

## WHAT HAPPENED TO PANTOMIME?

Ben Brewster, University of Wisconsin

Although fiction films had long become the major part of the film programme in the variety theatres or specialised film theatres in which films were seen, before 1908 few if any commentators thought that the figures they saw on the screen representing a composed action were actors or that what they were doing was acting. When the activity was discussed at all, it was likely called “posing for the moving pictures,” by analogy with posing for “life-view” lantern slides or song slides. Nevertheless, commentators were clear about what this activity was like, and in particular that, insofar as the performers had to convey the inner life of the figures they were supposed to represent, they had to do so in a highly mobile and exaggerated way. Challenging the notion that the cinematograph, if invented a century earlier, could have captured for us the acting of a Talma or a Rachel, Jules Claretie remarked,

*But would it have really been what I might call Rachel's statuesque gait that had been preserved for us by the cinematograph? [...] It would be the ghosts of Rachel and Talma that would appear to us today. Cinematographic life, or survival, is nothing but life somewhat extreme in its posthumous movement or fixity. There is no escaping a certain exaggeration in cinematographic gesture. To express a feeling in the cinematograph, to make it comprehensible, visible, the physiognomy has to exaggerate it to the point that it becomes a grimace. It would be Rachel's mask I would have before me, not her soul.<sup>1</sup>*

The figures on the screen so lacked presence that they could only register with grotesquely exaggerated gestures.<sup>2</sup> In the trade press, the same point was often made with less philosophical justifications, e.g., that bad stage actors are more successful in the cinema than good:

*The actor who is too reposeful on the stage, and expresses his meaning and feeling merely by the tone of his voice or in subtle movements, is utterly worthless for the moving picture. Sometimes the actor who has risen no higher than to scrub parts or the chorus can be made good use of for the moving picture because of his great proneness to gesture and motion.<sup>3</sup>*

or that the French perform better in films than the English:

*Strange as it may seem, the best moving picture actors or actresses are not found in the ranks of American and English professionals. The best material is found in the Latin races. The French and Italian people are notably successful. The explanation of this is that the Anglo-*

*Saxon is more phlegmatic. By reason of his natural suppression of powers of expression he fails to attain the same ends that the others mentioned do. There is a lack of required action.*<sup>4</sup>

By the time of this last quotation, the Autumn of 1908, trade commentators in France, England, and the USA were well aware that in France a company, Film d'Art, had been formed to make films featuring well-known actors from the Parisian stage. Perhaps as a result of this development, as much as the films that eventually appeared in November of 1908, the superiority of French films over those from other producing countries evidenced everywhere in audience preferences in variety theatres and movie houses, began to be attributed especially to the acting in those films, and that acting began more and more to be called "pantomime." In France, this tendency culminates in the publication of Eugène Kress's manual on acting for the cinema, *Le Geste et l'attitude*, whose subtitle – *L'Art mimique au cinématographe* – as well as its content marks its affinity with such pantomime manuals as Charles Aubert's *L'Art mimique, suivi d'un traité de la pantomime*.<sup>5</sup> In England, Nelly Gorman described the Film d'Art films as examples of "elevated pantomime;" and Colin Bennett wrote in his *Handbook of Kinematography* that "the kinematograph actor must be a master pantomimist, and the writer of kinematograph plays must write for pantomime."<sup>6</sup> In the USA, Rollin Summers gave a section of an article on "The Moving Picture Drama and the Acted Drama" the subtitle "The Importance of Pantomime," and argued in it that "The most apparent limitation of the moving picture is its powerlessness to use dialogue. A primary means of expression is thus eliminated and only pantomime remains."<sup>7</sup>

The claim that film acting should be pantomime did not, however, go unchallenged. As is well known, American commentators rapidly turned away from it, so that the prevalence of pantomime, seen as a form of acting inappropriate in works to be presented to an American audience, came to be counted among the defects of foreign films which authorised their exclusion from the American market by the cartels that came to dominate the American cinema around 1910.<sup>8</sup> In a racist twist, the Anglo-Saxon reserve that American audiences would or should prefer to see in the cinema would be subverted by the pantomimic gesticulation of the acting in French films. Less prejudicially, such commentators as Frank Woods in *New York Dramatic Mirror* began to argue against pantomime on realist grounds: "picture acting is not pantomime, [...] it is merely the art of fine acting without words, and [...] the essential thing is to have a good story to act and then act it in the most natural manner possible."<sup>9</sup> In England, rather, pantomimic acting became associated with other schools of traditional acting, ones that were, by the 1910s, provincial or "old-fashioned," but which continued to be felt to be appropriate for the cinema, both because the absence of speech in the cinema demanded a broader style, and because the audiences for the cinema were seen as relatively unsophisticated, like those who still appreciated the older acting styles of the spoken stage.

In France, things were somewhat more equivocal. Although descriptions of film acting as "pantomime," and of the fiction film as a form of "pantomime" were common from 1908 until the First World War, this was never a unanimous opinion. In his review of the preview of the first products of Film d'Art at the Salle Charras in Paris on November 22nd 1908, Adolphe Brisson, the principal dramatic critic of *Le Temps*, in a passage which seems to be echoing conversations with Henri Lavedan, the founder of Film d'Art and author of the screenplay of the most important film in that programme,

*L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*, after describing the weightier part gesture must play in film drama as opposed to the ordinary stage play, asks:

*So is this art, from which speech is subtracted, the same thing as pantomime? [...] By no means [...] Pantomime has a specialised language and grammar, immutable signs whose meaning never varies; one of those signs means greed, another pride, another flirtatiousness, and so on. The cinema refuses to use this alphabet; its aim is life. To grasp, sift, fix, by stylisation, the forms of life and their fleeting aspects, that is the task it has taken on.<sup>10</sup>*

Other French commentators continued to dispute the significance of mime acting for film.<sup>11</sup>

So far, this article has been merely about *talk*: what contemporaries said about films and film acting, as evidenced by what was published in both the film trade and the lay press. When dealing with contemporary comment – especially journalistic comment, but the same is also true of discourse in general – it is crucial to bear in mind that it by no means follows that because we can find articles that say that something really is happening, or because we can find articles that say that something has begun to happen that there has in fact been any change. Column-inches have to be filled, and readers' adherence solicited, and for these purposes commonplaces and truisms are more useful and more easily available than descriptions of unfamiliar phenomena or original deductions.

This is important here, because, under one common sense of “pantomime,” most cinema was pantomime by definition. Although in England, the term had taken on a different meaning, in France (and probably also the U.S.A.), the basic meaning of “pantomime” was a play without spoken dialogue.<sup>12</sup> With the relatively minor exceptions of the *phonoscène* and those films accompanied by actors behind the screen speaking words in synchronisation with the figures on it, fiction films were enacted dramas where there was no dialogue, or the dialogue was inaudible and hence anything it was supposed to convey had to be supplied by other means. In this sense, it was therefore a truism to say film was pantomime, and the evocation of a genre with its roots in antiquity was highly flattering to the tradesmen who purveyed these wares.<sup>13</sup> Most references to fiction films as pantomimes are of this kind. When Édouard Helsey in *Comœdia* calls the Film d'Art productions “these important pantomimes,”<sup>14</sup> it means no more than if he had said “films” except to imply these are high-class films. When “Souffleur” writes in the *Bioscope* that

*The school for cinematograph acting – when it comes – will find that gesture and pantomime, acting by signs instead of words, will have to be taught, and taught thoroughly; moreover, it will be found that a peculiar class of gesture – broad and deliberate – is necessary to permit of good photography and satisfactory results<sup>15</sup>*

the first part of this statement says little more than that film actors must cultivate gestures if they are to convey the inner life of their characters, while the second is the familiar insistence in these years that film acting has to be broad.

In the light of this, it is not surprising that Sabine Lenk, in a careful and detailed study of both the film trade and the lay press in France before the First World War, concludes that the regular appeal to “pantomime” is superficial:

*In their efforts to integrate the new entertainment medium, most writers rely on external features: film is mute, it tells stories, it usually shows human beings in action, music accompanies its offerings – all these things are also true of pantomime. Hence many conclude that film is a kind of pantomime.*<sup>16</sup>

However, in an as yet unpublished thesis on acting in the early British cinema, Jonathan Burrows argues, on the contrary, that

*most of the relevant evidence that we can examine points to the pervasive influence of one specific European theatrical histrionic tradition which predominantly informed the choice of productions, performers and acting styles that they [theatrical adaptations made in Britain between 1908 and 1911] showcase. That tradition is the discipline of authentic wordless pantomime.*<sup>17</sup>

Burrows's claim has two parts. First, that there was an acting tradition associated with pantomime distinct from other acting styles in the theatre of the period, and second, that the film acting described as pantomime, in particular the acting in the early Film d'Art films and that of such films as the 1911 Cooperative Film Company adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, acted by F.R. Benson and his troupe, can be shown to conform to that tradition. What Burrows attempts to do is to find prescriptions and proscriptions in manuals for pantomime acting that contradict those found in similar manuals for the spoken stage, and then to demonstrate that the films he believes are strictly pantomimic conform to the rulings in the pantomime books and not those for spoken drama.

Burrows's first point is that, in the tradition of spoken drama which Lea Jacobs and I call "pictorial," gestures were slow. He cites Gustave Garcia's prescription that "precipitation between two gestures, in fact want of repose in the general treatment of a scene completely destroys the illusion which the spectator would otherwise feel."<sup>18</sup> This he contrasts with Aubert's claim that the action in pantomime had to be "rapid [...] expressions which require too many explanatory gestures must be rejected or modified because they cause length."<sup>19</sup> For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, he links Garcia's call for slowness in gesture to Dene Barnett's summary of eighteenth-century acting manuals to the effect that gesture was timed to the delivery of dialogue at a very fine-grained level: "The action tended to be matched to the short phrase rather than to whole passages. One acted by the word rather than by the paragraph or by the pervading emotion."<sup>20</sup> Clearly, the same could not directly be true of pantomime, which has no spoken component. However, insofar as pantomime involved gestural dialogues and monologues, i.e., gesture was used as a substitute for speech in pantomime, the timing of such gesture could approach that of spoken drama. Moreover, in the same passage Barnett himself draws attention to the vigour of gesture in *récits*, speeches in which the actors describe an action not directly depicted on stage, and an example in Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale* in which 22 plates with widely different attitudes and gestures illustrate a *récit* of 16 lines shows that gestures timed to dialogue could be very fast indeed.<sup>21</sup> Aubert's rejection of long, complex gestural sequences in pantomime is directed more at achieving clarity than at pace as such – a string of gestures without speech to clarify the meaning might easily cause the spectator to lose the thread of the mimed dialogue. "Length" is not being criticised here for slowing down the action, but for spoiling the "immediacy" that

Aubert demands characterise pantomime gestures. Finally, if gesture is rapid in many films of this period, and later, this is attributable to the brevity of scenes in films,<sup>22</sup> a brevity necessitated by the overall length of the short films standard around 1908, but retained in feature-length films, which usually have many more scenes than stage plays of equivalent length.

Burrows's second contrast is between Aubert's suggestion that, in pantomime, groups of extras may all perform the same gesture simultaneously and Johannes Jelgerhuis's insistence, in his *Theoretische Lessen over de Gesticulatie en Mimiek* of 1827 that "nothing is more ugly than for two Actors to stand alike, because contrasts must hold in the whole of the tableau."<sup>23</sup> Burrows sees the extras in *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (specifically, the members of the King's Guard in the scenes immediately before and after the assassination), and those in the Benson *Richard III*, as acting in unison in this way. However, Jelgerhuis and Aubert are talking about such different issues in the respective passages that the contrast is more apparent than real. Aubert's suggestion is in a chapter entitled "On the Unity of Expression" whose main point is that different gestures should never occur simultaneously: "In no case should an actor be allowed to express two things at once. For example, to respond to the line *So you no longer need me?* by a *no* with the head and a *leave me* with the arm." Similarly, two actors should never make gestures at the same time, although (but he insists it is not an exception):

*It is true that several actors, when addressing a single person, may at the same time gesticulate, implore, insult, threaten; but were they one hundred, were they one thousand, they never represent anything but one crowd, one party, one unit – in other words, a single interlocutor. And, so long as this crowd and the person it addresses do not make their gestures at the same time, but each in turn, then the dialogue will be just as clear as if there were only two people on the stage.*<sup>24</sup>

What is at stake is the temporal relationship of gestures. Given that gestures can be realised in an infinite number of ways – indeed, much of the art of acting lies, not in the correct performance of a gesture, but in producing a unique variation on the gesture – then it is quite possible for a group of extras to conform to Aubert's insistence on performing gestures in sequence, and hence on a crowd all producing a single gesture at once, without offending Jelgerhuis's concern for contrast in the stage picture as a whole, insofar as each extra produces a variant of the gesture, coordinating his or her variant to fit with the others' into a harmonious ensemble.

There is no doubt that the turn taking principle expounded by Aubert for pantomime was also standard in spoken drama. At a broad level, it can be demonstrated in the directions given in play texts.<sup>25</sup> Where extras are concerned, it is clear that one of the reasons Chronegk's direction of the Meininger troupe was seen as so innovative and so offended theatrical traditionalists is that he rejected the Aubert prescription and provided each of his extras with an individual piece of business to perform at his own pace, and the result, at least for the traditionalists, was precisely the distraction that Aubert was trying to guard against.<sup>26</sup>

There might seem to be a contradiction between this turn-taking and the idea of the tableau, both in the sense of the climactic picture and the sense of conceiving the organisation of the action on stage as the movement from one picture to another – after all, the tableau was the assemblage of a group of different, indeed contrasting atti-

tudes, all held at once. But the stasis of the climactic picture is what helped avoid the distraction, since the audience had time to take in its complexity, and the compositional structure even of the picture which was hardly held at all immediately indicated whose was at that moment the principal part – the succession of pictures is what made possible the turn-taking.<sup>27</sup> Rather than a contradiction, there is a tension between turn-taking and tableau, part of the overall tension between stasis and movement in pictorial theatre.

As for the films, I see nothing in the ensemble work of the actors playing the guards in *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* to offend Jelgerhuis. Their gestures – e.g., when they all raise their swords to swear to the King to carry out the murder, or when they all point to the dead Duke as Henri emerges from his bed curtains – are similar, but their arrangement in a semi-circle ensures variation in their outlines for the spectator. Moreover, there are clear examples of tableaux in the early Film d'Art productions, as well as constant resort to turn-taking.<sup>28</sup> There seems nothing to suggest that there was any difference between pantomime and spoken drama in these matters, and hence nothing in the films of 1908-10 which was incompatible with emulation of either theatrical form. Burrows's source of rules for pantomime acting, Charles Aubert, says as much:

*Actors [sc. in spoken drama] will easily see that, if they can leave to mimes in the narrow sense most of the deliberate or considered gestures which are intended to replace speech, it is very much in their interest to study and use all the instinctual expressions which so powerfully enliven speech by giving it more force, clarity, and warmth.*<sup>29</sup>

Whereas these arguments for a specific acting style for pantomime have depended on comparing prescriptions for pantomime actors with supposedly contradictory ones for actors for the spoken stage, Burrows claims at least one case where an acting manual directly contrasts rules for standard drama and for those for pantomime. He paraphrases Gustave Garcia to the effect that (in standard acting) the actor should avoid symmetrical movements of the limbs, and goes on:

*However, quick, "symmetrical movements [...] are admissible" he [Garcia] adds, but "only in pantomimic action." Rapid mobility and a plastic susceptibility to instantaneous changes of expression are "the first condition of a good pantomimist." Thus, "The very faults to avoid in tragedy or high comedy could be turned to good account" in mute drama.*<sup>30</sup>

We should note that Garcia discusses "pantomimic action" rather than "pantomime." Indeed, it is arguable that he never discusses pantomime as a genre, probably because it was not a significant genre on the British stage when he wrote. Burrows's second quotation shows this clearly. In full, it reads:

*In descriptive ballets the dancers have to express all their sentiments by pantomimic action. Mute actors, such as the dumb girl in Masaniello, are also introduced. This sort of acting requires a great knowledge of the different gestures appropriate to each sentiment and passion. The first condition for a good pantomimist is to possess a face susceptible of great variety of expression – of great mobility. The very faults to avoid in tragedy or high comedy could be turned to good account in low comedy or comic parts. Symmetric, awkward movements prove very successful when judiciously used.*<sup>31</sup>



The references to ballet and to *Masaniello* show that he is thinking of moments in other genres (I will discuss ballet-pantomime in more detail later) where gestural substitutes for dialogue are used, such as the communications of a character who is dumb (one can easily imagine other, similar cases, e.g., when characters are forced to converse by gesture to make their communication inaudible to another character). Note that the sentence Burrows completes with a reference to “mute drama” in fact concludes with “low comedy or comic parts.” The usage of “pantomimic action” in the passage from which Burrows draws his first quotations might seem more generic:

*Symmetrical movements in acting are admissible only in pantomimic action or low comedy, and are therefore incompatible with elevated sentiments. In high comedy or tragedy such movements would be out of place.*<sup>32</sup>

But the basic framework is the same: Garcia is distinguishing between types of gesture appropriate to low and high genres, and assumes (forgetting here the example of *Masaniello*) that characters in the low genres are more likely to resort to mime.

These quotations from Garcia also illustrate the difficulty of the approach Burrows takes, assuming that the manuals codify a style, and that an examination of what actors do in surviving films will allow us to assign the acting in those films to one style or another. Garcia does not think of acting as one style, or even a set of styles for different kinds of theatre. Pictorial acting is not really a matter of “styles” at all. Rather, it is an approach to acting which enjoins the actor to consider at every moment how he or she looks to the audience in relation to the stage picture as a whole. Acting manuals codify the approach as a set of rules – dos and don’ts – but these are not absolute; thus, all the manuals tell you that the arms should not be raised above shoulder level, but I have no doubt that in most performances of most plays in the nineteenth century some actor raised his arms above his shoulders at some point. The rules’ purpose is to ensure that the stage picture, and hence the actor’s part in it, is appropriate to the situation depicted, to the character being depicted, and to the genre of the play being performed. They are rules of decorum, and as such are meant to be broken when situation, character, or genre require it. The manuals codify the pictorial approach in a neo-Aristotelian manner as a set of prescriptions for verisimilitudinous mimesis.<sup>33</sup> What appears on stage will be plausible to the audience if it respects the rules of decorum, which include the provision that, *in extremis*, the rules should be broken. As Lessing put it, the actor may permit himself “the wildness of a Tempesta, the insolence of a Bernini,” if the situation demands it and the transitions to and from the rule-breaking moment are properly handled.<sup>34</sup> As a result, pictorial acting encompasses as many styles as there are genres, as many styles as there are situations, and, indeed, as many styles as there are actors. Indeed, it could be argued that pictorial acting would allow a place for acting which fits no recognizable style, which does not look like acting at all (and which therefore might, in a different context, be identical to the strictest naturalistic acting). Burrows’s key example of the reduced acting style he argues was more typical of respectable (i.e., non-melodramatic) stage acting in Britain at the turn of the century, Charles Hawtrey, might be a case in point:<sup>35</sup> Hawtrey specialised in a very narrow kind of comedy in which what was comic was that he failed to respond to situations in the expected way, i.e., the “actorly” way; a similar kind of humour is generated by those pantomime dames who do not act in a womanly way (or Cary Grant when

in drag in *I Was a Male War Bride*), though in this case it is a refusal to act according to character that is at stake.

Clearly, such a broad account of pictorial acting is intended to make the very notion of “verisimilar” acting impossible (or coterminous with pictorial acting as such). One of the things that has most surprised Lea Jacobs and me in the reception of *Theatre to Cinema* at conferences where questions of early film acting have arisen is that, although we were concerned lest our critique of Roberta Pearson’s opposition between “histrionic” and “verisimilar” acting might be too virulent, in the event many people have rather conflated that distinction with our one between pictorial and naturalistic acting – supposing maybe that the two oppositions are conceptually different and what we call pictorialist performances might be classed as verisimilar by Pearson, and vice versa, but for most purposes lumping together Pearson and Brewster and Jacobs as slightly different accounts of how film acting evolved from theatrical beginnings to cinematic realism. This conflation has not yet appeared much in print, as far as I know, but an example would be Charlie Keil’s remark that “Brewster and Jacobs dispute the validity of categories based on purported distinctions in theatrical practice, but they agree that the transitional period witnesses a marked change in performance style. I see no reason to abandon the descriptively useful terms Pearson has devised.”<sup>36</sup> But the real problem is the escalator model as such, the idea of a “transitional” period during which an old-fashioned, stage-centered style (with all the bad connotations the anti-theatrical prejudice associates with “histrionic”) is more or less steadily displaced by something natural, unaffected, realistic and better adapted to the cinema. This evolutionism is already evidenced in the 1910s themselves, and is now well entrenched, so well entrenched that one book is not going to shift it. Moreover, although our point about naturalistic acting was that it was a programme so maladapted to cinema that only a very few filmmakers attempted to espouse it, we did see it as coming after pictorialism, and hence interpreted film performances which were heavily influenced by post-naturalist theatrical movements such as symbolism as somehow pre-naturalist, because they can be analysed in pictorialist terms.<sup>37</sup> We thus opened the door to the temptation to consider particular film performances as somewhere on a diachronic line between traditional theatrical acting and modern cinematic acting, when what an understanding of pictorialist acting allows is the possibility of describing the differences between different performances and different performers synchronically, without branding one as more “advanced” or “regressive” than another.<sup>38</sup>

The misappreciations induced by evolutionist accounts of early film acting are illustrated by the way recent commentators contrast the performances of Raphaël Albert Lambert and Charles Le Bargy in *L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise*. Thus Burrows:

*There are, it is true, several moments of relative stillness and undemonstrative behaviour in L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise from Albert Lambert as the eponymous Duke, but the main star of the film Le Bargy – playing Henri III – often employs very broad gestures and moves in a noticeably frenzied fashion, particularly in the scene where he gives instructions to the conspirators.*<sup>39</sup>

And Lenk:

*The sociétaire of the Comédie-Française [Le Bargy, though the description would apply equally to Lambert] often uses what, from a present-day standpoint, seems an exaggerated*



and misplaced gestural pantomime, while the acting of the other performers is more nuanced and reserved.<sup>40</sup>

Thus the difference between the two performances is seen as a stylistic discrepancy, Lambert being more advanced, Le Bargy regressive. But this is to ignore the point emphasised above – that pictorialism calls for different acting for different characters and situations. *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* is generically the most experimental of the Film d'Art productions. In it, Lavedan abandons the conventions of the well-made play which dominated most late nineteenth-century drama and opera, and tries to create what might be called a pageant play, one in which historical events unfold in the manner of a chronicle within a providential horizon in which each character and each deed is reducible to a moral type. This form had been tried by Romantic writers, and Ludovic Vitet's *Les Etats de Blois* of 1827 might even be a direct influence, but these plays had been regarded as unperformable; however, there was a very similar impulse behind many of English spectacular theatre's productions of Shakespeare, most particularly Herbert Beerbohm Tree's 1910 *Henry VIII*, and it is clear that there was a widespread preoccupation with pageant drama at this time, seen as restoring the sacral dimension that the bourgeois theatre had lost (witness the fascination with such folk dramas as the Oberammergau Passion Play).<sup>41</sup> Within this genre, de Guise stands for Hubris, brushing aside all the omens foreshadowing his death – the anonymous letter, the nose-bleed, his mistress's and his fellow Councillors' warnings – so Lambert shows him with a calm somewhere between heedlessness and an appropriately Iberian *sosiego*, while Henri III stands for Tyrannical Pusillanimity, barely screwing himself up to destroy his long-time ally and rival, so Le Bargy's gestures show agitation, terror, uncertainty, contradictory impulses, superstition.<sup>42</sup> The contrast in the acting is not one between an old and a new acting style, but between different characters in different situations. Brisson captures this contrast in his review: "The King [...] ferrety, disturbed, mouselike, agitated, [...] the Duke [...] bold, his eye steady, his posture haughty, trusting to his courage."<sup>43</sup>

Thus it seems to me that Burrows does not establish his claim that there was a pantomime acting style distinct from the acting styles of the spoken stage (except insofar as most early film and pantomime both lacked one of the crucial aspects of that stage, namely, the conveyance of information via the resources of the voice). And I would also agree with Lenk that most identifications between film acting and pantomime in this period are restricted to the obvious features in this last parenthesis. But this does not mean that there was no significant influence from acting in French pantomime upon the acting in the early French film. I have stressed that neither contemporary accounts nor what we can see in the films suggests that there was an acting style for spoken theatre that can be homogeneously distinguished from one for pantomime; I have also indicated that spoken theatre itself had no homogenous acting style. Might not the same be true of acting in pantomime? One problem here is the small number of detailed accounts available. Most modern commentators simply rely on Charles Aubert's *L'Art mimique*, assuming this one source is a description of contemporary pantomime practice, when the author's own comments suggest that he is promoting a particular conception of mime, not describing the range of mime practice of his own day, let alone the full range of mime acting.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, a glance at films made in all film-producing countries before the First World War shows that actors in the cinema used a mime vocabulary which is barely if at all referred to by Aubert in his manual. These pan-

tomime gestures are not attitudes or expressive gestures, but rather gestures that stand in for speeches the characters are supposed to be making. Aubert distinguished five kinds of action:

*Mimic movements can be divided into five kinds, viz.:*

- 1) Movements of action, *which are purely and simply the movements required to carry out an action: to drink, to walk, ... etc.;*
- 2) Movements of character, *which are persistent and define the character, habits and quality of a role;*
- 3) Instinctual movements, *which are spontaneous, involuntary, and convey an emotion, a physical or moral sensation;*
- 4) Descriptive or speaking movements, *which are voluntary, deliberate, composed, and whose aim is to express a thought, a need, a desire, or to describe a person, an objet, or to indicate a point or direction.*
- 5) Complementary movements, *which make up the participation of the whole body in the expression signified by the main movement, giving that expression more force and harmony.*<sup>45</sup>

He goes on to say that the fourth category, the speaking movements, are above all hand gestures, and that they are relatively conventional, and hence require more exposition in his manual than the first three categories.<sup>46</sup> Despite the large space devoted to this fourth category of gestures in Aubert's manual, he includes few of the gestures that we see in the films, and the usage he describes differs from that in the films.

In one of the first American articles attacking mime in the cinema, Frank Woods exemplifies the "old pantomime" as follows: "If an actor desired to indicate to another that he wanted a drink of water he would form his hand in the shape of a cup and go through the motions of drinking."<sup>47</sup> This gesture, familiar to anyone who has seen many films made in the 1900s and 1910s, is not in *L'Art mimique*. Kristin Thompson describes another familiar gesture:

*One could catalogue many standard gestures in films before 1913. For example, when characters place an open hand palm down about three feet from the floor, that indicates "child."<sup>48</sup>*

This gesture even occurs in a film that has been described as pioneering a "specifically cinematic direction of actors,"<sup>49</sup> *Germinal* (SCAGL, 1913), when a number of blacklegs are forced to run the gauntlet of a crowd of striking miners. One of the blacklegs makes the gesture as an excuse to his fellow workers for his return to work. This gesture – an open hand held low, palm down – is found in Aubert (p. 99, fig. 121), but with the meaning "small" (or "short" – *petit* can mean either), and contrasted with that of an open hand held high, palm down (fig. 122), meaning "big" or "tall." Obviously, there are contexts where "short [person]" and "child" could be synonymous, but the *Germinal* example is not one of them – it is the father-child relationship that the blackleg is referring to, not the size of the child; he is excusing his return to work on the grounds that he has a child to support. The only other familiar mime gesture I can spot in Aubert's long list is "arms folded, held close to the body, one elbow higher than the other" (p. 66, fig. 54), which he says means "carrying a child in one's arms; a child; a mother." The only meaning I have seen this used for is "baby."

However, all these gestures are recorded, with the meaning evident from the films, in a relatively recent work, Joan Lawson's 1957 book *Mime: The Theory and Practice of Expressive Gesture with a Description of its Historical Development*.<sup>50</sup> This book (dedicated to Margot Fonteyn) is written for ballet dancers and choreographers. Mid-nineteenth-century French ballet, in particular (often called "ballet-pantomime," as in the passages from Garcia's acting manual cited above), had extensive passages of musically accompanied mime between what were more strictly dances, and such mime evoked the same contradictory views that we find in relation to the mime dramas of the turn of the century – some commentators find the mime the most affecting part of the performance (e.g., Théophile Gautier on Fanny Elssler in *La Gipsy* in 1839),<sup>51</sup> others condemn it as an incomprehensible waste of time (e.g., Hector Berlioz on *La Chatte metamorphosé en femme* in 1837).<sup>52</sup> Modern ballet, and modern choreography of classical ballet, have minimised the extent of mime, but it is still impossible to perform or follow the action of *Giselle* or *Swan Lake* without using or understanding some mime, so ballet dancers, unlike stage actors, still have to learn this vocabulary.<sup>53</sup> Hence their presence in Lawson's work. Why their absence (or modification) in Aubert's, given that their appearance in films suggests they were probably also present in contemporary stage pantomime?

Nineteenth-century French mime usually claims descent from the work of Gaspard Debureau at the Théâtre des Funambules in Paris in the late 1820s.<sup>54</sup> Debureau specialised in (some authors claim named) the white-clothed clown Pierrot, and although the mime plays in which his Pierrot appeared were comedies, this clown had a melancholy streak. Debureau's Pierrot attracted the attention of literary intellectuals, giving rise to the long history of Pierrots in modernist theatre, ballet, music, and painting as well as literature. After Debureau's death, pantomime persisted as a popular form, usually in the context of variety theatre (especially in Marseille), but the mime contemporaneous with the early cinema owes much to a revival, appealing to Debureau, centring on the Cercle des Funambules, a club founded in Paris in February 1888 by a group of intellectuals including a novelist (Paul Margueritte), a dramatic critic (Félix Larcher), and a journalist (Raoul de Najac), Paul Hugounet, an early member, stated the principal aim of the Cercle des Funambules as follows:

*To promote the growth of modern pantomime, by providing authors and musical composers with the opportunity to produce publicly their works in this genre, whatever the artistic tendencies of those works in other respects.*<sup>55</sup>

This formulation seems deliberately catholic with respect to the range of mime acting in the current theatre, but in a later work, Hugounet adds that the Cercle also aimed for a reform of pantomime, distinguishing the work of the Cercle from the pantomimes staged in French variety theatres, thus constituting the Cercle as a sort of "Théâtre Libre de la Pantomime" (Hugounet's phrase):

*The point was to suppress in pantomime all the conventional gestures which make it obscure, to set aside a whole alphabet which is incomprehensible to the audience.*<sup>56</sup>

This, along with the use of serious and original music, would serve to distinguish the work of the Cercle from variety-theatre and circus mime.

This distinction, between an incomprehensible arbitrary mime vocabulary, an “alphabet” as Hugounet calls it, and a mime based on the natural expressiveness of the body is too much of a commonplace to be accepted as a real description (note how it echoes the fifty year earlier opposition between Gautier and Berlioz), but it does suggest a range of types of acting in pantomime, and why a writer like Aubert, who shared the Cercle des Funambules’ reforming ideas, would try to make his descriptive gestures motivated or “natural” signs rather than arbitrary ones.<sup>57</sup> However, there is another contrast that helps to explain the paucity of descriptions of the conventionalised gestures. A review in *Théâtre* of a March 1911 performance in Marseille by Georges Wague and Christine Kerf in the mime play *Aux Bat’ d’Aff* commented:

*How remote this is from the traditional pantomime of those so highly regarded famous old mime-artistes and how much I prefer this new art of M. Wague, more true, more accurate, more sincere.*<sup>58</sup>

Wague, indeed, boasted that he avoided hand gestures, restricting himself as far as possible to expressive attitudes. However, this praise evoked a furious response from the mime Bighetti:

*M. Wague’s modernism is not an artistic formula, it is no more than a recipe to draw a crowd [...]. Pantomime is a difficult science, and to know it you must have learnt it. How can you make yourself understood with gestures if you do not use the conventional signs of the mimic alphabet?*<sup>59</sup>

Bighetti (like Sévérin, Thalès and Jacquinet) was a pupil of the Marseille mime Rouffe (1849-1885), whereas Wague was largely self-taught – he had debuted as a reciter of verse, and had then progressed to full-blown mime plays via the *cantomime*, a mixed form in which the mime illustrated a song performed simultaneously by a singer in the wings. This quarrel thus counterposes two conceptions of the professional status of the mime. For Wague, mime is the mastery of the natural expressivity of the body, and hence is in principle open to anyone; for Bighetti, it is a learned alphabet, and hence is only available to those who undergo a long apprenticeship under the tutelage of another, older mime. But the mime who sees his work as a craft secret is not going to publish a how-to manual. Hence the written record, including both mime manuals like Aubert’s, and the descriptions of mime by literary intellectuals and drama critics,<sup>60</sup> favours a “new pantomime” which minimises the conventional vocabulary, but that vocabulary – the “old pantomime” – can survive quite vigorously uncommented alongside.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps it should be pointed out that this “new” pantomime has little to do with the modern French mime we are familiar with from the work of Jean-Louis Barrault and Marcel Marceau. These mimes trace their descent to Etienne Decroux, who reinvented mime in collaboration with Jacques Copeau at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier at the end of the First World War. Decroux’s mime drew on modern dance, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze’s eurhythmics, and gymnastics and other sports more than it did on the pre-War mime tradition.<sup>62</sup> In particular, contemporary descriptions of pre-War mime show no evidence of the concern in the work of Barrault, Marceau, and also Tati, for the evocation of an invisible world, where the mime conjures up a whole environment, other characters, objects, etc., with his body alone and no scenery and no props, except per-

haps a few nondescript ones.<sup>63</sup> Pre-War mime used all the resources of the spectacular theatre – props, costumes, scenery. Once again, this suggests that there was no specific acting style for pantomime, except where acting was directly related to speech: pantomime was simply theatre minus words.

French mime actors did, however, have a significant effect on the French cinema, since so many of them acted in it. In France in the *belle époque*, pantomime was a part of variety entertainment. Pantomimes were presented (by professionals and amateurs) in private performances in the homes of the rich, soirées and charity concerts; pantomime was part of the repertory at the big music halls, such as the Folies-Bergère and the Moulin Rouge; it appeared on the bills in lowly café-concerts. At one end of the scale, it was an intellectual pastime with modernist aspirations, at the other end a popular entertainment barely distinguishable from strip tease. Not surprisingly, the same stratum of the acting profession that served the variety theatre also provided the acting personnel of the early cinema, and hence the early stock companies as well as deliberately promoted “cross-overs” from the live stage included many with experience in pantomime. An examination of the filmography of a few famous stage mimes as recorded in Raymond Chirat and Eric Le Roy’s *Catalogue des films français de fiction de 1908 à 1918* illustrates the point. Paul Franck appeared in twenty-three films in these years, Jean Jacquinet in forty-nine, Stacia Napierkowska in seventy-six, Gaston Sévérin in nine, Thalès in seventeen, Charlotte Wiehe in four, and Georges Wague in fifty-two.<sup>64</sup> Some of these mimes, for example, Sévérin, appeared in films relatively rarely, and almost always with his own mime troupe in adaptations of stage pantomimes; others, notably Wague, became fairly regular film actors without abandoning their stage pantomime careers, while yet others, particularly Jacquinet and Napierkowska, moved from pantomime acting to acting almost exclusively for film. But the overall presence of pantomime actors, or actors who had established themselves in pantomime, in French filmmaking, is undeniable. However, by the same token, these actors fit seamlessly into the ensembles with which they worked, ensembles that included many actors from other stage traditions. Napierkowska, it is true, is an actress with a very distinctive, dance-like style (she had been a dancer as well as a mime, and, in general, female mimes were often called on for dance in their mime dramas more than the men – thus, most of Wague’s leading ladies were originally dancers) and this does lead to her drawing excessive attention to herself (e.g., as the messenger in the 1909 Pathé *Cléopâtre*), but in films like Capellani’s *Notre Dame de Paris* (SCAGL, 1911) her fellow actors Henri Krauss and Claude Garry match the breadth of her gestures. And, although I knew *Germinal* (SCAGL, 1913) very well, I did not realise Jacquinet was a mime until I undertook the research for this article.

In addition to the conventionalised mime gestures described above, there are other instances of mime in early film. In the 1910 Biograph film *Gold Is Not All*, there is a scene in which a poor couple, played by Mack Sennett and Linda Arvidson, watch a rich wife leaving her house in her automobile. After the car leaves the screen with the couple enviously watching it, Sennett points off in the direction the car left, makes circles in the air with his forefinger, then points at himself, and lifts a foot and taps his shoe. The meaning of the gestures is clear enough: the poor husband says to his wife something like “Look, she gets to ride in a car, while we have to walk!” However, these gestures do not appear in any source I know of mime gestures. Lawson has a gesture for “walk,” but it is made solely with the arms, moving them backwards and forwards like



a child imitating the pistons of a railway locomotive.<sup>65</sup> Sennett (or perhaps Griffith) seems to have invented these gestures for the immediate situation.

Note that Sennett's lips do not move during this sequence of gestures. Aubert argues forcefully that pantomimists should not move their lips, indeed, they should make no reference at all to the notion that people speak (e.g., make no gestures indicative of listening to others speaking); the good mime has the talent to "cause the very existence of speech to be temporarily forgotten."<sup>66</sup> Burrows, Lenk and others have taken the absence of lip movements as typical of stage pantomime, and hence its occurrence in films as a sign that these are "pantomime-influenced" films; the fact that in other films characters' lips do move thus for them marks the shift to a more realistic kind of film acting. However, Aubert himself complains that some pantomimists did move their lips, while the standard gesture for "Silence!" in the other manuals is a finger to the lips with the hand palm out, and hence an obvious reference to speech, so once again, Aubert adopts an extreme position on this matter.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, film actors throughout the silent period restrict the amount of visible speaking they do, so the distinction is not an absolute one. But, from the beginning, filmmakers and spectators thought of the moving-picture camera as a recording apparatus, and were aware of its limitations, including, for the most part at this period, the absence of recorded sound, so they did not have to imagine the world filmed as one lacking speech, while the absence of speech in stage mime was purely a generic convention, so Aubert, at least, thought it needed special treatment.<sup>68</sup>

However, in later Biograph films, while gestures of the type found in *Gold Is Not All* remain common, they usually accompany lip movements, and can be realistically motivated as "talking with one's hands" while speaking. Also, the effort to avoid conventionalised gesture often results in them being fairly obscure, unlike Sennett's (and as gestures accompanying talk are likely to be). In *A Lodging for the Night* (USA, Biograph, 1912), when Charles West as Dick Logan has to explain to the sheriff how he was set on by thieves in the night and yet exculpate his guilty host since he is sweet on that host's daughter, he speaks to the sheriff and moves his hands up and down and across his body as if playing arpeggios on an invisible piano. In the absence of an intertitle (the print I have seen lacked intertitles, which I am sure would have been present here in a release print), it is quite unclear what he tells the sheriff.

This kind of "talking with one's hands" mime ("pantomimic action," in Garcia's sense, but motivated by the absence of audible sound in silent film) remains common in the cinema, particularly in the comic cinema (again confirming Garcia's notion that pantomimic action was particularly appropriate for low genre),<sup>69</sup> and, indeed, had a rich flowering in the late silent period, when the talking picture was already on the horizon. Think of the children's attempts to convey to their father the fact that the chicken leg he is about to serve to his next-door neighbour is still adorned with the fatal rosette which will reveal that this chicken is that neighbour's prize rooster, in *Pass the Gravy* (USA, Hal Roach, 1928), or Monte Blue's mime to his wife across the street to explain the effects of his old flame's attempts to seduce him in *So This Is Paris* (USA, Warner's, 1926), or Adolph Menjou's relation to his valet of his night's adventures in *A Gentleman of Paris* (USA, Paramount, 1927). In these last instances, filmmakers resort to mime partly to evade censorship – mime enables things to be conveyed by characters to the audience that censorship would not allow in dialogue, whether the content of that dialogue was represented by titles or by audible speech.



There is one last type of mime that is remarkable for its absence, or at any rate rarity, in the early cinema. Although, as we have seen, pantomime was associated with ethnic stereotypes, it seems surprisingly infrequently used to convey ethnic information. It may be true that, very broadly speaking, the basic ethnic stereotype at work – the notion that the breadth and frequency of gesture is in inverse proportion to geographic latitude (in Europe at least) – is reflected in the acting of ethnic types, but the effect is quite slight. In *The Baby and the Stork* (USA, Biograph, 1912), it is important to the plot that the man who delivers the coal at Bobby's family's house is Italian (because this explains why suspicion falls on him when the family's baby disappears, a suspicion motivated by a newspaper article presumably referring to something like black-hand gangs engaging in kidnapping – here too, the print I have seen lacked titles and inserts), but nothing in Edward Dillon's performance marks this Italianicity to me. Even more strikingly, although it is a central feature of *Assunta Spina* that it is set in Naples, and this is emphasised in costumes and even more in the use of Neapolitan settings for the exteriors, the repertory of gestures deployed by the actors – Francesca Bertini as Assunta, Gustavo Serena as Michele, Alberto Albertini as Raffaele, and Carlo Benedetti as Funelli – is quite standard, with no Neapolitan peculiarities, despite the notorious gestural specificity of the Neapolitan, and the availability of a famous book on Neapolitan gesture – Andrea de Jorio's *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano* of 1832<sup>70</sup> – to use as a source. It may be that the national and international character of the film market deterred filmmakers from the use of local peculiarities, unless these were immediately comprehensible to an international audience as “local colour,” so gestures which needed to be understood to follow the plot of a film had to belong to a cosmopolitan repertory (or be so firmly naturalistically motivated as to be comprehensible to anyone without previous familiarity). Although the *raison d'être* of the play by Salvatore di Giacomo on which the film is based is that it was in Neapolitan dialect, every Italian print I have seen has dialogue titles in standard (Florentine) Italian, without the slightest attempt to capture a Neapolitan flavour.<sup>71</sup>

However, in the comic series he directed and starred in for Gaumont, Léonce Perret does seem to be using gesture to mark what is presumably the Parisian culture of his protagonist (which seems in general much more important to Léonce than it is to Linder's Max or Prince's Rigadin, despite the fact that one assumes that these characters usually live in Paris). In *Léonce à la campagne* (Gaumont, 1913), there is a scene in which Léonce and his wife Poupette (played by Suzanne Le Bret) are staying at Léonce's uncle's house in the country. One evening they are called to meet a group of the uncle's friends, who have come to dinner. The guests, local bourgeois, are sitting outside on the terrace awaiting the call to dine. Léonce and Poupette approach the group from the rear, as most of the guests listen in rapt attention to a harangue from a plump middle-aged gentleman with a self-important attitude. After introductions, the gentleman resumes his harangue. Standing behind them, Léonce and Poupette exchange glances, then both look to camera and make the same gesture: they hold their right hand to their right cheek, with the hand bent so that the back of the fingers is nearly against the cheek and the wrist is towards camera, then wave the hand up and down, rotating it at the wrist, so it brushes the cheek. The meaning of the gesture is not precisely clear (to me – I wonder if a modern Parisian would recognise it at once?), but it seems to involve contempt for the guests and a degree of incredulity, together with complicity with the spectator: “Who do these bumpkins think they are?” I cannot find it in any of my sources on pan-

tomime or ethnic gestures, though it might be a variant of de Jorio's *negativa*, in which the bent hand is held with the back of the fingers under the chin and the back of the hand facing the interlocutor, and whose meaning is "I reject what you propose!"<sup>72</sup> Here, though, it surely underlines the fact that Léonce and Poupette are Parisians, with the assumption that the spectators are, too, or at any rate they are more likely to identify with a Parisian than with a provincial.<sup>73</sup>

So, what did happen to pantomime? It seems clear from this argument that a pantomime-based cinema was not a "road not taken," neither an inappropriate theatrical borrowing that had to be cast off to allow the emergence of true cinematic acting, nor a lost opportunity to create a "non-realist," stylised cinema. Insofar as the early cinema shared an obvious feature with stage pantomime, its lack of audible dialogue, it was a form of pantomime, as all those "superficial" commentators maintained, and it employed many stage mime practitioners. But apart from the area of gestures that supplied the absence of speech, there was no special pantomime acting style – rather there was a very wide range of acting "styles" in the pictorialist theatre as a whole, which included the pantomime theatre, and the cinema drew on them all. And the mime that supplied the absence of speech continued to be used in the cinema, and indeed, was probably more widely used and more elaborated and orchestrated in the late silent period than in the 1910s. Rather than attempting to demarcate the broad trends of a stylistic history of film acting, we need to study the different ways actors deployed the resources of pictorialist theatre in the early cinema.

- 1 J. Claretie, "M. Claretie et la Cinématographie," *Ciné-Journal* (26 November 1908), p. 6 (reprinted from *Le Temps*).
- 2 Claretie here invokes a *topos* of early commentary on the cinema most familiar nowadays in Maxim Gorky's famous 1896 review of a Lumière Cinématographe show in Nizhni Novgorod. See N. Burch, *Life to Those Shadows* (London: BFI, 1990), pp. 23-24 and J. Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 407-409.
- 3 *Moving Picture World* (13 July 1907), p. 298.
- 4 "Film-Picture Actors," *The Bioscope* (2 October 1908), p. 18
- 5 E. Kress, *Le Geste et l'attitude: L'Art mimique au cinématographe* (Paris: Comptoir d'édition de "Cinéma-Revue," 1912), and Ch. Aubert, *L'Art mimique, suivi d'un traité de la pantomime et du ballet, 200 dessins par l'Auteur* (Paris: E. Meuriot, 1901). In *Théâtre contre Cinéma. Die Diskussion um Kino und Theater vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg in Frankreich* (Münster: MAK S Publikationen, 1989), p. 153, Sabine Lenk gives many other references to commentary suggesting films are pantomimes and that film acting is pantomime, including Louis Schneider in *Phono-Ciné-Gazette* (15 August 1908), p. 693 (reprinted from *L'Etoile Belge*), Fourniols in *Touche-à-tout* (December 1912), p. 479, and Des Anges in *Comœdia* (12 April 1913), p. 4. She also establishes that the same was true of Germany in the same period.
- 6 *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* (20 January 1910), p. 611; and C. Bennett, *Handbook of Kinematography* (London: Kinematograph Weekly, 1911), p. 219. For a detailed account of English claims that film acting was a form of pantomime, see John Burrows, "The Whole English Stage To Be Seen For Sixpence!": *Theatrical Actors and Acting Styles In British Cinema, 1908-1918* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, to be published).
- 7 *Moving Picture World*, vol. 3, no. 12 (19 September 1908), p. 212.

- 8 See R. Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 136 ff.
- 9 "Spectator's Comments," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, vol. 63, no. 1622 (22 January 1910), p. 17.
- 10 "Chronique Théâtrale," *Le Temps*, no. 17317 (23 November, 1908), pp. 1-2. The section of this article on the Film d'Art programme was subsequently reprinted as "Ce que M. Brisson pense du Film d'Art," *Ciné-Journal*, vol. 17 (3 December, 1908), pp. 7-9; it is extensively quoted by G. Sadoul, in *Histoire générale du cinéma II: Les pionniers du cinéma 1897-1909* (revised edition, Paris: Denoël, n.d. [1978]), pp. 504-507, and there is a partial translation in R. Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism, A History/Anthology, I: 1907-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 50-52.
- 11 For example, the film trade journalist Yhcam, and Maurice Luguet ("Opinions," *Comœdia* (18 February 1914), p. 4). See Lenk, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- 12 In England, pantomime was and is the name given to a local variant of the magical spectacle which in France would have been called *féerie*, one in which the emphasis was on clowning. The different kinds of pantomime practised in France and England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had similar roots in eighteenth-century (and earlier) illegitimate theatre, which, at least officially, had been required to be wordless, and had often featured clowns. As the restrictions on the illegitimate theatre were progressively relaxed, French pantomime, claiming descent from Gaspard Debureau, took its aesthetic dominant from the mime, whereas English, epitomised by Joseph Grimaldi, found its in the clown. The indifference to reference in the trade press is illustrated by the fact that this perfectly well-known distinction did not stop English commentators from claiming that actors who had distinguished themselves in pantomime (in the English sense) were therefore particularly suited to the cinema – thus, a *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* profile of Flora Morris highlighted her experience in "pantomime, one of the finest training grounds for the picture actress" (27 April 1911, p. 1775, *cit.*); J. Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- 13 The *Bioscope* published a learned article, "The Revival of Pantomime," by Laurence Trevelyan tracing the history of the genre from the primitive imitation of animals through ancient Greece and Rome to the puppet dramas of Maeterlinck and Reinhardt's *Sumurun* (21 December 1911, pp. 813-815).
- 14 Reprinted in *Ciné-Journal*, vol. 12 (5 November, 1908), p. 7.
- 15 *The Bioscope* (7 December 1911), p. 679.
- 16 Lenk, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 17 Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
- 18 G. Garcia, *The Actor's Art: A Practical Treatise on Stage Declamation, Public Speaking and Deportment, for the use of Artists, Students and Amateurs* (London: T. Pettit & Co., 1882), p. 158, *cit.* in Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.
- 19 Aubert, *op. cit.*, p. 228, *cit.* in Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 20 *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), p. 18 (*cit.* in Burrows, *op. cit.*)
- 21 A. Morrocchesi, *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale* (Firenze: Tipografia All'insegna di Dante, 1832), pp. 255-257 and figs. 17-38.
- 22 See the analysis of gesture in a scene in *An Official Appointment* (USA, Vitagraph, 1912) in B. Brewster, L. Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 127-129.
- 23 J. Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen over de gesticulatie en mimiek* (Amsterdam: P.M. Warnars, 1827; repr. Uitgeverij Adolf M. Hakkert, 1970), p. 90.
- 24 Aubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-230.

- 25 See my analysis of the last scene of Paul Armstrong's *Alias Jimmy Valentine* in "Alias Jimmy Valentine and Situational Dramaturgy," *Film History*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1997), p. 405.
- 26 "Two citizens cannot begin a conversation without the bustle of a market-place erupting behind them, so that we are willy-nilly distracted from the important dialogue." Hans Hopfen, "Die Meininger in Berlin," in *Streitfragen und Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1876), p. 241.
- 27 See the analysis of William Archer's description of a scene from *Hernani* in *Theatre to Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
- 28 See the analyses of *La Tosca* and *La Fin d'une royauté* in *Theatre to Cinema*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-123.
- 29 Aubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.
- 30 Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
- 31 Garcia, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 33 One of the most unfortunate things about Roberta Pearson's distinction between a "histrionic" acting style and a "verisimilar" one. R. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), esp. pp. 27-37 and 43-50 is that her definition of "verisimilar," conforming to a conventional notion of the real world, is a crude version of the Aristotelian notion of verisimilitude, conforming to a set of maxims that say how in certain situations, certain characters will behave, and such a regime of verisimilitude governs all nineteenth-century acting before naturalism. Of course, generic appropriateness also enters into the definition of Aristotelian verisimilitude, but it would be hard to deny that even the most "verisimilar" Biograph performances do not take this into account – Mary Pickford acts differently in comedy than she does in drama.
- 34 G.E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy* (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 19.
- 35 Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47 and 339-58. "Might be," since I have not seen any of Hawtrey's films or read enough description of his stage appearances to make an overall assessment of his acting.
- 36 *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), p. 141.
- 37 A Yeats specialist has pointed out to us that a passage in which the poet discusses Sarah Bernhardt's acting in a 1902 production of *Phèdre* which we used (*Theatre to Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p. 100) as evidence for the length of poses in the pictorial acting tradition was intended to mark her performance as a modernist rather than a traditionalist one. Similarly, what we treated as Asta Nielsen's "pre-naturalist" pictorialism might better be seen as a "post-naturalist" pictorialism, and the influence of symbolism on the films in which Lyda Borelli or Emma Bauer appear is undeniable.
- 38 Pace Keil, if we did "agree that the transitional period witnesses a marked change in performance style," we do not think that the mid-1910s performances of Borelli, Bauer, Nielsen, Bosse and Sweet can be seen as having evolved in the same way from the acting of the film stock companies when these were formed in 1907-8. Perhaps one might generalise that acting improved overall in the late 1900s, as performers learnt to master the special conditions of film as opposed to stage acting (which is not to say that performances became less theatrical – more likely, as performers gained confidence in the new medium, they realised that stage practices they had thought would not "go over" in film did register with audiences, and hence their film performances became more like their stage ones). But the development of cinematic acting in the 1910s cannot be reduced to a single evolutionary line.
- 39 *Op. cit.*, p. 74 note 43.
- 40 *Op. cit.*, p. 170. In *Théâtre contre Cinéma*, Lenk accepts the notion of a natural cinematic

- vocation for “realism:” “If directors like Calmette, Le Bargy, or Carré return to well-worn theatrical paths, pure filmmakers like Jasset or Feuillade strive for the reproduction of ‘authentic’ life” (*ibid.*, p. 171). In later articles, and in those written in collaboration with Frank Kessler, she emphasises rather the suggestion that, following Brisson in the review of the first Film d’Art programme cited above, film actors strive for an artistic “stylisation” of life, which is, of course, by no means incompatible with a pictorial approach to acting. See especially F. Kessler, S. Lenk, “‘...levant les bras au ciel, se tapant sur les cuisses.’ Réflexions sur l’universalité du geste dans le cinéma des premiers temps”, in R. Cosandey, F. Albera (eds.), *Cinéma sans frontières, 1896-1918, Images Across Borders* (Lausanne-Québec: Payot/Nuit Blanche, 1995), pp. 133-144, and F. Kessler, “Lesbare Körper,” *KINtop*, no. 7 (1998), pp. 15-28.
- 41 A less lofty influence, clearly, was earlier historical films such as the Lumière’s *La Mort de Marat* (ca. 1897, Catalogue no. 749) or Pathé’s 1902 version of *L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, which themselves derive from dioramas, tableaux vivants and history paintings, all popular manifestations of nineteenth-century pictorialism.
- 42 More generally, in pictorialism villains have broader gestures than heroes. This is still evident in Capellani’s *Germinal*, where it would be a mistake to see Jacquinet’s performance as Chaval as “hammy” while Henri Krauss’ as Lantier is “naturalistic,” and to attribute the difference in style to the fact that Jacquinet had a long career in mime before he became a film actor.
- 43 Brisson, *op. cit.*
- 44 Burrows simply asserts that Aubert is “authoritative” (*op. cit.*, p. 76), without offering any justification for the claim. Apart from the pantomime manual (which had the good fortune, for later commentators, to be translated into English many years later), Aubert was the author of two volumes of pantomime plays, but, as far as I know, none of these were part of the standard mime repertory of the period.
- 45 Aubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13. The radically different assessments we have seen in contemporary discussions of mime in theatre and film (and in ballet, as we shall see below) can be largely accounted for if we distinguish what part of mime acting the commentators are discussing. In general, those who regard mime as immediately comprehensible and affecting are talking about Aubert’s third type of gestures, the ones expressing characters’ feelings; those who regard it as an arcane system of hieroglyphics are talking about his fourth, those gestures that stand in for characters’ speeches. Largely but not wholly. In the review of *L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise* cited above, Adolphe Brisson clearly objects to the stereotyped character of mime expressions of feeling as well as to the arbitrariness of the speaking gestures.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.
- 47 “Spectator’s Comments,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, vol. 62, no. 1612 (13 November 1909), p. 15.
- 48 “The Formulation of the Classical Style 1909-28,” in D. Bordwell, J. Staiger, K. Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 189-190.
- 49 M. Marie, “Place de *Germinal* dans l’histoire du cinéma français,” 1895, special issue *L’Année 1913 en France* (October 1993), p. 230.
- 50 (New York: Pitman, 1957). See p. 92 for “drink,” p. 87 for “child,” and p. 85 for “baby.”
- 51 *La Presse* (4 February 1839).
- 52 *Revue et gazette musicale* (22 October 1837).
- 53 See M.E. Smith, *Music for the Ballet-Pantomime at the Paris Opéra, 1825-1850*, Yale University Ph.D. thesis (1988), especially pp. 70-76.
- 54 Mime had a place in variety theatre in other European countries and the USA. In these years, too – the issue of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* that reviewed the first Film d’Art films



- shown in America contained an advertisement for a mimed Wild-West show – but French mime received more literary attention and its history is easier to trace.
- 55 P. Hugounet, *Mimes et Pierrots, notes et documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la pantomime* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1889), p. 238.
- 56 Hugounet, *La Musique et la pantomime* (Paris: Ernest Kolb, n.d. [1892]), pp. 15 and 17. Hugounet also edited a special number of the magazine *La Plume* on pantomime: no. 82 (15 September 1892).
- 57 Lawson gives the following for “mother:” “1. Raise both arms through 2nd position. 2. Bend forearms inwards and allow them to cross chest. 3. Both hands come to rest with the fingertips just below and inside opposite shoulders. Traditionally the R[ight] hand is nearest the heart. Palms against body” (p. 102). She suggests, however, that the original meaning of this gesture (which might be thought naturally to express “chastity”) was “virgin,” but the use of it in paintings of the Virgin Mary led to its arbitrary adoption as the sign for “mother.” Contrast this shift from the motivated to the arbitrary with Aubert’s conflation (for natural reasons) of the signs for “baby” and the sign for “mother.” In the same way, Aubert replaces the sign for “child” with its motivation, the indication of a small size. Lenk notes the opposition between a “natural” and a “conventional” school of mime, but assigns Aubert to the latter, on the grounds that *L’Art mimique* devotes so much space to descriptive gestures, ignoring the “non-conventional” nature of Aubert’s descriptive gestures. See Lenk, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
- 58 21 March 1911; cit. in T. Rémy, *Georges Wague: Le Mime de la belle époque* (Paris: Georges Girard, 1964), p. 109.
- 59 Letter to *Théâtre* (13 May 1911), cit. in Rémy, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–110.
- 60 See for example R. de Najac, *Petit traité de pantomime, à l’usage des gens du monde* (Paris: A. Hennuyer, 1887), p. 4ff.
- 61 American trade-press comments that contrast an “old” and a “new” pantomime, such as H.F. Hoffman’s “Cutting Off the Feet” (*Moving Picture World*, vol. 12, no. 1, 6 April 1912, p. 53), imply, and have been taken by modern commentators to mean, stage acting versus film acting, but it may well be that they are echoing a debate current in the pantomime theatre of the day.
- 62 For this tradition, see J. Dorcy, *The Mime* (New York: Speller & Sons, 1961), with essays by E. Decroux, J.-L. Barrault and M. Marceau.
- 63 This kind of mime was, however, part of English and American clowning, particularly that used in the variety theatre as opposed to the circus, and as such found its way into slapstick comedy in American cinema. It may be that French mimes learnt it from Chaplin and Keaton as much as from any native tradition.
- 64 R. Chirat, E. Le Roy, *Catalogue des films français de fiction de 1908 à 1918* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1995). It should be said that this filmography is not ideal for generating this kind of statistics. No catalogue of early films can claim to be complete, so there may have been films in which mimes appeared which were missed entirely by the compilers., and there may be films which do appear, but in which the presence of a mime actor is not recorded. But there may also be over-representation as well as under-representation. Chirat and Le Roy seem to have decided to assign a catalogue entry to every title they found in an authoritative source. Quite apart from the quality of the sources they used – an entry in J. Mitry’s *Filmographie universelle*, surely the single major source of error in early filmography, seems to be enough to ensure a title an entry – the same film can have several titles that are authoritative in this sense. Films have working titles which are not identical to their release titles; they are given new titles on re-release; films which are adaptations of plays or other works may be referred to (especially in the memoirs of participants in their making) by the title of



the work adapted rather than the actual release title. There are examples of all these kinds of multiple entry in the films with mime performers listed in Chirat and Le Roy's catalogue. I have endeavoured to eliminate these extra numbers. Fortunately, for films which appeared in the Pathé Catalogues (films by Pathé itself, but also those by SCAGL and the early Film d'Art), H. Bousquet's *Catalogue Pathé des années 1896 à 1914* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1993-1994) and *De Pathé Frères à Pathé Cinéma* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1999) make this correction a relatively easy task.

65 *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

66 *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

67 For "silence," see Lawson, *op. cit.*, p. 109. "Secrecy" (p. 107) also involves a finger to the lips, but the lips are tapped and the hand is held palm in. This gesture, too, obviously refers to speech.

68 In the same way, although the scenes in most films in this period, even tinted and toned ones, were monochrome, no one thought they had therefore to pretend that the world filmed was one without colour.

69 See Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

70 See A. de Jorio, *Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

71 Francesca Bertini is supposed to have acted in the stage version in Naples before she entered the cinema (as one of Assunta's assistants in her laundry, not in the lead part). I do not know whether the Neapolitan dialect companies used specifically Neapolitan gestures in their performances as well as the language. If so, Bertini is avoiding them in the film version.

72 De Jorio, *op. cit.*, p. 291 and plate XXI.

73 Since writing this, I have learnt from Bernard Bastide that this is a standard French (not peculiarly Parisian) gesture meaning "Boring!" Note that the conventional mime for "bored" is a polite yawn, with the hand held to a half-opened mouth, not this much more vulgar gesture (see Lawson, *op. cit.*, p. 86).