A MARGIN OF PLAYFUL AMBIGUITY: OFF-SCREEN SPACE IN *THE STUDENT PRINCE IN OLD HEIDELBERG* (ERNST LUBITSCH, 1927)

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A DOUBLE MOVEMENT

Of the large number of European filmmakers who went to Hollywood in the 1920s, Ernst Lubitsch was probably the one who adapted best to the style and mode of production of the studio system. Although what had attracted the attention of American critics and producers were his historical films (with sumptuous sets and frames replete with extras), the German director was relatively quick to find the genre and style that would bring him success on the other side of the Atlantic (at least in terms of critical acclaim and professional prestige, as none of his silent films were big box office hits[1]): sophisticated comedy. The fact that Paramount would make him their production manager in the following decade is perhaps the most definitive proof of his rapid acceptance in Hollywood. However, this love at first sight between a European artist and the Hollywood studio machinery is, as will be revealed in this article, only part of the story.

As is well known, by 1923 the mode of production and basic norms of the Hollywood film style were already fully established. As Kristin Thompson (2005) has explained in great detail, Lubitsch would soon claim as his own a style of storytelling whose basic premises were not all that different from the ones he had been using previously in German films. But although his films may be easily classified within a mainstream style, a closer look at them reveals that those same films, in a kind of double movement, offer enough deviations from the norm to be considered atypical of Hollywood production in the 1920s.

The most significant deviation is ontological, as it directly targets the weak point of the style which, since Noël Burch (1978-1979), has come to be known as the Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR) (of which, perhaps a little rashly, classical American cinema is an updated category related to a specific place and time: Hollywood from 1917 to 1960). While it would be fair to say

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that the position the IMR reserves for the spectator is always the best of all possible positions (in other words, the position from which the spectator can easily see everything clearly), for Lubitsch this principle was far from paramount. Indeed, the quintessence of his style, which was basically defined by around 1925, reflects his desire to constantly challenge the spectator's expectations (Zumalde, 2002: 43), for example, by relegating what the spectator wants so much to see (motivated both by the *forewarnings* in the story itself and by the habits acquired through frequent visits to the cinema) to the off-screen space.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that the director of *The Marriage Circle* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1924) was not the first to challenge the "phenomenology of the explicit" which, to quote Imanol Zumalde (2013: 39), had become the "watchword of movies made in Hollywood in the 1920s." That honour of course belongs to Charlie Chaplin, who directed a film in 1923 that was original mainly for its insistence on "suggesting rather than showing", leaving it to "the imagination and intelligence of the spectator to draw the right conclusion" (Bourget & O'Neill, 2006: 91). Nevertheless, it is worth adding that the vindication of the indirect style and the off-screen space found in *A Woman from Paris* (Charles Chaplin, 1923), ahead of its time and probably for that reason unprofitable (in commercial terms,[2] that is), would not be repeated in Chaplin's work. It would, however, appear often in the work of Lubitsch. Indeed, as Zumalde (2013: 24) points out,

"Lubitsch was the only one who fully appreciated the *ellipsis lesson* of *A Woman from Paris*. In fact, the famous "Lubitsch touch", which was in full gestation in those years of the early 1920s, really came into operation when he made Chaplin's aesthetic experimentations his own, as evidenced by the practically identical style of the four films he released in quick succession in the year and a half leading up to *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), a monumental work in which the systematic use of elusive tactics ambitiously proposed by Chaplin to distract the spectator's attention from the frame by dramatically activating the off-screen space[3] come into perfect harmony with the key theme in Lubitsch's filmography: the deceptiveness of appearances".

THE OFF-SCREEN SPACE

The cinematographic frame is inextricably linked to the space that extends beyond its boundaries (Aumont et al., 1993: 24). For the IMR in the silent era, this space lying outside the spectator's range of vision—especially in those cases where the space will not be recovered later (and has not been earlier) by the story, i.e. what can be defined as the permanent off-screen space as opposed to the momentary off-screen space—must be, insofar as possible, ignored. The realistic reconstruction of the space on which the IMR is based would not be possible if this vaguely defined off-screen space were constantly being evoked. The spectator must ignore this space, or better still, activate only that part of the space outside the frame that supports the reconstruction of what Burch (1990) calls an inhabitable space. Thus, as Gómez Tarín (2006: 71) astutely points out, "in reality, the off-screen space is a contradiction for the IMR, which, being unable to dismiss it completely due to the nature of the cinematographic image itself, does everything possible not to expose it."

For her inventory of the different forms of experimentation in the classical style of the 1920s,

Thompson (1993: 187-188) adopts a taxonomy proposed by Bordwell (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985: 5-6) to distinguish between films that break with convention through their use of innovative devices (techniques), films that do so by giving those devices different functions from the ones they normally perform within their system, and films that deviate from the norm by violating the logic that determines the relationships between the three systems operating in narrative fiction films: temporal, spatial and narrative. According to Bordwell, this logic is founded on the subordination of the spatial and temporal systems to the narrative system.

BY ACTIVATING THIS SPACE BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE FRAME REPEATEDLY AND IN DIFFERENT WAYS, LUBITSCH'S FILMS INTRODUCE A CERTAIN DEGREE OF SPATIAL AMBIGUITY

Lubitsch's use of off-screen space in his American silent films thus not only exposes the ontological contradiction posited by Gómez Tarín, but also to some extent violates the logic of subordination of systems described by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson. By activating this space beyond the boundaries of the frame repeatedly and in different ways, Lubitsch's films introduce a certain degree of spatial ambiguity, which sometimes (especially in those cases where the off-screen space is permanent) has the effect of disorienting the spectator. In other words, in these films, mise-en-scene and editing decisions related to the management of space are not only aimed at reconstructing a realistic space (Bazin, 1999: 91) that will allow the spectator to follow the story being told as simply and comfortably as possible. Space in Lubitsch is not completely subordinate to causality. There are certain moments when the spectator has to work a little harder than in the other films of the era; for example, in the exact identification of the spatial relationships between on-screen and off-screen spaces. Obviously, this is a long way from the spatial ambiguity inherent in modernist cinema; nevertheless, compared to other films of the period, Lubitsch's pictures relate to the spectator in a very different way.

In view of the above, it is important to clarify how this difference represented by Lubitsch's work became integrated into the studio system. As noted above, although they did not create a big stir with the general public (perhaps because the average spectator of the period was not yet ready for the German filmmaker's oblique tales[4]), his silent films were well received by critics, professionals and executives in the film industry. As Thompson (1993: 188) explains, innovation was accepted and even promoted by the studio system, mainly because it served as an effective differentiating mechanism. Hollywood producers were interested in introducing innovations into their films to facilitate differentiation (especially for the purposes of promotion and marketing of their products) of films from one another in a highly standardised industry. In this respect, the films of the man who at the time was known as the "Griffith of Europe" (Eyman, 1999: 113) were quickly and unequivocally singled out. Definitive proof of this could be found in the constant references (always vague and ambiguous) to that very personal "Lubitsch touch" found in many of the reviews of his films that were published in the 1920s (Thompson, 2005: 129).

THE PRINCE AND THE BARMAID

There seems to be a general consensus among critics as to the most substantial of Lubitsch's silent films. Although in recent years there has been increasing (and, incidentally, totally justified) interest in the German period of the director of *The Oyster Princess* (Die Austernprinzessin, Ernst Lubitsch, 1919), the comedies he made just after the release of *A Woman from Paris* continue to be his

most acclaimed work. There is also a consensus that *Lady Windermere's Fan* is the most successful of the half a dozen[5] comedies of errors completed consecutively from 1924 to 1926, all of which feature the same themes (sex, infidelity and partner switching), the same settings (the world of high society) and the same formal solutions.

However, right after these six comedies that consolidated his style almost completely (only the decisive element of sound was missing), the Germany filmmaker made a picture that was different from those that preceded it in several ways. Whether it was because this time his directorial freedom to experiment was more restricted than on other occasions,[6] or because, as Lubitsch himself would acknowledge,[7] the way he decided to relate to his characters was different (a fact that makes this one of his most sentimental films), or because the director was never fully satisfied with the film's two leading stars (Norma Shearer and Ramón Novarro), or even because the camera movements (at times rather showy) add to the catalogue of devices of a filmmaker who until then had scarcely used them, there is no denying that *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927) is an anomaly among his silent films. And it is especially anomalous when compared to the aforementioned series of comedies with which he forged a style that would be indelibly stamped on the rest of his filmography. However, despite all these differences, there is at least one way in which this picture is a clear continuation

THE STORY OF A FLEETING LOVE BETWEEN A GOOD-HEARTED PRINCE AND AN EVANESCENT BARMAID REPRESENTS A CLEAR PROGRESSION IN HIS EXPERIMENTATION WITH THE POTENTIAL OF THE OFF-SCREEN SPACE, A PROJECT THAT LUBITSCH HAD BEEN PURSUING NOW FOR SEVERAL YEARS

Image 1. *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

of his immediately preceding films: the story of a fleeting love between a good-hearted prince and an evanescent barmaid represents a clear progression in his experimentation with the potentialities of off-screen space, a project that Lubitsch had been pursuing for several years.

Right after the end of the party in which Prince Karl has been mingling with the students of Heidelberg, who would from that moment become his friends, we are offered an entertaining sequence with the wanderings in and out of the frame of a pair of lovers searching for one another in vain around the garden. This failure to meet in the space (which will have other manifestations in the film), together with the evanescent nature of the characters (who appear and disappear constantly) operates as a kind of foreshadowing or reminder of the extremely precarious nature of a relationship that seems to be constantly on the verge of falling apart. On a closer look, everything that happens in Heidelberg seems to form part of a hallucination. This may be why the first time we see the palace (a visual symbol of the city) it appears as a reflection (projected onto the window of the train taking the prince to the city, where he will be studying). This appears to suggest the idea that the part of the story that occurs in this bucolic university town is merely a mirage (Image 1).

Images 2 and 3. *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

It is scarcely worth adding that the use of the space in dramatic terms, and especially the articulation of the relationships between the on-screen and off-screen spaces, would prove essential for the visualisation of a story in which the trajectories of the bodies around the space seem to work against their convergence and in which the lovers literally vanish out of the frame.

FEAR IN HER EYES

The garden party is in full swing. Suddenly, Kathi remembers that the prince is alone in his room and decides to go up to look for him. The prince, hidden behind the door leading into the garden, watches her come up and follows her to his room. The mise-en-scene on this occasion also underscores the trouble that bodies have in finding each other in the space. Finally, Kathi and Karl meet in the doorway that joins the prince's bedroom to a small room that serves as a kind of parlour. After a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, Kathi notices that the prince has tried some of the cake she had made for him, and in this detail they find the perfect excuse to recover the rapport they seemed to have lost. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, the prince tries to kiss her. She pulls away and ends up sitting on a couch (Image 2), while explaining to Karl (the prince has been left out of the frame now) that she is engaged, although she is not entirely sure about the match. "I think you know right away when you really love someone," she says, just before turning her head to the right of the frame (from our point of view) to look at Karl. But judging by her expression of panic (an expression that of course serves to confirm to the spectator that Cupid's arrow has indeed struck the barmaid's heart as well) and the rapid movement of her eyes as she scans the off-screen space around her, the prince is no longer where he had been standing just a moment before. Kathi's eyes (which we follow in the same shot) then turn towards the left of the frame (Image 3). Finally, the girl's startled jump, accompanied by another expression of surprise, tells us that the prince is sitting on the couch beside her, in the off-screen space just to the left of the frame.

A number of points are worthy of attention here. Firstly, the direction of the characters' gazes towards specific points outside the frame is one of the ways that the cinematographic narrative activates the off-screen space for dramatic effect. However, as Burch (1981: 27) points out, and as Lubitsch's sound films definitively confirm, there

are other ways to actualise this space: "whether through the use of sound, through the variation of the length of time the screen is left empty, or by means of off-screen glances, it is possible not only to bring now one and now another of the six spatial segments into play but also to indicate the extent of the off-screen space. The 'unit' for measuring it, though indirect, is quite precise." In the specific case of the segment described above, Kathi's gaze—a clear precursor to the flower girl's in *Angel* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1937)—serves to reconstruct quite precisely what is going on outside the frame, but at the same time, it introduces a certain degree of spatial ambiguity whose most immediate consequence is the disorientation (albeit for only a brief moment) of the spectator.

From the perspective of the dramatic development of the story, it is important to point out, as do Del Monaco and Pamini (1995: 105), that Kathi's look of panic when she believes that the prince has left is merely another of the various omens that mark the film and foreshadow its fateful conclusion. But it is not only the fear in the barmaid's eyes. The momentary disappearance of the prince (expressed—and this is important—in strictly spatial terms thanks to the off-screen space) highlights the inevitably ephemeral condition of a love which, as will be the case nearly ten years later in *Angel*, is constrained to the geographical limits of a city (Paris and Heidelberg, respectively) where the protagonist (torn between two worlds in both stories) finds an ideal context to give free rein to drives that he must repress back in Karlsburg, his usual residence (Zumalde, 2002: 60). It is no coincidence that both in London (in *Angel*) and in Karlsburg (in *The Student Prince*) it is raining heavily.

EMPTY SCREEN

After searching for one another in vain around the garden, the lovers temporarily give up the search and sit down: the prince in a garden chair,

and Kathi on a stone bench. An overhead shot reveals to the amused spectator that the lovers are virtually side by side, separated only by a garden wall; they are also sitting in the exact same position and have even adopted the same pose (both leaning their heads on their left hands) (Image 4). Thanks to the information provided here, as also occurs in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (Zunzunegui, 2016: 167), the spectator enjoys a privileged position, being aware of things unknown to the characters (Del Monaco & Pamini, 1995: 106). This narrative mechanism—which years later Hitchcock would turn into a key dramatic tool: his famous use of suspense—tightens the bond between the spectator and the situation presented, because the

Images 4 and 5.
The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

possession of knowledge that the characters lack makes the spectator feel compelled to do something useful with that information. For example, the spectator, while knowing it is impossible, would like to tell Kathi and the prince that in reality they are only a few feet apart. But in the end it will not be necessary, because their meeting will be facilitated by a beer coaster that the prince throws in the air, which ends up landing on the other side of the wall, right on Kathi's head. As if it were a game of volleyball, Kathi tosses the coaster back over the wall and it ends up landing on top of the student prince's cap. When he realises that there is somebody on the other side, he scales the wall and smiles to find that it was indeed Kathi who threw the coaster back at him, and he plunges into the off-screen space where he hopes to satisfy his most primitive desires.[8]

In the next shot we see an empty setting (Image 5) resembling a theatre stage, which is actually the view through one of the vine-covered arches of the garden porch. Suddenly, the couple burst into the frame from the left. Kathi is trying to evade the prince's efforts to hug and kiss her. When they reach the centre of the frame they stop (Image 6), and then moments later the chase continues; from this point, the couple will be fol-

lowed using a prolonged tracking shot from left to right. Every time they come to another arch (which serves as a frame for the shot[9]), the couple stops, and the camera stops with them. When the couple starts moving again, so does the camera. This operation is repeated three times. But in the off-screen space that separates the third arch from the fourth, the couple disappears, and the camera, like it did at the beginning of this sequence, offers a static shot of the empty space through the fourth arch, this time for eight interminable seconds. Suddenly, a dachsund runs in from the right side of the frame. It stops in the centre of the shot (Image 7), looks towards the off-screen space where the spectator imagines the lovers to be, and then turns around and exits the frame right where it came in. Once again, empty screen. Four seconds later, Kathi comes walking in from the left and raises her hand to her head, as if trying to regain her composure. The prince follows close behind her and takes her in his arms, with the intention of kissing her (again?) when he reaches the centre of the frame.

The first thing that this brief (but striking) segment very clearly demonstrates is that Lubitsch's films, unlike those of his contemporaries, are not characterised (at least, not as strongly) by the sys-

Images 6 and 7. *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

tematic erasure of the markers of enunciation on which the transparency of the classical model depends. The very long duration of the empty on-screen space mentioned above serves, first of all, to divert the spectator's attention towards the off-screen space to which the couple have unexpectedly been relegated. But it also serves to expose the presence of an enunciative marker. This is not only because "the longer the screen remains empty, the greater the resulting tension between screen space and off-screen space, and the greater the attention concentrated on off-screen space as against screen space" (Burch, 1981: 25), but also because the motionlessness (extended over time) of the camera (as we had become used to it stopping for only a moment) effectively betrays its presence. Thus, while other films deny the existence of the camera's gaze, this one, probably without meaning to, affirms it.

But returning to the garden scene, the introduction of this change in the narrative pattern of the sequence (we expected the couple to reappear under the fourth arch) thwarts the expectations of the spectator, who has to make do with what is presented in the frame (at the moment, nothing) to reconstruct what is going on outside it. But after eight seconds of emptiness, the space—or at least a small portion of it—will be filled by...

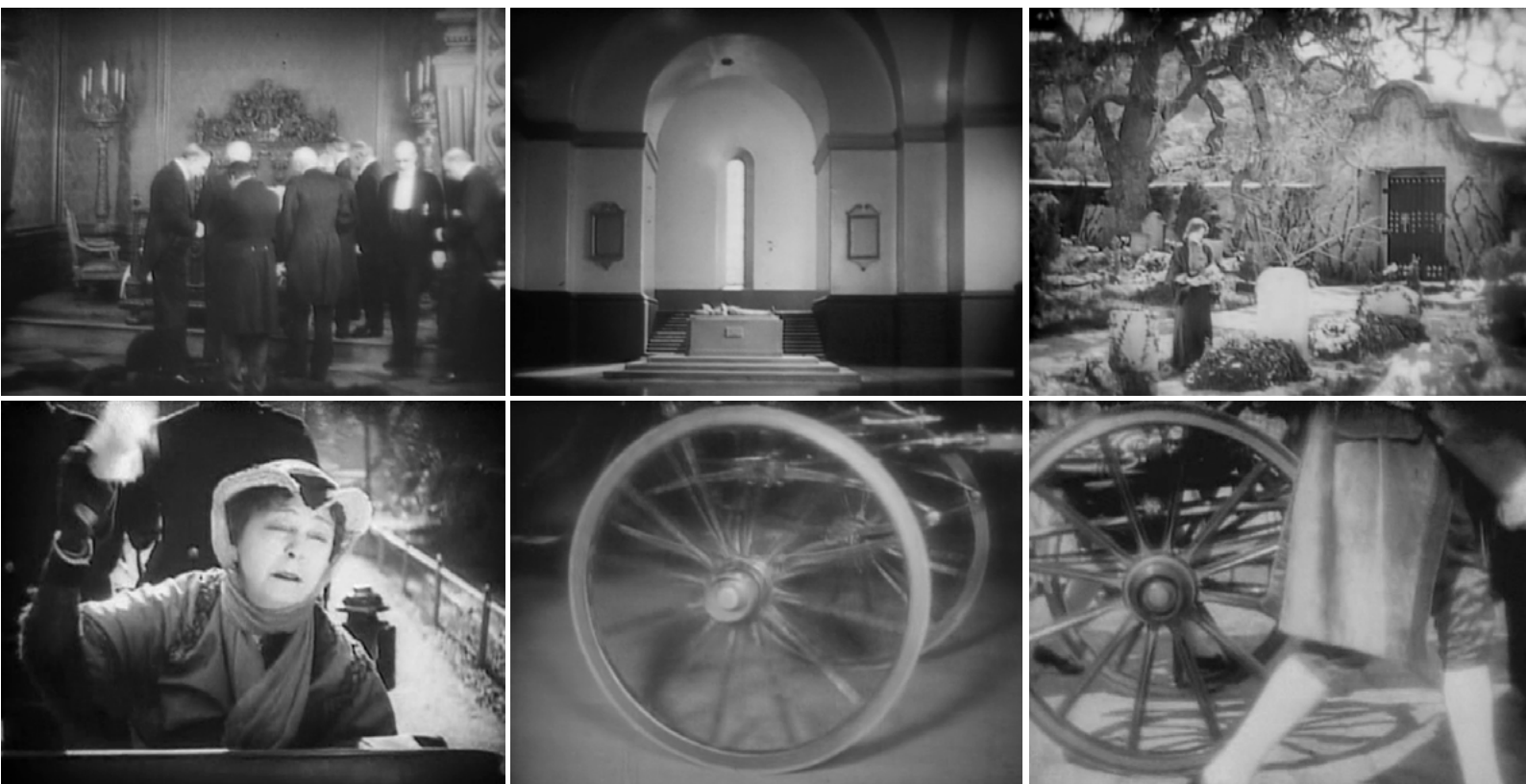Image 8. *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

a dachsund. The comic dimension of the scene is obvious, but there is something more. In fact, what we are viewing, albeit in embryonic form, is a visual ellipsis: a rhetorical figure incorporated into Lubitsch's arsenal of devices once he discovered the huge potential of sound, and which could be viewed as the final distillation of a style that makes indirect storytelling its hallmark.

IN A VISUAL ELLIPSIS, THE STORY DOES NOT SKIP OVER AN EVENT (AS OCCURS IN A TEMPORAL/NARRATIVE ELLIPSIS), BUT INSTEAD TURNS A BLIND EYE TO IT

In a visual ellipsis (Nacache, 1997: 30), the story does not skip over an event (as occurs in a temporal/narrative ellipsis), but instead turns a blind eye to it. Instead of showing us what we expect to see, the story shows us something else (which is happening at the same time) and which somehow helps us to reconstruct the event that has been elided from the story. In this case, instead of showing Kathi struggling to escape the prince's embrace for the fourth time (or finally giving in to his kisses), the story offers us an empty space, or better still, shows us what is happening right beside the action that the spectator expects to see, but which Lubitsch has decided to keep out of the frame. To explain what is happening off screen, the German filmmaker has a little dog turn around upon finding an obstacle in its way: a couple who, based on what we saw beforehand (in the first arch, while she tries to break away, he grabs her by the waist; in the second, he kisses her hands; and in the third, her neck) and on the length of their absence, it is likely (thinks the spectator) that they are locked in a passionate kiss. Kathi's expression when she finally enters the frame seems to confirm this.

Almost like an answer to this sudden disappearance of the lovers, in the film's final sequence

Images 9 to 14. *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

there will be another vanishing act. And while the previous ones were momentary, this one will be permanent: as permanent as Karl's renunciation of his urges and desires in order to fulfil his kingly obligations seems to be.

THE QUEEN VANISHES

Although in this article I have focused mainly on the elliptical treatment Lubitsch gives to space in his silent films, it would be unthinkable to conclude it without noting that his use of ellipsis extended to the temporal dimension as well. Indeed, Lubitsch's capacity for concision and narrative economy are as much defining features of his style as his use of off-screen space. The series of images[10] that ends with one of the tomb of Dr Jüttner—the prince's mentor, who seems to serve as the director's alter ego in several senses (his fondness for cigars, his playful manner)—is an

example of this: just when the prince is about to enter, a nurse comes out of the king's chamber, weeping (Image 8); inside, a group of ministers and courtiers are crowding around the bed of the dying monarch, relegating him to the off-screen space (their bodies block our view of him) and leaving a conspicuous empty space to the left of the frame, which will immediately be filled by the prince (Image 9); the tolling of bells announces the king's death; a wide shot and the absence of human figures emphasises the coldness of the great mausoleum where his body lies (Image 10); to highlight the contrast, a lap dissolve takes us to a humble graveyard where Kathi, in full mourning dress, lays some flowers on Dr Jüttner's grave (Image 11). In this simple, concise and heartrending way, the spectator is informed of the death of a character whose health problems had already been revealed in the story, but whom we never imagined to be so close to death.

Without doubt, the crowning moment in the use of temporal ellipsis comes with the gap between the last two sequences of the film. The prince says goodbye to Kathi in the same open field where they experienced their happiest moment on the night of the chase through the garden. But while on that occasion she was the one who fled from him, this time the tables are turned (of course, this sequence is presented as an inverted reflection of the earlier one). After saying goodbye to Kathi, the prince rushes off to a stagecoach awaiting him by the door of the inn. In contrast with one of the sequences that reveal the prince's lonely childhood—when his governess, disregarding the instructions of the prime minister ("His Majesty does

Images 15 and 16.
The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927)

not wish the Crown Prince to be excited by sentimental farewells"), looks back from her stagecoach to wave goodbye to the boy (Image 12), in a gesture of humanity, while he watches her departure with tears in his eyes—this time, the prince will not look back. His expression and his determination reflect a more ambiguous character than many readings of the film suggest: in this sense, the *sentimentality* that the film is often criticised for is called into question by a parallel that compels us to reconsider the character's *humanity*, as well of course by the bleakness of the film's ending.

The next thing we see is a lap dissolve that fuses the wheel of the prince's stagecoach[11] with another wheel (Image 13). When the dissolve is over, we see next to this new wheel the legs of a page, making us understand that this new scene is of a marriage procession (Image 14). This is thus one of those ellipses that do not go unnoticed by the spectator (unlike other time leaps used systematically in classical narration in the interests of narrative agility), particularly given the length of the period of time that has been elided. The spectator's awareness of the time leap also serves to underscore the inevitable nature of the ending. Between the moment the prince leaves Kathi and the royal wedding (probably celebrated months later) there is nothing: the first moment is the direct cause of the second. But what is especially interesting (especially for the purpose of verifying the hypothesis posited here) is what happens immediately afterwards.

When the camera takes us inside the stagecoach, the queen will be relegated to a permanent off-screen space. The representation of the character in this sequence will be limited to a wide shot of the stagecoach, only just barely allowing the spectator to glimpse her outline through a window (Image 15). Meanwhile, in the two frontal shots of the king inside the horse-drawn carriage, the queen will be ostensibly absent from the frame, emphasising her irrelevance to the protagonist. The "discursive violence" (Gómez Tarín,

> THE DEVIATIONS FROM THE NORM THAT HAVE BEEN EXPLORED IN THIS ARTICLE REFLECT, ON THE ONE HAND, THE SUBVERSIVE NATURE OF LUBITSCH'S SILENT FILMS MADE IN HOLLYWOOD AND, ON THE OTHER, THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE CLASSICAL PARADIGM

2006: 298) of this mise-en-scene decision will be underscored by the king's gaze towards the space to the left of the frame where we know (a piece of her veil can be seen in the lower left corner of the shot) the queen is seated (Image 16). In what almost seems an answer to that other woman who had the habit of vanishing,[12] the story withholds from us the image of his new wife. Both disappearances express in visual terms the sense of emptiness that Karl feels when he realises the full consequences of what his newly acquired status as king has forced him to give up.

CONCLUSIONS

The deviations from the norm that have been explored in this article reflect, on the one hand, the subversive nature of Lubitsch's silent films made in Hollywood and, on the other, the flexibility of the classical paradigm. Although it is true that his style departs in various ways from the parameters laid down by that kind of shared grammar that defined Hollywood in this period, it seems clear that the German director was also—somewhat paradoxically—a filmmaker who found something like a natural habitat in the studio system. This may be because, as noted by the Spanish film critic to whom we owe the most insightful reading of his work, Lubitsch found in Hollywood something he didn't have in Germany: "a solid base to refer to." In other words, a set of clearly defined genres and norms that he would be able to transgress, to invoke ironically and, in short, to challenge (Llinás, 1971: 40).

Lubitsch approaches these norms in the same way that he seems to approach everything in life: with a wry smile. He mocks them subtly, examines them and gleefully undermines the expectations of the spectator, but never with the serious and solemn stance of the iconoclastic artist. And thus, half joking, half serious, he ultimately sheds light on a new space, "a margin of playful ambiguity with respect to selected classical devices" (Bordwell, 1988: 179). ∎

NOTES

1   "Lubitsch had a following, but they weren't coal-miners, they weren't steelworkers", recalled an editor friend of Jack Warner in the 1920s (quoted in Eyman, 2000: 118). Apparently, such difficulties connecting with American audiences also affected other European filmmakers: "As early as February 1923, *The New York Times* was noting that the European invasion had produced films that 'didn't go as well as they should according to box office standards. It seemed apparent that the Continental stories and methods of storytelling were not acceptable to American movie fans.'" (Eyman, 2000: 118). In any case, it is worth remembering that the ultimate objective of the operation was not so much profit-making as winning prestige and legitimacy. The case of Lubitsch is also a good example in this respect, as although the five films he shot at the modest Warner studios in this decade did not reap big profits, they did serve to enhance the opinion that critics had of the studio's films at that time.

2   The other determining factor behind the film's commercial failure was, obviously, the absence of the Tramp himself in a Chaplin film.

3   For more information on Lubitsch's specific way of transforming a thematic principle ("the deceptiveness of appearances") into a formal principle (the offscreen space), see the enlightening analysis of *Lady Windermere's Fan* included in the expanded edition of *La mirada cercana* (Zunzunegui, 2016: 162-178).

4   "Indeed, a common complaint from small-town exhibitors was that Lubitsch films, while excellent, often

did not appeal to their patrons due to [their] sophistication" (Thompson, 2005: 129).

5 In chronological order: *The Marriage Circle* (1924); *Three Women* (1924); *Forbidden Paradise* (1924); *Kiss Me Again* (1925); *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925); and *So This Is Paris* (1926). There are no extant copies of *Kiss Me Again*. Only one negative remains of *Forbidden Paradise* (made from two incomplete nitrate bases) in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

6 It was an MGM production whose budget (1.2 million dollars) was four times that of his modest comedies for Warner. If we add to this an extremely interventionist producer (Irving Thalberg), who was also the female star's boyfriend, it would be easy to conclude that Lubitsch, whose critical prestige afforded him the privilege (uncommon for the time) of editing his own films (Thompson, 2005: 86), did not have the same freedom at MGM that he had enjoyed at Warner. Indeed, there are suspicions (albeit unconfirmed) that one of his sequences was even remade by an in-house director: John M. Stahl.

7 "'Then it won't be anything like *Forbidden Paradise*, say,' [an interviewer asked him before the première]. 'Not in the least! There I was above my characters, looking down on them. Here I'm on the same level with them, I'm one of them'" (Weinberg, 1977: 103).

8 As is made clear in the scene where Kathi demonstrates the quality of the bed by jumping on it, and as corroborated by nearly all his comedies, in Lubitsch's films the motivations of the characters are more sexual than romantic.

9 The re-framing effect generated by the image of the vine-covered arches invites the spectator to associate this scene with chases involving satyrs, fauns and nymphs in the Western pictorial tradition.

10 For questions of space, some of the less relevant shots in the series are omitted.

11 The motif of the stagecoach is used in a number of very different ways in the film.

12 There is another very significant moment in the film in this respect: when the lovers, while on a boat ride, understand that their relationship has no future, they return silently and with lowered heads to the inn. When they part on the stairs, Kathi exits the frame on the right and Karl remains, looking towards the off-screen space where she has gone. Thanks to a mirror hanging next to the door of Karl's bedroom, we can see what is happening in that space (which, to a certain extent, the story denies us access to), and we are incidentally made aware that Kathi, like Heidelberg, has something of a dreamlike, phantasmal quality.

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A MARGIN OF PLAYFUL AMBIGUITY: OFF-SCREEN SPACE IN *THE STUDENT PRINCE IN OLD HEIDELBERG* (ERNST LUBITSCH, 1927)

UN MARGEN DE ALEGRE AMBIGÜEDAD. EL FUERA DE CAMPO EN *EL PRÍNCIPE ESTUDIANTE* (ERNST LUBITSCH, 1927)

Abstract

The films made by Ernst Lubitsch in Hollywood during the 1920s contravene the norms of the classical style, especially through the use of off-screen space. The silent films of this director from Berlin violate one of the basic premises of the classical model: that the spectator must be positioned in the best possible location to be able to see everything easily. In addition, the way space is treated in these films is at times ambiguous and not always in keeping with causal logic. To explain exactly how these deviations from the norm occur, this article offers a detailed analysis of three sequences in *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1927), in which the off-screen space is activated in different ways.

Key words

Lubitsch; Silent Films; Classical Style; Off-Screen Space; *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg*; Ellipsis.

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Resumen

Las películas que rueda Ernst Lubitsch en Hollywood durante los años veinte contravienen las normas del estilo clásico, sobre todo, a través de la gestión del fuera de campo. Los films silentes del cineasta berlinés atentan contra una de las premisas básicas del modelo clásico, que consiste en colocar al espectador en la mejor de las ubicaciones posible para que pueda verlo todo sin esforzarse. Además, el tratamiento del espacio que se acomete en estas películas es, en ocasiones, ambiguo y no siempre está supeditado a la causalidad. Para explicar en qué términos concretos se producen estas desviaciones de la norma, en este artículo se analizan en detalle tres secuencias de *El príncipe estudiante* (The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg, Ernst Lubitsch, 1927), en las que el espacio *off* va a ser activado de diferente manera.

Palabras clave

Lubitsch; cine mudo; estilo clásico; fuera de campo; *El príncipe estudiante*; elipsis.

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