A short period of oblivion, and he was
wandering through a tedious maze of low-arched rooms--so low sometimes
that he must creep upon his hands and knees to make his way
along; it was close and dark, and every way he turned, some
obstacle impeded his progress. (cut to) There were insects too,
hideous crawling things with eyes that stared upon him, and
filled the very air around: glistening horribly amidst the
thick darkness of the place. (cut to) The walls and ceiling
were alive with reptiles--(cut to long-shot) the vault expanded
to an enormous size--frightful figures flitted to and fro--
(close-up) and the faces of men he knew, rendered hideous by
gibing and mouthing, peered out from among them; (cut to medium-
close shot of the actor) they were searing him with heated irons,
and binding his head with cords till the blood started; and

he struggled madly for life."[26]

15. Medium-close shot of the actor sleeping. Slow fade as the narrator dozes off. Cut to close-up of the actor's face. (Cut to. . .)

16. Medium shot of the child rising from its bed and running to its father. The mother catches it in her arms. (Cut to. . .)

17. Close-up of the actor's last gesture: ". . .he extended his arm towards them and made another violent effort. There was a rattling noise in his throat--a glare of the eye--a short stifled groan--and he fell back--dead!"[27]

What one notices about this narrative is that despite the obvious influence of Victorian melodrama, in fact it uses certain devices which are difficult to reproduce on the stage. While the fades and the dissolves can be reproduced on the stage by special lighting techniques, the flashback to the previous night in the theatre would pose greater problems since Dickens cuts back and forth between a series of individual images. In the theatre, this would necessitate extremely quick scene changes. In any case, since the whole scene is played in close-up, such an effect would be impossible to convey on the stage.

Robert Seymour's illustration for this chapter has a stagey, tableau quality but the techniques that Dickens uses actually deny the static point of view of the theatre and demand a constantly shifting vision from close-up to long-shot.

In theatre, good direction forces the audience to concentrate
its attention upon specific part of the stage where the
significant action is taking place. While the set is, of course,
important, there is a limited potential for pinpointing props
for a precisely measured length of time. In the cinema, the
camera is an absolute dictator; it shows us certain objects
and does not allow us to see anything else. In this scene from
Pickwick Papers, Dickens does not give us an impression of the
room as if it were a set for the action, but catalogues its
contents which then assume the function of signs--the little
heaps of rags and bundles, like the rags of the actor's life;
the stage-shoes and foils hanging beneath the shelf, which are
both a sign for the actor's profession and icons of the past.
As I shall show later, the 'object' is one of the most important
devices for making statements about theme and character when
there is no narrative voice to describe internal condition.

In Oliver Twist, Dickens' next novel, as Eisenstein
shows, the novelist extended this kind of cinematic perception
to the exterior scene. Eisenstein breaks down the episode where
Oliver and Sikes leave London to burgle the Maylie house, and
indicates how Dickens controls the "austere accumulation and
quickening tempo, this gradual play of light: from the burning
street-lamps, to their being extinguished; from night to dawn;
from dawn, to the full radiance of day. . . this calculated
transition from purely visual elements to an interweaving of

them with aural elements. . . ."[28] In fact, Dickens had already

used similar techniques in the <u>Sketches</u>, particularly in the

two pieces, "The Streets--Morning" and "The Streets--Night".

By the time he came to write <u>Barnaby Rudge</u> in 1841 it is

evident that Dickens had become interested in sense perception

as a theme. Thus we find the frequent references to eyes,

particularly in the opening chapter, and the beginnings of his

fascination with the opposing states of heat and cold as indicators

of internal disposition. In <u>Barnaby Rudge</u> he prefaces a

description of Gabriel Varden's ride to London with the following

treatise on the way the perceiving eye apprehends perceptible

reality:

> A man may be very sober--or at least firmly set upon
> his legs on that neutral ground which lies between the
> confines of perfect sobriety and slight tipsiness--
> and yet feel a strong tendency to mingle up present
> circumstances with others which have no manner of
> connection with them; to confound all consideration
> of persons, things, times, and places; and to jumble
> up his disjointed thoughts together in a kind of
> mental kaleidoscope, producing combinations as
> unexpected as they are transitory.   29

There seems to be here an exposition of filmic montage con-

struction, where transient images of persons and events, in

themselves unrelated, are connected together to produce new and

startling sequences which create a meaning by virtue of their

relationship.

Varden then falls into a slumber, jogging along on his

horse, and experiences his kaleidoscopic dream world as if it

were projected on an inner screen which he 'watches'. With

his sight turned inwards he is not aware that he is approaching

London, and Dickens goes on to describe the growing dawn, to

which Varden himself is insensible. I have broken down this

section into ten stages:

1. "And now he approached the great city, which lay outstretched

before him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the slug-

gish air with a deep dull light. . . .

2. "Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo began to fade,

3. "and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves.

4. "Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly

traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were

clustered round a square or market, or round some great building;

5. "after a time these grew more distinct, and the lamps

themselves were visible; slight yellow specks,

6. "that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out, as intervening

obstacles hid them from the sight.

7. "Then, sounds arose--the striking of church clocks,

the distant bark of dogs,

the hum of traffic in the streets;

8. "then outlines might be traced--tall steeples looming in the

air, and piles of unequal roofs oppressed by chimneys. . .

9. "and forms grew more distinct and numerous still,

10. "and London--visible in the darkness by its own faint light,

and not by that of Heaven--was at hand."[30]

As in the passage from _Oliver Twist_ mentioned above,

this description is notable for the accumulation of detail and the increasing tempo formed by the cross-cutting of visual and aural components. The earlier images are linked by a series of dissolves, as when the "halo began to fade and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves," as if an image were emerging on a photographic plate. What is more interesting, however, is the use of point of view. If this were a scene in a film, it would consist of one continuous tracking shot towards the city. The cuts are organic to the event--scenes are obliterated as "intervening objects hid them from sight." Dickens even notes a qualitative alteration from the 'natural' light cast from the sky, to the artificial light emanating from the city. In common with film, this passage is controlled by the gradual transformation effected by both time and space, by which the two become intertwined.

By the time Dickens came to write A Tale of Two Cities in 1859 he had developed these techniques so that they had little in common with either painting or the theatre. In that novel, he describes the murder of the Marquis by simply documenting the passage of time, that is, the diurnal movement from night to dawn to full day-light. We see the Marquis going to bed in his mansion; Dickens next directs our attention out of the window to the sleeping village:

> The stone faces on the outer walls stared blindly
> at the black night for three heavy hours; for three
> heavy hours the horses in the stables rattled at their

> racks, the dogs barked, and the owls made a noise. . . .
> For three heavy hours, the stone faces of the
> château, lion and human, stared blindly at the
> night. . . . In the village, taxers and taxed were
> fast asleep. . . .
> The fountain in the village flowed unseen and un-
> heard, and the fountain at the château dropped unseen
> and unheard--both melting away, like the minutes that
> were falling from the spring of Time--through three
> dark hours. Then, the grey water of both began to be
> ghostly in the light, and the eyes of the stone faces
> of the château were opened.   31

The cuts between the fountain in the village and the fountain

in the gardens of the château are important because they are a

visual reminder of the fountain in Paris near where the Marquis

has run over and killed a small child--an act which is to lead

to his own murder by the child's father. The use of visual and

sound bridges is one of the most useful devices by which film can link

together sections of narrative when there is no narrating voice

to 'remind' the audience of past events. One of the problems of

film is that it is not possible to stop it or turn it back

during a normal commercial screening, so the film-maker has to

rely on these bridging images. Serial publication, especially

when one is writing novels of the length Dickens was accustomed

to write, raises similar difficulties. As I have indicated, to

some extent the illustrations assisted in making these visual

links, but Dickens was often careful to support them with

images within the text itself.

As the dawn gradually assumes the radiance of daylight,

Dickens returns to his description of the façade of the

château:

> Lighter and lighter, until at last the sun touched
> the tops of the still trees, and poured its radiance
> over the hill. In the glow, the water of the château
> fountain seemed to turn to blood, and the stone faces
> crimsoned. The carol of the birds was loud and high,
> and on the weather-beaten sill of the great window in
> the bed-chamber of Monsieur the Marquis, one little
> bird sang its sweetest song with all its might. At
> this, the nearest stone face seemed to stare amazed,
> and, with opened mouth and dropped under-jaw, looked
> awe-stricken.   32

The water of the fountain turning to blood is clearly a device

which locates in time, though without referring to it specific-

ally, the murder of the Marquis. The stone face, stricken with

awe and outrage at the singing of the bird, is a more complex

image, given Dickens' customary ambivalence about violent action.

Certainly the murder of the Marquis is a blow for freedom, but

Dickens is unable to decide whether the means inevitably justify

the ends. Thus he juxtaposes the two images--the fountain

turning to blood and the stone face appalled by the freedom of

a bird to sing.

What is more interesting, in the light of this dis-

cussion, is the way Dickens uses these visual images as an index

to events of which we are told nothing. Only at the end of the

section do we discover what has occurred and then we see that

these images have anticipated and prepared for their narration.

At the end of the section, the Marquis' face is compared to

"a fine mask, suddenly startled, made angry, and petrified."[33]

It will be added to the line of stone faces, mute and helpless,

a symbol of the inhumanity of the Ancien Régime. During the

whole of this section, what seems to indicate its peculiarly
cinematic qualities is the way the central event is described,
not directly, but in terms of what is external to that main
action. The passage of time, the use of symbols, the close-ups
of the stone faces, suggest rather than report.

A similar technique is used by Michaelangelo Antonioni
near the end of The Passenger (USA, 1975). At the beginning
of the film, the central character, David Locke, a television
journalist, is in North Africa trying to get information for
a story on a guerilla revolt. Arriving back at his hotel,
weary after a fruitless day, he finds the only other guest,
David Robertson, lying on his bed, having died of a heart
attack. Locke decides to 'kill' himself by swapping identities
with Robertson. The rest of the film documents Locke's
increasing alienation and his struggle to be free in the face
of the fact that he is only a passenger on someone else's life.

Accompanied by a girlfriend whom he meets in Spain,
he arrives at a small village after a lengthy car-chase
involving the police, his television director and his wife.
Ordering the girl to leave him, he enters a hotel and lies on
the bed. At this point the camera pans around to shoot out of
the window and what follows is a shot lasting for seven minutes
in which the camera is almost motionless and no cutting or
editing is used at all—the camera simply records what passes
in front of it in the square.

What it records is, at first, an old man who is seen quietly sitting on a bench with his dog; then pandemonium ensues as the police, the director and the wife all arrive on the scene in a squealing of car tyres and brakes. The girl-friend, having evidently decided not to desert her lover, returns and the whole ménage enter the hotel, accompanied by the dog yapping about their heels. However, only by viewing this shot can one gain the sense of the impersonal nature of the camera eye and the sense of the randomness of many of the minor details. Before the pursuers arrive, we are subjected to a long period when the square is empty. Throughout the shot, people and animals cross the screen who have seemingly no relevance to what is going on in the rest of the film.

Only when everyone has entered the hotel does the camera pan back to reveal Locke, still lying on the bed, but in the same position in which we have earlier seen Robertson, for Locke too is dead--evidently murdered by agents of the established colonial government that Robertson had opposed by shipping guns to the local guerillas.

Antonioni's reasons for not showing Locke's death have not been fully explained. Interviewed by the Los Angeles Times he said: "I didn't want to show the actual killing of the man at the end. He's already dead. I didn't need to follow it through, which is what usually happens with this kind of movie. But I was upset, I didn't know how to do it."[34] The last sentence

is curious and seems to undermine what has gone before since
the director does not explain exactly why he was "upset".
Neither does his explanation account for the pains he took to
find a unique kind of camera which he then mounted on a gyro-
scope. Nor does it explain the similarity of this closing
shot with the camera-work in the rest of the film, which
Antonioni admits he was using in a new way. This involves the
camera preparing a space for the character to enter.

The closing scene involves a piano-sequenza in which
events change and grow within the frame. It is part of Antonioni's
new ideology of the 'objective camera', which he adopted after
his return from a visit to China, just before the making of
The Passenger: "I no longer want to employ the subjective
camera, in other words the camera that represents the viewpoint
of the character. The objective camera wielded by the author.
Using it I make my presence felt. The camera's viewpoint
becomes mine."[35]

The objectivity of the camera has implications for the
condition of the viewer of the film. Antonioni is by no means
preaching non-involvement--Locke's existential dilemmas, the
poverty of his inner life are attributable to a stance he has
deliberately chosen, that of the 'objective' journalist who tries
to escape the problems of his private life. The camera is in
the room where Locke's murder takes place and we, as viewers,
are 'behind' the lens. Something is happening behind our backs
and we do not see it. Where are we when Locke is murdered?

Where does our own responsibility lie?

The Passenger is a film which calls for a particular
kind of political consciousness. It requires that the individual
be responsible for his own personal revolution in order to
effect a general revolution. It shows that one cannot escape
from the past in order to live in sort of ideal, timeless
landscape, for the past--one's own, or other people's--inevitably
catches up. This is the reason for the car chase sequences
which seem to belong to another film-genre altogether. Thus
Antonioni, like Dickens in A Tale of Two Cities, includes
several visual bridges. At one point, Locke is riding on a
cable-car and the camera shows him leaning over the side, his
arms spreadeagled out in a gesture imitative of flying. However,
he is not flying, he is merely a passenger. This gesture is
repeated several times in the course of the film and it is in
a position similar to this that he is discovered after his
assassination.

I have included this rather lengthy discussion of The
Passenger in order to indicate some of the ways in which Dickens
can be found using visual devices in order to make thematic
points--in much the same way as a film-maker will be conscious
of the effect of his camera work. In fact, both Dickens and
Antonioni share a certain ambiguity towards the subject of
political revolution which is not necessarily stated, but is
made clear by their treatment of certain events. Dickens actually

shares with many contemporary directors certain attitudes

and values which are expressed by style, a topic which will

be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

We tend to think of Dickens, rightly enough, as a master

of descriptive prose. This is because he is, above all, a

story-teller. His novels translate well to the screen because

there is plenty of action and variety of incident. However,

as I have begun to show, his importance for film derives from

his anticipation of filmic technique. His eye, itself like a

camera lens, has a habit of zooming in on detail and picking

out that which a less keen vision would miss. All novelists

use close-up—they must if they are to describe a character's

face—but for Dickens the close-up was that moment when a face

or an object filled the field of vision to the exclusion of

everything else and made an impact that was unforgettable.

Also close-up allowed him to exercise his extraordinary talent

for physical description.

As Eisenstein points out, The Cricket on the Hearth

begins with a close-up: "The kettle began it!"[36] But this

device had already been used in a more sophisticated form in

Barnaby Rudge:

> Many years afterwards, old people who lived in their
> youth near this part of the city, remembered being in
> a great glare of light, within doors and without, and
> as they looked, timid and frightened children, from
> the windows, seeing a face go by. Though the whole

> great crowd and all its other terrors had faded from
> their recollection, this one object remained; alone,
> distinct and well remembered. Even in the unpractised
> minds of infants, one of these doomed men darting past,
> and but an instant seen, was an image of force enough
> to dim the whole concourse; to find itself an all-
> absorbing place, and to hold it ever after.   37

This description is taken from the episode concerned with the

riots after the burning of Newgate. When a film director

shoots a crowd scene, especially in a large-scale scene of

violence, he can fix our emotions and our attitudes simply by

showing a face. This face will be imprinted on the memory long

after the film is over. In the Odessa Steps sequence of Eisen-

stein's _Potemkin_ (USSR, 1925), one of the most poignant moments

comes when we see a woman shot down, resulting in her baby

carriage being rolled down the steps by her fall. A close-up of

her face is inserted among the long and medium shots of the

crowd fleeing down the steps: "Eyes glazed, mouth loosely open,

the mother's face sinks slowly out of the frame."[38]

Dickens also has a habit of including in his novels

incidental visions, characters who, like bit-players in a movie,

flit across our vision, are fixed for a moment by some extra-

ordinary analogy and vanish. At the Muggleton cricket match in

Pickwick Papers there is "one very stout gentleman, whose body

and legs looked like half a gigantic roll flannel, elevated on

a couple of inflated pillow cases. . ."[39] getting into a cab,

Pickwick sees "a strange specimen of the human race, in a sack-

cloth coat, and apron of the same, who with a brass label and

number round his neck, looked as if he were catalogued in some collection of rarities."[40]

Perhaps the most extensive use of close-up is to be found in <u>Our</u> <u>Mutual</u> <u>Friend</u>. The novel opens with two chapters which are designed to engineer a massive shift from the hideous reality of death to the more hideous illusion of life. The guests at the Veneering dinner party are described in terms of their reflection on a huge mirror:

> The great looking-glass above the sideboard, reflects the table and the company. Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work. The Heralds' College found out a Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield. . . and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down to be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy—a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophe- sying. Reflects Mrs. Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-coloured wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hairbrushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt-collar up behind. Reflects Mrs. Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking horse, hard features, majestic head-dress in which Podsnap has hung golden offerings. 41

While many novelists have described dinner parties in this way—that is, by a series of close-ups—there are certain devices in this passage which forcibly suggest the experience of watching a film. As readers, we are literally viewing the action upon a screen-- the mirror's surface--with the eye

panning along the length of the table. Associative links
are visually forged by cutting from the shot of the camel on
the coat-of-arms to the epergne in the shape of a camel. When
Podsnap is described, the eye moves from a medium shot of him
eating to a close-up of his head, with the hair like wiry wings.
We then move in even closer to a view of the beads of sweat on
his forehead. The description ends with the eye moving further
back so that we can see his shirt collar. The phrase "dissolving
view" seems to suggest a cinematic dissolve as a linking sequence
between the hair and the shirt collar.

The use of the mirror in this episode is a technique
which is important for the themes of the novel and for Dickens'
theories of identity. The gap between how a person looks and
what he or she _is_ beneath the mask of appearance is a recur-
rent area of investigation for Dickens. A mirror can be, for
him, yet another surface whose purpose is to remove us even
further from inner reality, or, by inverting the object, can
reveal more than it conceals. The very name Veneering suggests
people who have no inner life. The reader cannot 'know' them,
he can only watch them. Thus, in describing not the Veneerings
but their mirror-images, it is as if Dickens is giving us a
performance. And this performance is not theatrical but
cinematic for we are watching something that is one-dimensional;
we see images upon a flat plane.

The other use to which Dickens put mirrors is found
later in the novel. The Lammles, having proposed a fortuitous

meeting between their victims, Miss Podsnap and Mr. Fledgeby,

are left alone to discuss the potential success of their

double-game:

> There was a mirror on the wall before him, and
> her eyes just caught them smirking in it. She gave
> the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain,
> and the image received it in the glass. Next moment
> they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the princi-
> pals, had had no part in that expressive transaction. 42

What Dickens could have done was to simply go inside the char-

acters' heads and tell us what they each thought. Instead, he

again chooses to play out "that expressive transaction" on the

surface of a mirror. The mirror does not reproduce the object

but actually inverts it and thus exposes the real state of

affairs--the mutual contempt which is the foundation of the

Lammles marital union. In this way, the theme of the novel,

fragmentation of self and alienation from the world, is

expressed by the splitting-up and reversal of internal and

external phenomena, of appearance and reality.

The fact that a similar device has been used many times

in the cinema is hardly surprising. Film has to find ways of

describing the internal condition by using images in the

external world. A fairly simple example can be found in

G. W. Pabst's The Threepenny Opera (Germany, 1931) when Polly

Peachum catches sight of Macheath as his reflection looms into

sight upon the surface of a shop window. The reflection is

next to a bridal dress on a dummy and his appearance on the

glass is intended as a personification of her thoughts. The

mirror image, in Fritz Lang's <u>The</u> <u>Woman</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>Window</u> (USA,
1944) is used in a more sophisticated form as an important
structuring device. At the beginning of the film, the profes-
sor is looking at a painting of a woman displayed in the window
of an art gallery, when its subject appears in reflection on
the glass. She and the professor leave together, starting off
a chain of events leading to murder and his own suicide. At
the end of the film, when it has been revealed that nearly all
the action has been a dream sequence, the professor is again
looking at the portrait in the window, and again the reflection
appears, only to be revealed, when the camera pans back to the
real woman, as an aging, grotesque prostitute. As in <u>Our</u>
<u>Mutual</u> <u>Friend</u>, the themes of the film--the notion that identity
is only an image, residing in oneself or in the world, and
subject to perpetual re-evaluation--is registered within these
two shots where the image is removed from reality by several
stages.

This discussion of Dickens' use of the close-up leads
to the whole question of his techniques of characterization,
which have a central significance for his anticipation of film
language. As Susan Sontag argues:

> The cinema has its own methods and logic of repre-
> sentation, which one does not exhaust by saying that
> they are primarily visual. The cinema presents us
> with a new language, a way of talking about emotion
> through the direct experience of the language of faces
> and gestures. Nevertheless, there are useful analogies
> which may be drawn between the cinema and the novel--
> far more, it seems to me, than between the cinema
> and the theatre.   43

The language of the visible, which is the hall-mark of cinematic

characterization, may indeed have literary precedents and

these can be located in Dickens. It seems to me that there

are two distinct modes of characterization--the psychological ,

and the visual--and in the latter decades of the nineteenth

century the former became pre-eminent. Inevitably, this led

to some serious misinterpretations of what Dickens was doing

and the implications will be discussed in a later chapter.

At this point I shall indicate some of the ways in which

character can be depicted if one dispenses with the journey

into the mind of the character.

The problem confronting the film-maker, particularly

before the first sound film, was to construct a film language

made up of the grammar of the image rather than the word.

As George Bluestone points out in <u>Novels</u> <u>into</u> <u>Film</u>, there is

a crucial distinction between the literary and the cinematic

trope:

> Where the moving picture comes to us directly through
> perception, language must be filtered through the
> screen of conceptual apprehension. And the conceptual
> process, though allied to and often taking its point
> of departure from the percept, represents a different
> mode of experience, a different way of apprehending
> the universe.   44

The power of the linguistic trope is that it is capable of

including within its field of reference multiple allusions

which are denied to the film trope. When Eisenstein, in

<u>October</u> (USSR, 1928), wishes to imply that Kerensky is 'like'

a peacock, he must show us a shot of a peacock intercut with
a shot of Kerensky.

If we examine the way in which Dickens depicts char-
acter, the process seems to lean towards the cinematic rather
than the literary trope. His techniques of characterization
involve the visible as an index to the internal disposition.
Identity is to be assessed by a series of external signs which
may, or may not be compatible with their referents; for example,
Mr. Serjeant Snubbin in <u>Pickwick</u> <u>Papers</u>, who

> . . . had that dull-looking boiled eye which is often
> to be seen in the heads of people who have applied
> themselves during many years to a weary and laborious
> course of study; and which would have been sufficient,
> without the additional eye-glass which dangled from
> a broad black riband round his neck, to warn a
> stranger that he was very near-sighted.   45

Or, to take another example, Dickens introduces a character
by cataloguing his dress:

> He was a prim-faced, red-nosed man, with a long, thin
> countenance, and a semi-rattlesnake sort of eye--
> rather sharp, but decidedly bad. He wore very short
> trousers, and black-cotton stockings, which, like the
> rest of his apparel, were particularly rusty. His
> looks were starched, but his white neckerchief was not,
> and its long limp ends straggled over his closely but-
> toned waistcoat in a very uncouth and unpicturesque
> fashion. A pair of old, worn beaver gloves, a broad-
> brimmed hat, and a faded green umbrella, with plenty
> of whalebone sticking through the bottom, as if to
> counterbalance the want of a handle at the top, lay
> on a chair beside him, and, being disposed in a very
> tidy and careful manner, seemed to imply that the
> red-nosed man, whoever he was, had no intention of
> going away in a hurry.   46

The role that inanimate objects play as indices to char-
acter is an important aspect of cinematic technique. We recognize

Chaplin by his cane, his bowler hat, the baggy trousers and the ill-fitting jacket which form a visual code which is transferred from film to film so that whatever role he takes on, the essential character of the Tramp remains the same. For the Russian film theorist, Pudovkin, "the inanimate object has. . . enormous importance on the films." He goes on to argue:

> An object is already an expressive thing in itself,
> in so far as the spectator always associates it with
> a number of images. A revolver is a silent threat,
> a flying racing-car is a pledge of rescue or of help
> arriving in time. The performance of an actor linked
> with an object and built upon it will always be one
> of the most powerful methods of filmic construction.
> It is, as it were, a filmic monologue without words.
> An object linked to an actor, can bring shades of his
> state of emotion to external expression so subtly and
> deeply as no gesture or mimicry could ever express
> them conditionally.   47

We can see this idea at work in D. W. Griffith's The Avenging Conscience (USA, 1914), loosely adapted from Poe's "The Telltale Heart" and "Annabel Lee". In this film, a young man murders his uncle who will not let him marry his sweetheart. As a substitute for the chase-sequence with which Griffith generally climaxed his films, there is a psychological pursuit:

> The sequence in which the nephew. . . hears his mur-
> dered uncle's heart beating while the policeman is
> interrogating him is a montage tour de force and a
> remarkable exercise in cinematic metaphor. The inter-
> cutting of close shots of the nephew, the policeman,
> the pencil and the policeman's tapping foot creates
> what may be the most sophisticated use of editing along
> psychological lines in all of the prewar cinema.   48

In her discussion of Great Expectations in The English Novel: Form and Function, Dorothy Van Ghent seems to have been

the first critic to discuss fully the fact that Dickens often

compares his characters to inanimate objects. She attributes

this fact to the social and economic conditions of nineteenth-

century urban life in England in which industrialization resulted

in the dehumanization of individuals--the mechanization of the

human body to which Marx refers in his analysis of alienation

caused by factory work. In Victorian England, she argues, when

the economy was booming and mass-production becoming the norm,

human beings themselves became 'things':

> People were becoming things, and things (the things
> that money can buy or that are the means for making
> money or for exalting prestige in the abstract) were
> becoming more important than people. People were
> becoming de-animated, robbed of their souls, and
> things were usurping the prerogatives of animate
> creatures--governing the lives of their owners in
> the most liberal sense.   49

Van Ghent's argument may be only partly correct since we find

Dickens comparing his characters to objects as early as _Pickwick_

Papers when his imagination was concerned with an England which

still resembled a rural idyll. The theme of social injustice,

on which the novel ends, is directed towards the legal system,

as represented by the villainous lawyers, Dodson and Fogg. For

most of the novel, Pickwick inhabits a world of coaching-houses,

feasts at Christmas and at wayside inns, skating-parties and

balls. In _Oliver Twist_, Dickens' next novel, the attack on

Utilitarianism, through the medium of his criticisms of the Poor

Laws, begins to be evident.

What seems more likely, is that the tendency to attach

non-human traits to people was always a strong component of his

imagination. While it is certainly true that in novels like
Hard Times he was using this device to make a genuine social
comment, there are other times when he wishes simply to depict
a character by using a sign which is external to it. This would
be true of the gentleman at the Muggleton cricket match referred
to above.

The adoption of objects as signs seems to have something
to do with his frequent refusal to enter into the mind of his
character. Certainly, there are numerous occasions when we do
gain an insight into internal consciousness, particularly when
he resorts to first-person narration, but the usual method is
that of the omniscient narrator who can say, as he does in Pick-
wick Papers: "We cannot state the precise nature of the thoughts
which passed through Mr Trotter's mind, because we do not know
what they were."[50] Grandfather Smallweed, in Bleak House,
is introduced in "a grim, hard, uncouth parlour, only ornamented
with the coarsest of baize table-covers, and the hardest of sheet-
iron tea-trays, and offering in its decorative character no bad
allegorical representation of Grandfather Smallweed's mind. . . ."[51]
The character is further established by the description of his two
main domestic occupations—watching the trivets on the stove, with
the ironic association of trivia, and discourse with his wife, for
whom he keeps beside him "a spare cushion, with which he is always
provided, in order that he might have something to throw at the
the venerable partner of his respected age whenever she makes an

allusion to money. . . ."[52]

Often, Dickens chooses to reduce a character to one or two traits which are usually visual. Dorothy Van Ghent points out:

> . . .people are described by non-human attributes, or by such an exaggeration of or emphasis on one part of their own bodily members or into an article of their clothing or into some inanimate object of which they have made a fetish. Dickens' devices for producing this transposition of attributes are various. To his friend and biographer, Forster, he said that he was always losing sight of a man in his diversion by the mechanical play of some part of the man's face, which "would acquire a sudden ludicrous life of its own." Many of what we shall call the "signatures" of Dickens' people—that special exaggerated feature or gesture or mannerism which comes to stand for the whole person—are such dissociated parts of the body, like Jaggers' huge forefinger. . . or Wemmick's post-office mouth, or the clockwork apparatus in Magwitch's throat that clicks as if it were going to strike. . . . this general principle of reciprocal changes. . . may work symbolically in the association of some object with a person so that the object assumes his essence and his "meaning." [53]

This mode of synechdocal representation is not restricted to characterization. As J. Hillis Miller points out in his introduction to the Penguin edition of _Bleak House_, it is a device which Dickens was to turn into a system with which he structured that novel: "This procedure of synechdocal transference, naming one thing in terms of another, is undertaken as a means of investigation. Dickens wants to define England exactly and to identify exactly the causes of its present state."[54] The implications of such a device for the silent cinema are clear. The stars of silent

films relied on recognizable traits upon which the audience pro-
ceeded to construct a whole identity and of course Chaplin is
the most obvious example of such a method.

Dickens' own comments to Forster confirm Stefan Zweig's
impression that the novelist's eye is like a camera lens:

> . . .in latter days as an author he invented a kind
> of shorthand to reality, consisting of little signs
> instead of lengthy descriptions, an essence of ob-
> servation distilled from the innumerable happenings
> of life. He has an uncannily sharp eye for the de-
> tection of these insignificant externals; his memory
> and his keenness of perception are like a photographic
> plate which, in the hundredth part of a second, fixes--
> the least expression, the slightest gesture, and yields
> a perfectly precise negative. In addition, this
> perspicacious observation is enhanced by a marvellous
> power of refraction which, instead of presenting an
> object as merely reflected in its ordinary proportions
> from the surface of a mirror, gives us an image clothed
> in an excess of characteristics. . . . This extra-
> ordinary optical faculty amounted to genius in
> Dickens. . . . His psychology began with the visible;
> he gained his insight into character by observation
> of the exterior--the most delicate and fine minutiae
> of the outward semblance, it is true, those utmost
> tenuosities which only the eyes that are rendered
> acute by a superlative imagination can perceive.
> Like the English philosophers, he does not begin with
> assumptions, but with characteristics.   55

This element of optical refraction, described by Zweig, exerts
a subtle, and quite distinctive power over the human material
so exhaustively worked over in the factory of his imagination.
A camera eye cannot _in itself_ record the psychological condition,
the conceptions of life and the internal emotional condition of
the objects that it points to. This was demonstrated early on
by Pudovkin when he showed that if one took three strips of

film--a smiling face, a frightened face and a pointing revolver--
the audience would react in accordance with the order in which
the strips of film were projected.[56] Thus the camera must pin-
point traits, characteristics, facial expressions, peculiarities
of dress, and so on. Carl Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc
(France, 1928) was a truly remarkable achievement of the silent
cinema since it portrayed a complex psychological situation
almost entirely through the use of close-up, thus confirming
that what one sees can reveal internal condition without the aid
of dialogue.

Eisenstein, enlarging on Zweig's statements, suggests
that: "The screen's heroes are engraved on the senses of the
spectator with clearly visible traits, its villains are remem-
bered by certain facial expressions, and all are saturated in
the peculiar, slightly unnatural radiant gleam thrown over them
by the screen."[57] This 'radiance' is analogous to the peculiar
texture of Dickens' visual imagination. Conventionally, the
experience of watching a film has been compared to the dream-
state. In a darkened auditorium, the viewer watches events
which seem real, but are, in fact, a trick of perception. Both
partake of an illusion which is almost absolute. Christian Metz
suggests that a dreamer does not know he is dreaming, but the
film spectator knows that he is watching a film.[58] This may
not be true of films of a particularly escapist nature. Emerging
from the film theatre, we may experience surprise when we

discover that the reality of the world outside is not that of
the film. We are 'spellbound'.

To a certain extent, the reader of a Dickens novel may
experience distinctly oneiric sensations related to those he
feels when he watches a film. The very length requires that
he surrender himself totally to a created universe but another
reason may be the very tyranny of Dickens' imagination. The
dictatorship of the eye even claims characters within the novels
as victims. In Bleak House, two narrative techniques are adopted,
the first-person narration of Esther Summerson, and an anonymous,
present-tense narration, with the two points of view sharply
contrasted as a deliberate thematic motif. However, Dickens
finds it difficult to avoid using Esther as if he were the director,
and her eye a camera lens. Thus we find her describing her first
meeting with Mr Turveydrop in the following way:

> He was a fat old gentleman with a false complexion,
> false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig. He had a fur
> collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which
> only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete.
> He was pinched in, and swelled out, and got up, and
> stepped down, as much as he could possibly bear. He
> had such a neckcloth on (puffing his very eyes out of
> their natural shape), and his chin and even his ears
> so sunk into it, that it seemed as though he must
> inevitably double up, if it were cast loose. He had,
> under his arm, a hat of great size and weight, shelving
> downward from the crown to the brim; and in his hand
> a pair of white gloves, with which he flapped it, as
> he stood poised on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-
> elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had
> a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuff-box, he
> had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but
> any touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was
> not like age, he was not like anything in the world

but a model of Deportment.   59

Establishing a fictional world on the basis of visual
perception inevitably led Dickens to problems of epistemology.
Bleak House is a novel about interpretation--the interpretation
of what is seen and heard within the created world of the novel
and the interpretation of the text itself. Dickens had already
laid the foundations for this investigation in Dombey and Son,
which deals, more extensively, with sense perception. This theme
is discreetly reinforced by the many references in the text to
the eyes: the fiery optics of the train; the eyes that stare
at young Paul as he leaves Dr Blimber's Academy for the last
time; Uncle Sol's eyes, compared to red suns peering through
fog; the imagined eyes of the world that are turned upon Dombey
after his financial and emotional worlds have collapsed. Hablot
Browne, always sensitive to Dickens' themes, has a preponderance
of them in his illustrations.

Dickens wants to find out how our moods influence what
we see, altering what we feel about ourselves, and the way in
which we set up private worlds which exist as mirrors of our-
selves. He sets up a number of different modes of visual per-
ception with, perhaps, the ultimate goal of testing them against
each other. It is not that Dickens has relinquished his fascin-
ation with appearance, rather, he has moved inwards to examine
the process of perception itself. One of the first things he
does is to justify his own mode of seeing. Florence's idea of

a father is embodied by a "blue coat and stiff white cravat. . .
a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch." [60]
What Florence sees, unerringly reveals the underlying reality
of her father's nature--his stiffness, his inability to be
human, the fact that he is incapable of feeling because to her
he is simply a collection of objects. In this case, visible
traits are an accurate metaphor for a reality which exists
below the surface. Like Dickens, Florence picks out a few
salient characteristics and from them creates an identity.

Dickens evidently feels that at the root of the problems
of 'seeing' is the notion that we are all held captive within
our own mode of perception which blinds us to the world as it
really is. As Mr Morfin tells Harriet Carker:

> 'One don't see anything, one don't hear anything, one
> don't know anything; that's the fact. We go on taking
> everything for granted, and so we go on, until what-
> ever we do, good, bad or indifferent, we do from habit.
> Habit is all I shall have to report when I am called
> to plead to my conscience, on my death-bed. "Habit,"
> says I; "I was deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic to a
> million things, from habit."' [61]

This is a condition which affects many of the characters in
the novel, who seem to be suffering from restricted vision.
Mr Dombey has excluded, both literally and figuratively, Florence
from his field of vision; Uncle Sol is engaged in a fantasy
world centering on his aspirations for his nephew; Florence
refuses to see her father for what he is. Running from him
to Walter, she replaces one object of adoration for another:

> Oh load of love and trustfulness that lies so
> lightly there! Ay, look down on the closed eyes,

> Walter, with a proudly tender gaze, for in all
> the wide world they seek but thee now--only thee!   62

Dickens extends this realm of sense perception to include the problems of sense deception and shows how the eye can be deceived by the manipulation of surface reality. Thus he introduces the figure of Mrs Skewton, the first of a series of characters who forcibly demonstrate the gap between appearance and reality. Mrs Skewton has spent most of her life imitating a portrait of herself in youth, as Cleopatra, so that a three-fold removal from reality is engendered in which art (her cosmetics), imitates art (her painting), which imitates art (the lines from Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither her/Nor custom state her infinite variety"). In Dickens' later novels there is always the sense that if we seek to unveil what lies beneath form, we may well discover some terrible, nihilistic truth. Everything is resolving itself into dust, or imploding into a few drops of oily substance, like Krook in Bleak House.

Under Mrs Skewton's elaborate exterior is a vision of the void:

> The painted object shrivelled under her hand; the
> form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched
> dark eye-brows changed to scanty tufts of grey;
> the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous
> and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman,
> with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place,
> huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy
> flannel gown.
> The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith,
> when they were alone again.   63

The process of visual change is treated here by a slow dissolve, as if Mrs Skewton's artificial face were imposed over her real one. The macabre horror of the scene is heightened by what, in the cinema, would be a special effect, in the same way as Dr. Jekyll turns into Mr Hyde in film versions of Stevenson's story.

At the centre of the novel a dichotomy is established which, on first reading, seems to be rather strange. This is the difference between the visual perception of Paul and what seem to be alterations in visual perception made possible by railway travel. Paul tries to penetrate the meaning of external appearances by concentrating his attention on the image. At Mrs Pipchin's

> . . . he would remain in a nook between Mrs Pipchin and the fender, with all the light of his little face absorbed in the black bombazeen drapery, studying every line and wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye, until Mrs Pipchin was sometimes fain to shut it, on pretence of dozing.   64

And at Dr Blimber's:

> He loved to be alone; and in those short intervals when he was not occupied with his books, liked nothing so well as wandering about the house by himself, or sitting on the stairs, listening to the great clock in the hall. He was intimate with all the paperhangings in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floorcloth.
> The solitary child lived on, surrounded by this arabesque work of his musing fancy. . . .   65

Paul's mode of perception can be characterized by this word

"intimate". He turns objects into friends by an intense

perceptual engagement with the image which is then transformed,

by the act of interpretation, into imagination, or, as Dickens

would have put it, 'fancy'.

After Paul's death, Mr Dombey travels by train to

Leamington Spa and Dickens devotes considerable space to a

description of what Dombey sees and feels on that railway

journey. There is the sense that Dickens is speaking of an

age which is in the process of passing away:

> The very speed at which the train was whirled along,
> mocked the swift course of the young life that had
> been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its
> foredoomed end.   66

In the novel the growth of railway travel is seen as a symbol

of the uprooting of established ways of life. The slums of

Islington and Camden Town are cleared away to provide ground

on which to build Euston Station and the inhabitants of these

areas are moved to other areas. At the same time, there is also

a suggestion that earlier modes of perception are lost:

> Breasting the wind and light, the shower and sunshine,
> away, and still away, it rolls and roars, fierce and
> rapid, smooth and certain, and great works and massive
> bridges crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow
> an inch broad, upon the eye, and then are lost. Away,
> and still away, onward and onward ever: glimpses of
> cottage-homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of
> husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and
> paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant
> as they are left behind. . . .
>   Louder and louder yet, it shrieks and cries as it
> comes tearing on resistless to the goal. . . . Every-
> thing around is blackened. There are dark pools of

water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far
below. There are jagged walls and falling houses
close at hand, and through the battered roofs and
broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want
and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes,
while smoke and crowded gables, and distorted chim-
neys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up
deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance.
As Mr Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is
never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought
him there has let the light of day in on these things:
not made or caused them.   67

The railway journey, in Dombey and Son, liberates the

reader from the static, claustrophobic atmosphere of the Dombey

mansion. For the railway traveller in nineteenth-century

England, it freed his perception from the fixed point of view.

Mr Dombey sees the world through the flat, glass surface of

the carriage window and his eye takes in images which "fall like

a beam of shadow an inch broad," similar to the projected

frames of a film. The experience of the railway journey in

the novel is cinematic because the perceiver is always separated

from what he perceives; there is no opportunity to explore,

to analyze, to search for meanings (as Paul does) because the

significance of what is seen is not in the meaning of the image,

but in the relationship of one image to another--the principle

of montage. What railway travel shows one is not the same as

what the objects themselves could tell one. This is because

significance is registered by relationship rather than by the

object in isolation. The potential for becoming intimate with

what one sees is absent when one is detached and distant.

In the novel, there is the sense of an alteration in

perception. Paul is frequently described as old-fashioned perhaps because he possesses a way of looking at the world which was becoming increasingly inaccessible. When Mr Dombey gets onto the train, he literally begins to see differently. Railways, for Dickens, were a metaphor for the period of change and transition in which he lived. The speed at which they travelled contributed to the altering conceptions of time and space which led to the birth of cinema. A new space-time relation is born when space takes on the quality of movement, when we become aware of the simultaneity of events in different places, or of the simultaneous nearness and remoteness of objects, of their nearness to one another in time and their distance in space. What this amounts to is the liberation of the eye.

The sense of excitement and exhiliration which Dickens creates in his description of the railway journey is analogous to feelings shared by the early Soviet film-makers. Dziga Vertov, in the Kino-Eye manifesto, says:

> I am the cinema-eye. I am a mechanical eye.
> I, a machine, can show you the world as only I see it.
> From today I liberate myself for ever from human immobility, I am in perpetual motion, I approach and move away from objects, I creep up to them, I climb onto them, I move alongside the muzzle of a running horse, I tear into the crowd at full speed, I run before the fleeing soldiers, I tip over onto my back, I ascend with areoplanes, I fall and rise together with falling and rising bodies.
> Here am I, the camera, rushing about guided by a resultant force, manoeuvring in the chaos of motions, fixing motion from motion in the complex combinations.
> Freed from the obligation of 16-17 frames a second,

> freed from the limits of time and space, I can
> contrast any points in the universe, wherever I
> may fix them.
>   My way leads to the creation of a fresh percep-
> tion of the world. And this is how I can decipher
> anew a world unknown to you.   68

Both Dickens and Vertov share the same fascination with the

altering space-time relation. The railway journey in Dombey

and Son recreates visually the social theme of the two Englands

which had already been explored in Disraeli's Sybil and had

been discussed by Carlyle, Henry Mayhew and Mrs Gaskell. Seen

from a train, cottages and mansions are sharply contrasted

and neither is more significant than the other for each is

glimpsed only briefly.

In Man with the Movie Camera (USSR, 1929), Vertov

celebrates this new filmic perception. He dedicates his film

to showing exactly how the camera can alter what we see and can

also comment on social systems. The film begins with a series

of stills which then, gradually, begin to move, building up

to a symphony of moving forms. By cutting shots of a woman

in a beauty parlour with shots of factory production, Vertov

establishes a dialectic which is obviously political in its

intent. No inter-title is necessary to make his point. In the

same way, the cottages and mansions in Dickens' novel, when

cut with each other as single images, bring out the social

comment that he is implying. Thus we have the birth of the

'railway-eye'.

Of Man with the Movie Camera Vertov wrote:

Rues et tramways se croisent. Immeubles et auto-
bus. Jambes et sourires. Mains et bouches. Epaules
et yeux.
Volants et roues tournent. Caroussel et mains de
joueurs d'orgue. Mains de la couturière et roue de
la loterie. Mains des dévideuses et chaussures des
cyclistes.
Hommes et femmes se rencontrent. Naissances et
morts. Divorces et mariages. Soufflets et poignées
de main. Espions et poètes. Juges et accusés.
Propagandistes et auditeurs. Ouvriers et paysans.
Etudiants des facultés ouvrières et déléqués étrangers.
Un tourbillon de contacts, de coups, d'accolades,
de jeux, d'accidents, de gymnastique, de danses,
d'impositions, de spectacles, de cambriolages, de
papiers sortant et entrant avec comme toile de fond
toutes sortes de travail humain débordant.
Comment un oeil ordinaire, non-armé, peut-il y voir
calir dans le chaos visuel de la vie en course? 69

The "chaos visuel" of which Vertov speaks is that which is

produced by the 'speeding-up' of life in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries. Russia, at the time that Vertov wrote,

was experiencing its recent revolution from feudalism. It

had entered what Carlyle had called, a century earlier, the

Mechanical Age, an age to which industrial Britain was already

accustomed.

Nineteenth-century Britain, particularly in the urban

areas, witnessed a quantitative and qualitative alteration in

the sense of time. In the Renaissance, men knew that they

were different from the men of the Middle Ages, but it can be

argued that this was a knowledge that was accessible only to

a few--the literate, the travelled, those whose worlds were not

enclosed by the boundaries of their own villages. It was, in

effect, élitist time. Change was abhorrent and thus the theme

of Mutability, as expressed, for example, in the last two

stanzas of <u>The Faerie Queene</u>, is a symbol of the destruction

of the cosmos. In the Jacobean masque a vision of permanence

always conquers the mutable.

In nineteenth-century England, however, change affected

many more people. Writers preached a philosophy of progress.

Geographical mobility was increased by the growth of the rail-

way networks over England and the sense of speed experienced

by railway travel was accessible to rich and poor alike.

Walter Houghton argues:

> What Thomas Arnold had in mind when he remarked, on
> seeing the first train pass through the Rugby country-
> side, that "feudality is gone forever," is made
> explicit by a passage in <u>Sartor Resartus</u>, written on
> the eve of the Reform Bill of 1832: "Cannot the
> dullest hear Steam-Engines clanking around him? . . ." 70

Carlyle, in "Signs of the Times", claimed that the Mechanical

Age altered not only the way of life, but the internal

condition of the century:

> Were we to characterize this age of ours by any
> single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not
> an Heroical, Devotional, or Moral Age, but above all
> others, the Mechanical Age. It is the age of Machinery
> in every outward and inward sense of that word; . . .
> Not the external and physical alone is now managed
> by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. . . . .
> the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone,
> but our modes of thought and feeling.   71

The newly acquired sense of historicism and the dis-

solution of belief in the conception of the universe as an un-

varying system subject to an immutable Natural Law, contributed

to the concept of time and history as a continuum of trans-

formational change, buttressed by the theories of evolution
and change inherent in _The Origin of the Species_. Those whose
religious faith was not shaken by the Age of Doubt found
themselves adapting to the times in which they lived, as the
epitaph to a tombstone erected in 1845 (three years before the
publication of _Dombey and Son_) shows:

> THE SPIRITUAL RAILWAY
>
> The line to heaven by Christ was made
> With heavenly truth the rails are laid.
> From earth to heaven the line extends,
> To Life Eternal where it ends.
> Repentance is the Station then
> Where Passengers are taken in. . . .   72

If the development of cinema is teleological, then it
owes its origins to these altered conceptions of time and space.
Film, Frederick Edell argues, is "the medium that most dynamic-
ally reflects within its form the sense of change and the rela-
tivity of time and space that is central to the modern ex-
perience." 73 By conceiving of time as a continuum instead of
a series of static moments, the basis of artistic representation
was also altered. Instead of tableaux (like the tableaux in
a Jacobean masque, linked by slow transitions) art began to be
structured by strips of images, culminating in the stream-of-
consciousness novel of the first part of the twentieth century.

Certainly, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel
was experimenting with devices like time-shift, as for example
in _Tristram Shandy_. But in that novel, the narrating voice,
speaking directly to the reader, impedes the continuum and it

is not a work which would translate directly to the screen.

George Eliot prefaces the first chapter of _Daniel Deronda_ with

a little dissertation on the problems of temporal structure

in narrative fiction:

> Man can do nothing without the make-believe of a
> beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is
> obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must
> fix on a point in the star's unceasing journey
> when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is
> at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has
> always been understood to start in the middle; but
> on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not
> very different from his; since science, too, reckons
> backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into
> billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought, really
> sets off _in medias res_. No retrospect will take us
> to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in
> heaven or earth, it is but a fraction of that all-
> presupposing fact with which our story sets out. 74

Jean-Luc Godard, a hundred years later, was to experience

similar problems:

> I take the opportunity of telling you that as if by
> chance the only problem with the cinema seems to me
> more and more with each film when and why to start a
> shot and when and why to end it. Life, in other words,
> fills the screen as a tap fills a bath which is
> simultaneously emptying at the same rate at the same
> time. It passes, and the memory which it leaves us is
> in its own image, unlike painting. . . unlike music
> and the novel too which have been able to discover,
> employ and define two or three methods of taming it.
> . . . everything fits as they say, in life, without
> ever knowing whether it fits because that's life or the
> opposite, and anyway I say the opposite, because I am
> using words, and words can be reversed and replace
> each other, whereas can the life they represent be
> reversed? 75

The distinction between these two _cries_ _de_ _coeur_ is that

George Eliot is confronted with the difficulties of narrative

structure, whereas Godard is speaking of the image or shot,

a problem not of organization but of perception and mimesis.
George Eliot structures Daniel Deronda around a series of
time-shifts, but Dickens manipulates time within the shot
itself. His use of fades, dissolves, flashbacks, double-exposure
and cross-cutting establishes a dynamic time-scheme, often in
only two or three sentences. Like Godard, he realizes that
what we retain of the past is not the event but the image.
These images are linked together as a continuum, thus the im-
pact of the railway journey in Dombey and Son is the liberation
of 'life', that is, the escape from the 'taming' techniques of
conventional narrative structures.

In Dickens' novels we find, then, a preoccupation with
the world of sense experience. A keen eye, a natural tendency
towards investigation, a strong awareness of the gaps between
signs and meanings derived from his years as a journalist pro-
duced a mind intent on dismantling the structure of the visible.
Appearance meant for Dickens an endless bombardment of visual
images and aural impressions. It might be enough to state that
his work resembles the cinematic imagination of the next century
if it were not for the fact that evidence indicates a causal
link with the origins of film language. As it happens, we find
the great innovator of filmic construction, D.W. Griffith,
announcing that he adopted many of his techniques from a close
reading of Dickens' novels. Film critics, admirers of other

Victorian novelists and students of stage technique, have

argued that Griffith's claim is not to be taken seriously

and it is to this area that I shall turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Griffith and the Birth of Film Language

On the 2nd of August, 1948, James Agee wrote of the death

of D.W. Griffith:

> In Hollywood last week, many people were offering
> epitaphs for Griffith. But perhaps the most succinct
> was the one presented years ago by another man who
> could claim to know about such things, the Frenchman
> René Clair. "Nothing essential," he said, "has been
> added to the art of the motion picture since Griffith." 1

Griffith's overriding influence on the evolution of film

aesthetics cannot be overestimated. Before he joined Biograph

as a producer in 1907, the typical one-reeler utilized a

static camera which presented the events as if the viewer were

sitting in the best seat in the stalls. In France, Lumière

had realized the potential of film for reproducing observable

reality but his films tend to be little more than snapshots

which have attained the quality of movement. Méliès, by pro-

fession a stage magician, had discovered film illusion by

manipulation of trick photography, but even the most sophisti-

cated of his films, Le Voyage dans la lune (France, 1902), based

on the Jules Verne story, does not attempt to move beyond the

conception of cinema as an extension of the stage.

In America, Griffith's progenitor was Edwin S. Porter,

who stands as a bridge between Edison, the scientist, and

Griffith, the film-maker as artist. In Porter's films, one

can begin to see the first foundations of film narrative;
The Great Train Robbery (USA, 1904) is structured around a
chase sequence and includes what is believed to be the first
close-up. However, Porter had not yet moved beyond continual
narrative towards what we would now recognize as film con-
struction. The fourteen scenes each consist of a single shot
and Porter said that the close-up of the bandit shooting at
the camera could be inserted at any point in the film, since
its importance was for effect rather than as a contribution to
the structure of the narrative. Porter, as Roy Armes points
out "was not by any stretch of the imagination an artist.
He was a former mechanic and cameraman who, without trying
to be experimental, had hit on new ways of telling stories."[2]

When Griffith came to Biograph he brought with him
not only a decade of acting, directing and writing for the
theatre but a cultural background which was certainly lacking
in the Eastern European immigrants who started the early studios
as business ventures, and the inventors and scientists who
developed the first cinematographic equipment. As a child in
Kentucky, with a charming wastrel father not unlike Dickens'
own, Griffith read the novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, declaiming passages from them aloud, at night in
his room, and entertained theatrical ambitions.[3] After some years
working as an actor in the theatre, Griffith began to write
plays. In 1907, his play The Fool and the Girl, a melodrama

about migratory hop-pickers in California, written when he
was thirty-two, failed financially and met with a luke-warm
critical reception. Hector Fuller, in the Washington Herald,
said that "if one wants to tell the old, old and beautiful
story of redemption of either man or woman through love, it
is not necessary to portray the gutters from which they are
redeemed."[4]

It seems evident that as a playwright, Griffith was
strongly concerned with the serious social themes which were
to be expressed in films like Birth of a Nation (USA, 1915)
and Intolerance (USA, 1916) when he was at the height of his
creative power in the cinema. When the money that he had
earned from The Fool and the Girl ran out, Griffith was reduced
to accepting employment writing film scripts for Biograph, a
job that no one involved in the legitimate theatre would have
regarded as a significant advance in the career of a playwright,
and indeed he insisted on using the name "Lawrence Griffith" in
the early years since he believed his own was reserved for
greater things.

Griffith brought to Biograph a love for the novels of
Dickens, a claim he frequently asserted in newspaper interviews.
As Graham Petrie points out in his article "Griffith, Godard
and the Film Today", the similarities between the two men's
work are striking. Griffith, born in 1875, assumed many of
the values of the nineteenth century and although he was brought

up in rural Kentucky, his reading concentrated itself upon
the poetry and fiction of Victorian England.

His films often contain within them the sentimental
world-view that is typical of the Victorian stage and which
would be reflected in the plays in which he acted as a young
man. Petrie argues that Griffith

> . . . shared and even exaggerated certain of Dickens's
> more Victorian sentiments about motherhood, female
> purity, sexual love, patriotism, and deathbeds and
> lacking the intellectual rigor and depth of social
> understanding that enabled Dickens to counterbalance
> and assimilate these elements, he allowed his films
> to take on a moral imbalance that was archaic even
> at the time and contributed largely to the decline
> of his popularity in the sophisticated 1920s (when
> it also became fashionable to sneer at Dickens's
> supposed hopelessly dated morality). 5

Nevertheless, Griffith's social conscience was remarkably
strong and like Dickens, he was concerned with the oppression
of the poor and the weak, as a film like Intolerance shows.
The review of The Fool and the Girl is almost an echo of the
comments made on the publication of Oliver Twist, the novel of
which Lord Melbourne said: "'I don't like that low, debasing
style. . . I shouldn't think it would tend to raise morals'";
and Lady Carlisle remarked: "'I know that there are such un-
fortunate beings as pickpockets and streetwalkers. . . but I
do not much wish to hear what they say to one another.'"[6]

In a film like Broken Blossoms (USA, 1919) Griffith
seems to be recreating the world of Dickens' London--the Lime-
house docks, the murky, fog-drenched streets, the peculiar

mixture of innocence, brutality and corruption co-existing

side by side. Lucy Burrows is a frail waif-like heroine who

owes her fictional ancestry to Little Nell or Little Dorrit.

She is brutalized by her father, Battling Burrows, a small-time

prize-fighter who clearly resembles Bill Sikes or Daniel

Quilp. Cheng Huan, the Chinaman whose idealism has brought

him to England to convert the West to Bhuddism, is a kind of

Oriental Arthur Clenam, taking care of Lucy and, as an intertitle

sternly warns the audience, he has no pretensions to a sexual

relationship with her.

At the beginning of _Little Dorrit_ Dickens has Miss Wade

say to Meagles of his daughter:

> 'Yet,' looking full upon her, 'you may be sure that
> there are men and women already on their road, who
> have their business to do with y_ou_, and who will do
> it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be
> coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea
> there; they may be close at hand now; they may be
> coming, for anything you know or anything you can
> do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this
> town.'   7

This section of the narrative takes place in Marseilles, directly

after the first chapter which has shown us Rigaud and Baptist

in a Marseilles prison and Miss Wade's words about "'the vilest

sweepings of this little town'" will prove to be prophetic,

just as Arthur Clenam has crossed thousands of miles of ocean

from China to influence directly the lives of the Dorrits in

the Marshalsea.

Broken Blossoms opens with what had been the most

spectacular shot in any film up to that date—a tinted image

of the Thames, shimmering in blue lights. We then cut to

China where Cheng Huan is preparing to leave and is being

advised by his father about his mission to the West. The

juxtaposition of these two scenes reinforces the fact that

Lucy's life in London will be influenced by someone coming from

thousands of miles away. By showing the Chinaman's missionary

zeal in his own country, the moment when Lucy stumbles into

his curio shop is made doubly poignant since his fate is not

to convert the heathen, but to bring a few moments of happiness

to a friendless girl.

In fact, Griffith's vision in this film may not be as

sentimental as critics generally suppose. Lucy is beaten to

death by her father; the Chinaman takes revenge on Burrows,

killing him with a poisonous serpent and then stabs himself.

Neither love nor innocence can triumph, and idealism perishes

in the opium dens and gambling halls of London. Broken Blossoms

may well be a bleaker film than we believe, if we can rid

ourselves of contemporary notions about sentiment. In the

same way, the closing words of Little Dorrit seem ambivalent:

> They went quietly down into the roaring streets,
> inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in
> sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the
> arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and
> chafed, and made their usual uproar. 8

Thus, despite what appears to be a conventionally happy ending

in which Clenam and Amy marry, they leave the church and dis-

appear into the indifference of the crowd.

Dickens' point is more subtle than Griffith's, but
the tone of <u>Broken Blossoms</u> tends to remove itself from the
sentimental by both the sense of terror which lurks beneath the
pathos and by the iconoclasm of the image of Lucy enshrined as
an Eastern goddess, surrounded by flowers, while Cheng Huan
nurses her wounds. At the end of the film, when Burrows'
friends go to the police station to report his death, Griffith
inserts a shot of a policeman reading a newspaper containing
war news and the intertitle tell us that he says: "'Better than
last week. Only 40,000 casualties.'"[9] This comment returns us
to the beginning of the film, to the Chinaman's mission to
bring the two cultures into contact in order to promote under-
standing and prevent war.

As in <u>Little Dorrit</u>, nationalistic prejudice is viewed
as an impediment to valid communication, and the Chinaman's
ideals are sharply contrasted, firstly, by the smug English
missionary whom he meets just before his departure from China,
who hands him a tract on the cover of which is the single word
'HELL', and by Burrows' hatred for anyone not born 'in the same
great country as himself.'

Dickens' imagination seems firmly imprinted on Griffith's
work. A catalogue of his Biograph one-reelers includes titles
like <u>Love Among the Roses</u>, <u>A Child of the Ghetto</u>, <u>A Child's
Faith</u>, <u>Two Little Waifs</u>, <u>Simple Charity</u> (USA, 1910); <u>The Lily</u>

of the Tenements, The Thief and the Girl, Sunshine through the

Dark (USA, 1911); The Eternal Mother (USA, 1912); The Mothering

Heart (two reels) and Her Mother's Oath (USA, 1913). In

addition Griffith made at least one film version of a Dickens

novel--The Cricket on the Hearth (USA, May 1908).

The claim that these films reflect Victorian, rather

than Dickensian values, should be tempered by the recognition

of Dickens' contribution to shaping the Victorian imagination

and experience. Dickens actually created a whole series of

prototypes which he used again and again in his novels and

which passed into popular mythology: the young, innocent girl

who is a kind of moral standard-bearer in his work; the David

Copperfield/Oliver Twist character, a product of his experiences

in the blacking factory as a child. As George Steiner points

out, to some extent the nineteenth century was the creation of

its artists: "If we pause to examine the sources of that know-

ledge, we shall see that they are often purely literary or

pictorial, that our inner nineteenth century is the creation

of Dickens and Renoir."[10] Griffith, constrained at the beginning

of his career by the technical limitations of the early camera

and crude lighting, was forced to use very young girls and

what he found in Lillian Gish was a genuine expression of the

Little Nell/Little Dorrit quality which he recognized from

Dickens' novels.

Karl Brown, one of Griffith's cameramen, asserts that

Griffith actually solved the problem of characterization in

the cinema by his study of Dickens:

> One thing that gave me more and more comfort as
> the picture |Birth of a Nation| progressed was the
> faithfulness with which Griffith clung to his tried-
> and-true Biograph principles. He was most emphatic-
> ally not striving for natural realism but for a sort
> of cartoonist's projection of the outstanding features
> of his various character types.
>   For many years before my time, public thinking had
> been molded and hardened into fixed conceptions by
> the cartoonists who had created John Bull and Uncle
> Sam as national images: bloated monsters wearing
> clothes covered with dollar signs for the soulless
> corporations; and local politicians as instantly
> recognizable caricatures that were more revealingly
> characteristic than the men themselves ever could have
> been.
>   In Literature, Charles Dickens had been a sort of
> literary cartoonist, projecting word-images of
> characters whose essential characteristics were stressed
> at the expense of everything else. Griffith admired
> Dickens very much indeed, and what we admire we emulate.
> So Griffith's characters in The Clansmen were really
> caricatures, and for that reason became somehow
> inoffensive.   11

While Brown's comment that Dickens is no more than a caricaturist

is naive (and viewers of Birth of a Nation certainly do find

many of its characters offensive), what he understood by

Griffith's borrowings from Dickens was, in fact, the principle

of typage, which Eisenstein proposes in Film Form and which I

will discuss in the next chapter.

   While thematic similarities between Dickens and Griffith

may not seem capable of contributing towards the development

of film form, Eisenstein posits that it is precisely these

thematic links which set Griffith on the road to discovering

principles of editing which resulted in montage:

> The structure that is reflected in the concept of
> Griffith montage is the structure of bourgeois
> society. . . . in actuality (and this is no joke),
> he is woven of irreconcilably alternating layers of
> "white" and "red"--rich and poor. (This is the eternal
> theme of Dickens's novels, nor does he move beyond
> these divisions. His mature work, Little Dorrit,
> is so divided into two books: "Poverty" and "Riches".)
> And this society perceived only as a contrast between
> the haves and the have-nots, is reflected in the
> consciousness of Griffith no deeper than the image
> of an intricate race between parallel lines. . . .
>   And, naturally, the montage concept of Griffith,
> as a primarily parallel montage, appears to be a
> copy of his dualistic picture of the world, running
> in two parallel lines of poor and rich towards some
> hypothetical "reconciliation" where. . . the parallel
> lines would cross, that is, in that infinity, just
> as inaccessible as that reconciliation.   12

Eisenstein's point is a valid one. In a novel like Dombey

and Son, where Dickens sets up dialectical oppositions of

imagery--fire and ice, heat and cold--his efforts to propose a

transcendental synthesis in the image of the sea, which speaks

"of the love, eternal and illimitable, extending still, beyond

the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away",[13]

seemed forced, and the resonance of the image spurious.

What Griffith contributed to the early cinema was the

birth of film as an art form with aesthetic laws integral

to its own form. Borrowing from the cinema and from narrative

techniques inherent in the nineteenth-century novel, Griffith

developed the grammar of film language--the full-shot, the

medium shot, the close-up, the pan-shot, camera movement, the

cut, the iris-shot, the mask and the dissolve--and in addition,

was the first to realize the dramatic effectiveness of joining

strips of film together to evolve a filmic rhythm and tempo
out of which the young Soviet directors constructed their more
elaborate theories of montage.

The first Soviet directors viewed film as a metaphor
for political and social liberation from Tsarist feudalism.
Vertov felt that an art form which depended on mechanical
apparatus exemplified the very structure of dialectical materi-
alism. Just as the tractors on the collective farms increased
productivity and human well-being, so the camera, with its abil-
ity to record all reality, peasant or aristocratic, was both the
tool and the triumph of the newly formed socialist state. Be-
cause of the power of the camera to document the lives of the
workers, he required that the cinema should reject the theat-
rical romanticism of the emergent American film industry. In
Nous, one of the many Kino manifestoes, he wrote:

> NOUS déclarons que les vieux films romancés, théâtralisés
> et autres ont la lèpre.
> ----N'approachez pas d'eux!
> ----Ne les touchez pas des yeux.
> ----Péril de mort!
> ----Contagieux!
> NOUS affirmons que l'avenir de l'art cinématographique
> est la négation de son présent.
> La mort de la "cinématographie" est indispensable
> pour que vive l'art cinématographique, NOUS appelons
> à accélérer sa mort. . . .
> NOUS épurons le cinema de kinoks des intrus: musique,
> littérature, et théâtre, nous cherchons notre rhythme
> propre qui n'aura été volé mille part et nous le trouvons
> dans les mouvements des choses.   14

However, the debt that film narrative owes to other art
forms cannot be underestimated. Necessarily, early film-makers

solved problems of filmic construction by turning back to pre-
cursors which shared a narrative structure since, although the
fine arts concern themselves with the representation of the
image, to that image film imparts the quality of movement and
therefore it was the theatre and the novel that provided the
ostensible ancestry for the cinema.

Nicholas Vardac, in Stage to Screen, has demonstrated
that the devices used in the early cinema were not an excavation
of inherent form, but rather a borrowing from nineteenth-century
stage method. Due to the influence of Garrick, eighteenth-
century drama had "stimulated the growth of a new realism in
staging and acting"[15] which was fostered in the next century
by the scientific spirit of the age which sought to achieve
greater pictorial realism, resulting in the birth of photography
and the experiments to produce moving pictures. "Progress in
the invention of cinema came when the need for pictorial realism
was at its peak."[16]

Griffith's background and experience in the theatre,
then, brought to film a legacy of theatrical method, and it
might appear that Griffith's contribution to the emergence of
film art would rest solely on a theatrical heritage. However,
documentary evidence does exist to show that an equally important
influence was his early reading of Dickens. Graham Petrie quotes
a newspaper interview with Griffith:

> I invented that idea (cross-cutting from one scene to
> another to heighten tension). . . but it was not by

any means my own. I discovered it in the works of
Charles Dickens. He introduces a multitude of char-
acters and incidents, and breaks off abruptly to go
from one to another, but at the end he cleverly
gathers all the apparently loose threads together
again and rounds off the whole. It occurred to me
that the method would be far more suitable to films
than the straightforward system borrowed from plays
which was then in vogue and I put it into effect. . . .
There is another thing I owe to Dickens and that is
the discovery that tragedy and comedy can, with care,
be mixed to make a homogenous whole. . . . In his
books comedy alternates with drama, and I think that
the idea is worthy of adoption in mine as well.   17

Petrie prefers to modify Griffith's claim since, as he

points out, Vardac's exhaustive analysis of dramatic method

seems to indicate that the techniques which Griffith uses were

probably largely absorbed unconsciously from his years in the

theatre. He argues that Griffith was attempting to establish

"a respectable literary precedent. . ." and a "theoretical

justification. . ."[18] for his cinematic techniques and that the

simplistic way in which the director handles themes similar to

Dickens' own owes more to Victorian theatrical melodrama.

Petrie's argument is convincing; however, it could also be

argued that many of the devices that Dickens used, and, indeed

the nature of one dimension of his imagination, was also influ-

enced by the stage. As an amateur, he was certainly involved

in plays as an actor and a director and in fact the theme of

A Tale of Two Cities was suggested to him by Wilkie Collins'

play, The Frozen Deep. In a speech made to the General Theat-

rical Fund in 1858, he said, "'Every writer of fiction, although

he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes, in effect, for the

stage.'"[19]   Petrie recognizes that Dickens' influence on Griffith should not be dismissed since: "Innumerable characters, scenes and incidents in Griffith's films are clearly based on models in Dickens and, whatever other elements may have contributed to it, the typical Griffith structure of interwoven scenes and multiple plots drawn together and resolved at the end largely by means of coincidence is essentially also his".[20]

A. B. Walkley, in an interview with Griffith in The Times in 1922 argues that the Dickens influence was arbitrary:

> His best ideas, it appears, have come to him from
> Dickens, who has always been his favorite author. . . .
> Dickens inspired Mr. Griffith with an idea, and his
> employers (mere "business" men) were horrified at it;
> but, says Mr. Griffith, "I went home, re-read one of
> Dickens's novels, and came back next day to tell them
> they could either make use of my idea or dismiss me."
>   Mr. Griffith found the idea to which he clung thus
> heroically in Dickens. That was as luck would have
> it, for he might have found the same idea almost any-
> where. Newton deduced the law of gravitation from
> the fall of an apple; but a pear or a plum would have
> done just as well. The idea is merely that of a
> "break" in the narrative, a shifting of the story
> from one group of characters to another group. People
> who write the long and crowded novels that Dickens
> did, especially when they are published in parts, find
> this practice a convenience. You will meet with it
> in Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope, Meredith, Hardy,
> and I suppose, every other Victorian novelist. . . .
> Mr. Griffith might have found the same practice not
> only in Dumas père, who cared precious little about
> form, but also in great artists like Tolstoy, Turgeniev
> and Balzac. But, as a matter of fact, it was not in
> any of these others, but in Dickens that he found it;
> and it is significant of the predominant influence of
> Dickens that he should be quoted as an authority for
> a device which is really common to fiction at large.   [21]

While it is true that the narrative break is a common device in fiction, in Dickens' novels it assumes a more

significant formal and thematic function. Our Mutual Friend,

for example, is organized on a principle of the presentation

of a number of different modes of reality, or ways of presenting

reality. Although there is a central metaphor, dust, it does

not control and shape the narrative as the Jarndyce Suit and

the Marshelsea dominate Bleak House and Little Dorrit. Rather,

we have a number of parallel visions, or styles, being played

out against each other. Narrative breaks are not simply a

plot device, but a way of contrasting realities and the power

of the opening two chapters derives its force from the transition

from the sequence on the river where Hexam and Lizzie search for

dead bodies to rob, to the Veneering dinner party.

It is possible to ascribe a triadic system to these

differing versions of reality--Roy Armes suggests the uncovering

of the real, the imitating of the real and the questioning of

the real.[22] The sequences of Our Mutual Friend which describe

the city and the river are a kind of documentary realism:

> In these times of ours, though concerning the
> exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat
> of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two
> figures in it, floated on the Thames, between
> Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge
> which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing
> in. . . . At every mooring-chain and rope, at every
> stationary boat or barge that split the current into
> a broad-arrowhead, at the offsets from the piers of
> Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steam-
> boats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating
> logs of timber lashed together lying off certain
> wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After
> a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines
> tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the
> Surrey shore. 23

Obviously the phrases "beat the filthy water", "lashed to-
gether" and "hungry look" indicate a second level of meaning,
but their inclusion does not radically re-interpret what is
seen. If we, as readers, were to view the scene, we would
probably retain the same impressions, so that the general
effect is one of faithful verisimilitude. The aim is to pre-
sent the world as it is.

In the second chapter, the Veneering dinner party, the
guests described are not compared to things, they are nothing
more than things, or rather, a collection of nouns: "a Member,
an Engineer, a Payer-Off of the National Debt, a Poem on
Shakespeare, a Grievance and a Public Office".[24] It is not
simply that identity lurks behind outlandish traits, like
Jingle's speech patterns or Mrs Gamp's husband's wooden leg,
rather, there is simply no identity there at all. The Veneer-
ings and the Podsnaps exist only in language, that is, they
have no humanity other than as a linguistic device of Dickens'
art; like commodities manufactured by Victorian mass-production,
the Grievance and the Public Office are people produced in the
factory of Victorian experience, and like Lady Tippins or Mrs
Skewton, who are dismantled in their dressing-rooms at night,
they are, in every sense, an imitation of life, resembling
reality but in no sense partaking of it. In the mirror sequence,
we are forced to take their appearance from their reflections
on a mimetic plane and, in the same way, they live their lives

within a false world of wealth which does not exist but only
appears to exist.

John Harmon's importance in the novel is to point to
the endless playing-out of roles, the wearing of masks, which
is the product of the modern, urban experience. At the begin-
ning of Chapter XIII of the second book, "A Solo and a Duett",
which contains his recapitulation of his own past, he loses
himself in the Limehouse alleys, and the city as labyrinth
operates as an external manifestation of an internal condition.
Both he and Eugene Wrayburn are preoccupied with the problem
of identity and in the riven Harmon experiences a momentary ego-
loss when he realizes that the very concept of a stable self is
mendacious. Like the moment when the Lammles see their hidden
selves on the surface of a mirror, this dimension of the novel
is an attempt to interrogate the real. Chapter XIII tries to
deal stylistically with another range of experience and although
it is characterized for some critics, by a clumsiness of tech-
nique, Harmon's dialogue with himself, in which opposing roles
are accentuated by his reiteration of his own name as another
persona, is more than a mere device to facilitate flash-back
in time: it is part of the formal and thematic propositions
of the novel.

Our Mutual Friend is a multi-plotted novel in which
different worlds co-exist containing characters who are experi-
encing radically different versions of reality from each other
and planning multiple plots for each other's deception. These

worlds are linked by Dickens' characteristic use of imitative parallels, motifs which serve to link each sphere. For example, in one world there is a corrupt cripple, Silas Wegg, and in another there is an angelic hunchback, Jenny Wren; the shy, retiring Harmon is mirrored by the equally shy and retiring Lizzie, while the flighty, bored, frustrated Bella is a female counterpart of Wrayburn, ennervated by ennui and cynicism. The real metaphor of the book is not dust but Mr Venus' shop in which fragments of skeletons lie in drawers, longing to be articulated into one body, but invariably ending up as elements in a separate whole.

It is this tendency to view the world as a series of self-contained units which are only linked by their occupying place in a larger system that distinguishes Dickens' novels from those of George Eliot, Thackeray or Meredith. Narrative breaks are not simply a product of the exigencies of serial publication but a genuine component of Dickens' response to experience. A novel like <u>Bleak House</u> is actually organized on a principle of dual narration in which, in some cases, events are seen through the eyes of both Esther and the anonymous narrator to make the point that perception is necessarily subjective. Linda Arvidson, Griffith's first wife, recalls that when the director was making <u>After Many Years</u> (USA, 1908) he had to fight with the studio bosses to establish the use of parallel cut-back:

> When Mr. Griffith suggested a scene showing Annie
> Lee waiting for her husband's return to be followed
> by a scene of Enoch cast away on a desert island, it
> was altogether too distracting. "How can you tell a
> story jumping about like that? The people won't know
> what it's about."
>   "Well," said Mr. Griffith, "doesn't Dickens write
> that way?"
>   "Yes, but that's Dickens, that's novel writing;
> that's different."
>   "Oh, not so much, these are picture stories: not
> so very different." 25

Parallel cut-back, the underlying principle of montage,
was developed by Griffith far beyond the mere notion of narrative
breaks. In Intolerance Griffith takes four stories from four
periods of history--the present day, sixteenth-century France,
the Babylonian empire and Biblical Judea--and links them by
a common theme, that of the power of intolerance to kill and
enslave. The film is subtitled "Love's Struggle Throughout
the Ages: A Drama of Comparisons" and each sequence is connected
by recurrent shots of "The Woman Who Rocks the Cradle", a symbol
of the continuity of life. Griffith wants to make clear that
concepts like intolerance are universal, linking people who
exist in widely different parts of time and space; poverty,
injustice and self-sacrifice are common denominators in the
Babylonian empire and a small mill-town of early twentieth-
century America.

The same sense of the inter-relatedness of things is
always being conveyed in Dickens' novels. In Little Dorrit
Amy finds that the Marshelsea is a microcosm of the values
that exist outside the prison. A similar state is shared by

the expatriates who endlessly shuffle around the capitals of

Europe:

> It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself,
> that this same society in which they lived, greatly
> resembled a superior sort of Marshelsea. Numbers of
> people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people
> had come into the prison; through debt, through idle-
> ness, relationships, curiosity, and a general unfit-
> ness for getting on at home. They were brought into
> these foreign towns in the custody of couriers and
> local followers, just as the debtors had been brought
> into the prison. They prowled about the churches
> and picture-galleries, much in the old, dreary, prison-
> yard manner. They were usually going away again to-
> morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds,
> and seldom did what they said they would do, or went
> where they said they would go: in all this again,
> very like the prison debtors.   26

Similarly, Bleak House conveys a social system in which different

worlds are forced to come into violent collision with each other.

Chesney Wold is linked to Jo, the crossing sweeper, by Lady Ded-

lock's affair with Hawdon; Krook, the rag and bone man, appoints

himself as a sign for the Lord Chancellor, who like him, sits

at the centre of "rust and must and cobwebs. . ."; [27] every item

in Krook's shop signifies an aspect of the Court of Chancery

according to the interpreting eye:

> The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out
> of a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any
> counterpoise from a beam, might have been counsellors'
> bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy, as
> Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood
> looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled
> together and picked very clean, were the bones of
> clients, to make the picture complete.   28

Each element of the system--the system of English society and

the system which is the novel--is linked to every other, like

the intersecting rectangles in a Cubist painting and each

ultimately refers back to the controlling metaphor which is a metonymic sign for everything else.

In the same way, Intolerance forces each episode not only to refer back to the central theme, but also creates parallel links between each one. Paul O'Dell in Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood illustrates how these operate:

> The construction of Intolerance is such that each story finds parallels with itself in one or more of the other three, is complemented by the other stories, and is made more forceful dramatically by comparison. There are many times when the narrative of one story stops abruptly to give way to another story; but the linking of the factor, either the image of the cradle or a more direct parallel in the action of the two stories, carries on the momentum of the film and the effect is almost never jumpy or irritating. Griffith chooses to make several parallels between the Pharisees and the Committee of Seventeen. . . . he cuts from them to the Woman Taken in Adultery sequence from the Judean story: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."   29

When the Dear One, in the modern story, is threatened by the Committee of Seventeen, who are trying to take her baby away from her, Griffith shows a close-up of her head and then pans along her arm to where her hand is lying across the child's bootees. "He cuts back to the Judean story--without any linking title or images and superimposed over a picture of Christ surrounded by children the title: 'Suffer little children.'"[30]

Both Dickens and Griffith are using narrative breaks and imitative parallels in such a sophisticated and subtle way that it seems clear that no Victorian novelist other than Dickens could possibly have influenced the director. Not only does Dickens propose separate worlds which are linked, but he

forges the connections by _visual_ images. In Bleak House a

pointing hand serves as an iconographic motif creating parallels

between different parts of the text. The Hand of Allegory, a

"paralysed, dumb witness"[31] reveals the corpse of Mr Tulking-

horn lying in his chamber; Mr Bucket's forefinger points at

the guilty and innocent alike, and Jo points with his broom

through the railings of the cemetery where Hawdon is buried,

for Lady Dedlock.

These visual analogues serve as synechdocal clues to

the reader, showing him how he must read the novel, as J.

Hillis Miller explains:

> Though many of the connections in this elaborate
> structure of analogies are made explicitly in the
> text, many are left for the reader to see for him-
> self. One valuable bit of evidence that Dickens took
> conscious pains to prepare these correspondences is
> given in his plan for Chapter 16. In this chapter
> Lady Dedlock gets Jo to take her to see the paupers'
> graveyard where her lover lies buried. Jo points
> through the iron gate at the spot, and Lady Dedlock
> asks if it is 'consecrated ground'. Dickens's notes
> show that he was aware, and perhaps intended the
> reader to be aware, of the similarity between Jo's
> gesture of pointing and the gesture of the pointing
> Allegory on Mr Tulkinghorn's ceiling. The latter
> is mentioned in passing earlier in the chapter and
> of course is made much of at the time of Mr Tulking-
> horn's murder. 'Jo-,' says the note for this chapter,
> 'shadowing forth of Lady Dedlock in the churchyard./
> Pointing hand of allegory--consecrated ground/"Is it
> Blessed?"' The two gestures of pointing are alike,
> as is suggested by the similarity of pose in the
> illustrations of both by 'Phiz' for the first editions:
> 'Consecrated Ground' and 'A new meaning for the Roman'.
> Both are examples of that procedure of indication
> which is the basic structural principle of Bleak
> House. 32

Visual analogues, narrative breaks, the contrasting of

different spheres of reality, mimetic parallels, all part of

Dickens' technical canon, formed for Griffith the vocabulary
of what was to become film language. What remained for Grif-
fith to do, and for the Soviet film-makers to extend, was the
translation of these devices into an aesthetic system integral
to film form. Griffith understood intuitively what Eisenstein
was to elaborate into theory--that the impact of the cutting of
a film would depend on the length of each sequence in relation
to the next--that is, montage. Out of Porter's The Great Train
Robbery he evolved the dynamics of the chase, which became an
identifying clue to his directorship in the anonymous Biograph
films.

Porter had realized the excitement that could be created
by a chase sequence but although he was one of the first to
realize that a scene could be built up out of a number of shots,
he did not understand that the shot formed the first unit of
film grammar and therefore his movies still gave the impression
of consisting of one continuous action instead of a series of
actions. The Life of an American Fireman (USA, 1903) is the
first film scenario which describes details of not only
dramatic action, but location, camera position and transitions.
It opens with a shot of the fire chief sleeping and then cuts
to his dream--a mother putting her child to bed. He awakes and
paces the floor and then there is a dissolve to a close-up of
a New York fire alarm. In the third scene, the firemen are
shown sleeping and when they are awakened by the alarm they
rush to the brass pole and slide down. Of this scene Porter

says in his scenario: "'This in itself makes a most stirring scene.'"[33] There is then a cut to the horses coming out of the stables, being hitched to the fire-engines and leaving the engine house; this Porter believed, was the most exciting moment in the film because of the speed at which the events happen--that is the shortness of the shot, which he recognized as contributing to the pace. The sixth scene shows the apparatus leaving the engine house, then cuts to the carriages racing through the streets to the blazing fire.

The climax comes when Porter cuts from a shot of the exterior of the building to an interior shot of a bed chamber with a woman and child stifling in the smoke. A fireman breaks into the room and siezing the mother, descends the ladder to safety. Another cut brings us back to the exterior of the house from which we view the second rescue, this time of the child. What was considered to be daring about his film was the fact that the audience was caught up in the excitement of what they felt to be a real-life crisis to which they could react accordingly and Porter manipulated this excitement by breaking up the scene into shots.

Griffith saw the potential of the chase sequence and the excitement it generated in the audience and proceeded to develop it to maximise the capacity of film for immediacy of action. In The Lonely Villa (USA, 1908) he included a last-minute rescue, the suspense of which was due to the prolonging of the situation by intercutting between the helpless family

beset by burglars and the husband on his way to the rescue.
Each shot was made progressively shorter and "The movement was
to. . . create a mounting tension in the audience, as they
experienced by turns the fears of the family and the anxiety
of the husband. Their relief at the rescue was therefore all
the more pronounced."[34]

The significance of this experiment was that hitherto
the duration of a shot had been dependent on the amount of
time it took for the action to occur. By lengthening or shortening
the shot not only could the effectiveness of the story be height-
ened but a tempo and rhythm was established. By the time he came
to make Birth of a Nation Griffith had so perfected the chase-
sequence as a natural climax to the narrative that it formed
the basis of Eisenstein's theories of montage. Of Birth of a
Nation, Lewis Jacobs says:

> The policy of organizing a climax is here seen at
> its maximum effectiveness. It starts with a low
> number and multiplies, geometrically, into a new
> quantitative class. This has proved thus far on
> the screen the most potent way to touch off emotion-
> al explosions in audiences.   35

Elements like the double-climax, in which the Klans reassemble
to ride to the cabin after their rescue of Elsie Stoneman,
the symbolic and prophetic dimension of the Ride, the repetition
of shots of the burning of Atlanta, establish the film as a
landmark in the history of filmic construction, compared with
which, Porter's films seem crude and static.

John Fell, in Film and the Narrative Tradition, argues
that Griffith borrowed this construction from Victorian

theatrical melodrama which had developed technical innovations

in lighting and stage sets to facilitate swift scene shifts:

> The other main structural problem confronted by
> melodrama was that of simultaneity. The stories
> turned so often on coincidental appearances of
> characters at unexpected moments and on rescues in
> the face of imminent danger that staging had to
> facilitate two or more playing areas at the same time.
> Monk Lewis' Venoni (Drury Lane, 1808), used two cells
> separated by a partition. In Fitzball's Jonathon
> Bradford (Surrey, 1833) four apartments are organized
> on two floors:
> . . . The play's action progresses from one apart-
> ment to another or sometimes occurs simultaneously. 36

While technical advances in staging permitted shifts in time

and space, it remains true that the effectiveness of something

like a chase sequence was restricted by the limitations of the

size of the stage. In the theatre the duration of any one

'shot' in a chase is limited to the amount of time it takes

for the actor to cross the stage, so the potential for developing

the kind of tempo that Griffith used, where the shots become

progressively shorter, would be proscribed. While multiple

sets could be used simultaneously, there is a limit to the

number that the stage will comfortably accomodate.

The pursuit undertaken by the detective Bucket and

Esther in Bleak House in an attempt to find Lady Dedlock, is

structured by a constantly shifting tempo and the intrusion of

parallel events. The chase begins effectively with the arrest

of Hortense for Mr Tulkinghorn's murder. Mrs Bagnet has

journeyed to Chesney Wold to bring Mrs Rouncewell back to

London for a reconciliation with her son George. They travel

back to the Dedlock town house where Mrs Rouncewell and George

meet; Lady Dedlock slips away in the middle of the night

leaving a note and the following chapter documents Sir

Leicester's collapse. Bucket then arrives, finds out Esther's

address and calls on her at Mr Jarndyce's lodgings to ask her

to accompany him in his search for her mother. At this point

Dickens inserts a 'shot' of Lady Dedlock which is extrapolated

from Bucket's attempts to imagine where she is:

> Mr Bucket, satisfied, expresses high approval; and
> awaits her coming at the door.
>   There, he mounts a high tower in his mind, and
> looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he
> perceives, creeping through the streets; many solitary
> figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under
> haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not
> among them. Other solitaries he perceives in the
> nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places
> down by the river's level; and a dark, dark,
> shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary
> than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention.
>   Where is she? Living or dead, where is she? If,
> as he folds the hankerchief and carefully puts it
> up, it were able, with an enchanted power, to bring
> before him the place where she found it, and the
> night landscape near the cottage where it covered
> the little child, would he descry her there? On the
> waste, where the brick kilns are burning. . .
> traversing this deserted, blighted spot, there is a
> lonely figure with the sad world to itself, pelted
> by the snow and driven by the wind, and cast out,
> it would seem, from all other companionship. It is
> the figure of a woman, too; but it is miserably dressed,
> and no such clothes ever came through the wall, and
> out at the great door, of the Dedlock mansion. 37

It is, of course, this kind of narrative technique

upon which Griffith based parallel cut-back, made particularly

cinematic, in this case, by the shift from what Bucket imagines,

to what we, as privileged sharers of the omniscient narrator's

point of view, can 'see'. A further parallel is created by the
potential for mistaken identity. Is the figure Lady Dedlock
or the brickmaker's wife? Also, the suggestion that the image
of Lady Dedlock could be projected onto Bucket's handkerchief
suggests an actual anticipation of cinema, probably due to
the magic lantern shows that were popular in the middle of the
century. It might, indeed, be possible to project the images
on a back screen, in the theatre, but the effectiveness of the
Bleak House passage depends on the 'fading out' of Bucket
and the realization that we have shifted from the images of
the imagination to the real.

The pursuit continues with Esther and Bucket going to
the river in order to find out if Lady Dedlock's body has been
found there--that is, the realization of Bucket's fantasy. From
the river they proceed by coach to St. Alban's to see if Lady
Dedlock had visited Bleak House. In St. Albans they go to the
brickmaker's cottage and reconstruct her movements of the
previous night. They then turn back to London. At this point
Dickens inserts a chapter-long digression where the Fashionable
Intelligence discuss the rumours of her disgrace. In the
Dedlock mansion, Sir Leicester lies ill, cared for by his
relative Volumnia, and Lady Dedlock's empty room is described.
Esther and Bucket arrive in London, meet Alan Woodcourt by
chance on the streets and go to Snagsby's where they find Lady
Dedlock's note to Esther. The closing pages of the pursuit

show the arrival of Bucket, Esther and Woodcourt at the pauper's
graveyard where Hawdon is buried. Esther sees the body lying
before the gates and, despite the warnings of others, assumes
that it is the brickmaker's wife, since it is wearing her
clothes. For the unsophisticated reader, despite the fore-
shadowings, hints and clues, it is only in the final lines
that the body is revealed as Lady Dedlock's.

The excitement and tension which the pursuit generates
for the reader is a product of the way that Dickens manipulates
the pace. The long digressions in which we are shown the
Fashionable Intelligence discussing Lady Dedlock, the significance
of Sir Leicester's illness, the inserts of Lady Dedlock leaving
the town house, wandering among the brick-fields and Bucket's
images of her, the sense of multiple journeys being taken--by
Mrs Rouncewell and Mrs Bagnet, Esther and Bucket, Lady Dedlock
herself--all contribute to the long build-up towards Lady
Dedlock's eventual discovery at the gates of the graveyard.
Tension is further heightened by what Dickens called in his
chapter plans "Shadowing forth" and by the mistaken identity
motif which persists up to the last moment of this section of
the narrative. In addition, the fact that this pursuit has
already been prefigured by Bucket's pursuit of Jo, after he has
contracted smallpox, contributes to a tightly controlled
multiplicity of events.

In _Little Dorrit_, this technique was perfected even

further by split-second timing. Mrs Clenam runs from her
house to tell Amy of Arthur's true parentage and arrives back
just at the moment when the house collapses, with Rigaud, who
has apparently succeeded in his blackmail threats, inside it.
Perhaps the reason why Oliver Twist is so popular with film-
makers is attributable to the closing chase sequence where
Sikes is pursued across the roof-tops to his death, with the
narrative shifting from Sikes on the roof to Mr Brownlow below
and back again.

        Eisenstein notes a further device which Griffith adopted
from Dickens, that of 'atmosphere':

> The image of Mr Dombey is revealed through cold and
> prudery. And the print of cold lies on everyone and
> everything--everywhere. And "atmosphere"--always and
> everywhere--is one of the most expressive means of
> revealing the inner world and ethical countenance of
> the characters themselves.   38

Eisenstein is referring to the heat/cold dichotomy which
Dickens uses to define not only Dombey's nature, but the novel's
assumptions about death and about feeling. The description
of Paul's christening proposes a situation in which all the
elements are working together to produce the atmosphere--it is
not only the weather that is cold, it is also the church, the
font, the clergyman looking like a ghost and the meal afterwards
which seems more like a funeral collation of baked meats.
"It happened to be an iron-grey autumnal day, with a shrewd
east wind blowing--a day in keeping with the proceedings."[39]
Indeed the sense of coldness is appropriate to the fact that

this is the day when Paul will take on the Dombey name--
a name whose aural resonance takes in 'doom' and 'tombstone'.
Death and coldness seem inextricably bound together:

> 'Please to bring the child in quick out of the
> air there,' whispered the beadle, holding open the
> inner door of the church.
> Little Paul might well have been asked with Hamlet
> 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place. 40

This atmosphere pervades everything; even the "cold collation
set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more
like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment."[41]

In the same way that the film-maker chooses an object
external to the character in order to describe him or her, the
function of 'atmosphere', and of course particularly the
weather, is an important tool for telling the audience how to
interpret events or to indicate internal disposition. In
choosing to film The White Rose (USA, 1923) in the Bayou
Teche region of Louisiana, Griffith recognized the thematic
role that atmospheric conditions could play in contributing
to the mood and the sense of a film. When Teazie stands out-
side the Carrington house with her baby and sees its father,
Joseph Beaugarde with his fiancée, Marie Carrington, the steamy
rain and luxuriant foliage create an atmosphere which not
only threatens Teazie's already poor state of health, but
seems to point to Beaugarde's sexual and moral hypocrisy.
The socially conventional nature of his relationship with Marie
Carrington is revealed as mendacious when the heat and rain

outside the house suggest his physical passion.

In Broken Blossoms, made entirely in the studio,
Griffith was able to exercise total control over 'atmospherics'.
The misty street scenes, the fog-drenched wharves, the slow
dissolves from one scene to another attain a quality close to
Impressionist painting yet still retain the abundance of
detail, the closeness of observation that is typical of Griffith.
No other director had been so fully aware of the significance
of atmosphere to create the style of a film. In Way Down East
(USA, 1920) the climactic sequence at the end where Anna is
trapped on the drifting ice-flow, uses the concept of coldness
to comment on the earlier action.

Anna has gone to request financial assistance from
rich Boston relatives who receive her with coldness. In a
fake marriage she is seduced and when she becomes pregnant,
her 'husband' deserts her. She then goes to live in a rooming
house where her baby is born and dies and she is turned out
by her landlady. She finds work in a village and falls in love
with the Squire's son who has been intended for someone else.
Her seducer and her old landlady re-appear and one attempts to
blackmail her into leaving while the other spreads her story
around the village. At the climax of the film Anna rushes from
the Squire's house through a storm and collapses on the frozen
river. In the spring thaw the river is breaking up and she is
carried downstream only to be rescued at the last moment by

the Squire's son. It is this sequence which visually defines
the themes of the film: Anna has been trapped between the
coldness of her relatives and her landlady and the passion
of her seducer. On the river she is at the mercy of both these
states--with no one to intervene she will either die of cold
on the river or be swept away by its energy.

The extent to which other nineteenth-century novelists
and poets critically influenced Griffith's style is probably
more difficult to indicate. Certainly, he was well acquainted
with a wide range of Victorian poetry and prose and he made
two film versions of Tennyson's "Enoch Arden". The devices
which Griffith borrowed from Dickens often are present in
other writers; one need only look at the first pages of Conrad's
The Secret Agent or Henry James' The Europeans to find an
attention to detail very much like Dickens' own. What one
should be concerned with, however, is the frequency with which
such passages occur and the extent to which style is determined
by techniques which now seem cinematic.

It is difficult to think of any one novelist whose works
have been filmed and translated onto the television screen
more often than Dickens' have. If Griffith says that he solved
problems of filmic construction by going home and reading
Dickens, there is no reason why he should not be believed since
those texts contain within them not one solution but very
many.

Chapter Three

Conventions of Realism

So far, this thesis has been concerned with the illus-
tration of some of the cinematic techniques to be found in
Dickens' novels, and with the way Griffith translated them
into the new medium. An analysis of this kind necessarily
begs the question of its implications for the more traditional
critiques of Dickens. The history of Dickens scholarship
documents a period of great popularity during his own lifetime,
followed by a reversal when his novels were dismissed as
sentimental and naive. Following a number of reappraisals by
critics like Humphrey House and Edmund Wilson, in the 1940s,
Dickens' reputation was re-established. However, it remains
true that most critical approaches have placed the novels firmly
within a moral tradition.

This approach tends to be limiting, for it ignores
possible links with the epistemological preoccupations of the
Romantics, with whom Dickens may well have much in common.
Contemporary Dickens criticism, particularly the work of
J. Hillis Miller, is beginning to approach Dickens through other
methodologies--structuralism, semiology and phenomenology.
Like Miller, I tend to see Dickens' characters as products of
a nineteenth-century existential vision. Their peculiarity

is a measure of their own isolation from each other. Their

attempts at communication are futile. Language itself is a

bankrupt currency and thus they find themselves adrift in a

world whose codes have long since ceased to adequately express

a coherent meaning. Some, like Tulkinghorn in <u>Bleak House</u>,

are the masters and hoarders of these dead languages; others,

like Jo in the same novel, float in a sea of meaningless ob-

fuscation. As they move through London, the city that is the

emblem of their own confusion, they are endlessly confronted

with visual and verbal manifestations of disorder and the

inexplicable. To some extent, this is not only because of

Dickens' own virulent imagination, which places his characters

in a landscape peopled by the grotesque. It is evident, from

reading Henry Mayhew, the chronicler of working-class life in

the nineteenth-century London, that the originals actually

existed; perhaps the rise of the mass-media has imposed a

bland, mass-identity and mass-experience on post-war society.

Reading Dickens in the 1970s, the age of Claude Lévi-

Strauss, Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jean-Luc

Godard, poses new problems for our concepts of realism and blurs

the traditional dichotomy between Romanticism and Classicism.

In concentrating too intently upon content, Dickens scholarship

has tended to ignore form. Thus Dickens' unique style has

received little attention. A semiotic approach would be par-

ticularly fruitful for a novel like <u>Bleak House</u> with its obsession

with signs. The critic who is preparing such a study would
be as well to turn to some of the writings on film semiology,
since the world of a Dickens novel requires an extension of the
visual sense.

It is true that many of Dickens' characters exist only
in language, that is, they are no more than functions of Dickens'
own rhetoric. There is little point in treating Podsnap in
Our Mutual Friend as if he had motives and a moral disposition
since he is not a character but a metaphor for a spurious
values. Thus he is used to create the concept 'Podsnappery'.
He does not exist visibly, but mentally--an 'idea' in the mind
of the reader.

However, there are many other characters who exist only
within perceptible reality. This is true of Jingle, in Pickwick
Papers, whose internal life is unknown to the reader. He
simply appears, confronting Pickwick with this idiosyncratic
presence. Characters like Jingle create a code with visual and
aural signs, and we are wholly dependent on these signs for
our knowledge of them. These signs are clues to their reality.
What we have is an impression of reality, since the characters
exist only as surface, upon which yet another surface has been
imposed--that of Dickens' style.

Christian Metz, in Film Language, argues that, paradoxic-
ally, film seems more real than the theatre:

According to Rosenkrantz, the spectator is summoned

> to take a position in relation to these very real
> actors, rather than to identify himself with the
> characters they embody. The actor's bodily presence
> contradicts the temptation one always experiences
> during the show to perceive him as a protagonist in
> a fictional universe, and the theater can only be a
> freely accepted game played among accomplices. Because
> the theater is too real, theatrical fictions yield
> only a weak impression of reality. . . . The theatrical
> spectacle. . . cannot be a convincing duplication
> of life, because it is itself a part of life, and too
> visibly so: Consider the intermissions, the social
> ritual, the real space of the stage, the real presence
> of the actor--their weight is too great for the
> fiction the play elaborates to be experienced as
> real. The stage setting, for example, does not have
> the effect of creating a _diegetic_ universe; it is only
> a convention within the real world.   1

Film, on the other hand, presents a world that is so blatant-

ly unreal, that we cannot resist investing it with reality.

The characters that we see on the screen are intangible; one can

literally pass one's hands through them. Lacking the reality

of three dimensions, an illusion of perspective is created on

a flat plane:

> It is because the world does not intrude upon the
> fiction and constantly deny its claim to reality--
> as happens in the theater--that a film's diegesis
> can yield the peculiar and well-known impression
> of reality that we are trying to understand here. 2

Metz's phenomenological approach to cinema suggests new ways of

approaching Dickens' modes of representation. Dickens creates

a world that is so graphic and so visible that we tend to

forget its distortion. The world of his novels is an hermetically-

sealed universe which forestalls, by its very structure,

intrusion from the outside. By the time he came to write

Bleak House, he had begun to create fictional systems which

had no point of reference outside themselves. By various
techniques of mimesis, he creates a model of English society
which is a kind of mirror image of the real England. The
problem of interpretation, which is the theme of the book,
is extended to include the act of interpretation, by the reader,
of the book itself. Thus the novel is the space between the
reader and the text. Since the world of the novel is seeking
to mirror the world of the reader, a certain amount of refraction
is involved. In fact, one could plausibly compare a novel
like Bleak House to a parabolic chamber of different kinds of
distorting fairground mirrors. Each mirror reflects back
every other mirror, producing multiple images of refraction.
The ultimate effect is prismatic; what we see is not depth,
but various kinds of surface.

The effect produced by a Dickens novel is similar to
that deliberately worked toward in much contemporary cinema.
This is particularly true of some of the New Wave directors in
France, many of whom served a critical apprenticeship with
Cahiers du Cinéma, the influential French film journal which
gave birth to the auteur theory.   We
find the same tendency in contemporary American film. Robert
Altman, arguably the most interesting director to emerge in the
1970s, had his training as a maker of television commercials.
This is a fact which must account for his obvious preoccupation
with surface reality. In Nashville (USA, 1975), the political

candidate, Hal Philip Walker, sends his sound-trucks round the city, blaring out political slogans. These are 'concealed' from the ear of the audience by the various layers of conversation that obstruct them. When we finally understand what is being said, we realize that it is rubbish. Even a director as idiosyncratic as Fellini is a product of his own rebellion against post-war Italian neo-realism. Recognizing that naturalism is a trick or convention, he deliberately disrupts the expectations of the audience by showing characters whose appearance represents a challenge to visual conventions. He does not distort perception; rather, he demonstrates that the world is itself distorted, if we insist on the existence of an _a priori_ standard of normality by which it can be measured.

Although the cinema is little more than eighty years old, the speed of its growth towards maturity mirrors the increased pace of the twentieth-century world. Thus it has long ago shed its literary antecedents and is now becoming its own historian. It has not cast off its origins; it has arrived at the point at which it has its own tradition and development to provide a context for its present state. This, perhaps, accounts for the movement away from studied realism or experimentalism towards a synthesis of its conventions. It may account, too, for the growth of 'self-conscious cinema', producing films like Truffaut's _La Nuit Américaine_ (France, 1973) and Godard's _A Bout de Souffle_ (France, 1959). Like the novel in

the first decades of the twentieth century, film is now in-
tent on interrogating its own form. Out of this introspection
has grown a second wave of theories of film language, revital-
izing the theories of Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Admirers of
Godard would go so far as to say that we are moving towards a
new system of aesthetics, not merely of film, but of all art.

The techniques documented in the first two chapters of
this thesis were to become not simply conventions, but the raw
material of filmic construction. In comparing Dickens to
contemporary film-makers in this chapter, it should be remembered
that while Dickens was certainly anticipating the beginnings
of the new medium, often he used these devices with greater
sophistication in his own work. Thus, one can argue that con-
temporary cinema, through evaluating its own origins and form,
has now arrived at the point that Dickens had already reached.
The comparison is partially intended to defend Dickens against
some of the misinterpretations of his work that have arisen due
to the tendency to judge him by criteria derived from other
works. In the light of previous errors of judgement, it is
tempting to refuse to analyze Dickens' novels with critical
tools that actually belong to another medium. Yet, as we have
seen, there is much in Dickens which becomes intelligible
when comparisons are drawn with cinema. A significant advantage
of such comparisons is that it becomes increasingly possible
to argue against the hostility of those who require of him the

psychological realism, the stylistic austerity and the refine-
ment of sensibility typical of his later contemporaries.

The extent to which Henry James was indirectly respon-
sible for reducing Dickens' critical reputation can hardly be
underestimated. W. D. Howells, praising James in a review,
commented: "The art of fiction, has, in fact, become a finer
art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray. We
could not suffer the confidential attitude of the latter now,
nor the mannerism of the former any more than we could endure
the prolixity of Richardson or the coarseness of Fielding."[3]
James himself contributed to the debate in 1865 when he re-
viewed Our Mutual Friend anonymously for the Nation. Although
this review was written when he was only twenty-two, and in
later years he declared his admiration of Dickens, it does
represent many of the artistic values that were to result in
Dickens' decline in critical popularity. In it, we can detect
an ideology of realism which was attempting to impose itself
on a wholly different mode of representation.

James begins by declaring that Our Mutual Friend is
the poorest of Dickens' works: "And it is poor with the
poverty not of momentary embarrassment, but of permanent ex-
haustion. . . . For the last ten years it has seemed to us that
Mr. Dickens has been unmistakably forcing himself. Bleak House
was forced. . . the present work is dug out as with a spade and
pick-axe."[4] James, it seems, has seldom "read a book so

intensely <u>written</u>, so little seen, known or felt."[5] Techniques

of characterization come under attack, since he feels that the

creations "have nothing in common with each other, except the

fact that they have nothing in common with mankind at large.

What a world were this world if the world of <u>Our Mutual Friend</u>

were an honest reflection of it!"[6]

Against Jenny Wren, a character in the tradition of

the Dickensian grotesque, James launches a particularly viru-

lent attack:

> Like all Mr. Dickens's pathetic characters, she is a
> little monster: she is deformed, unhealthy, unnatural;
> she belongs to the troops of hunchbacks, imbeciles and
> precocious children who have carried on the sentimental
> business in all Mr. Dickens's novels; the little Nells,
> the Smikes, the Paul Dombeys.   7

James then goes on to argue that "a community of eccentrics is

impossible. . . . Where in these pages are the depositaries of

that intelligence without which the movement of life would cease?

Who represents nature?"[8] Certainly not Eugene Wrayburn or Brad-

ley Headstone, whom he accuses of the vulgar posturing of the

melodramatic stage.

Ultimately, James is convinced that Dickens represents

a second-rate talent:

> . . . we are convinced that it is one of the chief
> conditions of his genius not to see beneath the sur-
> face of things. If we might hazard a definition of
> his literary character, we should, accordingly call
> him the greatest of superficial novelists. We are
> aware that this definition confines him to an inferior
> rank in the department of letters which he adorns; but
> we accept this consequence of our proposition. It
> were, in our opinion, an offence against humanity to
> place Mr. Dickens amongst the greatest novelists. For,

> to repeat what we have already intimated, he has
> created nothing but figure.   9

To be placed among the great novelists, according to James,

one must be a humanist, a philosopher and a moralist:

> He [the writer] must know man as well as men and
> to know man is to be a philosopher.
>   The writer who knows men alone, if he have Mr.
> Dickens's humour and fancy, will give us figures for
> which we cannot be too grateful, for he will enlarge
> our knowledge of the world. But when he introduces
> men and women whose interest is preconceived to lie
> not in the poverty, the weakness, the drollery of
> their natures, but in their complete and unconscious
> subjection to ordinary and healthy human emotions,
> all his humour, all his fancy, will avail him nothing,
> if, out of the fullness of his sympathy, he is unable
> to prosecute those generalizations in which alone
> consists the real greatness of a work of art.   10

With the aid of hindsight, it is clear that what James is pro-

posing is a manifesto towards his own, as yet unwritten novels.

The review is a minor landmark in the history of fiction and,

it can be argued, we learn more about what the Novel was to

become, than what Our Mutual Friend is. At times the review

is inconsistent. Like many other readers of the time, James

implicitly prefers the earlier novels: "In former times there

reigned in Mr. Dickens's extravagances a comparative consistency;

they were exaggerated statements of types that really existed.

We had, perhaps, never known a Newman Noggs nor a Pecksniff,

nor a Micawber; but we had known persons of whom these figures

were but the strictly logical consummation."[11]

     What one wishes to know is how James accounts for the

greater degree of psychological complexity which emerges in

the later novels--in the portraits of David Copperfield,

attempting to come to terms with his own history; or Pip's

stuggles to find his place in a class-system from which he

has been doubly-outlawed, by birth and by acquired wealth. As

Dickens reached middle-age, his exuberant fancy had to be reined-

in to match a darker vision. In his later years he could no

longer create a Sam Weller or an Alfred Jingle or a Mrs Gamp

and, one must concede with James, Mrs Wilfer is a poor substi-

tute. Those earlier figures, however, have a tendency to be

larger than the thematic systems within which they reside; they

possess an archetypal freedom which the structure of the later

novels cannot permit. James demands humour in a world where

violence and cruelty and the terror of lonliness are ever-

present fears. He requires humanity in a population notable

for its actual incapacity to be human: where Jenny Wren's

physical deformity has to be measured against the handicaps

of those who live around her.

James' claim that the qualification for being a phil-

osopher is the knowledge of man is, perhaps, ambiguous since

when James uses the word 'philosopher', he is referring to a

humanist tradition. Dickens' philosophy is epistemological--

thus in Bleak House he questions how we are to discover the

'truth', and if there is truth to be discovered beneath the

random, chaotic world of appearance. The question he proposes

is how one can know anything except that which one sees.

In fact, in Our Mutual Friend Dickens posits, explicit-

ly, his theories of identity. He creates a number of 'existential

types' in order to develop themes of isolation and fragmentation

of self. Harmon, Wrayburn and Headstone are all battling with

the concept of identity, and at one point, Wrayburn says of himself:

> 'You know what I am, my dear Mortimer. You know how
> dreadfully susceptible I am to boredom. You know that
> when I became enough of a man to find myself an em-
> bodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree
> trying to find out what I meant. You know that at
> length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more.
> Then how can I possibly give you the answer that I
> have not discovered? The old nursery form runs,
> "Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree, p'raps you can't tell me
> what this may be?" My reply runs, "No. Upon my life,
> I can't."'   12

When Harmon narrowly escapes death by drowning after his return

to England, he experiences a momentary ego-loss while in the

water:

> 'That is still correct? Still correct, with the
> exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself
> without using the word I. But it was not I. There
> was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.
> 'It was only after a downward slide through some-
> thing like a tube, and then a great noise and a
> sparkling and a crackling as of fires, that the con-
> sciousness came upon me, "This is John Harmon drown-
> ing! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Har-
> mon, call on Heaven and save yourself!" I think I
> cried it aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy
> horrid unintelligible something vanished and it was
> I who was struggling there alone in the water.   13

The unbearable pressure on the brain is the knowledge that the

concept of a stable self is mendacious. Harmon is living out

a life of inverse schizophrenia: where the external world

knows three individuals, Harmon knows that there is only one;

or rather thinks he knows.

What one notices about this novel is the extent to

which most of the forty or so characters are experiencing

radically different versions of reality from each other. With-
in the Hexam family, there are gaps of experience which even
love cannot cross. There are no bridges, no common language,
when one member of the family is attempting to achieve bourgeois
respectability through the medium of pedagogy; one is aggressive-
ly illiterate and one 'reads' the world in the strange shadows
of the fire. When characters attempt to join forces to scheme,
their differences tend to pull them apart. Venus has too much
decency to work in tandem with Wegg; Mrs Boffin, while in on
her husband's secret, is so kind-hearted that she is always
trying to give the game away. It is because of this sense of
individual isolation, that Dickens feels that there is no way
of knowing either man or men: we can only know what we see.

Not only are characters isolated from each other, they
also inhabit milieux which are, themselves, individual micro-
cosms in the novel. There is a tiny world on the roof-garden
of Fledgeby's business premises whose society consists of
Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren and Riah. There are the Boffins in
their Bower; Venus in his shop; the Veneering dinner parties
and many others. Hillis Miller notes:

> The unique style of life of each character is visible
> in all the language Dickens uses about him, and to
> move from a chapter about the Veneerings to a chapter
> about Wegg and Boffin is to move into an entirely
> different world. The narrator respects the irreducible
> peculiarity of each character or group. The basic
> structural technique of the novel is the complete trans-
> formation of tone and milieu from chapter to chapter. 14

This shift in style provides yet another surface on which the
reader can 'view' the characters. Miller suggests that the

novels, proposes notions of identity and raises questions about
realist aesthetics which demand the application of a theoreti-
cal system appropriate to the form that these novels take.
Given the fact that many of the devices Dickens used in de-
picting a character anticipated cinematic technique, it is to
be expected that a common theory can be shared by both Dickens
and film. The systems that were constructed at the beginning
of the twentieth century by pioneers like Eisenstein and
Pudovkin can be usefully applied.

Both Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein came to the
cinema from the visual arts: the former was a painter and
the latter had been working in the early, avant garde Soviet
theatre. When he joined the Protecult Theatre, Eisenstein
worked under Meyerhold who:

> . . . drew from Hoffman (expecially The Princess
> Brambilla) an: enhanced interest in the commedia
> dell'arte which he saw as the main element in a
> theatrical anti-tradition comprising the fantastic,
> the marvellous, the popular, the folk-loric: a
> non-verbal, stylized, conventional theatre which
> he could use as a weapon against Stanislavsky's
> Naturalism and psychologism.   16

Meyerhold's system of actor-training, 'bio-mechanics', con-
ceived of the human body "almost as a robot, whose muscles
and tendons were like pistons and rods. . . . This system was
given a psychological underpinning, Pavlovian reflexology:
'The actor must be able to respond to stimuli.'"[17] This theory,
aimed at bringing acting techniques into line with the age of

the machine, was a deliberate rejection of Stanislavsky's

mysticism and his insistence on the empathy of the actor with

the role.

Soviet expressionism as a "theatrical anti-tradition"

provided the ideal foundation for a revolutionary silent

cinema. Denied the possibilities of dialogue for further

development of character, the film-maker had to rely on what

Pudovkin called "the vividly externally expressive type. . . ."[18]

Eisenstein went on to expand this idea into the concept of

typage. Typage seems to give us an important clue as to the

way in which Dickens' characters were created and to the re-

sponse that they are supposed to elicit from the reader:

> I want to point out that "typage" must be under-
> stood as broader than merely a face without make-
> up, or a substitution of "naturally expressive"
> types for actors. In my opinion, "typage" included
> a specific approach to the events embraced by the
> content of the film. Here again was the method of
> least interference with the natural course and com-
> binations of events. In concept, from beginning to
> end, October is pure "typage".   19

Jay Leda, Eisenstein's editor and translator, explains in a

footnote to Eisenstein's text:

> . . . one might define typage as a modern develop-
> ment of the Commedia dell'arte--with its seven stock
> figures multiplied into infinity. The relationship
> lies not in numbers, but in audience conditioning.
> Upon entrance of Pantalone or the Captain, his
> mask tells the audience immediately what to expect
> of this figure. Modern film typage is based on the
> need for presenting the character in our first glimpse
> of him so sharply and completely that further use of
> this character may be as a known element. Thus, new,
> immediate conventions are created.   20

Eisenstein developed this theory out of a rather crude interpretation of Behaviourist psychology, in particular, the work of Pavlov. The audience, he claimed, could be conditioned into receiving a political message by the controlled use of visual stimuli. He was also interested in the work of Lavatar, who developed the 'science' of physiognomy:

> We do not attribute to physiognomy any objective scientific value whatsoever, but the moment we require, in course of all-sided representation of a character denoting some type, the external characterization of a countenance, we immediately start using faces in exactly the same way as Lavatar did.   21

By using typage, Eisenstein felt that he could present events, and drive home the 'message' of his films with the least possible human interference. In the Odessa Steps sequence of Potemkin, the massacre is depicted by a kind of facial montage, that is, a series of close-ups connected by long-shots. One of the most powerful shots in the film is that of the woman with the pince-nez who appears at the beginning of the sequence and at the end, her face covered in blood and her mouth open in horror.

The principle of typage can be usefully applied to Dickens' methods of characterization. He intends us to register our response to his characters according to a code which he establishes. Our responses are conditioned by a set of visual stimuli: signs created by appearance stand for a set of assumptions. Falstaff's obesity tells the viewer of the play or the reader of the texts that he is a glutton, but if we attempt to extrapolate a whole identity from one visual

trait, we will distort what Shakespeare intends. With Chaplin

and Keaton it _is_ possible to build up an exhaustive picture

from what is seen--costume, facial expression, idiosyncracies

of manner and relations with objects.

The significance of the _Commedia dell'arte_ to Eisen-

stein's theory is clear. Like all theatre which uses, or im-

plies, the concept of the mask--Noh, Kabuki, for example--it

demands rigid conventions which must be accepted, or even in-

ternalized, by the audience. Code-breaking rarely occurs.

Until the end of the silent era, cinema tended to rely heavily

on visual codes. Once the studio bosses realized that the

audiences recognized certain actors in different films, the

star system was developed, establishing certain stereotypes:

the 'It' Girl, the Vamp and the fat/thin combination of Laurel

and Hardy. Occasionally, these stereotypes became archetypes

of cinema, which was Chaplin's case--a Chaplin imitation is

found in Jean Vigo's _Zéro de Conduite_ (France, 1933). In the

sound era it was no longer so necessary to establish visual

conventions, but the genre movies, like Westerns, still de-

manded a fairly rigid set of codes, for example, the black/

white dichotomy found in the Western, so amusingly parodied

by Mel Brooks in _Blazing Saddles_ (USA, 1974).

A visual code consists of two kinds of sign: the

'fixed' sign and the 'free' sign. Examples of the former

would be facial appearance, which is difficult to alter with-

out extensive cosmetic camouflage; characteristic gestures;

verbal mannerisms and so on. These signs are fixed either for
the duration of the film or are carried over, by the actor,
into other performances. The latter category would include
dress and temporary gestures. In Von Sternberg's The Blue
Angel (Germany, 1930), the Professor is made to crow like a
cock at the wedding party, an action which he performs on
subsequent occasions. This gesture is 'free' because it is
acquired and has an additional symbolic significance.

Necessarily, the distinction between these two kinds
of sign can become blurred and this is particularly true of
dress. For Chaplin, the hat, the cane and the shoes are
fixed signs. In Godard's À Bout de Souffle the hero, Michael,
has a certain way of touching his lower lip with his finger.
At the end of the film, after his death, his girlfriend turns
to the camera touching her lip with her finger in the same
manner. Michel's own code has been transferred to her by
the fact of his death. For Michel , it is a 'fixed' sign;
for his girlfriend, it is not a sign at all, since it does
not operate for most of the film.

The point about these signs is that they belong
uniquely to a particular character. They condition our respon-
ses and, more practically, are an aid to identification. This
can be an aid to a director who will sometimes deliberately
disrupt the expectations of the audience by altering the
signs. This is the conscious intention of Nicholas Roeg's
Performance (UK, 1968), which puts two characters into identical
clothes so that we will confuse the two.

Visual codes 'create' the identity of the character.
Once they are accepted by the viewer, he can safely suspend
his previous notions of reality and surrender to the impres-
sion of reality created by the film. There is a telling
comment to this effect in an interview between Godard and
Cahiers du Cinéma. Godard has spoken for some time on the
subject of the representation of reality in the cinema, when
the interviewer interrupts with the comment: "There is a good
deal of blood in Pierrot." [Godard's Pierrot le Fou (France,
1965)] Godard replies, briefly: "Not blood, red."[22] He
then continues to speak of the problems of capturing 'life'
on film, but his remark encapsulates, in a phrase, the essence
of filmic conventions and the way in which he approaches them.
This involves either the acceptance of a code, or its inter-
rogation by both director and audience.

Eisenstein realized, early on, that our reality is
governed by a world of appearances which may be delusory. We
believe what we see, as Peter Wollen indicates, in Signs and
Meaning in the Cinema:

> During his work on Strike Eisenstein also elabor-
> ated his theory of 'typage' in the choice of actors.
> Like Kuleshov, like the whole theatrical tradition
> in which he worked, he rejected orthodox stage
> acting. Instead he preferred to cast films simply
> by the physiological, particularly facial character-
> istics he felt suited the part. A man who he saw
> shovelling coal in the hotel at Sevastopol where
> they were shooting was drafted into the cast to
> play the surgeon in Battleship Potemkin. 23

The origins of some of Eisenstein's actors reveals the actual

duplicity of appearance: the coal shoveller from Sevastopol

plays an aristocrat in the film; the image establishes a code

which is divorced from reality. Appearances are always play-

ing tricks with our knowledge of what should be the truth.

As Richard Roud points out in his monograph on Godard,

what film has in common with existentialism is that "both are

more interested in the actions, the behaviour of men than in

their thoughts."[24] I said, at the beginning of this chapter,

that I detected, in Dickens, the same view of the world, the

same sense of isolation that is typical of the twentieth-century

existentialist writers and film-makers. It is this, I think

which leads him to populate his novels with characters whose

reality can only be measured by their external life. They

have a tendency to be fixed in roles which define them--roles

which saturate their language and their gestures to the point

where they almost become automata.

At one, point, in the Justine section of Lawrence

Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, Pursewarden remarks, in his

diary: "'Are people. . . continuously themselves, or simply

over and over again so fast that they give the illusion of

continuous features--the temporal flicker of old silent

films?'"[25] This seems to be the condition of many of Dickens'

characters, who reduplicate themselves on each occasion that

they appear. These characters do not develop in the accepted

sense and it would be tempting to compare them to the images of still photography, a visual art which lacks the dimensions of time and volume. However, if they do not develop internally, they do move through the fictional landscape and fictional time-scheme of the novel. And they bear with them a rich system of signs by which they can be identified.

After the introduction of Grandcourt, in _Daniel Deronda_, George Eliot remarks:

> Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being? even when he is presented to us we can only begin the knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by innumerable impressions under differing circumstances. We recognize the alphabet; we are not sure of the language. 26

This is simply not true of many of Dickens' characters. He would argue that the language does not have to be 'learned'; it is established as soon as we know the alphabet. Mr Jingle, in _Pickwick Papers_, exists purely as a function of the signs by which he is identified and these are fixed signs that do not alter during the course of the novel:

> 'My dear; here's Mr Charles Fitz-Marshall.'
> 'Oh dear,' said Mrs Leo Hunter, 'how anxiously I have been expecting him. Pray make room, to let Mr Fitz-Marshall pass. Tell Mr Fitz-Marshall, my dear, to come up to me directly, to be scolded for coming so late.'
> 'Coming, my dear Ma'am,' cried a voice, 'as quick as I can--crowds of people--full room--hard work--very.'
> Mr Pickwick's knife and fork fell from his hand. He stared across the table at Mr Tupman, who had dropped _his_ knife and fork, and was looking as if he were about to sink into the ground without further notice. 27

Despite his assumed name, Jingle is instantly recognizable
to Pickwick and his friends (and to the reader) by his voice,
or rather his speech patterns. Jingle is one of Dickens'
most interesting characters because he is a blueprint for a
much larger system of assumptions, in Dickens, about identity.
His language has the staccato quality of morse-code, or a
verbal shorthand. His words lack depth and substance and we
are aware only of form. His sentences are a jerkily differen-
tiated aural experience for the listener, like a jingle of
bells which is incapable of being a tune. The fictional selves
which this strolling player is so adept at assuming, are acquired
and abandoned with the same rapidity as his language. Thus
identity (what there is of it) and speech reinforce each other
to propose something fragmented and discontinuous.

At the end of the novel, after Jingle has become the
recipient of Pickwick's philanthropy, we are to assume that he
has been the subject of a 'moral rescue' which has transformed
his inner being. This poses problems for Dickens, who has not
yet established that he has an inner being to be transformed.
After this alleged moral victory, significantly, Jingle ceases
to speak. The code by which he is recognized has been broken
and Dickens does not seem to know what to replace it with. If
he is altered internally, will he alter externally? Dickens'
uncertainty is perhaps due to the fact that the main sign by
which Jingle is recognized, is his voice, which is a fixed
sign. He tries to get round the problem by substituting Job

Trotter, Jingle's servant, as his mouthpiece. Trotter's main

sign is his suit of mulberry-coloured livery, a free sign.

His abnormally large head, a fixed sign, Dickens conveniently

forgets. It is easier simply to not describe this than it is

to alter Jingle's language, or to make it sound more meaningful.

Questions of signs and codes are dealt with fairly

extensively in <u>Pickwick</u> <u>Papers</u>, considering that it was Dickens'

first novel. Pickwick is confronted with a problem of inter-

pretation when he finds a stone with what appears to be cryptic

lettering carved upon it. He earns fame through the publication

of a scholarly pamphlet suggesting a possible solution to the

puzzle, and his admirers greet with derision the idea that the

letters stand for the sentence: 'Bill Stumps. His Mark.'

While the incident is intended to be merely a humorous digression,

in the context of the rest of the novel, it may have greater

implications. The world can only be interpreted correctly if

one has access to the key to the code. But, once one has

deciphered it, one may be confronted with a ludicrous, neutral

reality like 'Bill Stumps. His Mark". But this in itself is

just another code consisting of written signs--the mark that

stands for Bill Stumps, the name that stands for a man, who

stands for what? Either people are like Jingle, who proclaims

himself to be No-one of No Hall, Nowhere, a random configuration

of the language and the masks that they adopt and discard,

according to the necessity that is imposed upon them by the

world; or else they are finally unknowable.

Although _Pickwick Papers_ is Dickens' first novel, it
is, in fact, a blueprint for how we should read the rest of
his work. Each of the four Pickwickians is labelled by some
kind of tag which Dickens either develops, or hastily finds
himself dropping. Tracy Tupman, the rotund and notoriously
inept lover, suffers from a broken heart due to the machina-
tions of Jingle and becomes a pathetic, rather than a comic
figure. Not knowing quite what to do with this lachrymose
character, whose visual identity belies a 'tragic' interior,
Dickens quietly abandons him. Pickwick, on the other hand,
is identified by his genial gaze, gaiters and other paraphernalia
which are signs fluid enough to allow him a range of behaviour.
Sam Weller is only required to play the self which has been
initially ascribed to him. Dickens learned a great deal about
the structure and organization of a novel from the writing of
Pickwick Papers, although many of his problems were caused
by the fact that it began as an accompanying text to Seymour's
illustrations. At this stage in his career, the young novelist
had not yet realized that serial publication required advance
planning if the finished work was to possess unity and coherence.

For these reasons, the over-all effect of the novel
tends to be reminiscent of eighteenth-century picaresque
fiction; however _Pickwick Papers_ is still a product of its
author's unique imaginative engagement with the world. An
absence of controlled structural unity enables Dickens to

concentrate on the act of seeing. J. Hillis Miller's account

of the novel indicates cinematic qualities:

> Pickwick Papers is a long succession of scenes in
> which Pickwick and his friends meet, one after another,
> characters who surge up suddenly and vividly within
> the field of our immediate vision, command all of our
> attention for a brief span of time, and then disappear
> altogether, never, for the most part, to reappear.
> Instead, each figure or scene is merely replaced by
> others. Each character is detached from all others
> and incommensurate with all others. Each appears
> momentarily at the focus of vision, enacts his brief
> pantomime, and then leaves the stage for good. The
> general effect is of a swarming multiplicity, of an
> inexhaustible fecundity of invention. The characters
> appear suddenly from nowhere and there is an inex-
> haustible supply of them. . . . The spectator is at
> the mercy of these "characters". Their gestures, action
> and appearance hold him in fascinated concentration.
> Other people are traps who absorb the spectator in
> absorbing his attention. . . and since Pickwick has
> no access to the inner lives of the characters he
> meets, they must be caught at the moment when they
> are displaying themselves in farcical action. . . . 28

The condition of Pickwick is the same as that of the omniscient

narrator and that of the reader of the book. We do not have

access to the internal dispositions of the characters, because

Pickwick does not. Pickwick's picaresque journey through

England recapitulates the journey of the reader through his own

life, confronted with a multiplicity of figures who appear,

and vanish as quickly, their significance to his own history

no more than the fact that they were there.

The turning point in Pickwick's education comes in the

Fleet, when he is subject to a nightmare vision of collective

man:

> The great body of the prison population appeared to

> be Mivins, and Smangle, and the parson, and the butcher,
> and the leg, over and over, and over again. There were
> the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the
> same general characteristics, in every corner; in
> the best and worst alike. The whole place seemed
> restless and troubled; and the people were crowding
> and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an un-
> easy dream.
>   'I have seen enough,' said Mr Pickwick, as he threw
> himself into a chair in his little apartment. 'My
> head aches with these scenes, and my heart too.
> Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room.' 29

Not only do people reduplicate themselves over and over again,

but even their own particularity gives way to classification.

Dickens' description of clerks is like a botany lesson: "There

are varieties of the genus, too numerous to recapitulate, but

however numerous they may be, they are all to be seen, at certain

regulated business hours, hurrying to and from the places we

have just mentioned."[30] Lawyers, clerks, old maids, grand-

mothers are all depicted as belonging to a general class of

lawyers, clerks, old maids and grandmothers which contains

within it a possibly infinite number of permutations, each one

an emblem of the larger system that encloses it. Like the

clerks on the Stock Exchange in Pickwick Papers who inscrutably

eat ham sandwiches all day long, they behave as they must,

according to the system within which they reside.

    Viewed as a whole, we can see in Dickens' work recurrent

figures who are often fictional representations of persons he

knew.

Pip, David Copperfield and Oliver Twist are portraits of his

own childhood. Young, sickly girls and child-brides--Dora

in _David Copperfield_, Little Nell, Rosa Maylie in _Oliver Twist_--

are based on his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, who died at

the age of seventeen. Other 'types' recur, who are not immediately

recognizable from the biography, for example the ennervated,

cynical young man--Sydney Carton in _A Tale of Two Cities_,

Eugene Wrayburn in _Our Mutual Friend_--or the quiet, loyal,

older man--Arthur Clenam and John Harmon.

The 'classifications' or 'categories' in which characters

are placed are similar to the system employed by the _commedia_

dell'arte which Eisenstein developed into typage. The fresh-

ness and vividness of each new character who holds the atten-

tion of the reader does not dispel the feeling that the charac-

ter is part of a tradition or convention which operates ex-

clusively within the created universe of Dickens' novels. In

their resemblance to each other, these characters create a

code system which can be transferred from novel to novel. In

part, this is a product of Dickens' existential vision which

detects a society whose energy is running down, with the

resulting side-effect of an increase in homogeneity. Thus we

find a curious paradox--characters who appear to be isolated

units, "incommensurate with all others", as Miller says, are,

in fact, joined together by bonds of classification, like the

artifacts of factory mass production.

In the cinema, the Dickens/James confrontation which
we have been examining has manifested itself as the battle
between realism and non-realism and critics have set up Eisen-
stein and Rossellini as opposing forces in a war of artistic
ideologies. The question of realist aesthetics in the cinema
tends to be more heated than in the novel, since film is in
the peculiar position of being able to effect a literal represent-
ation of the world, based on illusion. The concept of Total
Cinema, which imitates all the senses, will raise unique problems
for aesthetics since the gap between art and reality will be
very narrow.

The two opposing theories of film can be summarized as
follows. Whereas Pudovkin had conceived of filmic montage as
a process of laying 'bricks' (that is, shots) end to end,
Eisenstein was interested in the juxtaposition of independent
shots in order to form a collision in the mind of the viewer,
and in that collision the meaning would be received. Eisen-
stein was able to move beyond Pudovkin because of his grounding
in dialectical materialism, on which his theory is obviously
based. From this model, he then distinguished five different
types of montage--metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and
intellectual--all of which may exist simultaneously in any
one sequence. Eisenstein has been frequently attacked for
proposing a system which rigidly adheres to what is, in
itself, only a sub-branch of psychology: Pavlovian Behaviourism.

Andrew Tudor, in <u>Theories</u> <u>of</u> <u>Film</u>, accuses Eisenstein of
failing to recognize the effect which culture has on the
response and argues that his espousal of the principles of
Socialist Realism in the 1930s (the aesthetic ideology officially
approved by Stalin) was a result of the "deepening knowledge
of the years,"[31] an argument which somehow avoids any recognition
of the extreme pressures that were brought to bear upon the
director by the official channels of Soviet policy in the
Stalinist era.

The Realist school, led by Renoir, Rossellini and
De Sica, rebelled against the organizing control of Eisenstein.
Renoir, in fact, adapted several novels from the school of
nineteenth-century French realism: <u>Nana</u> (France, 1926) and
<u>La Bête Humaine</u> (France, 1938), from Zola; <u>Une Partie du
Campagne</u> (France, 1936), from Maupassant; and <u>Madame Bovary</u>
(France, 1934), from Flaubert. The salient features of Renoir's
work are lyricism, an emphasis on natural light which allows
monochrome to assume the quality of limpid tones, and the use
of lengthy shots working with several cameras at once. Rossellini,
who came to prominence at the end of the Second World War as
the leader of Italian neo-realism, was working in direct
opposition to the products of Mussolini's propaganda machines.
To this end, he took his cameras out onto the streets to depict
the real life of the Italian people. "The dictator," Roy Armes
says, "had fed the people with slogans and deceitful phrases;

the film-makers had arrived to tell the unvarnished truth."[32]

To a great extent, Dickens anticipates the montage structure of film which Eisenstein developed. One need only examine any Dickens novel to be aware of a complexity of design that could be criticized as being excessive. In order to relate his story, he resorts to such devices as coincidence, multiple plotting, cross-cutting from one scene to another, and mimetic parallels. Frequently his novels end with a dénouement, which can be a source of irritation to a reader who is attempting to make sense of the events which have preceded it. Why, one may ask, does he not present the world as it is, rather than imposing a structure upon it which seems, at times, to add to the irrelevancies? Eisenstein, in a remarkable feat of observation, noticed that in the centre of an episode in <u>Oliver</u> <u>Twist</u>, Dickens inserted a treatise on his own methods of organization:

> It is the custom on the stage, in all good murder-
> ous melodramas, to present the tragic and comic scenes,
> in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and
> white in a side of streaky bacon. The hero sinks
> upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and mis-
> fortunes; in the next scene, his faithful but uncon-
> scious squire regales the audience with a comic song.
> We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the
> grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and
> her life alike in danger. . . and just as our expect-
> ations are wrought up to the highest pitch, a whistle
> is heard, and we are straightway transported to the
> great hall of the castle: where a grey-headed seneschal
> sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals. . . . .
> Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so
> unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The
> transitions in real life from well-spread boards to

> death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday gar-
> ments, are not a whit less startling; only, there,
> we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on,
> which makes a vast difference. The actors in the
> mimic life of the theatre, are blind to violent
> transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling,
> which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators,
> are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous. 33

What Dickens is saying here, is that what may appear to be an

over-zealous authorial control, is in fact serving the interests

of realistic representation. Realism is itself an artistic

convention. When James accuses Dickens' later novels of being

forced, he is implying that the writer is deliberately over-

manipulating his material, instead of allowing it to assume what

James would call its organic shape.

The novelist or film-maker has two choices: he can

return the world to the consumer purified through his own mind

so that it is an alternative, and, by implication, better

world, or he can present it, through thought, as an object of

thought. Having filtered out what he senses to be irrelevant,

a director like Rossellini says: "'Things are there. Why

manipulate them?'"[34] "Thus Rossellini," Peter Wollen says,

"becomes a natural wholemeal director while Eisenstein is an

ersatz, artificial, pre-digested."[35] The process of signifi-

cation is subject to a similar dichotomy:

> Within a Romantic aesthetic, the signals were taken
> as symbols, to be decoded not by applying a common
> code but by intuition and sympathy, projection into
> the artist's inner world. . . . Within Classical
> aesthetics signals remained made up of conventional
> counters or tokens, as the Romantics contemptuously
> dubbed them.   36

It can, however, be argued that it is possible to transcend this dichotomy. One method is to present a number of different versions of reality side by side, as Dickens does in Our Mutual Friend (see Chapter II). One can attempt to interrogate reality by questioning how it is 'known', the process which Dickens undertakes in Bleak House.

A similar task is being undertaken by contemporary cinema. An obvious comparison can be drawn with Fellini, who say of himself:

> Visually, I've often made use of the theme of circus life which is a mixture of spectacle, risk and reality. My characters are often a bit bizarre. I'm always talking to people in the street who seem rather unusual or out of place or who have some physical or mental affliction. . . . Since all these elements form a part of me, I don't see why I shouldn't introduce them into my films. 37

Like Dickens, Fellini has come under attack for his interest in the bizarre, the crippled and the abnormal. Marcel Martin is troubled by the fact that the 'light' or salvation in a Fellini film comes from "a crippled child, a madman, a mentally retarded child (La Strada), or from a youngster (the little railway employee in I Vitelloni)."[38] Martin goes on to level an accusation against Fellini that is very similar to that made by James against Dickens. He makes the following remarks about I Vitelloni (Italy, 1953):

> I mean that he manufactures a story, and constructs it out of all kinds of changes of fortune and startling events that are aimed at proving something, instead of simply selecting ordinary events from reality that could take on moral significance when

> confronted by his camera. . . . In short, the
> weakness of the second half of the film comes from
> the fact that Fellini manufactured sudden changes
> that have no natural cause, other than the will of
> the film-maker to illustrate a certain thesis. Instead
> of allowing reality to speak for itself (and here he
> goes against neo-realism) he completely destroys it.
> This I would call artful, tricky, and let us not
> hesitate to use the word—dishonest. . . . Fellini
> also manages to accumulate all sorts of visual gadgets
> that are the most visible expressions of the abstraction
> and dramatic schematization to which he gives way
> more and more. . . .   39

This is the outraged cry of a critic who refuses to allow a

director to move beyond the school of which he had originally

been a member—neo-realism. The sudden changes "manufactured"

by Fellini are also manufactured by life, as Dickens points

out in Oliver Twist.

Andre Bazin, however, detects in Fellini a director who

seems to have transcended the problems posed by realist and

non-realist aesthetics:

> His characters are never defined by their "character"
> but exclusively by their appearance. I deliberately
> avoid the word "behaviour" because its meaning has
> become too restricted; the way people behave is only
> one element in the knowledge we have of them. We
> know them by many other signs, not only by their faces,
> of course, but by the way they move, by everything that
> makes the outer body the shell of the inner man—even
> more, perhaps, by things still more external than
> these, things on the frontier between the individual
> and the world, things such as haircut, moustache,
> clothing, eye glasses (the one prop that Fellini has
> used to the point where it has become a gimmick).
> Then, beyond that again, setting, too has a role
> to play—not, of course, in an expressionistic sense
> but rather as establishing harmony or disharmony
> between setting and character. . . . But it is here
> that we reach the boundaries of realism, here, too,
> that Fellini, who drives on further still, takes us

> beyond them. It is a little as if, having been led
> to this degree of interest in appearance, we are now
> to see the characters no longer _among_ the objects,
> but, as if these had become transparent, _through_
> them.   40

Fellini is intent on showing characters whose physical unique-

ness provides the context for their being. It is only through

appearance that these people can be understood. In some films,

like Satyricon (Italy, 1969), this tendency can become excessive;

in others, the introduction of such a character becomes the focus

of the film. In La Strada (Italy, 1954) the scene in which

Gelsominia is confronted by the boy with the misshapen head and

fails to make him laugh is central to a proper understanding

of the film. Because the scene has been frequently discussed

by critics, I prefer to look at a sequence from Casanova

(Italy, 1976) which, while a poorer film than La Strada, reveals

the same fascination with appearance.

Casanova, having failed for the first time in his life

to submit his body to his desires, has decided to commit suicide

by drowning himself in the Thames. He is prevented, at the

last minute, by seeing the form of a very tall woman, accompanied

by two much smaller figures, on the opposite bank. Together

with his manservant, he seeks her out and finds her in the tent

of a travelling freak-show devoted to the mysteries of female

sexuality. The woman is revealed to be a Russian giantess and

although she takes on and defeats male opponents at arm-wrestling,

she is also strikingly beautiful. For a second time she 'saves'

Casanova by allowing him to defeat her in the test of physical strength, thus restoring his male pride.

Discovering that she is waited on by twin midgets, he follows her to her tent, hoping that one of them will help him to gain access to her bed. Peering through the canvas of the tent, he watches her being bathed by the midgets while she sings a Russian folk-song. In this shot, the 'freaks' are seen as possessing a self-contained happiness denied to Casanova, the voyeur who, wrapped in his cloak on the desolation of the marshes, is excluded--an outsider. Hoping that the midget will call him when she is prepared to receive his favours, Casanova falls asleep outside. In the grey light of early morning, he is awakened by his servant only to find that the tent and its inhabitants have mysteriously vanished.

In this sequence, the conditions of normality have been reversed. The freaks have created for themselves a community--a society which does not need the compassion or the approval of those outside itself. Although diminished in actual (as opposed to apparent) power by the encounter, Casanova may have gained understanding. In the La Strada scene, Gelsominia is helpless before the crippled child who stares at her; his isolation confirms her own. Casanova's isolation is also increased by the incident but the scene in the tent does not necessarily propose an existential universe since there is always the potential for individuals to form groups,

based on mutual aid--as the midgets help and protect the
giantess, she helps and protects them and is also willing to
allow Casanova to save face in the arm-wrestling scene.

Fellini refuses to reject freaks on the grounds that
they are not part of 'normal' human society. Nor will he ig-
nore their deformity. Unlike James, he acknowledges their
existence and points out that they can only be understood
through their appearance, since it is appearance which provides
the context for their being. The world in which they live is
defined by the visible: they exist in the perceived world of
others who do not speculate about their motives since it is
their appearance which always captures the attention. Yet,
at some indefinable moment, appearance ceases to be an opaque
wall, deflecting back signals to the perception of the viewer.
At this moment, appearance becomes the principal mode of access
to the inner life. This is also true of a character like
Jenny Wren in Our Mutual Friend. We experience her inner life
via the incongruity of a hunch-back possessing the 'normal'
human emotion of wanting, and, indeed, expecting a husband.
It is her appearance that creates the paradox which invites us
into her inner life.

Fellini's preoccupation with the appearance of his
characters is a kind of metaphor for his concepts of reality
and art. The neo-realist director will say, 'Here is life.
Its truth is evident.' It is this kind of statement in which

Peter Wollen detects a logical fallacy. The naturalist model,

he argues, "rests on a monstrous delusion: the idea that truth

resides in the real world and can be picked out with a camera.

Obviously, if this were the case, everybody would have access

to the truth, since everybody lives all their life in the real

world."[41] What we see, then, is literally the appearance of

reality, which creates impressions for the senses to deal with.

But if one allows reality to speak for itself, as Martin demands,

one must bear the consequences of its telling lies, a problem

which fascinates contemporary film-makers.

Contemporary directors have responded to these problems

of realism in a number of ways. Increasingly they have come

to regard the text of the film as the subject of its own in-

vestigation so that the film's 'reality' is itself. Robert

Altman came closest to this approach in Nashville, a film which

aroused extreme reactions of praise and anger:

> One Marxist critic, in a letter to Cinéaste, char-
> acterizes Altman as a "progressive who hates the
> notion of working collectively to change anything,"
> and quotes Lukács to the effect that "This process
> begins. . . with the substitution of pure psychologism
> for the representation of real and complete, that
> is, social, human beings and slowly transforms individ-
> uals into a shapeless bundle or uncontrolled torrent
> of free undisciplined associations, finally eliminating
> all discipline, direction and stability from psycho-
> logy and morality."   42

The proliferation of characters, the absence of any real

character study in favour of a "cocktail of human types"[43]

creates the potential for a different kind of interaction in

which the only common denominator is the mutual presence of

these characters in Nashville and their relative involvement

in the country and western music industry, which Altman claims
is a metaphor for his personal view of society.[44]

Through appearance, the characters relate, or fail to
relate to each other. At one point in the film, Julie Christie,
playing herself, arrives in Nashville and is introduced to the
country-music star, Connie White:

>   (Connie looks at Julie, unable to find a fram of refer-
>   ence for the way she looks.)
>   • • •
>   HAVEN
>   You know Julie Christie, she's a famous star. She
>   got one of those Academy Awards.
>   CONNIE (shocked)
>   No! Come on Haven, she can't even comb her hair.   45

At the end of the film, Albequerque, a country girl who aspires
to stardom, is given her big chance after the star, Barbara
Jean, has been gunned down at a political rally. Because she
is untidy, badly-dressed and rather silly, we expect her to
sing badly. In fact she has a voice of great power and passion
and she manages to avert the sense of shock that the audience
at the rally feels after the shooting. Altman creates a de-
liberate contrast with Sueleen, another aspirant to stardom.
Because Sueleen is attractive and well-groomed, she is given
opportunities to perform but she has no voice. Another character,
Linnea, is defined visually, by the fact that she is the only
white member of an all-black Gospel singing troupe.

Each character in the film is created by his or her
appearance and by an additional surface--that of the film itself.

Altman is not telling us that these characters do not 'exist' in the real world, for his characters are recognizable proto- types of Middle America. The Nashville of the film is, apparently, a close enough replica of the real Nashville. But Altman is not making a fictional documentary about the Tennessee music industry. Nashville is the controlling metaphor of the film, but it is also a metaphor which has been transformed into a surface through which we see the characters. It is a surface, firstly, because it represents superficial values (which we are openly invited to criticize) and secondly, because Nashville is the 'style' of the film. Just as Dickens' characters are often defined by the language used to describe them, so Nashville becomes the metalanguage or metastyle that defines the charac- ters of the film. Altman introduces real people into Nashville-- Julie Christie and Elliot Gould--to show that they too become fictionalized by simply being in the movie.

Films like Nashville lead us to the final awareness that the 'world' that we are viewing is only an illusion of light on a flat plane, a surface in which underground film-makers are taking an increasing interest. In 1975 the Whitney Gallery in New York presented an exhibition entitled "Grain Fields", showing films of the modulations of the grain on film stock when projected in different ways and at different speeds. The films had become their own subjects. It is unlikely, however, that even the most committed film-goer could be induced to

watch more than one such programme and it is to Godard, the in-
novating force of the New Wave, that one must turn for a state-
ment on contemporary cinema. In calling his article "Dickens,
Godard and the Film Today", in imitation of Eisenstein's es-
say, Graham Petrie recognized that Godard, like Griffith is a
creator of film language.

In spite of the difference of a hundred years, Godard
and Dickens share some of the same attitudes towards their
respective societies. Both are romantics whose idealism often
runs contrary to their commitment to social change. As a Marx-
ist, Godard is initially concerned with analyzing the conditions
of bourgeois materialism in the modern world. His characters
are are usually well-off, well-educated, often glamorous. They
partake wholeheartedly of the products of their society: the
women read glossy magazines, their husbands drive desirable
cars. They are the living expression of the image that bourgeois
society has of itself.

Beneath this veneer, however, lies a fragmentation and
a chaos with which they are unable to deal. Their marriages
are threatened by their failure to communicate; relationships--
both marital and extra-marital--are revealed as an endless exer-
cise in role-playing. Outside the home they are confronted with
slogans, noise and violence and they are trapped by words, gestures
and objects which in turn both define and destroy them. Without
the means of distinguishing fact from fiction, they are threaten-
ed from within and without. In Une Femme Mariée (France, 1964)

the heroine sits at a café table reading a magazine in which
there are photographs of girls modelling underwear. Near her
sit two girls who talk about first sexual encounters and she
is unable to avoid hearing their conversation. She is surrounded
by advertising hoardings and the camera pans back and forth along
the slogans to form new words from fragments of complete ones.

Godard depicts a world in which causes have lost contact
with the effects they engender. Man is dehumanized by the arti-
facts of the society he has created and by the values he lives
by; the woman in Une Femme Mariée is an object for her husband,
for whom marriage is legalized prostitution, and for the compan-
ies who exort her to buy their products from the pages of maga-
zines and street posters. Godard constantly points to the in-
ability of bankrupt forms--language, symbols--to communicate
anything important in a world where form and substance are in
the process of divorce. His characters do not develop psycho-
logically; they simply play out their roles, as the young gang-
ster, Michel, in À Bout de Souffle plays at being his own self-
image and his girlfriend acts out her allotted betrayal of him.
Occasionally, his characters are permitted some sort of gesture
of freedom, for example, when Michel closes his own eyes before
he dies. But even death is revealed as another role that must
be acted out.

Although he is an Hegelian, Godard's dialectic is capable
of producing no synthesis or solution. His creative and politi-
cal energy lies in the simple presence of contradiction. Intent

on investigating reality, he is wary of capitulating to the com-
fort of illusions. Although he uses _cinéma vérité_, it is only
one of the many different styles and narrative devices to be
found in his films, because he is aware that naturalism is yet
another appearance which is created by the film-maker for the
purpose of his film. Yet, as a Marxist, and, latterly, a Maoist,
opposing the chaos is a vein of pure idealism which represents
the antithesis in his dialectic. Royal S. Brown notes:

> From one film to the next, one always finds a counter-
> current to the trends of modern society, a counter-
> current manifested in both the actions and the atti-
> tudes of the characters and, on the other hand, in
> the handling of pure cinematic technique. In other
> words, against a background of chaos and banality
> that is presented in all its blatant ugliness, Godard
> juxtaposes a varied layer of idealism that runs the
> gamut, through his oeuvre, from poetic involvement
> and even romanticism to radical political action.
> Generally, Godard seems to have a Rousseau-like vision
> of a civilization that has lost contact with an ideal
> through the progressive modernization, mechanization,
> "capitalization", and, ultimately, socialization of
> human life. Certainly, the de-humanization of man
> represents an important theme in many of his films,
> from _Alphaville_ and _La Femme Mariée_ to _Made in USA_
> and _Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle_. 46

The sources of this idealism are not easy to document.
The origins of hope appear to spring from love and political
involvement since they "offer a more solid basis of idealism,
rising above role-playing, with which to combat the meaningless-
ness of social existence. One of the principle themes of
Pierrot le Fou, for example, seems to be the Rimbaldian war
cry, 'Love must be reinvented.'"[47] Yet, even then, Godard
cannot resist reserving his commitment, since his characters may
reach the eventual awareness that "even love is a role that is

superimposed upon social absurdity, on which it even comes to depend."[48]

The world of Godard's films is, in many ways, similar to the world of Dickens' novels. They share common themes but this, in itself, would be unremarkable. What is more significant is the way in which they both deal with the material at their command--the methods they use to create a style that "constructs and simultaneously interprets a world both familiar and unique." [49] Petrie notes that, like Dickens, Godard uses controlling metaphors. In Weekend (France, 1967) this is the motorcar, an image which takes on multiple significance for the film. This image implies:

> . . . on the one hand, the personal greed, selfish-
> ness, possessiveness, and indifference for the wel-
> fare and even the life of others that it can induce
> and, on the other, its function as a symbol of social
> status, the wasteful consumption that it encourages,
> and its role in underpinning the economies of most
> capitalist states. . . .   50

Like the metaphor of the Marshelsea Prison in Little Dorrit, this image fuses both public and private sectors. The central sequence in Weekend, the endlessly long shot of a traffic jam, is similar to the opening pages of Bleak House. By concentrating on two images, fog and mud, Dickens manages to create multiple meanings. The fog on the Essex Marshes is metaphorically the same fog that penetrates the heart of the judicial system. The mud in the streets of London is metaphorically the same mud that clogs up the carriage of justice. Even the

repetition of the word 'M'lud', uttered by the lawyers in the

Court of Chancery is an aural reminder of the mud outside.

The images of fog and mud, in Bleak House, like the image of

the motor car in Weekend, are not only a focus, but attract a

dense cluster of associations with implications for the entire

novel.

Godard's admirers agree that he has transformed the

formal properties of film. One of his innovations was to take

the principles of montage and extend them into the realm of

style. Documentary realism and the fictional versions of reality

represented by genre movies are often used within the same film.

Godard is not simply arguing for relativism or the subjectivity

of points of view. To some extent, he is proposing a dialec-

tic of opposing styles in whose synthesis the 'meaning' of the

film is to be found. Godard wishes to disrupt the conventional

notions of fact and fiction. Richard Roud quotes Godard as

saying: "Beauty and truth have two poles: documentary and

fiction. You can start with either one. My starting point is

documentary to which I try to give the truth of fiction. That's

why I've always worked with professional actors."[51] One of his

methods is to have a character turn and directly address the

audience, often with a political speech. The viewer is no

longer sure whether it is the character in the film, or the

actor playing the character who is addressing him.

This is also true of the narrative devices in Bleak

House. Dickens employs a dual narration: Esther's first-person,

past tense narrative is contrasted by an anonymous, present-

tense narrative. The 'voice' of the latter is not that of an

omniscient narrator in the conventional sense since it seems

to assume a persona whose vision of the world often conflicts

with that of Esther. Often, the two narrators describe, in

opposing terms, the same events or the same locales. Dickens

is proposing two different versions of reality, both of which

are fictional, but one seems more 'real' than the other because

the anonymous narrator is not a character in the novel. Thus

he has a status which is both fictional and non-fictional. But

this is also true of Esther, whose perception Dickens 'takes

over' as if she were a camera lens and he the director. Like

Godard, he gives documentary the truth of fiction and _vice_

versa.

Reviewing _One Plus One_ (UK, 1968) in the _New York_

Times, Roger Greenspun notes a recurrent motif in Godard's

films which is also present in _Bleak House_:

> The Rolling Stones' repeated assays on "Sympathy
> for the Devil" in their recording studio, the rote
> repetitions of passages and slogans passed back and
> forth among black-power revolutionaries in their
> riverside automobile junkyard, the mere adding up
> of questions and answers in the interview sequence, juxta-
> posing words to make new combinations (such as
> "So-Viet Cong") and finding new words in old com-
> binations (such as SDS in "Sight and Sound"; LOVE
> in "All About Eve")--all suggest a concern with
> ways of putting things together, and the film seems
> determined to be the prospective text of some ulti-
> mate, infinitely complex collectivism.   52

Godard's fascination with acronyms is a clue to the spectator

to tell him how to watch his films. Rearranging words to form

new ones is a metaphor for the process of making the film which,
for Godard, involves the attempt to find out what 'life' is say-
ing. In One Plus One the Rolling Stones are playing "Sympathy
for the Devil". They continually start the song over again and
when the film ends, they have still not produced a complete
version. Another version of the film was released, Sympathy
for the Devil, where, at the insistence of the producer, Iain
Quarrier, the Rolling Stones complete the song. This, however,
is entirely at variance with Godard's intentions since he is
unable to propose endings or conclusions, only different ways
of adding up a whole (hence the title of the film).

      This is also Dickens' proposition in Bleak House. In
that novel, most of the characters have clues to a central mystery
but no one character has all the clues. The most extreme exam-
ple of this condition is the rag and bone man, Krook, who has,
in his collection of dusty documents, the Will which will bring
an end to the Jarndyce Suit. Krook is trying to teach himself
to read and write so that he can establish the value of the docu-
ment for his own gain. He does this by chalking the word
'Jarndyce' on the wall of his shop but he is hampered by his
naturally suspicious nature which forces him to obliterate each
letter before putting down the next. He knows that the mark
he has made stands for J, the next for A and so on but he is
unable to link them together so that they will form a word.

      The adding up of clues or signs to form a 'correct'
answer is finally beyond the power of each character and beyond

the power of the reader, too. The two major plots--the Jarndyce
Suit and Lady Dedlock's affair with Hawdon which resulted in
Esther's birth--are not connected. This is not because Dickens
has failed to integrate these two strands of the narrative, as
Angus Wilson suggests.[53] Dickens deliberately misleads the
reader, making him believe that there is some link between the
two--Lady Dedlock is distantly related to the Jarndyces; Esther
lives in the Jarndyce household. But Dickens is making the
point that there are no answers, no one 'correct' reality that
he can show us. All the characters who die leave unfinished
business. When Alan Woodcourt and Esther marry, at the end of
the novel, they are set up in an exact replica of Bleak House--
a mirror image of the old one and the reader is left with the
uneasy sense that there are no conclusions, only fresh beginnings
within the same system of signs and assumptions. Everyone and
everything is cursed with indefinite postponement.

For Dickens, Godard and other contemporary directors
"a text is a material object whose significance is determined
not by a code external to it, mechanically or organically as
a symbolic whole, but through its own interrogation of its own
code."[54] A Dickens novel creates a 'world' with languages and
codes exclusive to its own system. The reader is not required
to test that world against the real world, he is asked to
enter into it, "to put his consciousness at risk within the
text itself, so that he is forced to interrogate his own codes,

his own methods of interpretation, in the course of reading,
and thus to produce fissures and gaps in the space of his own
consciousness (fissures and gaps which exist in reality but
which are repressed by an ideology, characteristic of bourgeois
society, which insists on the 'wholeness' and integrity of each
individual consciousness)."[55]

[1]Stefan Zweig, Three Masters: Balzac, Dickens, Dostoeffsky (New York, 1950), p. 75.

[2]Ibid, pp. 74-75.

[3]Graham Petrie, "Dickens, Godard, and the Film Today", Yale Review, LXIV (1974), 185.

[4]George Hogarth quoted in Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York, 1952), I,p.109.

[5]William Blacklock, "H. K. Browne's Illustrations in Charles Dickens' Middle Novels: Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son and Bleak House" (M. A. dissertation, McMaster University, 1976), p. 5.

[6]Michael Steig, "Martin Chuzzlewit's Progress by Dickens and Phiz", Dickens Studies Annual, II (1972), 121.

[7]F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 431.

[8]Ibid, pp. 431-32.

[9]Ibid, p. 432.

[10]Ibid, p. 433.

[11]Michael Steig, "The Critic and the Illustrated Novel", Huntingdon Library Quarterly, XXXVI (1972), 59.

[12]Steig, "The Critic and the Illustrated Novel", 61.

[13]Charles Dickens, Bleak House (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 606.

[14]Charles Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 310.

[15]Blacklock, p. 7.

[16]Leavis, pp. 432-33.

[17]Roger Manwell, ed., _The International Encyclopedia of Film_ (London, 1972), p. 342.

[18]Charles Dickens, _Oliver Twist_ (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 128.

[19]Charles Dickens, _The Pickwick Papers_ (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 105.

[20]_Ibid_, p. 106.

[21]_Ibid_, p. 107.

[22]_Ibid_, p. 107.

[23]_Ibid_, p. 109.

[24]_Ibid_, p. 109.

[25]_Ibid_, p. 110.

[26]_Ibid_, p. 110.

[27]_Ibid_, p. 110.

[28]Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today", _Film Form_ (New York, 1949), p. 216.

[29]_Barnaby Rudge_, p. 70.

[30]_Ibid_, p. 71.

[31]Charles Dickens, _A Tale of Two Cities_ (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 157.

[32]_Ibid_, pp. 157-58.

[33]_Ibid_, p. 159.

[34]Quoted by Lee Atwell, review of _The Passenger_, _Film Quarterly_, XXVIII (1975), 27.

[35]Michaelangelo Antonioni, interviewed by Gideon Bachmann, "Antonioni After China: Art Versus Science", _Film Quarterly_, XXVII (1975), 27.

[36]Charles Dickens, _The Cricket on the Hearth_ in _Christmas Books_ (London, 1970), p. 159.

[37]_Barnaby Rudge_, p. 594.

[38]David Mayer, _Sergei M. Eisenstein's Potemkin_ (New York, 1972), p. 195.

[39]_Pickwick Papers_, p. 162.

[40]_Ibid_, p. 75.

[41]Charles Dickens, _Our Mutual Friend_ (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 52.

[42]_Ibid_, p. 312

[43]Susan Sontag, _Against Interpretation_ (New York, n.d.), p. 243.

[44]George Bluestone, _Novels into Film_ (Berkeley, 1966), p. 20.

[45]_Pickwick Papers_, p. 515.

[46]_Ibid_, pp. 449-50.

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[18] *Ibid*, 190.

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[21] A.B. Walkley, *The Times*, 26 April, 1922, quoted in Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today", *Film Form*, p. 205.

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[25] Mrs D.W. Griffith (Linda Arvidson), *When the Movies were Young* (New York, 1925), p. 66.

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[43]<u>Ibid</u>, 24.

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