DICKENS' CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DICKENS' NOVELS
AND THE LANGUAGE AND CONVENTIONS
OF THE CINEMA

by

LINDA SHARAN GRANT, B.A.

A thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
August 1977
TITLE: The Relationship Between Dickens' Novels and the Language and Conventions of the Cinema

AUTHOR: Linda Sharan Grant, B.A. (University of York, England)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Petrie

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 151.
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

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the following people for their help and advice: Professor Graham Petrie, whose knowledge of the history of the cinema was invaluable in the preparation of this thesis; Professor Linda Hutcheon and Professor Joseph Sigman for their assistance with the final revisions; Professor Frederick Edell, for allowing me to read his doctoral dissertation and for our subsequent discussions which convinced me of the potential of my topic; Owen Mahoney, Judy Gaffney and Kathryn Blackett for dedication to typing over and above the call of duty; John Treilhard for taking over my teaching duties during a deadline crisis and for his continual supportiveness.
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 scholarship. 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, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (see Bibliography) does focus to some extent on form. However, like the other, isolated appraisals of technique, no theory 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 Film Form (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
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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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." According to his graphic quality, 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..." 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," 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 discussion 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." 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.
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 frontispiece 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 *Bleak House*, 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. . . ." 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 Chadband were undoubtedly in Dickens' mind, but it is the illustrations, rather than either of the narrators, that make these connections explicit.

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 *Bleak House*, which depicts the interview 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 *Barnaby Rudge*, 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." 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 *Iconologia*, 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. . . ." 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." 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 breakthroughs 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.

The process referred to here is not photography, but heliography, 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 representation 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 Cinématographe 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 breakdown 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." 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. . . ." 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 gives 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 distorted 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 *Sketches*, particularly in the two pieces, "The Streets--Morning" and "The Streets--Night".

By the time he came to write *Barnaby Rudge* 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 *Barnaby Rudge* 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 construction, 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 sluggish 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 docu-
menting 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 unheard, 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.

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 specifically, 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 discussion, 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 girlfriend, 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."

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 gyroscope. 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!" 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 Eisenstein'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 extraordinary 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. . ."; getting into a cab, Pickwick sees "a strange specimen of the human race, in a sackcloth 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 Our Mutual Friend. 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 prophesying. 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 recurrent 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 principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction. 42

What Dickens could have done was to simply go inside the characters' 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 *The Woman in the Window* (USA, 1944) is used in a more sophisticated form as an important structuring device. At the beginning of the film, the professor 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 *Our Mutual Friend*, 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 representation, 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.
The language of the visible, which is the hallmark 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 Novels into Film, 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 October (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 character, 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 *Pickwick Papers*, 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 buttoned 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 character 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 Tell-Tale 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 murdered uncle's heart beating while the policeman is interrogating him is a montage tour de force and a remarkable exercise in cinematic metaphor. The intercutting 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.  

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 *Pickwick 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." 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. . . . " 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 venerable partner of his respected age whenever she makes an
allusion to money. . . ."

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."

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." 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 proceeded 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 observation distilled from the innumerable happenings of life. He has an uncannily sharp eye for the detection 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 extraordinary 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. Thus the camera must pinpoint 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 remembered by certain facial expressions, and all are saturated in the peculiar, slightly unnatural radiant gleam thrown over them by the screen." 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. 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 ourselves. He sets up a number of different modes of visual perception with, perhaps, the ultimate goal of testing them against each other. It is not that Dickens has relinquished his fascination 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 whatever 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.

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. . . . Everything 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 chimneys, 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 exhilaration 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 aeroplanes, 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 perception of the world. And this is how I can decipher anew a world unknown to you.

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:
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 œil 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, elitist time. Change was abhorrent and thus the theme
of Mutability, as expressed, for example, in the last two stanzas of *The Faerie Queene*, 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 railway 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 countryside, that "feudality is gone forever," is made explicit by a passage in *Sartor Resartus*, 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 dissolution of belief in the conception of the universe as an unvarying 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 dynamically reflects within its form the sense of change and the relativity of time and space that is central to the modern experience." 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 impact 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 produced 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, Lumiére 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 profession a stage magician, had discovered film illusion by manipulation of trick photography, but even the most sophisticated 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 construction. 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 lukewarm 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 unfortunate 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 Limehouse 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 Buddhism, 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 you, 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."

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 Broken Blossoms 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.'" 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 understanding and prevent war.

As in Little Dorrit, 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 Love Among the Roses, A Child of the Ghetto, A Child's Faith, Two Little Waifs, Simple Charity (USA, 1910); The Lily
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 knowledge, we shall see that they are often purely literary or pictorial, that our inner nineteenth century is the creation of Dickens and Renoir." 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 emphatically 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.

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 materialism. Just as the tractors on the collective farms increased productivity and human well-being, so the camera, with its ability to record all reality, peasant or aristocratic, was both the tool and the triumph of the newly formed socialist state. Because of the power of the camera to document the lives of the workers, he required that the cinema should reject the theatrical romanticism of the emergent American film industry. In Nous, one of the many Kino manifestoes, he wrote:

\begin{quote}
NOUS déclarons que les vieux films romancés, théâtralisés et autres ont la lèpre.
----N'approchez 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 cinéma de kinoks des intrus: musique, littérature, et théâtre, nous cherchons notre rythme propre qui n'aura été volé mille part et nous le trouvons dans les mouvements des choses.
\end{quote}

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 precursors 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" 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."

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 characters 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..." 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 influenced 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 Theatrical Fund in 1858, he said, "Every writer of fiction, although he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes, in effect, for the
stage." 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 (more "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 anywhere. 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 steamboats 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 together" 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 present 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". 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 Veneerings 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 beginning 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 technique, 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 experiencing 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 Bleak House 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 After Many Years (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."

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 idleness, relationships, curiosity, and a general unfitness 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 tomorrow 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 Dedlock'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 booties. "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" reveals the corpse of Mr Tulkinghorn 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 himself. 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 Tulkinghorn'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.

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 Griffith 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." 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 seizing 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 heightened 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 emotional 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 *Jonathan Bradford* (Surrey, 1833) four apartments are organized on two floors:

... The play's action progresses from one apartment 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 accommodate.

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 handkerchief 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 fore­shadowings, 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 filmmakers 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 illustration 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 *Bleak House*, are the masters and hoarders of these dead languages; others, like Jo in the same novel, float in a sea of meaningless obfuscation. 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 particularly fruitful for a novel like *Bleak House* 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, paradoxically, 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.

Film, on the other hand, presents a world that is so blatantly 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.

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 intent on interrogating its own form. Out of this introspection has grown a second wave of theories of film language, revitalizing 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 contemporary 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 refinement of sensibility typical of his later contemporaries.

The extent to which Henry James was indirectly responsible 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 reviewed 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 exhaustion... 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 written, so little seen, known or felt." 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 *Our Mutual Friend* were an honest reflection of it!"

Against Jenny Wren, a character in the tradition of the Dickensian grotesque, James launches a particularly virulent 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 Dombey.

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?" Certainly not Eugene Wrayburn or Bradley 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 surface 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 proposing 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 struggles 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 substitute. 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 loneliness 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 philosopher 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, explicitly, 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 embodied 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 something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and a crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, "This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, 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. Within 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 aggressively 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 transformation 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 theoretical system appropriate to the form that these novels take. Given the fact that many of the devices Dickens used in depicting 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 (especially 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', conceived 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." 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 response that they are supposed to elicit from the reader:

I want to point out that "typage" must be understood 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 combinations of events. In concept, from beginning to end, October is pure "typage." 

Jay Leda, Eisenstein's editor and translator, explains in a footnote to Eisenstein's text:

... one might define typage as a modern development 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.
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.'

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 Eisenstein's theory is clear. Like all theatre which uses, or implies, the concept of the mask—Noh, Kabuki, for example—it demands rigid conventions which must be accepted, or even internalized, 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 demanded 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 without 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. Michael's own code has been transferred to her by the fact of his death. For Michael, 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 responses 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 impression 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 interrogation 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 elaborated 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 characteristics 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 playing 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." 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?'" 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.

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.
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 differentiated 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 *Pickwick Papers*, considering that it was Dickens' first novel. Pickwick is confronted with a problem of interpretation 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 machinations 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 inexhaustible 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 uneasy 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.'

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." Lawyers, clerks, old maids, grandmothers 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 enervated, 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 freshness and vividness of each new character who holds the attention of the reader does not dispel the feeling that the character is part of a tradition or convention which operates exclusively 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 Eisenstein 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 representation 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. Eisenstein 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, overtontal, 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 *Theories of Film*, 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," 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: *Nana* (France, 1926) and *La Bête Humaine* (France, 1938), from Zola; *Une Partie de Campagne* (France, 1936), from Maupassant; and *Madame Bovary* (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;
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 *Oliver Twist*, Dickens inserted a treatise on his own methods of organization:

> It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous 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 misfortunes; in the next scene, his faithful but unconscious 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 expectations 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 garments, 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 signification 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. . . .

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.

André 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.

Fellini is intent on showing characters whose physical uniqueness 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." 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 investigation 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, characterizes 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 individuals into a shapeless bundle or uncontrolled torrent of free undisciplined associations, finally eliminating all discipline, direction and stability from psychology and morality."

The proliferation of characters, the absence of any real character study in favour of a "cocktail of human types" 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 reference 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 deliberate 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 prototypes 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 characters 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 innovating force of the New Wave, that one must turn for a statement on contemporary cinema. In calling his article "Dickens, Godard and the Film Today", in imitation of Eisenstein's essay, 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 Marxist, Godard is initially concerned with analyzing the conditions of bourgeois materialism in the modern world. His characters 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 exercise 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 threatened 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 artifacts 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 companies who exhort her to buy their products from the pages of magazines and street posters. Godard constantly points to the inability 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 psychologically; they simply play out their roles, as the young gangster, 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 political energy lies in the simple presence of contradiction. Intent
on investigating reality, he is wary of capitulating to the comfort 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 attitudes 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 justaposes 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 meaninglessness of social existence. One of the principle themes of Pierrot le Fou, for example, seems to be the Rimballdian 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."

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." 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, selfishness, possessiveness, and indifference for the welfare 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. ...

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'lad', 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 dialectic 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." 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, juxtaposing words to make new combinations (such as "So-Viet Cong") and finding new words in old combinations (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 ultimate, 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 saying. 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 example 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 document 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. 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." 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)."
NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE


2 Ibid, pp. 74-75.


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.


8 Ibid, pp. 431-32.

9 Ibid, p. 432.


15 Blacklock, p. 7.

16 Leavis, pp. 432-33.

18 Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 128.


20 Ibid, p. 106.


26 Ibid, p. 110.

27 Ibid, p. 110.


29 Barnaby Rudge, p. 70.


33 Ibid, p. 159.

34 Quoted by Lee Atwell, review of The Passenger, Film Quarterly, XXVIII (1975), 27.


37 Barnaby Rudge, p. 594.


39 *Pickwick Papers*, p. 162.

40 Ibid, p. 75.


42 Ibid, p. 312


45 *Pickwick Papers*, p. 515.


47 V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting* (New York, 1949), p. 115.


50 *Pickwick Papers*, p. 299.
55. Zweig, pp. 76-77.
56. Pudovkin, p. 139.
57. Eisenstein, p. 208.
59. *Bleak House*, pp. 242-44.
64. *Ibid*, p. 166.


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4 Hector Fuller, review of *The Fool and the Girl*, *Washington Post*, 1 October, 1907, quoted in Henderson, p. 5.

5 Graham Petrie, "Dickens, Godard and the Film Today", *Yale Review*, LXIV (1974), 188.

6 Quoted in Angus Wilson, Introduction to *Oliver Twist* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 27.


17 Quoted in Petrie, 187,88.

18 **Ibid**, 190.


20 Petrie, 191.


22 Armes, p. 10.


24 **Ibid**, p. 49.

25 Mrs D.W. Griffith (Linda Arvidson), *When the Movies were Young* (New York, 1925), p. 66.

26 *Little Dorrit*, p. 565.


31 *Bleak House*, p. 721.


34 Lewis Jacobs, "D.W. Griffith: New Discoveries", in his The Emergence of Film Art, p. 46.


37 Bleak House, p. 824.

38 Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today", p. 199.

39 Dombey and Son, p. 109.

40 Ibid, p. 113.

41 Ibid, p. 113.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE


2 Ibid, p. 11.


5 Ibid, p. 49.

6 Ibid, p. 51.

7 Ibid, p. 50.

8 Ibid, p. 51.

9 Ibid, p. 52.

10 Ibid, p. 53.


15 Our Mutual Friend, p. 124.

17 Ibid, p. 27.


21 Sergei Eisenstein, "Film Form: New Problems", *Film Form*, p. 127.


23 Wollen, p. 41.


28 Hillis Miller, pp. 283-4.

29 *Pickwick Papers*, p. 737.


34 Wollen, p. 139.


36 Ibid, p. 159.


41 Wollen, p. 166.


44 Ibid, 23.


50 Ibid, 199.
51 Roud, p. 8.
54 Wollen, p. 162.
55 Wollen, p. 162.
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