

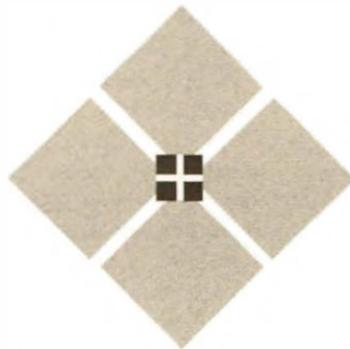
J E A N M I T R Y

The **Aesthetics AND PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CINEMA**

TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER KING



THE AESTHETICS AND PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CINEMA



JEAN MITRY

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CONTENTS



FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY BRIAN LEWIS vii

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BY BENOÎT PATAR xiii

INTRODUCTION 1

I. PRELIMINARIES

Cinema and Creation 4

Cinema and Language 13

Word and Image 19

II. THE FILM IMAGE

The Image Itself 29

Structures of the Image 59

III. RHYTHM AND MONTAGE

The Beginnings of Montage 89

Cinematic Rhythm 104

The Psychology of Montage 150

IV. RHYTHM AND MOVING SHOTS

The Liberated Camera and Depth-of-Field 168

Speech and Sound 230

V. TIME AND SPACE OF THE DRAMA

In Search of a Dramatic Structure 276

Content and Form 336

NOTES 381

INDEX 389

FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Brian Lewis

Jean Mitry loved the cinema and devoted much of his life to it.

At the center of any critical theory lies a fundamental experience to which a critic remains devoted deep in his or her heart, a “what if” or “how come” or “why” experience, which goes on to generate a life’s work of observation, rationalization, intellection, and theory. Underneath it all, Jean Mitry was driven by the “wow” experience. He loved the experience of sitting in front of the screen. He loved the movies.

Driven by the “wow,” Mitry endeavored to explain the “why,” “what if,” and “how come”: Why the world on the screen was so compelling. Why, when leaving the theater, life could seem so pale and flat. Which films gave us this experience. How they worked their magic. Which films failed and why.

Jean Mitry’s *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, first published in 1963–65, is thus a description and defense of a certain type of cinema, an important type but certainly not the only one. He used many of the intellectual weapons of his day, including psychological theory and phenomenology, to valorize this cinema above all others, to define an essence which was and remains now the essence of the “wow” experience. Mitry’s cinema comprises those movies which elevate us from the everyday, presenting a vivid, concrete world of experience, pregnant with symbolic meaning and deep feeling, a world which is “same” but “other.”

Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma appeared at the moment of a significant paradigm shift in the history of film studies, a moment of awakening and self-consciousness. Mitry played a pivotal role in this

shift. Previous thinkers interested in the cinema had largely developed their descriptions and theories under the influence of newly developing styles of film practice, which they tended to champion as the final cause of the cinema. But by the 1960s, the cinema had, in a sense, been fully invented stylistically, and Mitry was the first to attempt to take stock of this phenomenon in all its variety and complexity.

Mitry was one of the earliest university teachers of film history and theory and one of the first to legitimize film aesthetics as an object of serious study. He planned his two-volume *Esthétique* as a definitive step forward and away from that of his predecessors, correcting their errors and mediating their disputes. The discipline still seemed young enough to accept that sort of encapsulating and transcendent perspective. Acknowledging his predecessors’ contributions to our understanding of certain types, or forms, of film, he nonetheless found earlier thinkers overtly partisan. His first volume, *Structures*, would transcend these “monumental stylistics” and define the essence of all film experience. His second volume, *Formes*, would treat the cinema in its various styles and manifestations. While his descriptions of the values and capacities of the cinema admittedly lead to a critical hierarchy or canon, it is one, he claims, based not on mere preference but on a scientific analysis of the unique capacities and expressive potentials of the cinema itself.

Mitry attacked the need to explain and correct with extraordinary eclecticism, delving into any literature that might help account for the maturing art form: philosophy,

psychology, linguistics, biology, physics, aesthetics, and, most significant, the literature of film theory and criticism itself, which he was the first to present as a systematic body of knowledge worthy of analysis and critique.

Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma is, then, both about film and about film theory. In fact, we find within it at least three major ambitions, each of which Mitry attempts to fulfill comprehensively: a psychology of the film experience, an aesthetic-linguistic theory of film as a means of symbolic expression, and a critical history of film theory.

Mitry would first delimit and investigate a central knot of experiential factors which structure all of our film experience. These “structures” define what it is to sit in front of a screen and watch a movie. He describes the mechanisms which allow us to perceive movement and depth, the fundamental psychological duality of the moving image as real and not real, the structuring aspects of the frame, and the concrete qualities of sound. He contrasts these perceptual and psychological aspects of the film experience with the experiential features of other arts, laying the ground for a claim that the cinema has a unique potential and unique vocation as an art form which engages all of the senses simultaneously. Mitry goes on to show how various styles or forms of film work to create different modes of the core cinematic experience, without defining its true essence.

Mitry then explores the expressive and symbolic capacities of the cinema. Film is more than art, he argues, because it can become discourse and language as well. How does film signify? How does it say and what can it say? This is the second great interrogation of his work and the heart of his aesthetic and critical theory: an investigation of the cinema as a kind of language system which can work toward the expres-

sion of ideas through the narrative presentation of concrete reality—a language embedded in and arising from the experience of the concrete. This investigation leads him into lengthy discussions of the nature of perception and intellection, the symbolic capacities of the arts, and the expressive capacities of discursive language itself. He argues the unique status of the cinema as a means of expression which is at the same time a double of reality, an art, and a kind of language.

For better and for worse, it was Mitry’s fate that his writings begin at the dawn of film aesthetics and span its entire history up to the structuralist and deconstructivist theories of the 1970s. On the positive side, this gave Mitry an extraordinary intimacy with and historical perspective on the works of others, as well as on the evolution of his own work. Mitry was really one of the first true moderns of film theory, a tremendously important transitional figure, who was able to synthesize and correct the work of his predecessors and point in the direction of new approaches.

On the other side, it led him into debates which today appear unimportant, trapping him on the trailing edge of a paradigm rejected by the critics who were to follow: the grand aesthetic theory which focuses on film as an object of perception. Mitry contributed to the paradigm shift in film theory, leapfrogging his predecessors. But he also suffered the same fate, and almost immediately. Mitry published his film theory just as semiotics became fashionable, just in time to be critiqued as a nonscientific idealist by the new “scientists” of film theory, following Christian Metz in France and in Britain. Just in time to become unfashionable virtually overnight.

This was an extraordinarily unfortunate coincidence, both personally for Mitry and for anyone interested in thinking seriously

about film. In France his work was largely, undeservedly, dismissed. In English, his monumental history of the cinema remained untranslated, and his theory is only appearing now, more than thirty years later, in this translation of the abridged version edited by Benoît Patar and published in France in 1990 (see Patar's introduction following this preface). Where Mitry is known, it is largely through the analyses of others: Dudley Andrew's chapter in *The Major Film Theories* or my own book, *Jean Mitry and the Aesthetics of the Cinema*. Irony of ironies, many people know Mitry's work through two extended critiques by his great rival, Christian Metz, partly translated in *Screen*.

What is remarkable to me now in reading this translation is the freshness of Mitry's description of the film experience. In hindsight, the arguments of his many critics often seem crude; they are not so much saying that Mitry got it wrong but rather that his was not a question worthy of serious study.

Semiotics has had its day, and Mitry arises with this new translation, from the ashes as it were, still important, still relevant. It is really a matter of adequation. As film is a complex social, cultural, psychological, and physical phenomenon, so it can be analyzed from different perspectives, and the theories, critical languages, and methodologies which inhabit these perspectives can coexist. The fact is, no one can explain the psychological power of a certain type of film better than Mitry. No one has ever described the experience of these movies better. No one has ever written better criticism, for example, of an "auteur" cinema or an "art" cinema—of the work of, say, Sergei Eisenstein or John Ford, two creators who made the types of films Mitry held most dear. Taken in this context, Mitry's ideas and descriptions are fundamentally valid, profound. It is clear,

given the attention he paid to his work, that Metz realized the importance of Mitry's writings, even while leading the charge in a new direction.

Mitry was a wonderful, generous, energetic person and thinker. He had a remarkable memory for films and saw everything he could as many times as possible. He was born to a middle-class family in Soissons, near Reims, in 1907. ("Jean Mitry" is actually a nom de plume which he chose from a map of France, replacing, he told me, Jean-René-Pierre Goetgheluck le Rouge Rillard des Acres de Presfontaines.) The family moved to Paris some ten years later, on the death of his father. While Mitry says he was not a particularly brilliant student, he claims to have always been fascinated by the physical sciences and how things work. Spending a high school year with a family in Manchester, England, he frequented the cinema as a kind of refuge, and it became a central focus of his interest. He returned to Paris a "cinema addict."

Mitry seems to have known and hung out with everybody on the Paris film, theater, and arts scenes: the Prévert brothers, Artaud, Aragon, André Breton, Alberto Cavalcanti, Jean Epstein, Louis Delluc (who later would coin the expression "photogénie" to indicate that "magic of the movies" Mitry spent a life attempting to describe). He helped found Paris's first film club. He wrote for and edited many of the earliest cinema journals. He assisted on the sets of numerous productions such as *Napoléon* by Abel Gance. (Eventually Mitry would produce several short films of his own.) He met Sergei Eisenstein in Paris, and I believe this encounter was seminal to his later theory. He worked briefly with Jean Renoir. He helped to cofound the Cinémathèque Française. He taught film history at the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques, then at the Univer-

sité de Paris, and later at the Université de Montréal. (A film club in Montreal still bears his name.)

His output was prodigious: histories, theories, works of criticism, reviews, editing—ceaseless production and reflection on the cinema. How remarkable it is to read “I saw *Nanook of the North* for the first time (at least as far as I can remember) in September 1922” and to realize that this man would continue to be thinking and writing about the cinema some fifty years later.

The original *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* comprised some 900 pages of very small print in two volumes. These volumes were condensed by Patar, a philosophy professor and cinephile of Belgian origin living and teaching in Montreal, who became a good friend of Mitry. With this condensed (but still generous) volume now available, no longer will Mitry be accused of trying to say everything about everything in a treatise on the cinema! Of course, some of the charm and frustration of slogging through the extended philosophical, historical, and psychological detours of the original is gone, but the essential ideas and all of the passion seem to be here, and translated in a very flowing and precise language by Christopher King.

The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema offers the reader a thoroughly modern psychological description of why and how most people love the movies. In the movies, “reality itself” becomes transformed, full of meaning. This is the magic of the cinema, the essence of the “wow” experience. And in this potentiality, Mitry argues, film language is uniquely equipped. Only the cinema, he says, can speak to us through the virtual perception of concrete reality, leading to emotions, reason, and richly suggestive symbolic meanings. Cinematic language, articulated first through perception and emotion, opens a door, makes it possi-

ble for us literally to relive the world in a new and fully experienced mode of apprehension.

Clearly there is more going on here than scientific description. There is a kind of means and ends test: those forms of film which do not work this way, which do not fulfill this unique potential, will not pass the ultimate test. Is the film concrete and alive; does the film evoke the ecstatic and mediating possibilities of great art; does the film, finally, stimulate a rethinking and reexperience of the world? To violate the illusion of concrete reality, the effect of the simulacrum, fails the means test. To show without speaking fails the ends test. In either case the full potential of cinema is frustrated. Eisenstein, a great theorist and practitioner of symbolic meaning and the concrete symbol, passes with flying colors. Jean-Luc Godard will not.

In fact, to be fair, Mitry seemed to love all movies, but those that worked their experiential and symbolic effects in this special way were those that really interested him. Even his one-volume history of the experimental cinema—a type of filmmaking not obviously accessible to his approach—contains wonderful descriptions of a certain kind of experimentation in cinema.

Mitry’s theory can be surveyed for various formative affinities and influences, including the writings of Eisenstein, gestalt psychology, and phenomenological aesthetics. In fact, I situate his work in a much larger tradition of aesthetic theory, dating back at least as far as the Romantic poets, traceable through the French Symbolists and reaching forward even to contemporary literary and film theorists. Mitry shares a passion for the concrete symbol as an instrument of revelation. He has extended the language of poetic theory to cinema. In cinema he finds the ultimate form

of nondiscursive or lyrical language: the concrete symbol, perceived through the senses, opening doors to experience and meanings beyond the realm of normal discursive expression. Film is a vehicle for renewal and discovery.

Reading Mitry again, thirty years after reading him the first time, it is clear to me that his work will never really grow old. As a history, synthesis, and correction of early film theory, it will remain useful and interesting. As a defense of symbolic expression generally, it is an important extension of aesthetic theory into a new domain. Most of all, Mitry still gets the experience of the movies right. Mitry's description of the structures and forms of film constitute a comprehensive and powerful model of film as an experiential phenomenon—a psy-

chology of the film experience which has never been bettered. Mitry explains to us in an entirely compelling way the charms and magic powers of the cinema.

Simon Fraser University
July 1996

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Benoît Patar

Jean Mitry stands by himself and needs no explanation. I shall therefore confine myself to providing the reader with some indications as to how I proceeded in editing and abridging his original two-volume *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* and to suggesting some directions which might assist in reading this translation of my abridgment.

The guidelines which governed my work were threefold: to respect the author's wishes, to abbreviate the text without mutilating it, and to underline his cinematic approach.

In the first instance, I used the notes which Mitry had written in a copy of the two-volume edition, following the work of his editor, and observations made to him both by me and by my friend François d'Apollonia.

Then the general principle I adopted (which was also Mitry's own) was to cut out the chapters and subsections with no direct connection with the cinema—such as the lengthy remarks on the history of painting and music. The author and I had had several discussions about this and agreed that it would be better to remove these sections. In fact, Mitry was perfectly well aware of the irrelevance of these analyses.

In addition, I had to remove any text requiring specialized philosophical or technical knowledge. Moreover, several "arguments" had become dated and therefore needed shortening. I also had to abbreviate certain quotations which, in the circumstances, no longer proved the point.

The object otherwise was to preserve the text and to make it intelligible despite the cuts and sufficiently representative of the original edition.

The cuts suggested by Mitry were as follows:

	<i>Volume 1</i>	<i>Volume 2</i>
Pages	1-47	Pages
	56-57	87-92
	66-89	156-160
	90-94	171-259
	98-101	275-334
	149-165	357-368
	195-258	385-400
	404-418	410-430

As readers of the original *Esthétique* may realize, I have followed the master's suggestions quite faithfully. But, at the same time, I have attempted to save a number of pages which, in my view, seemed indispensable. For instance, I avoided cutting the passages devoted in volume 1 to the cinema and its creation (29-47) and to shots and angles (91-94) and in volume 2 to the problems of dramatic structure (281-334) and to thoughts about content and form (385-400). I made the choice to abbreviate these passages rather than eliminate them altogether.

In addition, I had to move the subsection devoted to color to the end of the volume, after the lengthy remarks about the camera and depth-of-field. To have included the question of color in the cinema in analyses relating to sound and music would have been both incongruous and perverse. (In any case, color nowadays is not regarded as a variation or support for the *mise-en-scène* or story telling.)

That being so, I might be criticized for not having respected the original intentions of the great historian of the cinema, for having made unnecessary cuts, and for having

shortened a particular passage and left another alone. That is the fate of all editors. However, what I would say to any potential critic is that it was Mitry's firm intention to fuse together the two volumes and, without hesitation, make savage cuts in certain chapters. In truth, the author of the *Esthétique* was a modern, i.e., someone who refused to take refuge in some intangible past but who adjusted to the times. Consequently, I never had the impression of betraying his thinking in bringing it up to date, only the conviction of serving it and providing researchers the opportunity of understanding it.

Rereading Jean Mitry is a stimulating and cleansing exercise, for the author of the *Esthétique* was a thinker in every sense of the word, unaffected by fashion, rigid thinking, or established traditions. All that mattered for him was a constant contact with the cinema. Indeed, his whole thinking is, first and foremost, a phenomenological (in the true sense) inquiry into the "seventh art." To his eyes, theory always derives from an understanding of the ultimate function of story telling. This initial impetus, interpreted scientifically, was what he used to describe and formalize its meaning. That this should correspond or not with modern rhetoric is of little consequence to him; or rather leads him to develop a polemic, intended to be exclusively reflexive and critical.

The isolation experienced, more often than not, by the great historian of the cinema essentially came from this radical and rigorous attitude.¹ In fact, it is much easier to carry on theoretical discussions within university campuses or between recognized spokesmen than continually to demonstrate the truth of an argument and how precisely it corresponds to the object it expresses. No one more than Mitry knew the social and logical foundations of de-

bate; no one more than he understood the artificial (in the sense of *arti-fex*) nature of speech (Russell and logical positivism counts for something), but this did not prevent him from proclaiming the descriptive and ontological (that tainted word!) nature of thinking. How can a debate be continued if it is bogged down in a contrived nominalism where words and syntagms have only potential reference value and are left *ad placita* (to use as the speaker sees fit).

It was necessary to delve back into the history of the cinema and reconfirmed memory. This Mitry did with a patience and modesty inspirational to any researcher or scientist. Patience, first and foremost: seeing certain films seven, eight, nine times, listening to colleagues' opinions, trying to confine his attention to the perceived object (always difficult to achieve). Modesty, then: always prepared to revise his judgments, to reevaluate a fact, to consider new approaches.² His wonderful memory, his extraordinary knowledge of the great era of cinema, did not remove his desire to know more or to rediscover what he already knew. No one would deny, least of all he himself, that he could at times make mistakes.³ This in no way undermines the essential part of his judgments, since these are above all built on epistemological skepticism (interpreted by some as methodological doubt) and on a genuine applied knowledge of film storytelling techniques. With this in mind, the fact that *Citizen Kane* is not the masterpiece it is generally held to be or that *Broken Blossoms* is a timeless work of art in no way vitiates his analysis or the range of his working methods.

What form does his analysis take? First, the author of the *Esthétique* considers that cinematic language, because of its specific structure, has no affinity with the other arts. For him, the characteristic of cinematic language is that it is not a language in the conventional sense of the word but a rep-

resentation with signs developed within it in a way not to be compared with any pictorial or literary method of development. In the cinematic method, the represented object encourages the storyteller to exploit it in order to make it into a signifying fact devoid of any demonstrative or symbolic reference. What is more, the symbol structure of the seventh art (when it exists) in no way derives from the photographed object or objects but from the organizing relationship established between them in the narrative sequence. In this context, realist cinema does not exist at all, since it is the result of a deliberate fabrication of reality according to the perceived angle, chosen light, or time span expressed.

For Mitry, there is no such thing as grammar in the cinema, since the film sign is always new and original. Though literature necessarily involves syntax and grammar, the cinema avoids them at all cost, since it does not transmit but rather refers to the concept it exploits. Screen adaptations of novels are a snare and a delusion, since the only element in common between a literary narrative and "its" cinematic equivalent is the story line. And that is a slender connec-

tion! In reality, the director is responsible for what happens on the screen, not the novelist. The latter supplies an intention, a purpose, for the film, which the director uses with more or less talent and skill. That is not to deny the influence the screenwriter (the producer even) may have on the filmmaker—like any other creator, a director is affected by those around him—but that does not give us license to say that he is the author of the film.

Moreover, the dramatic nature of the cinema has little or nothing in common with the theater. That they both employ actors performing on sets does not make the two modes of expression similar; for, in the theater, speech is the vehicle for the storytelling, whereas in the cinema, it is only its necessary support (as much for the silent cinema as for talkies), the sign which is a token of its intention.

Mitry's thinking, as we see, is uncompromising. It aspires to be an understanding of circumscribed reality, a strict theorization of a well-ordered argument. Yet above all else, it is a passion, an unswerving wish to protect meaning in the cinema and extol its virtues.

THE AESTHETICS AND PSYCHOLOGY
OF THE CINEMA





Introduction

The cinema, by virtue of its novelty as an art form different from all others (though including certain features peculiar to each), has given rise to a number of problems and has confronted us with the question of establishing an aesthetic principle appropriate to it alone.

When it was realized that the circus spectacle of the cinema's first years was able, in its own way, to tell a story and even suggest a few ideas, the first concern was to take stock of its gains and to establish, in the absence of workable rules, an elementary system of operation. For this we are indebted to a few technicians aware of the requirements of their craft; the aesthetic considerations did not come until much later.

From 1911 onward, however, the poet Ricciotto Canudo, a friend of Blaise Cendrars, Picasso, and Apollinaire, was the first to wonder about the future and the possibilities of the cinema, which, there and then, he christened the "seventh art." In it he could see the powerful instrument of a new lyricism; and his insight, inspired by an intuition of his genius, did much to bring it under the consideration of a few intellectuals, among whom were, as might be expected, Cendrars and, a little later on, Louis Delluc, Colette, and the very young Louis Aragon. Still there were no rules, no system; only discoveries and insights of the most incredible lucidity.

Before he became one of the lieutenants of the French school of the 1920s, Delluc was the first to become aware, from 1918,

of the need for an aesthetic principle. Although he was not exactly a theorist, he was the first to prepare the ground and point out the essential resources of cinematic expression discovered haphazardly in the work, at that time revelatory, of D. W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, Mack Sennett, and Charles Chaplin.

The first theorist of the cinema, however, was, without a doubt, Jean Epstein, whose essays in 1920 and 1922 laid down the first foundations of a visual expression based on devices quite rightly considered to be fundamental: *montage* [the French term refers to the general process of editing, i.e., the assembly of various disparate shots to form a coherent continuity, as well as to the more specific form of editing which is best described in Eisenstein's *Theory of Cinedialectics*] and closeup, in other words, rhythm and symbol. Even so the sole concern was still to establish an elementary syntax, a rudimentary code of style. The cinema was well into the process of evolution; people were only just beginning to know how to make use of it; it was being studied; its capabilities were being assessed. The time for an aesthetic principle had not yet arrived.

Germaine Dulac was about to follow up the researches of Epstein to determine the elements upon which editing depended and to adumbrate her first notions of "pure cinema," while Elie Faure, revealing a visionary genius, was in turn indicating the essential properties of the new art.

We should be careful not to overlook Abel Gance and Marcel L'Herbier, whose

personal ideas were more effectively expressed in their films than in their writings; nor, of course, the most outstanding representatives of the German Expressionist school, Fritz Lang, F. W. Murnau, Lupu Pick, and the screenwriters Carl Mayer, and Henrik Galeen, whose work was the most active evidence of their very precise opinions concerning the capabilities of the cinema. Nor should we forget critics such as Emile Vuillermoz, René Jeanne, Pierre Henry, Lucien Wahl, and especially Léon Moussinac, who, in his writings, carried forward the heritage of Delluc; nor aestheticians such as Lionel Landry and Dr. Paul Ramain.

The aesthetics of the cinema, however—at least in their most important characteristics, assembled into systematic and carefully considered theories and no longer dependent on fleeting and scattered insights—were to make their appearance in Soviet Russia as the consequence of the work of Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein.

The writings of the latter are even to this day the most penetrating that the art of film has ever prompted. Nonetheless his aesthetics (for here we are indeed dealing with a theory of art), however noteworthy, are of limited scope. I mean that they treat only one aspect of the cinema, the aspect which was to earn Eisenstein his reputation. They cannot be generalized. Rather than aesthetics, they constitute a monumental code of stylistics proceeding from a set of aesthetic principles to which it attaches importance without providing a definition.

In fact, these "general aesthetics" are to be found only in the writings of two theorists: Bela Balázs and Rudolf Arnheim. Both of them tried, using the work of their predecessors as a springboard, to define and codify, in a systematic and coherent manner, the generative elements of visual expres-

sion. But their work has been superseded for the very simple reason that their system was based not on the fundamental principles of this expression but on certain notions which, though essential, are not enough to explain the whole of cinema.

All the same, Arnheim was the first to try to establish general guidelines by relating the film effect to the psychology of perception. But he went no further than a few elementary principles in basing his analysis upon the differences between real events and their reproduction in motion pictures, without attempting to define the why and wherefore of this differentiation, and without attempting to justify a system of aesthetics based on this evidence.

It can be stated categorically that all systems of aesthetics, that is, all studies to date, limit themselves to a definition of the principles of "montage" by overcodification, turning one possible stylistic code into the basis for a general system of aesthetics. Though it is true that "montage" is one of the essential components of film expression, it is only one manifestation, one element of language and structure and not a condition for that language.

Some younger theorists, doubtless alienated by this categorization but categorical in their own way, have tried to deny the fact of "montage," merely to replace it with a certain use of "depth-of-field"—without realizing that the latter is nothing more than a particular manifestation of the former.

A system of aesthetics can never confine, within one interpretation, notions which must include them all.

The aesthetics of painting must include the fundamentals of pictorial art, must consider them in their entirety and then conclude that all forms and styles are equally viable, from the frescoes of antiquity right up to abstract painting, as well as all the schools in between; in other words, as much

the Conventionalism of Bougereau and the Mannerism of Boucher as Impressionism or Cubism.

Without claiming to wall up the art of cinema behind formal laws constantly in flux, believing that such laws apply only to style and, more generally, that any work of art worth the name determines the rules appropriate to it alone, I have tried to devise a system of aesthetics by attempting simply to define the rules of its existence.

Since cinema derives from life and from immediate reality, it seemed to me necessary to place, *from the outset*, the film image in the context of this "objective reality." Thus no one will be surprised to find here, even before we embark on the question of aesthetics, essential information concerning the notions of language, structure, and perception which *define* this image, its role, and its capabilities and which constitute the *foundations* of any aesthetic of film.



Preliminaries

Cinema and Creation

By the very fact that it is expressed both in space and in time, the cinema is connected to the arts which preceded it. This is not to say, however, that it has no value without them. It is possessed of resources which belong to it alone and, through them, of a specific quality guaranteeing its independence. The association of the primary elements gives rise to a new entity which transcends them just as a multicellular body transcends the individual cells which compose it.

What, then, are the resources of the cinema? How does it relate to the other arts and how is it different from them? This is what the present study proposes to examine.

Who Is the "Auteur" of a Film?

The question of a film's "auteur" has often been discussed, but the problem has always been badly presented. In fact, to ask oneself who is the creator of a film is to suppose that all films are produced in the same way, according to the same rules or methods—which is to disregard, from the word go, the material conditions for cinematic production.

In André Malraux's *Psychologie du cinéma*, a popular work (Malraux uses layman's language to describe very specialized knowledge), he concludes: "In any case, the cinema is an industry . . ."

This "in any case" which haughtily dismisses a reality as unfortunate as it is ob-

vious is prompted by all those who believe that the cinema is an art and concern themselves (or wish to concern themselves) only with the conditions which make it what it is. If I heeded only my feelings, I would be limiting myself to the consideration of that quality strongly in evidence even in the most insignificant film. However, though the industry and its priorities are most often in opposition to the needs of art, we must own, in all fairness, that were there no industry, the cinema would have no chance of being art because it would not be able to support itself.

The production of films entails such resources that no fortune would suffice were only the consideration of art to be taken into account. It is only the commercial aspect which can ensure the continuation of production and, as a consequence, any possible progress, whether it be technical or artistic (the one being the result of the other). It must be noted that the cinema became an art only by means of—and in proportion to—its industrial growth. To overlook this is to ignore the most obvious reality. Neither should it be forgotten, however, that it could not be an industry without being an art—an artistic spectacle, a story in moving pictures. This industry must, therefore, be rational, aware of its obligations and needs, and not attempt, blinded by self-interest, to stifle or paralyze a quality which is its justification (even though, from time to time, it does have to curb its excesses).

The sole *raison d'être* of cinema resides in the extent of its mass appeal. In these con-

ditions, works of art are bound to be the exception. Their number is increasing by virtue of the development of cinemagoers and particularly by virtue of the interest that the cultivated public takes in the art of the screen, but this public constitutes a tiny minority. Nevertheless, production nowadays, precisely because of this industrialization, has reached a level of average quality which guarantees, to some extent, the value of the spectacle. If there is a plethora of mediocre films, their mediocrity is most often found in their content rather than their form, and very bad (that is, badly made) films are becoming increasingly rare.

Since the cinema is industrialized, all films are the product of a combined effort; but though different technicians have to solve certain particular problems, the overall question is always posed by an individual—guiding it in the direction he wishes it to take. To say that a film is produced by teamwork, implying thereby that the *auteur* is the team, is absurd. It is to mistake one thing for another.

A cathedral is the product of a combined effort, but it is not a combined *work of art*. It has only one creator: the man who conceived it, who imagined and planned it—the architect. The others, whatever their talent or the extent of their contribution, merely followed orders. Obviously the painter who designed the stained-glass windows and the sculptor who fashioned the statues are the only creators of the stained-glass windows and statues; but because these are never more than ornaments whose position, size, and requirements have been planned by the architect, these details add to the work but do not actually constitute the work itself—at least not in its basic structure. They become part of it—that is all. Although Hardouin-Mansard needed the assistance of a few stonemasons, the palace of Versailles is still his work alone.

Film, then, has an *auteur*. It remains for us to discover who.

Standard Production

In standard production the producer buys up the rights of a novel because it is well known, because it is a bestseller, or, quite simply, because he sees in it a possible part for a star whose name will potentially guarantee the popular success of the planned film.

Once the star has been contracted and the financial backing secured (as far as possible), the producer hires a scriptwriter whose task is to adapt the novel, i.e., transform the situations developed in literary form into scenes suitable for cinematic expression. Working sometimes by himself, sometimes in collaboration, the scriptwriter then writes a *treatment*, that is, a series of scenes with the purpose of highlighting the important events of the dramatic action and placing them in space and time, thereby creating the framework, the skeleton, of the film. He may not write the dialogue himself, in which case his work will pass into the hands of a dialogue writer. This writer will provide the characters with the speeches which reveal their respective personalities, their behavior, and will express certain ideas which the images might not have been able to suggest. With this work complete, the producer will hire the technicians, that is, the director (chosen by virtue of the subject matter and the qualities for which he is known), the cameraman, and the designer (each of them accompanied by his assistants).

In ideal circumstances, the director, taking over the work of the scriptwriter (with or without him but preferably with him), will compose what is called the *Storyboard* (or *shooting script*). He will divide the script into a series of sequences and each sequence into a series of shots. Each of these

shot descriptions will include indications for framing and lighting (with special regard to camera movement or movement of each of the characters), with a detailed description of the image as it will appear to the audience once the film has been completed. Certain shots or visual effects might seem to him sufficiently expressive, in which case he will cut, where he thinks fit, any superfluous dialogue.

After which, with the storyboard as a reference, the designer will create the necessary sets, constructing their space in conformity with the requirements of the drama and the movements which it entails. Through many discussions, the director, designer, and cameraman will hammer out in the most minute detail the delicate problems raised by the technical considerations.

When this has been done and the sets dressed by the set dressers and prop men, the lighting set up by the electricians, the actors and crowd artists hired by the production department, the actual business of shooting begins.

With everything planned and fitted into a detailed schedule, the next part of the process is really nothing more than the execution of a predetermined plan, like the construction of a building from the blueprints of an architect—with this exception, however: that the “materials” used, far from being inanimate like building materials, are living and therefore in a state of constant change. It is mainly the actors who have to be directed to obtain certain effects or fulfill various dramatic needs, a task which falls essentially to the director, who, on the set, has merely to ensure that the work is carried out according to the pre-established plan (although he has continually to deal with the unforeseen and must be able to improvise around the original ideas when the infinitely variable practical considerations show these to be impracticable or impossible). The actual reality of

making a film is a tricky business subject to endless compromises.

It is therefore abundantly clear that the director, in this instance, though he might have directed the actors and conceived the cinematic structure of the film (having inevitably imposed on it his character and personality), can hardly claim credit as the creator of the film. At least he cannot be considered as such in principle and by definition. The dramatic structure is not his, nor the dialogue—and the dramatic structure is what determines the director's work, whatever form this might take. Chronologically and dramatically, the work of the screenwriter precedes—and affects—that of the director.

Now, like the director, the screenwriter has only worked on commission. However much of his own personality he was able to inject into his adaptation or dialogue (if indeed it is he who has written the dialogue), he is no more the “creator” of the film than the director.

One might conclude from this—as people have—that the creator is the producer. Indeed, the producer is—at least in intention—the initial creator, the instigator of the work. But by himself he has created nothing. He has launched a combined effort, a film that owes its existence to him perhaps but whose qualities are quite independent of his personality. The producer gives orders but is not creative.

Who, then, is the *auteur*, the *essential creator*?

The answer is quite simple: it is, out of the scriptwriter, the director, or the dialogue writer, the one whose personality is strongest, the one capable of imposing most definitely his creative will. Often it is the director because, in his capacity as head of the operation, he is able to reevaluate, rethink, and relate to his own personal vision the work of all his colleagues, whoever they might be. But if he is merely a consci-

entious craftsman, if he has confined his work to the perfect technical execution of a plan imposed on him, then clearly it is the scriptwriter who is the strongest influence. To the perceptive critic this is immediately apparent. Films like *Marty* or *Twelve Angry Men* are the work of screenwriters, whereas films such as *Rio Bravo*, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, and *Rebel without a Cause* owe everything to the director. In these films, the work of the screenwriter is eclipsed by the personality of the director.

Sometimes—but rarely—the relationship between scriptwriter and director is such (and their collaboration so close) that they succeed in forming a creative unity which then becomes the real auteur of the film. We might cite the couples: Carné-Prévert, Aurenche-Lara, Feyder-Charles Spaak (although a film such as *Le Jour se lève* owes more to the director Marcel Carné than to the dialogue-writer Jacques Prévert or the scriptwriter Jacques Viot, whereas *Les Enfants du paradis* can be attributed to Jacques Prévert as much as to Marcel Carné).

All the same, we are concerned here with auteurs in the strict sense. The problems that their relationships entail have so far been merely touched upon. We should add the following: *A film is expensive only because producers have no money.* Say they make a film which normally—that is, with good actors—might cost a million; they might have at their disposal (and even then not always) a quarter of that. With as much again from outside funds, they have half the necessary capital. And the rest? Well, this is credit advanced by the distributors to whom the film is sold *in advance*. Now, credit is expensive. To make sure of the box-office success of the film, the distributors demand stars, and the stars, knowing they are necessary, put themselves at a high premium, with the result that the film which could be produced for a million ends up costing twice that amount.

It is not possible to make films in normal conditions—that is to say, *without conditions*—until producers provide the funds necessary for their production. Add to this the so-called commercial imperatives imposed by distributors and it is easy to understand why, as things are, a director cannot do as he wishes. To repeat: one does not make a film to make a film; one does it to *make money*.

Standard Production in the U.S.A.

The arrangement just described is really only valid in France and countries with small film industries. Whatever the film, the director in our industry always retains some measure of personal creativity. He remains the man in charge and requires of the scriptwriter merely a dramatist's work from which he constructs "his" film.

This does not apply in the United States, where the cinema is an organized industry. In the normal run of modern production, the technical shooting script is not developed by the director but by a specialist who has responsibility for the "screenplay." Most often it is the scriptwriter himself. The latter is no longer, as in France, a dramatist or dialogue writer who writes *for* the cinema but a film auteur in the strict sense of the word, that is, a creator who writes the shooting script of his story at the same time as he is composing its dramatic structure. He is a creator, an expert in the techniques of his craft, who has no interest in directing (or has yet to develop it or lost it) insofar as practical considerations or material difficulties are concerned.

It is clear that, *in this case*, the director who receives (sometimes the day before shooting) a script in which everything has been predetermined down to the last detail and who has merely to deliver it *as such* cannot be regarded as an auteur. Here directing takes on its true meaning, that of

delivering or putting in place, just as in the theater. It is merely a matter of directing the actors, of controlling a crew of technicians. It is a difficult, often delicate job but one which has nothing to do with creativity in the proper sense; or it is at the margins of "creativity" where we find the orchestral conductor with his interpretation of a musical score.

Needless to say, it depends entirely on personality, the understanding between scriptwriter and director – indifference or enthusiasm, active participation or pedestrian execution. In so many cases the influence, taste, and talent of the director bring out (or not) the salient features and color of the primary material, for a script (however perfect), though it is obviously the *idea* of the film, even the formal idea of the film, is always only *primary material*. A film exists only on film.

For the director directing a script he has written or adapted himself, the shooting script is no more than an aide-mémoire. On the set (often the day before) he gives necessary instructions to the crew but he does not need to give them *to himself*. He knows beforehand what he wants to do; he has *thought out* his film. On the other hand, when a scriptwriter prepares a script for a director, it is essential that all the instructions be written down in precise detail. If they are not—for the reasons we have just cited—the director *becomes* the real auteur.

We can see, then, that in current production methods the question of authorship depends on the individual case in point. As a general rule, however, we may say that the auteur of a film is whoever writes the shooting script, be it the director as is usual in France or the scriptwriter as happens most often in the United States.

Whatever the case, the strongest personality will always impose itself. It is personality, in the American industry, which distinguishes the directors of real talent. It

allows them access to freedom of choice, conception, and treatment in the cinema. Given the opportunity, they turn into genuine creators.

Artists and Artisans

We can understand therefore why, of all the arts, film is definitely *the most difficult*. It is also (financial considerations apart) the easiest in which to start. It provides a handy tool for producing acceptable work.

In the cinema, anyone can easily pass for an artist because the mechanical resources available to him are self-operating and produce (with no application of talent necessary) a result which is *already* in some measure a work of art.

If he is observant, if he has foresight and a certain feeling for the cinema, six months' apprenticeship in a studio under a director (preferably of mediocre talent, in order to learn above all *what not to do*) will be quite enough for him to become acquainted with what is pompously called the "industry" and be able to direct a feature film. In fact, the production, sets, lights, photography, and acting, all organized into some sort of coherence around even a clichéd subject, cannot help but give (unless there is poor cooperation) a passable result.

The actors may be excellent performers (even badly directed they *still* know their craft); the sets may be interesting, the photography outstanding, the dialogue witty. With technicians or artists working in a medium where each is a past master in some special field, it is quite rare for the coordination of their efforts to be completely devoid of interest. Blessed with a secure talent and skilled in a craft acquired most frequently over a long period of study, these collaborators protect the director from mistakes he could easily make in areas of knowledge where he is ignorant. Thus they put their know-how to the service of "his"

work of art, it being that, most frequently, the art of the director consists in knowing how to put different talents to use. A film could easily be made without him and not suffer too much for it. All of which does not prevent our director from believing himself to be a genius and, with all due modesty, comparing himself with Shakespeare.

To say that a director knows his craft is to say that he knows how a shot is made, how it is framed, how a tracking shot is done, all of which are *practicalities* which even the least gifted might learn in a few months. Which all seems absolutely essential—to judge by the interest certain magazines take in explaining them tediously to introduce their readers to the art of film. Rather as if one were trying to explain architecture to someone by showing him how a plumbline is used.

Obviously the majority of film directors are nothing more than artisans. But the job of managerial function has nothing to do with the art of film, and for a director worthy of the name it is the least part of his job. To my mind, the misunderstanding is caused by the fact that there is a confusion between the job performed by the director (*generally connected with aesthetics*) and the job performed by his collaborators—technicians whose work is connected to technique rather than aesthetics (though the two are related). Does the director imagine a tracking shot? It is not he who pushes the dolly. The technicians are there for that, and theirs is not to reason *why*. But he must know *absolutely why*. Now, the *why* is the province of aesthetics, i.e., pure theory, and has nothing to do with practical craft. The director knows this from the start without needing to have served as an assistant for ten years to learn it. *Provided, of course, he has gained the requisite theoretical knowledge.* One can be the conductor of an orchestra without knowing how to play the violin—but not without a knowledge of harmony

and counterpoint. And this theory is not learned in a matter of weeks; it requires many years.

This said, anybody (no matter who) can claim to be a director within a few months. He will always be under the impression that he is directing the film when the whole technical process starts to work for him, when the technicians, skilled in their particular craft, undertake to deliver what he believes he has conceived. For film most frequently is merely the product of a combined effort, the production of an artifact which may well have certain qualities (may even become a "work of art") but which we would be hard put to describe as evidence of a creative spirit. It sometimes happens that a harmonious relationship, a mutual understanding, succeeds in creating a kind of (entirely latent) second personality which shocks us when it appears. The film then gains from this a strength, a meaning, a quality, which makes us believe that an artist is expressing himself; but our shock is no less great when the next film produced by the same crew does not live up to expectation.

If a director wishes to be something more than the headcraftsman, if he wishes to be creative, then of all the artistic professions his is certainly among the most difficult there are.

In general, it is no more difficult to make a film than to write a novel. Given perfect resources at one's disposal and the skill of the technicians at one's command, the job of directing could, in many respects, be even easier. In reality, however, the practicalities of making a film are a great deal more difficult. That is true first of all because, though schools teach grammar and syntax, they do not seem to have heard of the aesthetics of the cinema. The novelist needs only a knowledge of his own language, whereas the would-be filmmaker (though he might have a doctorate) has ab-

solutely no knowledge of the language which he must use. Today the principles of film structure are clear enough, but they are still very rudimentary. A knowledge of them is not enough to make a film. As well as talent and ideas, which are as essential to him as to the novelist, the filmmaker must have a style; that is, he must know how to adapt his knowledge of aesthetics toward the production of a personal work of art and use that knowledge in a conscious manner. Above all he must establish new rules which may have application only in the work in hand but which will bestow on it its originality and make of it something more than the trite and methodical application of an academic knowledge. If every work presupposes its own rules, it must also be able to justify them. It is not enough to choose such and such a form over some other—one must know why and know it inside out.

Thus if a creator of films wishes to be an auteur, it is not enough for him to know his theory as any more than a series of first principles to guide him in his work. He must also know psychology in its various forms: behavioral psychology, to be able to give life and veracity to his characters and order their behavior; the psychology of perception, to be able to gauge how and why a particular form, rather than another, will produce the desired effect in the audience, making effective a predetermined effect. In short, the knowledge the novelist possesses (deriving from writing but which 2,000 years of culture and use of verbal language have enabled him to measure and control) the filmmaker has to discover and pioneer—it being his responsibility to try and estimate the value of new methods.

It will be argued that a novelist, painter, or poet is not necessarily a theoretician. This is self-evident; but there is not a single great artist to my knowledge who was not a theoretician in some way or another, who

was not at least completely aware of what he was doing and *why* he was doing it. For if the work of art is the product of chance, as sometimes happens, it is chance, in this case, which is the artist. The so-called creator plays no part. To be a sleepwalker is one thing; to be a genius quite another.

Film Auteurs

However small their number, it is these creators who are relevant to us—and they alone.

We have set out a panorama of the methods of modern production in order to show—and prove—that the director cannot *always* be regarded as an auteur and is not, in principle and by definition, the auteur of every film (in contrast with the novelist, who is the auteur of everything he writes).

All things considered, however, it is of absolutely no importance whether the auteur in a normal, standard production (a fundamentally impersonal operation) is the scriptwriter, director, or floorsweeper. Since the question does not arise unless it concerns a work whose nature rouses the interest or curiosity of the public, there is no need to wonder who "as a rule" is or should be the auteur of a film; however, there is a need to know, when it concerns a worthwhile work of art, who is responsible for it. This becomes self-evident, for when a film displays an aesthetic principle and reveals a personality, it is not difficult to observe that this personality *always* comes from the director. Which is tantamount to saying that the auteur of a film is whoever composes its visual content, its form—so true is it that images here are what words are for the novelist, what notes are for the composer. And so obvious is it also that here, when he has something to say, it is he, the director, who chooses his subject and makes his adaptation. The producer confines himself to producing.

On the other hand, it will be argued that a John Ford, a Fritz Lang, or an Orson Welles is not always (is rarely even) the creator of the subject he directs. But here again the auteur does not demand of a given subject anything more than a theme through which and by means of which he succeeds in signifying the ideas precious to him, expressing them in a manner peculiar to him alone.

A film is, to begin with, a subject, an intention. In other words, *an auteur is less whoever thinks of a story than whoever gives it a form and style*. Otherwise Racine, Corneille, and Shakespeare could not be regarded as auteurs.

In the cinema, form and style are the product of the images, and the images are the product of the director. The scriptwriter can never consider himself as auteur of a film (whose situations and characters he may well have imagined) until the day he has directed it or supervised its execution firsthand.

It does not take much to realize that in all the films of Carl Dreyer, Sternberg, Murnau, King Vidor, John Ford, and Lubitsch, who rarely used the same scriptwriters from one film to the next, there is a formal and thematic identity, immediately recognizable; while it would be useless to look for some similarity of tone or spirit in two scripts by the same writer directed by two different directors.

Take, for instance, Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* and *Design for Living*. His scriptwriters for these were respectively Samson Raphaëlson and Ben Hecht. Both conceived in the same genre, satiric comedy, they exploit the same themes in exactly the same way and form. The same is true of John Ford, whose *Stagecoach* (scripted by Dudley Nichols), *My Darling Clementine* (scripted by Samuel Engel and Winston Miller), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (scripted by Nunnally Johnson) display an identical style and similar preoccupations.

It would be useless, however, to look for analogies between *The Informer*, also by John Ford, and *C'est arrivé demain* by René Clair, both of which were produced from scripts by Dudley Nichols. The auteurs of these films, one might say, are Liam O'Flaherty and Lord Dunsany, to whom we owe the novel and the short story which inspired the films; the difference is to be found in the originals and not the adaptations. That is as may be. In this case, though, the directors themselves are no more than adapters. Yet they can be seen in each image, in each shot, in each camera movement. If the scriptwriter really were the dominant personality, it would be his and his alone which I should be able to perceive and recognize, just as I recognize Gounod in *Faust* and Berlioz in *The Damnation*. But it is to Gounod that I refer, not Michel Carré or Jules Barbier. The filmmaker in film can be compared with the composer in music and the scriptwriter with the librettist. As for the author whose work has been adapted, his work (though it might be a masterpiece) is never more than a point of departure, an argument reviewed and reconsidered from another point of view. What is important in the opera is not Goethe but Berlioz. The same is true of the cinema. For a work of art worthy of the name is not an intrinsically valid story capable of being expressed as successfully in literary, theatrical, or cinematic form; it is not a narrative existing prior to its expression in one form or another which one attempts to put into words or images, but a narrative constructed and achieving balance and meaning as it develops, deriving its life and meaning not only from but because of the genre in which it is expressed.

"A play," as André Malraux says, "is people speaking, and the efforts of even the ablest stage director merely help to suggest a world around the speeches."

A film is people living and acting. The

efforts of the director consist in making them come alive, in putting them "in the world," in determining their mutual reactions, and in placing them in relation one to the other. He has to *create* a whole universe of forms and relationships, signify *through* the images and not illustrate *with* them. It is not a matter of photographing people speaking.

The craft of Orson Welles is in no way comparable with that of Stanislavsky or Toscanini. Directed by Jean-Louis Barrault or some provincial director, *Hamlet* will always be *Hamlet*. Played by the Berlin Philharmonic or a brass band, the Fifth Symphony will always be the Fifth. The auteurs will always be Shakespeare and Beethoven. Similarly, written with images rather than words, films are *by* Eisenstein, *by* Chaplin, *by* Murnau, particularly since a script—even the most detailed of shooting scripts—has nothing to compare with a novel or play. An unplayed score, an unedited novel, an unperformed play, retains its own definite identity. An unproduced film does not even exist.

Almost always, the filmmakers most apparent in their films are directors who, from necessity, become scriptwriters. Since they alone are able to write in images, to *see* in detail what they imagine, they prepare their own script (alone or with the collaboration of a scriptwriter subordinate to their wishes) from subjects which they choose. Obsessed by a few fixed ideas, the most interesting have a personal vision of the world and what it contains. They concentrate on a moral, social, or philosophical aspect on which they focus their attention most sharply.

Yet the future of the cinema, inasmuch as one believes the cinema to be an art, does not lie in the hands of directors (however good the best of those working in the contemporary cinema may be in matters of style) but in the hands of the *auteurs*, that

is, those who first have something to say and then know how to say it in visual terms. For a long time now, the scriptwriters would have had the upper hand had they been able to write in images, but they were incapable of speaking except with words. They resemble beginners learning a foreign language who translate mentally what they are thinking into their own language. They mumble and stumble. Someone else has to translate what they say into language which can be understood.

For a real film auteur there is no appreciable difference between scripting, directing, and editing. These are merely three different phases of the same creative process; one is inconceivable without the others. It is not possible to cut together two different shots to create a particular effect unless they have been shot with that intention; which is, in turn, not possible unless it has been planned that way in the shooting script.

The Auteur and His Work

Thus filmmakers of any worth make their presence felt in their work and through their work. It bears the imprint of their character and temperament, insofar as an auteur is always his own subject. Some of them bring a personal message (Bergman, Visconti, Fellini, Buñuel); others pursue an original theme (Bresson, Renoir, Fritz Lang, Sternberg, Dovshenko, John Ford, Donskoy). They are novelists or short-story writers (Stroheim, Orson Welles, Kurosawa, Antonioni) or lyric or epic poets (Chaplin, Flaherty, Murnau, Mizoguchi, Griffith, Eisenstein).

For this fact, lesser films rouse an interest sometimes greater than an accidental success. This is a normal state of affairs—as long as it does not have the effect of warping the critical judgment of those all too ready to proclaim the latest offering of an

admired filmmaker as a masterpiece. A work is not automatically good because it is produced by the pen, brush, or camera of a great artist. A daub, even if it is signed by Poussin or Picasso, will still be a daub. The signature cannot make me see it as a work of genius—contrary to those few for whom the latest film of a filmmaker is *necessarily* better than his previous work on the assumption that an artist's personality is bound to develop and become richer as it gets older.

As for me, I take to heart Tolstoy's remark: "Goethe? Shakespeare? Everything signed in their names is supposed to be good and every effort is made to discover beauty in stupid failures—which has the effect of perverting general taste. All these great talents, the Goethes, Shakespeares, Beethovens, Michaelangelos, created, alongside their beautiful works, things which were not only mediocre but, quite frankly, awful."

No one could claim that filmmakers—be they Chaplin, Eisenstein, Bergman, Ford, Fellini—have divine infallibility as artists. Even if this were so, "one would have to admit that whenever it is encountered, it is always accompanied by a complex of special circumstances which make the result a thousand times more fortuitous in the cinema than in painting or literature" (Bazin).

Auteurs, then, but only *of* something, judged according to the criteria of what they do—nothing more.

Cinema and Language

At the beginning of this study, we suggested that the cinema was an art. We were perhaps confusing the means with the end and examining its self-declared purpose as though it were predetermined.

Yet, as was pointed out by Victor Perrot (who, from 1919 onward, was one of the

first to see in the cinema a new form of writing and to wonder whether or not the cinema was an art), "It is as though one were asking: Are words art? Are colors art? Are musical notes art? Surely it is the way in which words, colors, and musical notes are utilized which constitutes the arts of writing, painting, and music. The same is true of the cinema: it is a medium, but what a medium!"

A means of expression, then, before being (even potentially) an art. But this requires clarification: a means of expression (keeping to the limited sense of the word) allows only the translation of feelings and emotions and is incapable of expressing ideas. At best it is able to suggest a few ideas deriving from the impressions it communicates, but here they are only vague, imprecise ideas completely dependent on the nature of each. Painting and architecture—the plastic arts—are means of expression; also dance and music; with this difference, however, that they are developed in time, by which fact they imply a mobility of emotion. But music and dance are no more able to express ideas than the other arts.

A means of expression capable of organizing, of constructing and communicating thoughts, able to develop ideas which can change, form, and transform themselves, then becomes a language—indeed *is* what is termed a language. If literature allows for the expression of ideas as well as emotions, it is because poetry and the novel are the aesthetic forms of a language which is *speech*. We should observe in passing that, in "means of expression," ideas (vague and imprecise) are reached by passing *first of all* through emotion. Conversely, in language, emotions are reached by passing *first of all* through ideas. Which leads us to a definition of the cinema as an aesthetic form (just like literature), exploiting images which are (in and by themselves) *means of expression*

whose extension (i.e., logical and dialectical organization) is *language*.

The cinema is also a means of reproduction and communication, inasmuch as it is initially no more than a series of moving photographs of real or imaginary events. But the cinema—which is to images what literature is to speech—is understood at one and the same time as the instrument of a particular dialectic, the art of exploiting that instrument and the means of communicating the result. There is, unfortunately, only one word to cover these three meanings. We would need to be able to say: *motion picture* to correspond with speech; *film effect* (or art of the cinema) to correspond with *literature*; and *cinematic effect* to correspond with *printing*.

In ideographic writing, ideas are signified by the associations between the components of a single ideogram. The same component assumes different meanings according to its associations with different others. The forms, however, are fixed. Each structure has a precise and unequivocal meaning; the same ideogram has to be used to signify the same idea.

To some extent, the cinema appears to be a new form of ideographic writing—with this very great difference: that the artificial and conventional symbols of the latter are replaced, in the cinema, with fleeting symbolic values depending less on the objects or scenes represented than on the visual context in which they are placed. And this context—through the associations and relationships which it determines—lends to these objects or scenes a temporary meaning.

These same ideas can thus be signified in many different ways, but none of them can be signified each time by the same images. There is no link, no causal quality, between signifier and signified—otherwise the former very quickly becomes an abstract sign devoid of the living qualities indispensable to it.

The idea, in film expression, is subject to the conditions of perceptible reality which it exploits to prove its validity. It must never interfere with the logical development of this narrative reality; on the contrary, it must become identified with that reality, finding its true purpose within it.

It will perhaps be argued that film is a form of writing rather than a language, since film images have no phonetic equivalent (necessarily related, therefore, with words). The image of a chair indeed shows us the object but does not name it. It brings to mind the word defining "chair." However, it would be giving *language* a very limited meaning to confine it to speech alone. It is obvious that if by *language* we mean the only medium through which conversation may be carried out, then the cinema could never be termed a language. Images can provide the means of self-expression but never the *exchange* of ideas (for then conversation would be difficult, costly, and long-winded!).

Nor, in this case, could mathematics—for I cannot see how one could talk about rain or fine weather in terms of algebraic formulae! And were we all to agree that language is merely the use of speech, what would we call the organic structure which makes it possible to express an idea with a sign, symbolic or not, fixed or ephemeral?

It is this structure (and it alone) which I shall continue to call *language*—verbal language, peculiar to conversation (of which it is merely one particular form—perhaps the most supple and manageable form but by no means the most perfect). "Means of expression" does not imply any dialectical development, since this development itself is the very stuff of which language is made.

To repeat: all forms of writing necessarily imply language of which they are the symbolic form fixed into words or other symbolic representations. Since film images are not used, for their expressive pur-

pose, as simple photographic reproduction as a means of transmitting ideas, we are indeed dealing with a language. A language in which the image plays the part of both *speech* and *word* through its symbolic and logical properties and its attributes as a potential sign. A language in which an equivalence of the data of the perceptible world is no longer acquired through (more or less) abstract shapes but through the *reproduction of concrete reality*.

Thus reality is no longer "represented"—signified by a symbolic or graphic substitute. It is *presented*. And this is what is used to signify. Ensnared in a new dialectic for which it becomes the form, reality becomes employed as an element in its own narration.

Observations

Besides the observations we have noted, certain critics (and some psychologists) have argued against this notion of language but, I fear, by basing their objections upon inaccurate information or, at least, by confining the concepts of language within an extraordinarily narrow perspective. Here, as often as not, each of us examines more general concepts to the limit of his own speciality, sometimes refusing to consider what is outside our particular sphere of interest. Often logicians suffer for not being psychologists and vice versa (and critics suffer for having no knowledge in any field).

It is obvious that the cinema could never be a language except outside the classical definition, which would suggest that cinema makes use only of abstract signs whose forms are fixed and whose meanings are constant. But it is one thing to wonder whether it comes under the heading of a certain definition and another to wonder whether it is not a language after all and that it is the definition which is inadequate.

For this classical definition pertains to verbal language; it is a linguistic definition, not one of "logic."

A film is something other than a system of signs and symbols (at least it does not present itself as that *exclusively*). A film *first and foremost* comprises images, images of *something*. A system of images whose purpose is to describe, develop, and narrate an event or series of events. However, these images—according to the chosen narrative—become organized into a system of signs and symbols; *in addition* they become (or have the possibility of becoming) signs. They are not uniquely signs, like words, but first and foremost objects and concrete reality, objects which take on (or are given) a predetermined meaning. It is in this way that the cinema is a language; it *becomes* language to the extent that it is *first of all* representation and by virtue of that representation. It is, so to speak, a language in the second degree. It appears not as an abstract form to be supplemented by certain aesthetic qualities but as the aesthetic quality itself supplemented by the properties of language; in short, an organic whole in which art and language are fused, the one being indissolubly linked with the other.

In a sense, this would be the perfect paradigm for the theories of Benedetto Croce, for whom aesthetics and linguistics are one and the same science. As he says,

In fact, for linguistics to be a separate science from aesthetics, it ought not to have expression (the aesthetic effect itself) as its aim. Now, it seems superfluous to prove that language is expression. . . . It is always possible to reduce the scientific questions of linguistics to their aesthetic formulae. . . . The philosophies of language and art are one and the same.

We could prove that at the level of current language the ideas of Croce are inaccurate. In fact, expression may well be an

effect of aesthetics, but it is not the sole effect. In other words, any aesthetic effect is expression, whereas any expression does not necessarily derive from aesthetics. When I write a letter to my tax man, I am indeed expressing ideas, but the letter has nothing to do with aesthetics. Conversely, if I write a poem, the ideas, the sentiments, acquire a *value*; the expression in a poem becomes the aesthetic effect itself. The ideas of Croce are true only as far as poetry is concerned; the work of art makes them so.

This distinction does not apply to the language of film, however, for the simple reason that it is always placed at the level of the work of art. Whether the work is good or bad changes nothing; it is not a matter of *quality* but of fact. The language of film, by principle and definition, derives from artistic creation. It is not a discursive but a developed language. It is lyrical rather than rational. The language of film is not the language used in conversation but that used in a poem or a novel; and images—though organized according to a predetermined meaning—inevitably leave an area of vagueness around the thing expressed which makes us rather think that it does not encompass or designate a rationally defined thought.

The essential nature of the cinema is to be an *image*. A sequence of *moving* images, naturally. In its structure, film is movement and change: change of shot, sequence, angle of view; movement suggested intellectually (for instance, between several actions going on in different places). We all agree, however, that it is, above all, the *representation* of movement—which it could never be were it not in motion *itself*—but which even so ensures that it is *above all* an image.

If it is normal that linguistics should be concerned only with the verbal language, it is perhaps time that we attempted to provide a definition of the “essence” of lan-

guage, for there can be no relationship between the filmic and the verbal except inasmuch as they are both languages. We search for syntactical analogies where there are none. The point of comparison is not to be found in the forms but in the structures. And it is time that the overrestricted definition of linguistics gave way to a logical definition of greater scope.

Since it is a means of translating the tiny impulses of thought, all language is necessarily associated with the mental structures which organize them, i.e., with the operations of the mind, which consist in conceiving, judging, reasoning, ordering, according to associations of analogy, consequence, or causation.

In this way, we can say that a language is a means of expression whose dynamic nature implies the development, in time, of some sort of system of signs, images, or sounds.¹ And the purpose of the dialectical organization of this system lies in the expression and signification of the ideas, emotions, and feelings included within one stirring thought of which these form the actual tiny impulses.

Thus language implies different systems, each of which has its own appropriate set of symbols but which combine in the formulation of ideas of which they are merely in the formal expression (in whatever form they appear). Thus verbal language and film language express themselves by using different elements in different organic systems.

Cinema and Literary Discourse

“Yet,” as Henri Agel asks, “is film language specific or is it merely the fascinating integration of methods borrowed from other means of expression?” In other words, is this not a restatement, in the way images are organized, of modes of expression or methods deriving directly from literature—that is, the visual transposition of certain literary devices? We must accept that almost all of them can be found. Ellip-

sis, syllepsis, repetition, contrast are all in constant use. Litotes is quite infrequent but it does exist. Antithesis, periphrasis, hyperbole, enumeration, gradation, suspension. As for metaphor and synecdoche, they are common currency.

We shall examine them all when we consider, further on, genre and style. I would simply say that (with the exception of the structural devices such as ellipsis) these stylistic devices, as used in the cinema—because of the different forms they assume—have quite a different meaning from what they have in literature. There is very little connection between synecdoche in film and synecdoche in literature, visual metaphor and verbal metaphor, unless they are both synecdoche and metaphor, i.e., a particular way of approximating or presenting ideas. However, they can be distinguished in their effects.

It is not the least bit surprising to me that critics and teachers are amazed and astounded to encounter such similarities because, in fact, these devices are not really a function of language. They are not "genuinely" part of it. They are merely the impressions left by thought structures and are literary only because, up to now—for many thousands of years—the verbal language has been the only possible way of translating or applying them.

This is quite untrue, I hear you say—these forms of thought are the way they are only because language has allowed them to be formulated in that particular way. They would not exist without it.

It is quite true that language has given a matrix to thought; it has, through its very structures, given rise to certain ways of thinking or, more exactly, it has forced thought into existence through the forms which it provides. However, what is the origin of these forms if it is not thought itself seeking to become organized in speech? No one could possibly deny the influence of

language over thought nor the considerable part it has played in its expression. Without it, thought would have remained primitive, rough and ready and without flexibility. But it would have been the forms and not the *intentions* which would have been primitive. The thoughts of ancient civilizations were simplistic only by the absence of means through which they might have been produced.

What we must remember is that the means of expression preceding grammatical language contained structures capable of translating the "mental shapes" determined by the thought process. There is no doubt but that language gave to these structures a hitherto unsuspected flexibility and allowed thought to become more precise by making its expression more precise. But—though it perfected the expressive forms—it did not *create* methods of thinking appropriate to thought itself.

If the purpose of cinematic technique is to translate this thought process in terms of film, then it is done using "mental shapes" and not literary shapes, which are merely its verbal application. It is normal, both in the cinema and in literature, for these "mental shapes" to be found in various different forms.

We cannot overlook the fact that it is language which has fashioned the mentality of human beings; it is through and by means of language that we think. We can claim, therefore, that the basic characteristics of film expression derive from the thought processes to which language has accustomed us; but it is wrong to say that these characteristics are merely the transposition of certain structures whose origins are exclusively literary.

The first director to create a visual metaphor—most probably Griffith—did not stop to consider how he might arrange his images to create the equivalent of a metaphor; but, knowing that he had to express

something in a certain way, he constructed his film accordingly. He collected various images intuitively, created various associations, and, remarkably enough, produced a metaphor. It was the same with all the techniques of the cinema. This is why it seems to me rather futile (if not a little puerile) to search in the arts and methods of expression of the part for the various forms or means which anticipated film expression.

Throughout the ages, people have thought and tried to express their thoughts. Throughout the ages, they have also sought to express movement, sometimes signifying it in pictorial terms, sometimes describing it through speech, impressing on it movement deriving from imposed rhythm and cadence. The great thing would be to discover certain features of this movement (such as those captured today by the cinema) in the masterpieces of literature! For in literature we see tracking shots, pans, closeups, and dissolves when we observe quite simply the expression of these same forms of thought, the same rhythmic associations and the same descriptive sequences—except that the means are different, means which try to give, in a roundabout fashion, what the cinema achieves directly. Should this be any surprise?

No one could fail to see that the first sentence of *Salammbô*—“C'était à Mégara, faubourg de Carthage, dans les jardins d'Amilcar... (It was at Megara, on the outskirts of Carthage, in the gardens of Hamilcar . . .)” — opens out like a long tracking shot complemented by a sort of descriptive pan. However, this is produced solely by the metrical requirements of the sentence, revealing a universe and introducing us to it with the luxurious languor of a movement perfectly in keeping with the listlessness of the climate, morals, and spectacle; in other words, everything for which it serves as an introduction. A “descriptive” movement

suggesting a comparison with a tracking shot (only a tracking shot could easily provide the same effect) but which it can only suggest because the cinema exists and is in no way a precursor to that existence.

We read in Proust: “At first, as my mouth got closer to the cheeks which my eyes offered for me to kiss, the latter, as their perspective changed, focused on new areas of cheek, the neck observed from much closer, as though through a magnifying glass, exhibited with all its open pores a crudeness which changed the character of the face.” Is this not the equivalent of a track forward into extreme closeup, with the camera being used subjectively? A track forward in which the movement and effect of magnification change in proportion to the perception of the object in the viewfinder? Obviously! But while we had to wait for Proust to translate these impressions in literature (and for the cinema to become aware of the potential), I do not think that people in love waited for either Proust or the cinema before they got close to a face they desired and experienced an emotion.

It is obvious that the cinema brought about an effective solution to the problem of reproducing movement; but there again, art has always tried to translate movement in some way or another. We might search in vain for some trace of precinema in the simple fact of this expression, but the expression of something only the cinema can reproduce perfectly. But that is another problem altogether.

We must not forget to point out this major difference: if art translates movement, it *signifies* rather than expresses it. And it signifies it only because it does not possess it. The cinema, conversely, does not signify movement; it *represents* it. If it signifies, it is *with* and *by means of* movement. Where, in literature, movement is a goal, in the cinema it is merely a beginning.

Thus to discover apparent comparisons,

techniques corresponding in the language of cinema to various categories of shot and camera angle, long shots alternating with closeups, shot/reverse shot, pans/tracks, upward/downward tilts, editing effects (or any other characteristic form) in the works of Virgil, Homer, Livy, Racine, Victor Hugo, Byron, Shelley, Dickens, Coleridge, or Pushkin, as has been done with authors such as Paul Léglise, Etienne Fuzellier, and Henri Agel, is devoid of interest from the film point of view and can lead to nothing which might enrich our knowledge of the cinema through the discovery of an expression falsely characterized as precinematic. It is rather as though we suddenly realized that men walk and, in walking, prefigure the tracking shot or that, since they are able to turn their heads left or right, this simple gesture heralds the pan!

The cinema sets out to translate certain aspects of the real world, certain impulses of thought or the creation of a mythical universe. It is therefore normal for it to overlap and offer comparison with previous arts pursuing comparable aims. Just as the means are different, so also are the results. The thought, however, is the same.

Word and Image

Thought and Language

Every thought is formed inasmuch as it is formulated. Since language is the most direct expression of thought, we may say that the latter is, for the most part, formed in words. But language is an objective reaction whose nature is not essentially different from the majority of reactions which make up human behavior and for which it can stand as a substitute. Nonformulated thought, reduced to states of awareness, preexists and stands outside language and may be translated—or, at least, become mani-

fest—in other ways. Primitive language, as we have seen, was a way of translating states of awareness or mental attitudes by means of purely physical reactions.

All the same, thought is based on concepts and judgments. These judgments, however, are no more than the intellectualized product of a series of elementary reactions in which it would seem that conditioned reflexes play an important part.

That the associationist principles of classical psychology have proved inadequate for explaining certain conditions of consciousness (notably, the phenomena of perception) and have been mostly superseded nowadays does not mean that we may deduce that association has no part to play in psychic life. On the contrary, it seems—according to Henri Delacroix—that the spontaneous functioning of thought happens only as a consequence of association, particularly the systematic associations which occur in conditioned reflexes and which may be considered as elementary, nonverbal, nondifferentiated judgments. "The very composition of the conditioned reflex," he argues, "dictates a previous synthesis, a synthesized understanding of experience." "Our mental process," Ruyssen observed in 1904, "classifies our behavior before our minds are able to classify material objects and it is through our activities that we succeed in perceiving species and types." On which Bergson elaborates when he writes: "all living beings generalize—by which I mean they classify. They thereby isolate the character which interests them and further attach to it common properties; in other words, they classify and, consequently, abstract and generalize. Abstraction and generalization are first of all experienced before they are thought. Generalities automatically assumed, occurring in representations, become transformed, in man, into general ideas, com-

plete and carefully considered" (*L'Évolution créatrice*). Ribot added: "Ideas are merely transformed feelings," and already Gassendi could see a primitive judgment in the joy of a dog recognizing his master.

Thus if thought is formed insofar as it is formulated, then it is clear that all ideas are linked to the method and forms of expression which signify them. A thought expressed cannot be separated from the language which expressed it. And since we express ourselves with words, "language requires that we establish between our ideas the same clear and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity, as between material objects" (Bergson).

Word and Idea

Every verbal expression begins with words indicating objects or translating ideas. Considering that there might originally have existed in written signs or sounds a more or less symbolic representational relationship with the signified, it is all the more probable that this "identification" became manifest in the practice of magic characteristic of primitive civilizations. But we have seen how quickly the sign became liberated from its role of subordinate to reality and became conventional in its essence. Sound groups also became differentiated through the great variety of languages. However, in certain roots belonging to the expression of similar things, we do find obvious traces of "sound-images" which evoke the things being signified. As Dr. Allendy indicates, "this is how the sibilants *Ji* and *Zi* suggest the sound of the sighing or soughing of the wind, the sound of fire, a whirlwind, or an arrow, and express the idea of rapid movement or life, as in the Semitic root word *Ziz*, the Sanskrit *Jiv*, the Greek *Zoe*, the Russian *Jizn*, etc. The bass sounds suggesting the fall of a heavy, soft body, like the syllable

Ma, relate, in all languages, to the basis of material objects, to matter, mass, the womb, the mother, and also the sea."

We are not making a philological study here and so we must agree, for the sake of convenience, that the word is a conventional sign, from both the phonetic and the morphological points of view. Take, for example, the word *chair*. We all agree that it indicates a certain object in current use, a piece of light, movable furniture we are accustomed to sit on. It may be *a chair* or *this chair* but the individuality of this object becomes apparent only through the use of the determinative article. If I say *the chair*, each of us will, of course, recognize that we are talking about the same object; but each of us might be seeing a quite different object, for, though nothing resembles one chair more than another, they can all be distinguished by some idiosyncrasy of shape or style. The word is automatically transformed into a concept by the fact that it cannot limit itself to the simple recollection of the unique and essentially individual experience which is its origin and to which it owes its existence. Thus it indicates a type, a category, grouping together all the objects which, stripped of their individual character, reveal features of the same design. The word becomes an idea, an abstraction. Starting with this design, i.e., four feet supporting a horizontal surface with a backrest, a chair may be represented with innumerable peculiarities. Provided that the image corresponds with the requirements of the category, each chair will be understood as a chair. The concept is therefore the object type reduced to its essential characteristics, its specific attributes.

Any phrase in which abstract subjects such as table, chair, and rain are included can easily be transposed into another which has the same meaning but in which the subjects are replaced by expressions of

a symbolic nature indicating "sensory contents."² If a child is asked, "What is rain?" he will reply, "When water comes down." Granted the meaning here is vague, but we would find it difficult to argue that it is more precise to say "It is raining"—being as each of us then sees an image associated necessarily with the concrete. The "idea" is contained only in the words, not in what they represent. The mind cannot comprehend rain through an "in-itself," only through an image associated with particular sensory data.

Popular language is rich with symbolic representations, picturesque, living expressions. The study of dialects or slang is significant in this respect. Abstract meaning, of a more intellectual nature, is the language of logic. But, by a strange paradox, because of their grammatical structures, it is abstract words which generate the greatest number of confusions. In that it apparently follows a logical development, the grammatical form implies meanings which words could never possess were they reduced to their primary meanings.

In fact, current language has little regard for the expression of transcendental truths. It is limited to observation and aims less at translating intelligible reality than at providing a rule of conduct, at being part of behavior. As Brice Parain indicates, "The accent of our voices, our gestures, and, especially, the order which each precise task places on us, apparently establishing a genuine common ground between collaborators, thereby corrects the imprecision of language. Pass me that "thingamajig" over there, will you? The apprentice or workmate addressed in this way immediately guesses that his colleague is referring to the ruler lying on the floor or the plumbline. Sometimes it is enough merely to point."

Besides, it is obvious that if words represent objects or types of objects, they may also contain within themselves the proof of

an intelligible or imaginary world. But if I wish people to understand whatever I might imagine or put a name to, I must be precise—I must describe it in some way or another. If I invent a mythical, as yet unknown creature—which I call a "unicorn"—I must decide that it is a white horse with a sharp horn on its forehead, i.e., I must construct it from information I already possess.

The Two Languages

That words in scientific statements should have a precise meaning consistent with logic, that their grammatical structures should be regulated to avoid any contradiction is, as we have seen, the most important consideration as regards rational language. However, the very precision of this language puts it beyond any aesthetic consideration.

In fact, art gives rise to a *creative interpretation* serving as a response—like a changed, transformed echo—to the creative impulse of the artist. All poems, all novels, imply a mutual interaction between author and reader. Logic (which also plays its part) becomes a "logic of interaction," in other words, something like the logic of probability in aesthetics. In much the same way as its counterpart in aesthetics, it is based on the logic of relationships—with the exception that its effects are no longer required to be true but true to life. They are no longer required to convince but to move; they are no longer required to specify but to suggest. As a consequence of which, the relationships controlling them tend toward the emotional rather than the rational. Thus it is the responsibility of logic to organize language by playing up the psychophysiological mechanisms which provide the basis for affectivity (intuitive associations, more or less conditioned reflexes, immediate

structures of consciousness, etc.) and upon (true or false but *perceptible*) causal relationships, with the aim of guiding this affectivity into established feelings. If it moves into the realm of ideas, it is those ideas requiring the participation and intellectual activity of the spectator or reader, deriving from feelings thereby established in them.

There is no connection, therefore, between lyrical and logical language, except inasmuch as they both have their origins in organizing structures. In his work on language and rhythm, M. Pius Servien points out this difference very effectively. He writes:

At the heart of language—language which we thought to be an integrated whole, a sort of boundless ocean—we have discovered two areas with opposite characteristics. We have given them a name: the first, the Language of Science, the second, the Lyrical Language (these are really just two labels, newly attached to two newly discovered areas and not vague or imitated meanings). This was the beginning of entirely new research into language, into Lyrical as well as Scientific language.

The deep-seated reason why aesthetics has been incapable of progress, only of grand ambitions and ever-changing ambiguity, becomes apparent: one of the areas, Lyrical language, cannot be reduced to the other (moreover, both of them are equally inaccessible to any overture from the effete bastard language of Metaphysics).

The poet, the Master of words, essentially qualified to make his voyage of discovery deep into the heart of language and draw up new resources with each successive discovery, perceives these two poles, these two heights for him to scale, these two areas of concentration of extreme beauty: extreme Lyrical language and the language of Science at its most extreme which, as we have seen, is mathematics. (*Science et poésie*)

In other words, in the language of science (or logic), each phrase has one single meaning, not several. An exact equivalent can always be found to a phrase in the language of logic.

The language of logic considers the sum total of all phrases such that it becomes possible to agree totally as to their meanings. These phrases contain equivalents translatable from one language to another. From the point of view of logistics, the number of meanings capable of being transmitted through the language of science is infinite.

Conversely, in lyrical language, each phrase has only one meaning and can never be the equivalent of any other. The meaning of phrases in lyrical language is intimately related to and uniquely dependent on their rhythm. In this way, these phrases can never be reduced to the language of science, which is “an impoverished, limited language detached from language in its totality to become introverted, with entire categories of phrase lost forever.” This is true, for instance, of all categories of the optative mood (Racine’s “Dieux! Que ne suis-je assise à l’ombre des forêts”) and all those which are exclamations (P. Valéry’s “Hélas: j’ai quelquefois entendu Hérodiade déclamée, et le divin cygne!” and “Avec ces mots vivants, il n’est jamais possible de savoir dans quelle mesure nous nous entendons les uns les autres [With these living words, it is never possible to know how much we understand each other]”).

Yet the fact that the meaning of phrases depends on their rhythm, that the very meaning of words depends to a large extent on their position in the phrase (or the rhythmic structures governing them), does not prevent either the words or the phrases from having a logical meaning. Obviously it is the “secondary” meaning, determined by the rhythm, which becomes *the most important*, superimposed over the “primary” meaning, extending or opposing it, rein-

forcing or canceling it, playing with or against it. But what is remarkable is that *it cannot exist without it*. The "secondary" (or lyrical) meaning of a word exists and can only exist as the consequence of the logical meaning which determines and guarantees the word.

In other words, though lyrical language might not allow itself to be bounded by precise definitions like the language of logic, it can still be only one part of it, being partly based on it. It is merely one form, both larger and more subtle (the aesthetic form itself), whose basic resources still *lie outside language*—although the lyrical qualities of that language derive from it. These resources, this foundation, is *rhythm*.

Lyrical language is nothing more than the effect of rhythm being injected into normal language, then subjected to the logic of numbers and metric relationships (rather than formal logic), both of them set in apposition, opposition, and juxtaposition to each other in an interplay of never-ending interrelationships.

The Verbal Image

The term *verbal image* is often accorded by linguists (Vendryes, among others) to the psychic unit preceding speech. According to Charcot, this unit is formed by a collection of several images, differently endowed: a visual image and an auditory image accompanied by a "kinesthetic" image (associated with tactile impressions or with muscular effort signified by the object) and an "oral" image (associated with the mechanics of speaking). The sum total constitutes the word, regarded as the developed consequence of the basic motor mechanisms to which we referred earlier.

However, under "verbal image" we are including all the different features of the mental image, insofar as this is associated with the words which invoke it and, more

particularly, the image suggested by phonetic structures which then become causative.

To say, as we have, that the idea is identified with an image is tantamount to saying that all words suggest images. But, as we saw in the example of the chair, though the representations associated with it are infinitely variable, the image—at that level—is limited to describing the object, representing it in our consciousness. It agrees with the logical meaning and does not go beyond it. On the scale of aesthetic values, it might be called a *primary image*. It is the image we "see" when we read a text in which words are unimportant, transparent, as it were, with the ideas they suggest.

We guess at these words rather than read them. Our imagination is immediately carried to the signified, that is, to the images which establish in our minds a whole series of associations and connections for which they are merely the temporary but necessary support. Their sequence creates a universe which becomes formed or deformed, according to the way it is read, in a continuous, homogeneous, and constantly variable mental activity.

Thus in the language of logic, though the word *chair* betokens a particular object, it manifestly does not have any of the properties of that object or that idea. The word *virtue* has no particular virtue and the word *dog* does not bite.

In lyrical language, the word *dog* does not bite, either. But it does suggest (or rather may suggest) something other than what it signifies. It may become the image of a feature of the animal and, by extension, the image of all features similar to a feature of the animal. Mention fidelity, for instance, and we include everything which fidelity suggests.

In Racine's line "Dans l'orient désert quel devint mon ennui?" the word *orient* not only describes a geographically de-

fined area; it also reveals a whole series of images relating to some previous historical or biblical knowledge we may have of the Orient (custom, behavior, action, ostentation, or solitude). Its semantic density opens out like a fan and becomes the sum of colliding, collecting images complementing or contradicting each other, a "feeling" which, while subordinate to the general meaning of the phrase, nevertheless contains it, puts it into context and gives it its particular color and both richer and more ambiguous character.

Words, in this case, are no longer merely interchangeable means of expression; they become *creative*. In other words, they are able to suggest ideas beyond those they normally signify, ideas produced by their extraordinary associations, their rhythm, and the tension between their differentiated meanings—this is the "poetic effect," in principle and by definition "its very essence."

As Jean Paulhan notes, the "mystery" of literature and especially poetry

appears, in effect, to consist in a transition and, so to speak, a metamorphosis of such a kind that language and spirit are indistinguishable: either the rhythm and rhyme *prompt* the thought, or the emotion and inspiration *prompt* the rhythm and prosody. In short, thought, in poetry, behaves as though it were language and language as though it were thought, the whole thing arising from the same confusion (one which claims the linguist as its first victim). The difference is that, in poetry, this confusion appears to be more striking, apparent, and based in reality. Which might lead us to conclude that poetry is the perfect vehicle for the study of language, even more than language is for the study of poetry. (*Les Linguistes en défaut*)

Whereas the image suggested by the logical meaning is always more or less *static*, here—the synthesis of an assortment of

ideas, the product of comparisons or associations—it becomes an active mental representation. As creator of ideas and currents of ideas, it is *dynamic*. In lyrical language, the "word vehicle" becomes charged with added meaning. The emotion it contains is translated by a whole network of strange relationships. Transformed into a metaphor or symbol, the image may be called *secondary*. This is the image generally described as the "poetic image." But another image may be added to the poetic image, one which is often more subtle—determined by the music of the words, whose meaning is allusive. Produced by associations of pitch and tone, relationships of strong and weak tempi, this image is made all the more complex by the colored sensations provided by assonance and alliteration.

The importance of alliteration is too well known for us to dwell on it. Let us remind ourselves merely that in phrases such as

Un frais parfum sortait des touffes
d'aspédroèle,
Les souffles de la nuit flottait sur Gal-
gala . . .

the repetition of the *f* sound gives the impression of a light breeze playing on the wild vegetation. And this has less to do with realistic imitation than with translating the physical sensation of what is being evoked, of expressing the emotion engendered, discovering it in the words themselves, in their movement, their rhythm, their musicality. Harmony is more suggestive than imitative.

It is true, however, that the famous verse "Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes" tries to be imitative. But in

Ariane, ma soeur, de quel amour blessée
Vous mourûtes aux bords ou vous fûtes
laissée,

the application of assonance and allitera-

tion is made purely subjectively. The *s* sound is imitative of nothing at all. Nor really is the *f* sound in

Il n'y avait pas de fange en l'eau de son moulin;
Il n'y avait pas d'enfer dans le feu de sa forge.

In "Tout m'afflige et me nuit et conspire à me nuire" the repetition of the *i* on the third syllable of each of the four tonics translates enervation and the pressure of overwhelming emotion. In

Le gouffre roule et tord ses plis démesurés
Et fait râler d'horreur les agrés effarés,

Victor Hugo, through the repetition of the *r* sound, translates the noise and chaos of the storm. But the same sounds may also achieve a caressing quality:

Sur la plage sonore où la mer de Sorrente
Déroule ses flots bleus, au pied de
l'oranger . . . (Lamartine)

or translate a feeling of melancholy:

Et la narine jointe au vent de l'oranger
Je ne rends plus au jour qu'un regard
étranger. (Valéry)

Alliteration and assonance try to be no more than *evocative*. As was pointed out by Auguste Dorchain, who, though no great poet, was at least a great critic, "Every time we forget this essential truth and try to credit these words and letters with an autonomy, an independent life, a directly imitative or symbolic quality, we lapse into silliness, unintelligibility, absurdity."

It is no less true that actual verbal material is implicated here, creating and determining suggestion beyond (but *from the starting-point of*) the logical meaning: extending the metaphor and enveloping it with its musicality. It would seem that its

essence lies in the interaction of vowels whose variable sound patterns are harmonized around identical sound supports (the consonants).

In any case, the word in the poem—essential as regards logical or metaphorical meaning—gives way to the syllable or phonemes forming the "verbal material." The word no longer reveals the idea; it provides a screen and presents itself as primary material. It signifies but through a *form* rendered perceptible, and its value as a sign now becomes subsidiary. As a group of articulated sounds, it is no longer the *means* but the *ingredient* of poetry. It is supported by a musicality which translates the inexpressible—nonspecified or rather specified by something unspecific, by a rhythm "calling on" a nonsignified meaning, invoked by a sort of lyrical duplication.

At the limit, to quote André Breton's expression, words can be "diverted from their mission to signify." Which leads us to the jingles of children's games, in which words, though devoid of meaning, determine, through a certain verbal intoxication, a kind of joy both physical and mental and achieves, beyond the absence of content, a real incantatory "signification." A case in point would be

Am, Stram, Gram
Pic et pic et colégram
Bour et bour et ratatam
Bour, Tam, Gram,

in which the structure—consciously or not—seems to be the copy of a syllogism (with thesis, antithesis, and synthesis deriving from an initial proposition) providing the logical framework within which verbal modulations referring to anything and everything are placed.

It is manifestly always easy to connect words "gratuitously" if the desired result is only the strange or amusing effect of a telescoped expression. It is *more difficult* to

invest them with meaning, to impose on them a logical meaning *necessary* for extracting an *additional* "secondary" meaning to complement, extend, or negate the previous meaning. Indeed—all things considered—it is the most difficult.

It is therefore important for words to have a meaning upon which, around which, and more especially beyond which the rhythm is based and developed. But since words act above all as part of the "structure," the power of their meaning is limited to that of "catalyst." The verbal image is a function of *rhythm*, *tone*, assonance, and alliteration. The intellectual (symbolic or metaphorical) image which we have described as the "secondary" image (which contemporary poetry seems breathlessly to pursue to the exclusion of all else) counts less, to my mind, than the *verbal image*, which might be described as the *tertiary image*.

It would appear that poetic feeling is the product—or consequence of the many frictions created by words between the logical meaning, the metaphorical meaning, and that inexpressible meaning arising from their musicality. By their collisions, associations, and superimpositions, they become fused into a new meaning which is, for me, the very essence of poetry.

It would appear that lyrical ecstasy is nothing more than the consequence of a "psychophysiological mechanism" of which words are merely a tool. A rhythmic and measured laryngo-buccal action is for words—like ideas developed in a rhythmic continuity—what dance is for the body: a specific dance or the act of dancing is more important than "whoever it is who is dancing."

Just as the body ignores its weight and becomes "transcendent" in the rhythm, words leave behind their primary meaning. They gain another more or less incantatory meaning which transcends or negates them. Which is the source, among the many

other meanings, of the extraordinary force which extends the emotional impulse, in which the *continuous* rhythmic progression is modulated by the tonal or metric discontinuity.

One of the features which make contemporary poetry so arid is the tendency to regard poetry as merely a "moment of sheer introversion," the creation of a subjective universe, so subjective that it cannot be communicated, and to ignore the requirements of rhythm in order to concentrate exclusively on an impressive metaphor.

Disregarding the basic properties of the word, many poets belonging to schools evolved more or less out of Symbolism—a Symbolism which, in my opinion, they have misunderstood and misinterpreted—call upon the "transcendent" qualities of music, for its (potential) capacity to express without words, when they are at their least musical. They forget that rhythm is the first condition of music.

Now that it has neither structure, rhythm, movement, nor prosody of any kind, not only can the poem dispense with all the plastic qualities which are essential to it, but also (and more particularly) the image has no meaning—except whatever might be imputed to it. Under the pretext of frantic subjectivism, *anything can become the image of something*.

Now, the image is neither a beginning nor an *end in itself*—it is rather a *conclusion*, the culmination of something upon which it is based, which dominates and justifies it. Deprived of this support, it is destroyed. Seeking this "pure image" is like wanting the perfume of a rose without the rose, the rose without the rosebush. And these image ideas soon become reduced to mere ideas of images.

It is difficult for me to explain these notions without recourse to my own personal experience, since any outside observations seem incapable of doing justice to the ob-

ject. I beg the reader's indulgence, therefore, and can only presume this mechanism to be the same in all human beings. At least, believing myself to have normal human characteristics, it would be my conclusion that it is so in other people.

As far as I can see, any image of any object automatically refers to the word which designates it. And the reverse, obviously, is also true. But this word is not presented as an abstract, amorphous, colorless sign. It is presented as a dynamic structure, such as a sound-group or a *verbal image*.

Take, for example, the word *sauvetage* (life-saving)—one of the first slightly complex words in a children's dictionary. I can see in front of me the image used to accompany it (to facilitate understanding). It is a drawing representing a boat being launched by some sailors whose prow, forced up by a wave, seems to be running against the wave or meeting it head on. In the process of spelling out the word, I give life to the drawing: the lifeboat, illustrating the idea of life-saving, with the sailors rowing with all their might toward the shipwreck in the distance, running against the huge wave, riding it and, sailing over the choppy sea, disappearing as it makes toward the wreck. In doing this, I spell out the word: *sau-ve-ta-ge*. Now, while the sounds *sau-ve* are associated with the movement of the oars and the efforts of the sailors, these two syllables running against the letter *t*, representing the boat riding the wave, suggest the upright consonant like a wall difficult to climb. Once the wave has been breasted, the boat glides along with a slow and extended diminishing movement, just like the sound *age*—an open *a* dying away in a sigh: *ge*. And the boat disappeared into the mist.

The syllables thus become part of the image. In fact, they become an image in their own right, and the image takes its movement from the verbal modulations

with which it is identified. The whole thing forms the idea, the symbol of life-saving.

This replica of plastic mimicry, a sort of simulacrum of reality in an evocative sign, this audiovisual entity, sensory as well as symbolic, is, to my mind, what constitutes the act of conceiving—at least in the mind of a child—and its final conclusion in the concept. For the same is true of all the words of my childhood, i.e., all the usual, familiar, everyday words. When the spelling book did not provide me with an image to look at, I used to make one up in my mind. Such was the case with the word *naufrage* (shipwreck). I could see a clipper ship overtaken by a storm with huge waves breaking over it, half sinking. The mainmast, struck by lightning, crashed down on the bridge with a dreadful noise, a noise which coincided with the *fra* of *naufrage*. An enormous wave gave off the sound *nauf* as it broke over the hull and the vessel sank in the billows like a death rattle: *age*.

Might I say that the finest poem I have ever read, one which overwhelmed me with an extraordinary, strange, indescribable rapture, an ecstasy I have never experienced since, is the play of vowels and consonants in the very simple “Ba Be Bi Bo Bu . . . Za Ze Zi Zo Zu” of the very modest Régimbaud? It is a truism that in poems, even the most erudite of them, what we are looking for perhaps is to rediscover, elevated to a higher plane, the secret of our newborn cries, the emotion of our first impressions. In the child, there corresponds to the audiovisual structuring I have just described, whose purely emotional nature must obviously be in common to all human beings, a mental structuring whose nature is purely logical. Which explains why the child has, from its earliest infancy, an organizing capacity associated with reason and judgment.

The “visualization” of language is difficult to verify objectively. This is not so,

however, in the "tendency" shown in all children's drawings. In fact, the child never represents things according to a personal vision, as, for instance, he might see them from a particular angle, but according to his *understanding*. He considers things according to the coherence of their characteristics. The child does not draw a house or a car but an "idea": the "idea house" or "idea car" always presented like the architect's vertical section or the engineer's blueprint (allowing for simplification).

Obviously, being able to reproduce a single feature implies a capacity for identifying all the different points of view with an objective unity. But—and if I might cite again my own memories as reference—the drawing is the synthesis of an analytical and logical examination because the child looks, in all things, for the ideal model to unite the essential characteristics, an "in-itself" to satisfy and calm him, to give him the assurance that he has captured the "totality" of which he is conscious (although the single isolated feature gives him the impression that part of the object has eluded him). In his clumsiness, the child wishes to "capture everything," and this wish merely increases his clumsiness. His personal vision, therefore, does not derive from a look at the world but from his representation of it, from the make-believe he uses to translate it: a make-believe attaching a creative emotion to reason, enclosing it but remaining subordinate to it. It is for this reason that no psychology can be established without a starting point in the genesis of the mental processes, taking

them from their source in order to follow more and more closely the formation of intelligence itself.

However, lyrical language and logical language find their meaning right in the origins of mental activity, being the expressions of two tendencies in the human mind: reason and emotion, both appearing together. Mixed up initially in the same expressive search, in the same feeling, these two languages become separated in proportion to the extent the mind becomes conscious of the real world and realizes the need for *objective* awareness.

Once again: it seems to us that the cinema is the only art, the only means of expression capable of bringing about the synthesis of two languages, able to reconcile reason and emotion, reaching the one through the other in an interdependence whose reciprocity remains constant. Thus we are in a position better to understand and accept the part the image has to play in the conditional structures of film.

Just as lyrical language is based on verbal logic but transcends its meaning through the rhythm to which it surrenders or through a symbolic function, the language of film is based on the logic of reality but transcends its immediate meaning through reciprocal associations in the organic continuity of the film. The images being subordinate to a predetermined rhythm, a new meaning emerges as a consequence of that rhythm. However, before we start to consider this, we must study the individual capacities of the film image.



The Film Image

The Image Itself

The Indefinite Image

Being a moving image, the film image is composed of a certain number of successive snapshots. Each series of snapshots recording the same action or the same object from the same angle constitutes what is called the *shot*. The shot is the smallest unit of film, but there are a great many photographic elements which make up the shot and these are called *frames*. It is this basic unit, this individual photographic unit, which we will consider first.

A photographic image is the "mechanical" reproduction of reality viewed through a lens and resulting from the impression of areas of light on the subject created by the photochemical reaction of a light-sensitive emulsion on a cellulose base. It may be said, therefore, that this means of reproduction is quasi (to all intents and purposes) impersonal.

But a photograph is the product of a photographer. With a particular reality to record, the cameraman makes a certain choice: he chooses his frame. Where necessary, he organizes the various elements in his field of vision, creating certain harmonious relationships. Moreover, by regulating the intensity of the light, composing with light and shade, he increases or reduces the "impression" of size of the various elements. The opening of the aperture (the greater or smaller amount of light allowed into the camera body) also gives a

particular quality to the image and therefore to the objects represented in it.

It is indisputable that the photographic image is always the consequence of a certain interpretation. It is the evidence of what one man sees and thereby carries an obvious subjectivity. One may say that it is the "mechanical" impression of a personal vision of a given subject (which, incidentally, may also have been previously composed). In short, this image may be imbued with aesthetic qualities as well as a certain intentionality.

I use the term *indefinite image* to describe a completely impersonal reproduction, endowed with qualities common to all images in the widest sense of the word.

The image is obviously dependent on the agents producing it. Not only is it either in black and white or color (which already constitutes a certain interpretation) but, in addition, the same subject, lit by the same lighting, may be reproduced differently depending on whether orthochromatic or panchromatic film stock is used. The feeling of depth is more or less pronounced depending on whether a short or long focal-length lens is used. With a wide angle, a room ten meters deep becomes huge; the receding perspectives are such that someone coming from the background toward the camera gets bigger in incredible proportions and seems to cover the distance in seven-league boots. On the other hand, with a long focal-length lens, a distant cavalry charge advancing at the gallop seems not to get any nearer. The effect is particu-

larly striking, in the case of the wide angle, in *Citizen Kane*, and the charge of the German knights in *Alexander Nevsky* is a perfect illustration of the use of the telephoto.

For all that and whatever the differences to the reproduced object that each process of photographic recording makes in its reproduction, we would maintain (provisionally) that the image, devoid of any creative will of its own, is similar to the recorded reality.

It is the attribute of all images to be images of something. To demonstrate its distinction from the mental image, that is, from pure imagination (the attribute of consciousness and the states of consciousness), the image must be produced, *fixed* upon a support from which it takes its character of objective reality. But this support is a flat surface. It would be wrong to say, therefore, that the image of a chair is identical to the chair itself. For this to be true, it would need to be an *exact* copy in the same space, which is the same as saying that *another* chair would be necessary.

Now, the image of a chair is not "another" chair. Being the projection of a three-dimensional space such that the space retains all its *apparent* qualities in the transfer, the film image represents as much the spatial relationships of an object as the object itself. It is the *image of space*, being the image of the shapes and relationships defining that space. Objects have their position in it, their dimension, their size. They are *in* the world "here and now," specific, linked together by a network of interdependences and reciprocal determinations as they are, *actually*, in reality. This fact alone does not determine the character of "reality" in film images, but it does provide the basis for it.

To suggest that the image of reality represents forms less than their substance and their extension in space is another way of saying that the image of reality is not reality

but its image: I can sit on a chair but I cannot sit on the image of a chair. However, once I stop trying to move the representation in the way I am able to move the object represented, the image, in my eyes, takes on all the appearance of reality itself. Set down in the world, the camera fixes reality from a single viewpoint and, in fact, represents only that. But in the world of reality (wherever that might be) I am also limited to considering space and the objects in it from a single and unique point of view. If I look at the chair in front of me, I see it as a shape, i.e., in one plane or from a certain angle. If I close my eyes or turn my head, the shape disappears. But the chair continues to exist nonetheless. It presupposes an infinity of different aspects depending on the point of view from which it is seen and coexisting within it inasmuch as it is a real object. I can only become aware of these aspects successively. To do this, I must move around the chair; and one of these features must disappear for another to appear—etc., etc. In other words, each of these features will be presented as though it were a different image. Visual perception does not offer me a "space" but an "image of space," a particular "situation" presented to my eyes as a two-dimensional image.

Film being a succession of images, camera movement allows the director to shoot around the object, to observe it according to a whole series of successive points of view—just like the images provided by my movements in reality. The only difference (quite considerable though it be) is that I am unable to move within the "film space," except when the director of the film wishes me to. If he decides that I may, I am forced to follow him—whereas, in actual space, I am free to move wherever and whenever I please. In any case, the object is distinguishable by its materiality. It occupies a space, an area—while the images presented by my eyes or the film are only ever two-

dimensional. Images succeed and exclude each other, whereas the chair *is* simultaneously all these features and yet none of them. Any specific feature draws out all the others in the reality of the object.

Images relating to other experiences are provided by memory. In my consciousness, the features I cannot see are the memories of or the potential for a particular sensation. In other words, to a large extent, consciousness signifies memory; at least the one cannot exist without the other and, as Bergson writes, "no perception can exist without being mixed up with memory." Seeing, in fact, is recognizing—at least from the starting point of a certain previous experience. In any image, i.e., in any object we see, we recognize a series of impressions evoked by that particular object: the concrete evokes the abstract; objectivity triggers subjectivity. More than ever, a perception is a judgment.

We mentioned that the image of reality is similar to the film image. It is obvious, however, that this is only an impression. In fact, these images are quite different. The film image *effectively* presents itself as an image. It exists objectively as such. Stuck to a cellulose base, projected onto a screen, it is detached (as an image) from the material objects of which it is the image and has no further association with them. It is independent, autonomous. The perceptual image, conversely, is not detached from material objects and has no independent existence. It *is* what I see, or, more exactly, it is identical to it: through my eyes, a "reality" is presented to my consciousness and my image-making consciousness projects upon reality the image it has structured using the information provided by my eyes.

In other words, the image *is* "objectified" perception, related to whatever caused it and with which it identifies. Supplied directly by my consciousness, it is the product of a permanent relationship between

the external world and myself, between my observation and the objects I observe. It stops being what it is only inasmuch as I stop looking at it. My moving changes its temporary aspect and the "object" is constructed in my mind from the sum of the sensations I experience. Correlative to the reality I am observing and the information supplied by my perception, the image *becomes* the object, *that specific object*, i.e., the perceived reality, such as I perceive it.

As we shall see in a later chapter, the object (or what we call the object) is constituted with the help of a great many sensations relating to one single structure, one single "entity." It is a group of sensations "objectified" around an identical being considered as the subject or inspiration. To quote Bradley: "the object is the ideal content of a series of perceptions." But if this is the case, if the perceptual image cannot be detached from material objects, if it is "perceived reality," then it could never be similar to a two-dimensional image. By which I mean that the world before my eyes appears to them as a two-dimensional image (though it is the image of a three-dimensional reality). To put it another way: I might place a window between myself and the world—the world would then appear to me through the window as though projected onto it like a film image projected onto a screen. In other words, though the perceptual image (structured perceived reality) might differ greatly from the film image, the "real image" (i.e., the world before my eyes, the immediate representation—the product of my image-making consciousness as distinct from the images of which it makes images) is analogous to it.

Moreover, films are made to be seen: uniquely to be seen. Now, in the cinema I perceive the image of the object in exactly the same way that I view the object itself when, that is, I allow myself to concentrate on it—unless it becomes endowed thereby

with an aesthetic value. In which case, the image, confirming itself as a personal vision, becomes mediatory and therefore intrusive. But the "indefinite image" appears to my eyes in the same way as the object directly observed.

To reiterate: we can only see, i.e., perceive, objects "from the outside." From whatever aspect it is presented, it is always shown as an "image."

The chair we mentioned, with its leather seat and back rest, obviously presupposes an "interior," an "inside." Equally, the leather hide covering it, with the shiny side showing, also has a reverse side. But I cannot see the reverse side—and will never see it except by demolishing the chair. In other words, the image of the interior cannot co-exist with the image of the chair, since I am forced to break it open in order to see its "inside." The interior of a solid body is impossible to know. In fact, from the moment we perceive it, it stops being an "interior." If I break an object (the body of a vase, for instance), it immediately appears as a surface, i.e., an exterior. The interior is a construction of the mind.

From the real image to the film image, there still remains the impression of relief. But this sensation is less important than it would appear. We know that its "rendering" in normal perception is the effect of normal binocular vision and any attempt to present an impression of it is based on the separation of two "parallactic" images. But the result, when it is achieved in the cinema by a process of this kind (anaglyph or some other), is always more intense than it appears in reality. Reality is therefore, to some extent, misrepresented.

Which relates to the fact that the impression of relief is not solely due to binocular vision. Its cause is not just optical but also psychological. The notion of relief is partly a function of habit, an accommodation conferred by our movements and our under-

standing. Through the effect of constantly renewed experience, we come to know the extent of the distance of objects relative to us: we know it precisely. Thus our notion of space and our vision of objects are complementary and mutually corrective. We might presume, therefore, that the impression of relief is created by the constant synchronization of visual perception and our experience of space.

We know that distant objects appear to us bigger than they would according to the laws of optics, i.e., we see them bigger than we would in reality, were our perception—or that notion—only due to our vision. We also know that someone blind from birth who suddenly gains his sight through a surgical operation does not see things in relief. In spite of his binocular vision, objects are displayed to his eyes as though they were on the same plane. Habit and accommodation allow him to become increasingly more aware of relief, but this notion is not an automatic acquisition. And there is the well-known story of the blind man seeing for the first time and suffering intense physical pain because "he could not tear away the images stuck to his retina"; he had to close his eyes to find his way around.

In a painting or a photograph, perspective provides a "feeling" of depth, size, and the shading of the volumes, the "feeling" of relief. But this "feeling" is less a sensation and more an "idea." Facing these images, I can clearly see that certain objects "must" be placed in the background. I recognize these objects to be distant, extended in space; and I can see the effect of this through the use of perspective. But I cannot control this distance or experience it effectively as I might relative to objects arranged on the same plane. Depth is translated by a facsimile.

In the cinema, on the other hand, the photographs move. Their succession repre-

sents movement. Superficially, the feeling of depth is also provided entirely by the vanishing perspective, by the relative dimension of objects arranged in space. This is proved when, for a particular effect, I freeze-frame *the same image*, the same frame, for a few seconds: the image is flat, without relief. Despite the perspective, it does not stand out against the background; it is stuck to the screen. It is no more than a photograph.

However, when suddenly objects start to move, characters move about, everything quickly changes. We immediately feel the depth of the space. It is movement which determines the feeling of space—in fact, it effectively creates it. And the image immediately appears to stand out from its base (and actually does so): I am no longer perceiving a photograph projected onto a flat surface but a “space.” The film image is presented to my eyes as a “spatial image,” in exactly the same way as the real space before my eyes.

Obviously this is a feeling of depth rather than relief, but the one is a function of the other. Beings, characters are in relief because they are “spatialized”: be it that they move or that we move around them. Particularly since, in the latter, the resulting geometric transformation emphasizes still further the feeling of space.

Psychological relief, then, is an acquired phenomenon. Now, this “feeling of relief” is most important. It is the vestige of binocular relief, particularly sensitive in near objects by reason of the impression of “detachment” it creates, but which adroit lighting can sometimes produce equally successfully.

It is possible—even probable—that one of these days it will be achieved without requiring the audience to wear special spectacles or sit in the right place in front of a polymorphous screen—as is the case nowadays; all these techniques will become

obsolete. But I do not think it will add much to cinematic expression or provide a more intense feeling of reality. Moreover, we must find a means to reduce its exaggerated effect—caused by the fact that, in the cinema, the binocular impression is supplementary to psychological relief, whereas in reality they are both mutually corrective and compensatory. Except when this exaggeration is used to create a particular expression or special effect. In which case, the image accentuates—mechanically or not—the strangeness of the expression and is no more than the exact image of reality as we know it, devoid of that sensation.

Before proceeding any further (and since we are dealing with the “indefinite image,” i.e., any image), it would be well to say a few words about the mental image to which (or to the production of which) we must refer sooner or later.

The Mental Image

Mental images are not, as was once believed, attenuated sensations. There is no “content of consciousness” or retention of mnesic images. Memory is not a receptacle for storing received impressions from where they can be conveniently withdrawn, as they are (even more or less erased by time, as is the case with the faded, yellowed photos we sometimes dig out of our family albums).

In this respect, Husserl and the studies of the phenomenology and psychology of form (*Gestalt*) have led to great advances, not only in the psychology of perception but also in the effects of consciousness and even in the notion of the mental image, by rejecting completely the idea of a content of consciousness and a more or less substantial image, an image-object retained in the memory. It is obvious that if Bühler and the Würzburg psychologists meant image in this sense, i.e., like Taine, Ribot, and the As-

sociationists, then, indeed, the fact that this sort of image is a myth means that thought is better off without it. But a thought without "image-objects" is not, practically speaking, a thought without images, and to say that we think *in* images, *with* images, does not imply the existence of a collection of fixed, amorphous impressions but an infinitely changeable creation of the imagination—understood to be activity of the mind. Clearly this is the sense we impute to these "constituents of thought" known as "images."

"An absolutely universal rule," Husserl writes, "is that, generally speaking, an *object* cannot be presented in any possible perception, that is, any possible consciousness, as an immanent reality" (*Ideen*). "All consciousness is consciousness of." In other words, consciousness does not exist as an "in-itself"; it is not a substantial form of reality. The object of *which* I am conscious does not exist *within* my consciousness; it is a datum of my consciousness—none other than perception itself, complete and realized; a perception "knowing itself" through what is perceived. Consciousness of the object becomes confused with the object of *which* one is conscious. As far as I can see, it can only exist in this sense and, moreover, can exist through it only as an object. The object is correlative with the perceived reality and with perception.

In any case, *what* we are conscious of inevitably lies outside the realm of consciousness, without which we could never be conscious of *it*. But perception and mental representation are two completely separate realities. In perception, reality consists of the objects presented to my consciousness. In the mental image, reality is my thought presenting an image to itself, which intentionally creates it and its structure along with the insubstantial forms of the thought object.

In other words, the image is the actual

form in which thought appears to consciousness, knowing itself as such. But it is not a psychic content, an inert reality, a remnant of consciousness, something which thought might use but existing before it. It is an activity of the mind, a voluntary action. Intrinsically, the image is nothing.

If I think of an object—say a chair—I do not see the image of a chair as though it were a photograph I might project in front of me. "What I am seeing," as Sartre says, "is an existing chair, but I am seeing it 'absent'." The way an image *is*, he adds, is exactly the way it *seems*. However, these definitions (which have caused a lot of ink to flow) demand further explanation and invite several reservations, particularly since many commentators have distorted their meaning: implying, for instance, that the "absence of a chair" can be visualized—a singular phenomenon, to say the least! Indeed, it seems difficult for the absence of an object to *appear*, for the existence of that object to depend on its absence.

We must understand the following: The image does not appear as an "object" but as the "absence of reality." It has no perceptible content. It does not exist outside the intentionality which causes and creates it. Also, the terms *presence* and *absence*, generally applied to concrete reality, are completely without meaning in this context. The image is unreal, insubstantial. It is not the presence of an object but an "appearance," a fiction—let us say a "form."

Form—it will be argued—is always the form of something. Consequently, form without substance is nothing. But it is not pure nothingness, since nothingness has no appearance. Now, the mental image *exists*. It is a mode of existing, not one of not existing. It is a nonbeing in the sense that it is not a received impression, a concrete reality. Even so, it is a judgment. It is a potential record, a hollow form but present as a form,

a form suggesting the object through everything it is not. It is a representation without content and objective reality.

However, Sartre says further on: "When I think of my friend Pierre, in the act of imagining, my consciousness relates directly to Pierre and not via a likeness contained *within* it." To which we might be tempted to reply: yes, but how could my consciousness relate "directly" to Pierre who is no longer in the "here-and-now" unless I have a memory of him and think of him via that memory?

Consciousness can never visualize pure nothingness. Thus we can state, at least provisionally, that when I think of a chair, I do not visualize an "image-chair," retained by my memory, but the chair itself, the "reality-chair," *via my memory of it*. I am not seeing an image recognized as such any more than a reality recognized as such, but a reality presented as an image, i.e., a real chair recognized as absent.

What Sartre—following Husserl—calls the *hylé*,¹ i.e., what we understand in order to create the aesthetic appearance of a represented object, such as a painting, is nothing more than the image distinct from perception. Distinct not as an "in-itself" but as a direct representation of perceived reality, an "imaged" reality through which reality itself becomes visible as "form" released from its substance through which that substance becomes visible. It is like a reaction we make against perceived reality, considering only its image; in short, what I earlier termed a "real image."

Just like the mental image, this *hylé* is separated from actual perception to become an effect of memory, a voluntary action, a sort of judgment of reality. With this difference: that it is recognized as being the image of a reality existing here and now, while the mental image is known as an intention relating to something not existing (or not present).

Thus the mental image implies an effect of memory: a repeated memory, a "presentification," to use Husserl's terminology. But it also implies that perception must be retained, more or less affected by a coefficient of the past. Now, the content of consciousness does not exist. In which case, ought we to speak of "content of memory," existing in the unconscious or subconscious where the images perceived are retained outside consciousness which undertakes to "illuminate" them or "see" them in order to discover them as they are? However different the notion of the image might be, the problem remains the same; it has merely been given another name. Therefore the effect of memory is necessarily of another order altogether.

Before we look at this question, let us quickly examine what this "intentionality" might be, introduced into the effects of consciousness. Husserl says: "To the extent that *Erlebnisse*² are consciousness of something, we may say that they are related 'intentionally' to this something" (*Ideen*). We can see right away that the term *intentionality* has been distorted from the meaning it should have: consciousness "is related intentionally" but has no intention "to relate." It is only a word to indicate an obvious relationship between consciousness and what one is conscious of. To ascribe an "intention" to consciousness is to confuse the will with the way, the action with a knowledge of the action. Consciousness does not need anything: it actualizes the action and thought and presents them for what they are. It shows the effect of which they are the cause—that is all. Intention is a voluntary act directed toward whatever consciousness is conscious of, and intentionality is none other than the state of mind characterizing that intention, the consciousness of that wish becoming "known" in the object of its volition.

I cannot see the image of a chair except

by thinking of the chair, and I cannot think unless I choose to do so, unless there is some wish on my part. Consequently, the mental image is the product of a wish directed toward the object which we know to be absent. And it is because this image is the wish and consciousness of wishing, the thought and consciousness of thinking, that I am conscious of it as an image, knowing it does not exist except for my need of it. It is not to be confused with what comes to be from outside, imposing itself on my consciousness.

Moreover, perception is not a voluntary action, a choice made by consciousness, but evidence of meanings to which consciousness is witness. To touch a particular object, I must stretch out my hand; to see it, I must look at it. I may choose to do it or not to do it, but having done it, it does not depend on my wish or any intentionality that I perceive the object as hot or cold, smooth or rough, round or square, blue or red. I become conscious. My consciousness merely presents me with what it has "apprehended" through and according to what has come to it via the senses. This it does but without "choosing" to do so, either through the senses or in a particular way. Thus to say that perception is a choice and a judgment is to say that this choice and judgment preexist the thought process and therefore preexist consciousness. We know them only to the extent that they are presented to us, to the extent that we become conscious of them. They are the product of a series of elementary actions and reactions in which our existence involves us, imposing them on us through the routine of "being-in-the-world," i.e., through experience or perceptible intuition, through an experience we can think about but which is not the consequence of that reflection.

To paraphrase the famous controversy between Locke and Leibniz: "There is nothing in our digestions which has not first of

all passed down our esophagus." "Nothing," Leibniz might say, "but digestion itself." Yes—but what is digestion "in-itself," and what else could it be, but what is digested? Thus consciousness cannot exist beyond what one is conscious of any more than digestion can exist beyond what is digested. Consciousness exists only by virtue of a "reflected" datum—which is that consciousness. One cannot be conscious of walking except by walking. I know that I think, but I cannot be conscious of thinking unless I think of something. My consciousness concentrates on what I am thinking about and recognizes it as the effect of my thought: thus it is conscious of that thought; thus it is consciousness: in other words, thought can only become self-apparent via what is thought; to know that one is thinking is the act of thinking turned in on itself—the original thought becoming the object of thinking, the product of the act itself, its mirror image.

To contradict once again the Würzburg psychologists, who categorically state that thinking and knowing that one is thinking are one and the same—these two things are absolutely separate. To say they are identical is to confuse thought and consciousness. Indeed, consciousness—although better than a simple epiphenomenon—is really nothing more than a reflection, a mirror. As a mirror of sensation, it becomes actualized in the object. It is perception reflected back on itself via the structured object. As a mirror of thought, it becomes a concept and is actualized in the mental image. It is thought reflected back on itself, via what is thought. It is not that the object is *within* consciousness but that consciousness is or becomes the object—or at least becomes materialized in it. It is not that the image is *within* consciousness but that consciousness is or becomes the image.

Husserl writes: "Individual existence is presented in perception; faces are presented

in judgments of perception and memory." By the same token, we can say that the mental image is a *fact*. (An object is not a fact. What is a fact is that the object exists.) Neither is thought an "existential in-itself." It is a function of which consciousness is an effect, just as it is an effect of perception. This is why Descartes's *cogito* is inadequate in the form we know it. We should not say: "I think, therefore I am"; rather: "I am conscious of thinking" or, more precisely, "someone is conscious of thinking—as a consciousness that someone sets himself as existing in the world—as a thought he is individualized—therefore an individual exists—and everything set and individualized in this way relates to me—therefore, clearly, I exist."

Let us dwell, for a moment, on the effect of memory. As Bergson says, "Memory is never formed after perception; they are both formed at the same time. At the same time as perception is created, its memory is formed alongside" (*L'Énergie spirituelle*). This is doubtless true—perhaps even necessarily true. But memory is separate from perception. It becomes modified and distorted and in any case is not a "stored-up image." A memory becomes a memory only via the effect of an action on the memory faculty. Sometimes it is an involuntary action, caused by an external effect, by a shock, generally visual or auditory, by a kind of psychic automatism beyond the scope of this present study. But—voluntary or otherwise—memory is always *provoked*.

Whatever Husserl may claim, one cannot think *in terms* of memories, only *about* memories. In other words, an original perception is not repeated, "presented," i.e., reproduced in some way, but "reconstituted"—one might almost say *reconstructed*. Of an original perception, one can only reconstitute what one chooses, what appears necessary, what attracts one's thoughts so particularly. The mental image

is the effect of a certain choice made in our memories, the effect of a well-directed intention, a judgment. But what could this memory faculty consist of except the "storing up" of some image, some perception preserved as such.

Earlier we quoted the example provided by Sartre in *L'Imaginaire*: "How could my consciousness relate 'directly' to Pierre? I can visualize Pierre only through the memory I have of him." To which we can now add: unless my consciousness is the self-same memory, i.e., unless my thought, directed toward Pierre, becomes manifest in a mental image of "something" my memory has stored but which is *not that image*. For—in my view—there is no more of an image "stored up" *inside* our memory than there is music "stored up" *inside* the magnetic tape recording the score of a film. However, just as the tape retains the record of an agitation of the magnetic field through which it has passed, so apparently does our memory retain the record of an agitation caused by received impressions, each memory being merely a recollection provoked by the original images, "reconstituted" via this purely physiological agitation.

This is not a "content of consciousness" nor the effect of some "localization of the brain." As a "memory," this record is outside consciousness, even outside the subconscious. It must become an "image" again (through the effect of a spontaneous action, voluntary or otherwise) for it to reappear in consciousness; but as an insubstantial image, as the image of a reality recognized as "absent" because it is this very absence (or consciousness of this absence) which induces and provokes it. Also, this "recreated" image is always only a past event, "transformed" and interpreted. Being neither reproduction nor presentification, memory is merely the restructuring of a past event mentally "represented."

Clearly, memory involves a process infinitely more complex than the mere recording of sounds. But there are no more relationships between the "effect of memory" and the mental image than there are between the phenomena of inductive electricity and reproduced sound. Though human memory and electronic memory are not of the same nature, at least they apparently share the same techniques. However, it is the domain of physiology to prove this right or wrong and, ideally, describe in detail their respective operations. The subject is not as revolutionary as it might first appear, though.

Notwithstanding, the mental image—imagination, memory, or concept—is not really different from hallucination or from dream images. Though they may have different causes, they are effects of the same kind. Their only difference, as effects, is one of degree or intensity. We shall see that between the dream image and the film image (though there is considerable difference in the sense that the film image is, apparently, an objective, concrete image, placed "somewhere," in some way spatialized) the only difference, as regards "psychic participation," is one of degree and intensity.

The Image as Sign

THE IMAGE AS SYMBOL (IN THE LINGUISTIC SENSE)

Let us establish rightaway the following: in any film, any image—even the least well defined—is found to be loaded *already* with a certain meaning, even before the most basic of combinations comes along to create an eventual signification. By themselves, by their very presence "in-the-world," all things, all events, all individuals are possessed of a certain signification. Since the image presenting them to our eyes is composed of everything of which it is the image,

it is normal for its primary signification to be that of the objects represented.

This natural identification has been noted particularly by Maurice Caveing in one of the first issues of the *Revue de Filmologie*, as follows: "In fact, the nature of 'language' is to instill signification into a being other than the thing signified. Conversely, in the cinema, signification and the thing signified are one and the same thing: it signifies through itself (i.e., directly). Thus in the cinema we can speak only metaphorically of language, discourse and idea (*Denken* or *Sprache*). It is knowledge in the same manner because, being direct (that is, signifying through itself), it is only metaphorically knowledge, since this would presuppose a distinction between discursive thought and its object" ("La Dialectique du Concept au Cinéma").

We can say without hesitation that no one has ever claimed the cinema to be *knowledge* exactly; rather it is a purer, more complete "act of consciousness" associated with a signification or an aesthetic value. We are putting forward the notion that in the cinema signification and signified are the same in order to prove categorically that the cinema is not a language. Unfortunately, the above notion is predicated on a particular meaning of the verb *to signify* used in psychology. Indeed, to say that an image "signifies" to the extent that it represents a significant—or signifying—object is a strange misuse of words. It is to substitute the psychological for the linguistic meaning while claiming to argue from the linguistic point of view. In fact, in psychology the term *sign* (of a thing) refers to a representation incorporating a body of stimuli perceived in a similar way to the perception of the thing itself. In this sense, obviously in the cinema "signification and signified are one and the same," since the representation is absolutely identical to the represented object.

Relying on this evidence, certain filmologists try to show that the image can never be a linguistic sign, that is (to use Husserl's terminology), "in the act of signifying, the signification is not presented to the consciousness as an object." So, for a start, let us see just how far the image can be a *sign* in this sense.

The image of an object is identical to the object, to the extent that it establishes the existence of that object. The image thereby signifies what the object has power to signify. But as an image, that is, as a "representation"—by its very nature as an image—it signifies nothing. It *reveals*—that is all.

Film signification, however, is different. It never—or rarely—depends on an isolated image but on a relationship between images, i.e., an *association* in the widest sense of the word. The image of the ashtray signifies nothing more than what the object itself signifies. But by association this ashtray "in which cigarette ends are piled up" succeeds in suggesting the passage of time. In another context, it might well suggest something entirely different: tiredness, waiting, perhaps boredom. As Wittgenstein points out, "the sign is what is perceptible, through the senses, in the symbol." Two signifieds may therefore have in common the same sign.

We have a striking example in the famous pince-nez from *The Battleship Potemkin*. In closeup we see a pair of spectacles of the pince-nez type dangling by its braid at the end of a steel hawser. What might this image mean taken out of context? Nothing, other than the fact that a distinctive pair of spectacles is dangling at the end of a steel hawser. Which is precisely what we see, what is revealed to us. Now, it happens that this pince-nez belongs to Smirnov, the ship's doctor. We have seen him fiddling with it throughout the preceding sequences—so often, in fact, that this object has come to characterize the doctor, being one of his habits, his idiosyncrasies, his be-

havior. It has become, as it were, indicative of his whole personality. Moreover, we have just witnessed the revolt of the sailors of the *Potemkin* during which the officers have been thrown into the sea, among them Dr. Smirnov. Dragged by his feet, punched, kicked, and hoisted in the air like a bundle, he has just been heaved overboard, despite his shouts of protestation. We have seen him struggling and, in the fight, losing his pince-nez in the rigging.

Thus, directly, this image assumes a *meaning*. The "pince-nez" represents Dr. Smirnov or, more exactly, *signifies* his "absence." There is nothing left of this arrogant and contemptible officer except his ridiculous pince-nez stupidly dangling at the end of the hawser. The part stands for the whole; but what is interesting is that it is the most insignificant detail which evokes the character and transfers to him its characteristic ridicule. Even better: through his position and rank, Dr. Smirnov, specimen of the ruling class and the protsarist aristocracy, actually "represents" that class. Thus the pince-nez succeeds in signifying with one stroke the downfall of the bourgeoisie "thrown overboard." Symbolically, there is nothing left of this class except a ridiculous substitute implying the futility and stupidity of what it represents.

Though this example is obviously the most convincing, there are over a hundred similar examples in Eisenstein's films. Through him, we are at last able to see that the signifier and the signified are two completely separate entities, whose natures are as different as they could be, and that the image, when it does signify, *signifies something quite different from what it shows*, though it does so *through what it shows*. To quote the words used by M. Caveing, it is a question of "instilling signification into a being other than the thing signified." The image is indeed a function of the "sign" with all the demands which that function

entails, following the established definitions.

It should be noted, however, that the image, as opposed to the word, is not a *fixed* sign. A dangling pince-nez does not expressly mean "a man has been thrown into the sea; the bourgeoisie has been thrown overboard"; an ashtray full of burning cigarette ends does not mean "time has gone by," etc. This is nowhere near what it means. The cinema is not a conventional language—the effect of conventional and abstract signs. The image, unlike the word, is not "intrinsically" a sign; neither is it the sign of something else. As we have said, it shows but does not signify anything. It is charged with a particular meaning, with a "potential for signifying" only through its association with a series of *effects* in which it is involved. This is how it achieves its particular meaning and, in return, invests with new meaning the context in which it appears.

Hume divided understanding into *matters of fact* and *relations of ideas*. In the cinema, what happens is that the *matters of fact* become or determine the *relations of ideas*. The consequence is that signification does not belong or pertain to *one* image but to a series of images acting and reacting on each other. We find, as we noted already, the "intentional" structure of ideographic writing—but an infinitely mobile structure in which "representations" are not ideas but effects or objects.

Thus to say that "in the cinema, there is no process for the formation of ideas or concepts" is to deny the facts. It is these "ideas" alone which create understanding in the cinema, ideas formed as they inform. It is undeniable, for instance, that the image of the pince-nez has a certain expressive intensity and an emotional power infinitely greater than those of the officer himself. Apparently we are seeing in this type of "appeal" and its effects a reflection of prim-

itive symbolic thought which remains the basis for the processes of consciousness, the reflection of a mental organization preceding logic (that is, preceding the logic of reasoning) relying heavily on intuitive logic and identical to the processes of transference. As Eisenstein himself pointed out, "Thus we make use of a sensual and emotional construction of thought. Instead of the logico-informative effect, we obtain an emotional effect, a thought based on emotion and not on intellectual reasoning. We *do not register* the fact that the surgeon has been thrown overboard; we *react* to the fact through the particular composition in which it is presented to us" (*Film Form*).

We might examine more closely the kind of mental process which creates this symbolic signification by comparing it with the structure of a syllogism.

We know that the first premise is a "form" comparable with a perceptual structure: "all men" constitute a body (a circle) represented as being grouped inside a larger circle representing the body of "mortals." The second premise operates in the same way: "Socrates" is an individual grouped inside the circle of "men." The process which draws from these premises the conclusion that "therefore Socrates is mortal" may be described as the removal of the intermediate circle (men) after Socrates has been placed with his fellows in the large circle (mortals). The reasoning process is therefore a "regrouping": Socrates is, as it were, removed from the group classed as "men" to be regrouped in the class of mortals. Thus the syllogism merely derives from the general organization of structures. Moreover, the work of W. Köhler has shown that the restructuring which characterizes intelligence also operates in this way. Perceptual structures are "forms." The reasoning process or "acts" consist quite simply in allowing a reciprocal "transfer" to operate.

The shot of the pince-nez—and, conse-

quently, any image charged with meaning —presupposes a similar operation: the pince-nez takes the place of its owner, who is considered as "part" of a larger group. But the re-grouping here operates in the reverse direction; the transfer is from the part to the original group and thence to the group containing this group. This mental process, relying on intuitive logic, is merely a kind of "instantaneous judgment," extending and justifying perception.

It is worth stating, however, that, in a film, though all images signify (through their content), they do not have the value of *signs*; when they do, it is only incidentally, through the associations with the action which they describe. Moreover, in contemporary cinema the use of the closeup to isolate details and turn them into signs (in inverted commas) seems to have been superseded. Significant details are no longer isolated from the general scene to which they belong but stand out by virtue of the special place which they occupy in the framing of the image. The style used by Eisenstein is amply justified in epic films, but in psychological films the important feature is often signified by means of a whole series of relationships determined by the combined movements of the camera and the characters in the midst of a constantly moving, constantly changing whole. Nonetheless, it is the expressive demands of the content which must determine the descriptive value of an image.

In this respect, in his study on the problem of signification in the cinema, Roland Barthes, like many others, continually confuses the psychological and linguistic signs, the analogon and the symbol. His argument, relying first on the one and then the other, is, by this fact, packed with contradictions. "The relationship between signifier and signified," he says, "is essentially *analogical*, not arbitrary but motivated." This is true of the analogon but completely untrue

as regards the sign. Indeed, what analogy could there be between the pince-nez, Smirnov's fall, and the downfall of the bourgeoisie? What analogy could there be between an empty chair and a missing person who used to sit in it every day?

"To signify crying," Barthes writes of the Chinese theater, "the actor wrings the cuff of his sleeve and raises it to his eyes by lowering his head; in our theater, to signify crying, the actor must cry." Nonsense! If a woman is shown crying on stage, there is no attempt made to signify that she is crying; she is merely seen to be crying. To signify that she is crying, the director must employ associated images to imply that the woman—offstage—is crying. That is the difference.

Contradicting himself (and rightly so, one might add), Barthes writes elsewhere in his study: "Though reality is preserved during the course of a film, that is, invented and created by the film, it cannot become the object of a signification. For instance, if a film narrates, with actions, a love scene between two characters, that love scene is actually experienced by the audience; it does not have to be communicated (this is expression not communication). If, however, the love scene happens offscreen, either before or between two sequences, then it can only be *understood* by the audience via a precise process of signification—which expressly defines the semiological part of the film content."

However, though it is correct to say that "*the signified is everything outside the film requiring expression in the film*," this definition is acceptable only if we specify what we mean by "outside the film." It is not just what immediately pertains to the action and which must be *understood* by the audience (as in the above example) but all the indications, all the "evocations," which potentially justify or explain facts, actions, behavior. It may be something not pertaining

to the moment being considered but is still part of the film. One might imagine, for instance, this love scene to be between a woman and her lover; but the woman has another involvement, and we know that a ring she is wearing is a present from her "other lover." The shot showing the woman kissing her lover might draw attention to the ring and to her glancing at it unintentionally. The "presence of the other lover" registered both by the audience and in the woman's consciousness (she visibly reacts) justifies her behavior, etc. Thus it might be more correct to say: *the signified is everything outside a moment in the film requiring expression in that moment.*

Elsewhere Barthes claims—rather imprudently to my mind—that the film image may be used synonymously. Clearly a given signified may be expressed by means of a variety of signifiers. In Eisenstein's film, for instance, the broken candles (lighting the piano in the officers' wardroom) and the plate broken by the sailors in their mess suggest, like the pince-nez, the downfall of the ruling class. However, the very fact that this is suggested quite differently in each case means that they are indicating more than shades of meaning. The same idea is being expressed but through different significations directed toward very different ends. Moreover, this (merely relative) synonymy is purely accidental: it exists only in this particular film. Beyond *The Battleship Potemkin*, there is no relationship, no significant analogy of any kind, between a dangling pince-nez, splintered candles, and a broken plate. Elsewhere Barthes admits this implicitly when he states: "Synonymy is not aesthetically viable except when it is, so to speak, faked: the signified is expressed via a series of successive corrections and approximations and none of them really repeats the other."

As for what he says in respect of polysemy—it is all self-evident. A signifier may

express not just several but a quantity of signifieds, since the image assumes its value as a sign only from the context and the associations which that context implies. The same image (or, more exactly, the representation of the same thing, the same object, the same fact) may assume as many different meanings as there are contexts into which it can fit. Beyond what it reveals (and even *with* what it reveals), an image says only what it is meant to say. This is often apparent in films which use a montage of newsreel footage: the same image, juxtaposed with some other image, may succeed in conveying the exact opposite of what it was supposed (or meant) to record objectively.

There is no symbolic codification in the cinema; otherwise the film loses its living authenticity, the power given to it by concrete reality. From the moment that the symbol is "conventionalized," it becomes merely an abstract sign embedded in the continuity. It is more valid to say expressly in a subtitle "some years later" than to show a dog-eared calendar to signify the passage of time. The subtitle borrows its precision from language, whereas the conventional image of the calendar, inaccurate in what it evokes, states beforehand (as a recognized symbol) what it intends to suggest. As Barthes so rightly points out, "the aesthetic viability of a film is due to the fact that the filmmaker is able to separate the form of the sign and its content without leaving the boundaries of intelligibility."

Though limited and directed by its context, ambiguity of signification is necessary to film clarity. Therein resides the essential difference between the cinema and logical (i.e., "rational") language in which the meaning is clearer the more it is limited, precise, circumscribed.

A conventional sign is viable in the cinema only to the extent it is misrepresented; in other words, to some extent ridiculed.

We all know the classic example of Charlie Chaplin, who, back to camera, staring at the picture on his girlfriend's wall (she having just left), appears to be racked by terrible grief to judge from the fact that his shoulders are shaking as though he is sobbing. The sign could not be more conventional—no one could mistake it. No one! . . . rather everyone: Charlie turns round and there he is, mixing a cocktail and vigorously shaking the cocktail shaker.

Though obviously a symbol system exists, serving as a support for signification in film, it is in no way conventional. It is an infinitely variable system, the one we use in everyday thinking. Consequently there is not—nor could there ever be—a syntax of signifiers (*syntax* meaning a body of grammatical or linguistic rules). The only syntax—or, to be more accurate, the only rule—used in film signification is the syntax of logical association. We shall return to this when we deal with the development of continuity, i.e., the relationship between form and content. In the meantime, we can only echo Barthes's quasi-definition, in summary of what has just been said: "signification is never central to a sequence: it is only marginal. The object of the sequence is epic; it is what surrounds it which is the signifier; one can imagine sequences which are purely epic, without signification; one can hardly imagine sequences which are purely signifiers."

However, there have been so many absurd statements concerning the "sign" in the cinema that it would be fitting to close this section by quoting some remarks which might otherwise confuse the reader. For instance, the remark attributed to Chris Marker, whom we credit with more sense generally: "a certain editing art may disappear . . . as we become less interested in the sign and more in signification" (*Cinema 61*, no. 57). Now, if he meant becoming more interested in "what is signified" . . . but

how on earth could one be *less* interested in the sign and *more* in the signification? A sign is valid only by virtue of what it signifies. One could never be interested in a sign which signifies nothing . . . it would cease being a sign! Moreover, signification is valid—indeed exists—only insofar as it is signified, i.e., *supported* by the sign. I would be glad to know what signification is if it is not signified. The one exists only because of the other. So this distinction is absurd. One cannot be interested in a sign independently of what it signifies; nor can one be interested in signification without involving whatever makes it signify.

To put it in a nutshell: in the example from *Potemkin*, the sign is the pince-nez (object) and the signified is the downfall of the bourgeoisie (idea). The signification is a mental "form"; it is the product of the association of the object in a given context which makes the object signify this and not that. In fact, whether verbal or visual sign, *signification can only exist when the sign is capable of being understood*. This understanding, in the cinema, does not involve direct translation into words. It stands by itself, to the extent that it is simply *logical*.

THE IMAGE AS ANALOGON (IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE)

Now let us see in what way the image may be regarded as a "sign" in the psychological sense of the word. By making a careful examination of objects we will see that the identification of signifier and signified is altogether relative and that the image, though analogous with what it reveals, *always adds something to what is revealed*.

Previously we mentioned that in the cinema represented objects had a dimension, a "solidity," that they were "involved" as they are in reality. In fact, they are more so. Indeed, in reality, objects are involved only by their presence; however, their involve-

ment is translated by an obvious "accessibility." I can make of these objects what I want, act on or with them as I wish. They are involved in all *possible* events, i.e., in none; and whatever I might do, they are *impartial*.

In the cinema, on the other hand, objects are involved in a narrative reality which has a beginning and an end—a purpose. Their accessibility is compulsory. They cannot be other than *the way they are presented*, and they cannot help but take part in the action which is foreign to them but which involves them by the very fact that they witness it. They are *in* the drama and are part of the drama.

The clock over the mantelpiece in the room where a dramatic action happens is, obviously, not part of the drama. It cannot make an active contribution. However, it tells us the time and thereby *informs* us. In any case, it is *there*. And it is the same for all objects—furniture or ornaments—which compose the setting, which, though extraneous to the drama, contain and, in some measure, reflect it. The action taking place among these pieces of furniture, among these objects, forms, through them, an entity both heterogeneous and homogeneous: heterogeneous by virtue of the elements actually present, active or passive, partial or impartial (the characters, the objects); homogeneous by virtue of the fact that this entity forms a "totality" presented in one image, one shot. Setting, characters, and objects are involved in the same action. It is a single space subject to a single time sequence.

Besides the characters (and with them), a complete space, a world (or an aspect of the world) is involved, forming the "narrative reality" whose changing circumstances we follow. However, each thing, each object involved in this way, commits not only its existence but also its "essence." And the same is true of any object, any setting and

concrete reality, which participates in any way in the action.

In the cinema, composed entirely of the concrete, everything relates to an idea. It will be argued that the same thing happens in reality. But in actuality the ready accessibility of the object divests it of this referencing power. In the cinema, on the other hand, the objects are present under the signifying pretext. As we have just said, they are involved in a *directed* reality. It is the "need to be there" of the *specific* table which implies the "need to be there" of all possible tables and, thereby, of an "idea-table." Or, if you prefer, the emphasis absent in reality is manifest in the film image, particularly since what is involved in the film is not so much the object itself but an aspect of the object, an *image*.

One can say then that the mental image never exhausts what it represents. When I think of the countryside, I may imagine a tiny farm or a remote field but I cannot conjure up every possible feature of every possible countryside, i.e., every image which that idea implies and which the word *countryside* contains—potentially at least. This inexhaustible meaning exists only in the idea itself. It implies the "calculable infinity" known as countryside. The image I call up is, for me, merely an adequate indication, a partial representation, temporary but necessary. It is the crystallization of the idea in my mind, its "actualization." The word is a matrix to contain every possible image but containing none of them. Thus to say, as does A. Binet, that "the image is not adequate for rendering the whole meaning contained in words" is nonsense because this meaning is no more or less than what I choose to attribute to the words. And it is the image alone which gives it to them. It is the image which focuses the meaning of the word, clarifies it, and somehow places it in my consciousness by providing it with a color, an ap-

pearance, and a form. The image fixes the idea (provided it does not exhaust it). The word exhausts neither idea nor image; it reflects them.

Nor does the film image exhaust what it shows. It shows only one aspect but always reflects a generality. Far from limiting what is represented to its representation, it suggests a vista beyond the representation but *originating* in it exclusively.

The image of the chair is both perceived as an image, seen and understood as a real object; it is the chair *presented as an image*. In other words, the film image finds its place less between reality and fiction than between essence and existence. It invokes an essence through a concrete existence, just as it invokes a presence through an absence: reality in the cinema is present because it is effectively represented but it is absent because it is *only* represented. (Thus the image of the chair confirms the absence of the object though I see the chair through its image.) Moreover, this image is only ever a *chosen aspect*, directly juxtaposed with another chosen aspect. One might say that *any object presented in moving images gains a meaning* (a collection of significations) *it does not have "in reality," that is, as a real presence.*

We must emphasize that we mean "essence" here in its phenomenological sense, i.e., as pure potentiality and not in the Kantian or Platonic sense. It is imperative to stress this point so that errors of interpretation may be avoided. Moreover, it is this way of regarding the "essence" as an "in-itself" or as a transcendental "a priori" which gives Bazin (and a few others) the idea of the camera discovering the world "beyond the world," the world of essences, pure spirits, beyond the human eye, a camera, as it were, "discovering the divine," whereas it is our minds which find, through the images of objects (and because the image "makes the object unreal"), the

essence it conceives "beyond the objects themselves." In the cinema, the immanent finds expression in a *certain transcendence* but not in the "transcendental."

Which is why it seems wrong to say, as does Roger Munier, that the film image is the "pre-face of the world, a world up to now debased as an object but appearing to regain its status through the film image" (*L'Image fascinante*). This conception is the consequence of the fact that, like Bazin, Munier regards the image an *objective phenomenon* independent of human vision. To consider the film image as a "statement of the real world," by virtue of its objectivity *considered as absolute*, to say that it is "*cosmophanic in its essence*," is to posit the world as "in-itself" and to posit this "in-itself" as necessarily identical (and yet "purer") with the object as we know it, without realizing that the object is the way it is only by virtue of our perception. This is to dabble in "transcendental realism" – a position condemned by the whole of modern physics. To use the image of Francis Ponge: the "mimosa-without-me" does not exist, at least insofar as the "mimosa-is-an-object."³

This might almost be conceivable were the vision of the camera to transcend human vision. However, not only is this vision "directed" but it is dependent on an optical system designed by man so that its "reproduction" is effectively the same as human vision. If by chance this optical system showed a vision revealing a "transcendental reality," we would reject it as incongruous and call it "bad."

We are almost in agreement with Munier when he says, "The limits of paper or screen are enough to endow this fraction of reality . . . with a *meaning* it would not have in the material world in which it is registered. . . . The true world only has potential meaning. Conversely, in photography, it defines itself as a world, delivering its many-faceted appearance at once. It is

true that it may be photographed from a great many angles. But from one single angle, only one photograph is possible.⁴ Reality, collecting all its potential meanings in the one photograph, including and, therefore, *denying* all possible interpretations, thereby expresses itself in its entirety. The photograph is reality-turned-into-statement (something like a *word* of the world). In the photograph, the world, *as world*, is named, even before any abstraction or choice, in its undifferentiated being. It is pure revelation" (*L'Image Fascinante*). Yet to say that reality is expressed "in its entirety" in the image seems to me to miss the point. An image can show only one *aspect*—nothing more. Yet this aspect acts as substitute for all other *possible* aspects. It becomes, as it were, the *sign* of everything it is not, i.e., all the aspects which it implies and for which it acts as substitute.

Thus it may be safely said that the image is a "revelation"—with the reservation, however, that it is the revelation of a more intensely *perceived* and *signified* reality, not a "transcendental reality." What Munier calls "photogenics" (revelation) is not, as he states, the meaning objects "give themselves",⁵ nor is it a meaning which we might ascribe to them but one which they *acquire* through the effect of being represented on film and also one which we *discover* in them (which we can only grasp through the effect of their *isolation*). The meaning we *attribute* to them can only ever be an *aesthetic* meaning dependent on the framing and organization of the field of vision.

Indeed, to say that the film image is "alienation" because, unlike painting, it *does not depend on a mediation* or that, in it, the "mind as *logos* is rejected," is both to speculate on its supposed "total objectivity" and consider it as an end in itself. Any image which is the product of a certain choice has been mediated. However, if there is mediation, it is less *in* the image or

for the purpose of the image (which would be the overall aim of a film) than *from* it and because of it. The film image (though it *may* be mediation) is above all the element of a language: *logos* and not the result or object of *logos*.

The essential magic of the cinema is contained in the fact that the "content of reality" becomes an element in its own narrative. "What is" becomes "what is not" or "what could be" or "what could not be otherwise": a transfigured "*what is*." Reality becomes the statement of unreality or fiction, of verisimilitude or lack of verisimilitude. We can see what someone's eye has already seen, an image in which reality, supplied with a more or less noticeable aesthetic coefficient, is shown to be more perfect than it is.

To demonstrate this signification, we must lay heavy emphasis on difference and analogy, which, in the cinema, indicate the relationship of what is represented with its representation. We should start by specifying—in order to avoid any semantic confusion—that the word *representation* is taken in the sense of "photographic" or film "representation." We admit that the word *presentation* is probably more suitable, since *representation* (in the sense of the German *Vorstellung*) generally indicates the direct or inherent data of consciousness or else an image *different* from the object of which it is the image—different in its "substance" (mental image) or in its interpretative nature (painting). What we call a *sign* (in the linguistic sense) is a representation regarded as a symbolic substitute or abstract representative.

We can immediately see that a film image—the "objective presentation" of a given reality—may be understood in large part as a "representation" (*Vorstellung*) despite the fact that, as an *image*, photography is not particularly interpretative. And this image—which is *Vorstellung* as a content

present in the consciousness (the image of something)—may play the part of representative (*Repräsentant*) as the *sign* of a suggested or symbolized reality of which it is clearly not the image.

Let us now consider for a moment a painter painting a bunch of flowers on his canvas (the choice of banal subject is deliberate). The artist is representing an object which is indeed real. However, the reality he sees belongs to the object and not to the representation he makes of the object. The bunch of flowers painted on the canvas no longer has a reality as *an object-bunch of flowers*. Having become an object-painting, it now has only a fictional reality. Now, clearly, the purpose of the painting is the picture representing the bunch of flowers, not the bunch of flowers seen by the painter. The purpose is the representation itself endowed with the appropriate aesthetic qualities.

Thus we may say that, in painting, *the object represented disappears behind its own representation*. Transformed into a painted work of art, it can exist only through that painting. Having become the "bunch-of-flowers-in-the-painting," it can wither and die as a real object; the representation will survive. Yet it will survive only as a new object, an imitation of the original, both different and fictional. The "bunch-of-flowers-in-the-painting" is a specific, independent creation. It takes a voluntary act of consent to make it the image of the real bunch of flowers.

In the cinema, things are quite different. Whereas the painter's bunch of flowers is the effect of various colors applied by him on a canvas following an intention, the bunch of flowers recorded by me on film is devoid of all intentionality. The image is identical in all respects to the object in the viewfinder. It is not the effect of an artist but (dare one say it) the effect of the object itself, reproducing *itself* on film by means

of light reflected onto it and captured by the lens. The object is transferred onto film as a completely faithful copy.

Of course, if I consider the film image without projecting it, that is, if I look at each separate frame of the film, the "bunch-of-flowers-on-film" constitutes "in itself" a new object. That it might be similar to the real object does not alter the fact that it is fictional. It is merely a photograph reproduced on a strip of celluloid. Yet it is succeeded by a number of other photographs which change according to the recorded movement. (We might imagine a bunch of flowers being shaken by a violent breeze—always supposing there is no one acting on it or around it.)

If, now, I project this sequence of images, the "bunch-of-flowers-on-the-screen" takes shape. It becomes "spatialized" through the effect of movement and becomes identical to the real bunch of flowers in the viewfinder of the camera. Since the film representation of an object is identical with the representation of the same object "registered by a consciousness," I perceive it in the same way as I perceive the real bunch of flowers. In other words, in the cinema, contrary to what happens in all the other arts, *the representation is identical to the object represented*.

What I see, in fact, is no longer the bunch of flowers but, through and by it, the bunch of flowers itself. It is the real bunch of flowers my consciousness observes through my perception of an image immediately forgotten as an image by reason that it is perceived "as an object of which it is the image."

Thus the real object, the real being, is dispensable. Not only does the representation survive but also, through and by it, the object or being, endowed with all their apparent qualities. Obviously they do not survive "for themselves" but for me, the spectator, who receives the image of them.

This becomes quite apparent when we take another look at an old screen comedian. Today Raimu in *La Femme du boulanger* is as lively and topical as he must have been in the same film twenty years ago. Thus to speak of a "new object" or a fictional reality is not strictly accurate (at least for the "spectator-in-front-of-the-screen"), particularly since film is only filmic by being projected, animated—otherwise it is nothing more than a collection of still photographs.

Let us examine now another side of the question. If all he wishes to do is record images, the filmmaker expresses himself by creating *intentional* relationships between beings, the world, and objects. Directing consists essentially in structuring a space limited by a frame. The data in the image, then—necessarily—orders itself in respect of the frame which *defines* the living, active geometry which it encloses.

Captured by the lens, objects are implicated by a formalizing intention which gives them meaning. Thus representation constitutes a *form*, an "organic" whole different from the spatial reality of which it is nevertheless the image. The effect of this is a sort of duality or conflict between the represented object and its representation.

When I see the "bunch-of-flowers-on-the-screen," as we have said, I am seeing the real object through the image of it presented to me. This object is presented to my consciousness as an immanent reality, as an object devoid of intentionality. Thus it *tends* to break the confines of the frame. It is presented as though "seen through a window," nothing more.

Yet, at the same time, consciously or otherwise, I perceive an image, i.e., a structured reality, a *form*.⁶ The bunch of flowers is presented to me as an element in a compositional whole which gives it a *meaning*. The bunch of flowers becomes (almost in spite of itself) a sort of archetype satisfying the *need* for the object-bunch-of-flowers at

that particular time and place. It becomes in some way self-transcendent, the existential manifestation of an idea.

Seen as a reality and assimilated as the organic element of a structure, the object seems thereby to be in some way both subject and object, immanent and transcendent. Art consists in part in accenting either one or the other of these contradictory features.

Further on, we shall take a closer look at the considerable part the frame plays in this process. For the time being, the image, *as an image and because it is an image*, transcends the reality of which it is the image; the representation becomes, in some measure, the *concrete sign*—the signal—of what it represents, an *analogon* crystallizing all the potentialities, all the "powers of existing" of the represented reality.

This dual involvement is not immediately apparent; it cannot be analyzed spontaneously; it is experienced intuitively, even unconsciously. It is this seemingly obscure and somewhat mysterious effect which has given rise to the countless studies on the "magic" of the moving picture. Indeed, there is some kind of enchantment in this strange fascination. But magic is merely a word describing a great many things but explaining none of them. The most profitable way to explain it is to return to its sources, since this "involvement" depends on a whole network of psychological compulsions themselves based on mental reactions affecting perception and judgment.

Suffice it to say that the "photogenics" of Louis Delluc and the first theorists, Jean Epstein's "animism," Henri Agel's "soul of the image," and Edgar Morin's "quality which adds an extra dimension," though they are personal definitions of the same phenomenon, are merely explanations of the "narcotic properties of the poppy" type.

One of the least obvious features of the film image is that it is a striking reflection

of the continual antagonism between the unity of the object (perceived for what is unique and essentially topical in it) and the innumerable possibilities which it presupposes and which *analogon* implies. Nowhere else is it so obvious—this division between reality and appearance, between the concrete and abstract, between the immanent and transcendent—all complementing and justifying each other in a formal unity, the *image*.

THE FILM IMAGE AND VERBAL EXPRESSION

Say I am reading *War and Peace* and am talking about it with a few friends. Each of them, if he has read it, will recognize that we are talking about the same book—which we all know objectively as the work of Tolstoy. It is Tolstoy who presents the setting, the atmosphere, and the society, who analyzes the characters and events according to a conception of the world and a style characteristic of him. Yet when I am reading the book, the author is no longer Tolstoy; it is I, through him.

In fact, the author merely provides me with words, words charged with meaning and, as it were, transparent with their signification—as they must be, since any rhythmically exaggerated prose or overelaborate form risks drawing attention to itself, thereby creating a screen instead of effacing itself before the idea it intends to suggest. (Lyrical prose feeds on description. It exaggerates whatever it describes but can never reach the level of analysis, which is obscured by the opacity of the lyricism. The psychological novel must also have style, but one which depends less on the rhythm and form of the words than on a way of expressing, a means of expressing, a living reality, directly experienced and recognized as such.)

Transparent with their signification,

therefore, words lead me directly to that signification. I perceive them as “signifieds,” not as “signs.” My progress through the novel is not from one word to the next but from one idea to the next; and these ideas are presented to me less by the words than by their connections, i.e., in sentences organized according to a predetermined signification. Now, though these ideas are “suggested” to me, it is I who structures them, who creates a *personal* picture, who transforms them into “images.” And it is these images, charged with meaning, which affect me emotionally—meaning, obviously, which is constantly subject to the reference and control of the author but which nevertheless remains relative to the meaning I ascribe to them.

In other words, I create a personal representation of a certain world and certain objects, to the extent that the emotion I experience becomes correlative with the work of art and this personal representation—which may be altered on the way by new references upsetting my original assumptions but which helps me collaborate in the novel I am reading and makes me half-responsible for the pleasure it gives me.

Thus it may be that my personal representation of *War and Peace* has nothing in common with the representation made by a reader more versed than myself in the manner, customs, and social life in Russia at the time of Alexander I. But even with the help of the description, the analyses, and indeed everything expressible through the words, how could a reader who knows nothing of tsarist Russia be expected to imagine not only the battle of Borodino (pure spectacle) but also the social milieu of the Dolokhovs, the private life of the Rostov family, Prince André, his relationship with Natasha, her attitude to him, her spiritual development, and even the character of Pierre Bezoukhov?

Suffice it to say that for the reader, the

"intelligibility" of the work, its signification, meaning, implication, and influence (literary, moral, or social), in a word, its "value," depend to a large extent on his (the reader's) cultural awareness, his knowledge of the social milieu described, the connections of that milieu with the world, and, of course, his capacity for appreciating the author's style.

But valid or not, consistent or not with the author's intentions (allowing for the margin of personal interpretation which every imagination presupposes), the "reality" imagined by the reader is "experienced" by him in exactly the same way as perceived reality. The author creates the theme, but it is the reader who animates that theme and "puts it into visual terms." Reading can be said to consist in the "actualization in the imagination" of the "theme" of the novelist. Each of us creates his own actualization; each of us has *his own Bovary, his own Père Goriot, his own Raskolnikov, his own Rastignac, his own Rabouilleuse*. And one might well wonder, in view of the limitations on the filmmaker and the priorities he is forced to consider, whether the disappointment we all experience with the adaptation of a masterpiece is not due merely to the discrepancy between a particular representation of an object and the idea of it which each of us conjures up; for it is hardly conceivable that every reader of Balzac or Tolstoy should have such a highly developed cultural background as to give him the capacity for performing an exhaustive critical analysis pointing out the limitations or omissions of the adaptation or adaptor.

Thus, relying upon and even exploiting the reader's powers of imagination and comprehension, the novelist presents characters with specific roles to play within the body of the novel from which he is able to draw conclusions about their lives and behavior, even their existence. But whatever he may do to try to lose his own personality

from his work, the author is always evident in his characters. However true and lifelike their psychology, it is nevertheless a subjective creation, since analysis, in literature, is merely the author's opinion of his characters, his detachment as he considers them, judging them by absolute criteria which he himself establishes. It only becomes *genuine* psychological analysis when the subject is the author himself, observing himself, studying himself, and telling his own story — like Proust — or putting himself in the place of the central character, ascribing to it his thoughts and emotions — like James Joyce. Thus the most usual ploy for the author, at the same time as he describes to us the external features which he is duty bound to observe, is to share with us the innermost thoughts, impressions, and different reactions of his heroes, placing himself — and, at the same time, us, his readers — inside their consciousness.

The cinema, on the other hand, presents only actions. Though the characters are the creation of the filmmaker, at least they are there, present and active and "in the flesh." Dissociated from creative imagination, they seem to have an independent, exclusive existence which is objective and no longer merely conceptual. However basic their psychology, it is always "located." The characters are drawn according to circumstance and their development always depends on an effectively "experienced" reality. They are human beings "in the world"; they act and are acted upon. Which is why many characters and situations valid in the novel do not "hold up" on the screen. Often they are simple concepts granted an illusory and abstract existence. However convincing it may be in fiction, this existence is not as secure in a "true" reality where characters and situations must "retain their credibility" in the context of a network of relationships and circumstances which test their authenticity.

(which the novelist has the luxury of abstracting or omitting). Thus film presents behavior and attitudes. It suggests and implies but never (generally speaking) draws any conclusions, leaving this to the audience presumed (often mistakenly) to be educated. In this respect, it is more advanced than the novel. In the novel, we become aware of the inner consciousness through external phenomena and the analysis, always descriptive, is the product of associations determined by "observable" evidence. It is in fact synthetic, since the characters reveal themselves and psychologically "construct themselves" through their actions.

In a film, the characters, world, and society visualized by the filmmaker are effectively present and their intrinsic signification is clearly "contained" in the images which present them. This means that "what is shown" and "what is signified" are perceived at the same moment in a sort of "act of consciousness" involving perception and comprehension. The audience does not have to imagine what it is shown: all it has to do is surrender to the images and "live" the represented reality. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "film is not thought out; it is perceived." But, as we have noted elsewhere, what we are referring to here as the "signified" is an immediate datum relating to the perceived reality. It is merely a quality, a feature of that reality.

Which is why we cannot help but think, with M. Cohen-Séat, that in the cinema "the audience is never informed of something but *through* something." The two processes happen simultaneously. Therein, he says, lies "the whole difference between a (secondary) transmitter and direct reality."

Of course, we are not informed of something through a transmitter (considered as an abstract sign), since we are receiving a directly perceptible concrete reality. We are informed *through* a reality presented *first of*

all for what it is but almost always indicative of *something else*. In fact, we are informed of something *through* something. It is *through* the pince-nez that we are informed of the absence of Dr. Smirnov, i.e., the result of an action which consists of throwing him overboard. It is *through* the glass ball slipping from Kane's grasp that we are informed of his death. It is *through* the glass and the spoon (in the very first wide angle) that we are informed of Susan's poisoning (*Citizen Kane*).

Moreover, though film is not "thought," it must provide "material for thought," and it is time perhaps to establish the following: film absolves us of the need to imagine what it shows us, but it requires us to imagine *with* what it shows us through the associations which it determines. The image is not an end in itself; it is a *start*. *Nothing will ever be understood in the cinema as long as the represented data are regarded as its final thematic purpose.*

It is all too obvious, in mediocre films, that the theme is contained in these data, this "narrative" (but, equally, anecdote is the purpose of adventure novels and pulp novelettes). It is a matter of knowing what we are dealing with and on what level. We are speaking here of the specific qualities of film and not of a specific film (although a certain number of films have been able to create something out of these fundamental qualities).

To follow the analogy (or, rather, the antithesis) between the visual and the verbal, it should be noted that in a novel, the action may be signified by an abstract idea. I can say: "Pierre walks along the road." In the cinema, I am unable to express this idea. I must translate it, through a concrete representation, as if to say: "Pierre is walking along the road" (a use of the present continuous unknown in the French language but common in English). Also, he is walking along a *particular* road: *this one* and

none other. Which comes down to saying that, in the cinema, all actions are actions *as they happen*. Everything is *actual*, overlapping well and truly in space and time.

Consequently, only one tense is possible: the *present*. In fact, there is only the present, just as in objective reality where the fact of existing is understood as such only in its immediate manifestation: the action no longer exists once it has been accomplished. It becomes part of what we call the past but only by virtue of our memory retaining the impression of a momentary stimulation. It is remembered but the past exists only for us. It is a subjective reality, but it is also a nonreality. Objectively, one action succeeds another, one state succeeds another, and so on. Everything which may "exist potentially" (through our consciousness recognizing a future action as possible or considering it as probable) and which has yet to be realized belongs to the future, that is, to the nonexistent. There *is* only the present.

The concepts past and future have no meaning at all for someone without the memory faculty, living a vegetative life. Whatever consciousness one might suppose he possesses could only be the consciousness of *existing*. He could never know that he is changing or that he continues to exist, since this presupposes his remembering that he has been existing. So all he can know is a perpetually present "actuality." We remember objects to the extent that we are conscious of them and to the extent that they have a "time and place" corresponding with our own; but the objects themselves are what they are and then become immediately different: another grouping, another state, another phase. Without memory or consciousness, they are moved rather than move of their own accord. They react to impulse and their "indifference" is merely the effect of their inertness. They are there without being conscious of being

there and for them also (dare we say it?) their presence constitutes an absence. Naturally, everything is consequent on a previous past, but that consequence is *what is* and what alone exists at *that particular* moment. In other words, the present is the immanence of causes and effects, that is, the state of *existing* perpetuating itself by changing; it is time passing, unconscious that it is passing, but which *is*. And which is everything it could be at every moment of itself. To use a figurative expression, it is the "future" effectively experienced, i.e., "as it happens," "as it is taking place."

It will be argued that time and "objective" reality have meaning only for the consciousness perceiving them. *Meaning*—yes. But by the very fact that being conscious presupposes being conscious *of*, there is necessarily a "something," a physical reality of which we are conscious, the source of *that something* we are conscious of. Now, this reality, whether or not it is perceived, whether or not it can be perceived, only exists in the here and now, since the fact of existing is only justified by and predicated on "present existence"—otherwise it does not exist or exists no longer.

Only we who are aware of the successive states of objects, who can divide time arbitrarily into past, present, and future, can appreciate the movement directing these objects and "projecting" them into the future. In plain language, this movement *is*. It succeeds itself in a perpetual state of "time-being"—the effect of *existing*—and does not project itself toward a future. This is what we mean by *consciousness* of possibility or probability, the logical consequence of a certain time-being, whose terms of existence are related to its being a present "in the process of developing" and which exists only inasmuch as it is present. Dependent on all contingent previous and simultaneous states, each "state" is both ephemeral and *different*, since everything is

mutually dependent in a reality totally involved in each of its moments. There can be no "precise" reproduction of a particular state. Each one is unique. And this very uniqueness is the result, the *guarantee of its very existence*.

Not only is the cinema limited to presenting objects in the *present* tense but, always presenting circumstances in a constant state of action and reaction, it alone of all the arts is able to signify the immanence of reality, capturing the "here and now" in a narrative "unity," i.e., within a space of time which is existence itself preserved and pursued in the continuous actuality of its development.

To return to our analogy: in narrative, the narrator recounting a past event continues to be present. When, for instance, he tells us "I was very late for school that morning and was scared I'd be told off, especially since Monsieur Hamel had told us he'd be testing us on participles and I hadn't a clue," he is looking at a past event he can recall to share with us. He sees it through his memory; he reconstructs the scene and makes it recur before his eyes as a series of mental images. By recomposing it for ourselves, we understand perfectly the "distance" between the past event and the act of narration which the narrator performs in the present. It is, as it were, a look at the past from the vantage point of the present.

There is nothing like this in the cinema. When a character describes a memory, the transition from present to past is indicated either by the evidence of the facts, by commentary, or by action with dialogue (subtitles in the case of silent films). Whatever the technique used, we know where we are; the events we see taking place before our eyes are located in time through their relation with what we have already seen. But they still take place in the "here and now." The past is "actualized." It is no longer memory; it is an action "in-the-process-of-tak-

ing-place." It all happens as though we feel we have been suddenly transported back in time. Our attention is held by the action happening in a directly perceptible concrete reality. The past, as such, does not exist in the cinema. All past action is a "present" transferred into the "life" of the drama via a logical or psychological association; it is the present "in the past"—but always the present.

Which is why some psychologists have felt justified in saying that the "vision of the past in the cinema does not correspond with an act of consciousness relating to remembered objects." This is certainly true but a "backwards shift in time" when the hero has been seen to lapse into a gloomy daydream does not presume to present the daydream "in its subjective state." What the character is *thinking* is not revealed, merely *what he is thinking about*. Once again we enclose an "interiority" by taking it "from the outside." The subjective image is quite different from this supposed representation of memory.

But what essentially distinguishes visual from verbal expression is the fact that the latter is made up of a series of distinct terms which signify through their successive relationships, contributing, each in turn, an element of the overall structure. All verbal expressions are contingent to a greater or lesser degree upon time passing (except, perhaps, interjections which stand by themselves). Each word has a signification predicated on its meaning within the phrase and each phrase has a signification relative to the collection of terms which it comprises. Every description, every analysis, is made up of a sequence of complementary and mutually corrective phrases, created by the gradual definition of the elements of an entity synthetically constructed by the thought. Verbal signification appears to the consciousness in the same way as a photographic plate, whose shapes,

subtleties, and shading are gradually revealed in the developing bath.

Film signification is also successive, but it is organized in terms of images. Now, an image is *already* a complete *entity* in itself. It represents a space, a collection of objects and relationships all simultaneously perceived. It would require several pages of text to describe the content of a single shot: so many verbs to signify states, movements, and actions; so many subjects, attributes; so many direct, indirect, or adjectival complements! Thus a shot cannot be the equivalent of either a word or a phrase; rather it is the equivalent of a whole series of phrases. Several phrases are needed to describe even the simplest closeup, and a great number are needed for a description of a more complicated wide angle.

Which explains why the cinema, before being a language, is a means of expression, like painting. The image "in itself" is not the most basic unit of film expression. But being a fundamental element, it becomes clear that before being narrative, before being organized dramatically in time, before being *rhythm*, the cinema is *space*, that is, the representation of a certain area. It is associated in this sense with the principles of painting and the plastic arts.

This perception of a homogeneous whole organically structured by means of a system of heterogeneous and separate elements suggests a definition of the image as a *syncretic* expression (supposing it has none of the pejorative connotations attributed to it in philosophy). It might even be said (paradoxically, it would seem) that the film image is both syncretic and eclectic, since this system is the effect of a choice, the result, often, of compositional experimentation.

Which completely refutes André Bazin's claim that the cinema, in contrast with literature, is obliged to signify more or less that "every evening, the marquise took her tea at five o'clock." Doubtless Bazin intended

to emphasize the concrete nature of the moving image, but he chose a poor example. In fact, though the cinema is sometimes required to describe to us in precise detail an action of this kind, it never does so *explicitly*—as does literature. Narrative, when it provides information of this kind, is obliged to say: "every evening the marquise took her tea at five o'clock." Film simply shows us a corner of the setting: in her receiving room, the marquise is taking tea with a few middle-aged friends. We see what is happening, where it is happening; we hear what is being said and, *incidentally*, we notice, on the mantelpiece, the clock showing that it is five o'clock. In this way we *discover* that the marquise, receiving a few friends today, is taking tea at five o'clock. It is only through the conversation, i.e., *indirectly*, that we learn that she never departs from this daily routine. Reality is presented to us, vivid, intense, and intimate; whereas the novel, when it has to present characteristic information without developing a redundant scene, is obliged to fall back on a signification both synthetic and substantial, as abstract as it is ludicrous.

On the other hand, the novelist always holds one advantage over the filmmaker, in that he can describe what he wants, what he thinks is essential, and can ignore the rest. I can only see what he wants me to see. If he draws attention to the behavior of a particular character or insists on analyzing him in detail, I have to disregard the setting (which is merely sketched in), whereas in the cinema, though the director might isolate his characters temporarily in a closeup, the setting is still visible. Though it is in the back-ground, it is still there, with them and at the same time as them, with its detail and characteristic features. The wide angle allows me to see it in its entirety. I will see it again presently; it is never completely lost from sight. I never forget that the characters are actually act-

ing in the real world. As René Micha so rightly points out, "the cinema, despite its inflexibility, cannot prevent our attention or, at least, our eyes from being drawn to a specific part of the decor, to a secondary character, maybe to the main character's hand (where they were not meant to stray). We may, within certain limits, read the signs differently from the way they are presented to us. For instance, we may shift our attention temporarily from Tim Holt's mouth, where cheekfuls of food and violent oaths are jumbled together, to concentrate on the lady serving in the kitchen (*The Magnificent Ambersons*), exactly as we do when we look at a painting by Vermeer or Tintoretto; certain films invite this (at the same time giving us free rein), like Franz Hals's *Echt paar ten voeten uit*, in which different plants—thistles and ivy—are tangled, perhaps symbolically, around the feet of the married couple. This slight ambiguity, together with all the other ambiguities I have mentioned, is precisely what makes the cinema potentially so successful. A film becomes a means of knowledge and a work of art when its different elements compete, playing against each other, to reveal an existence through the concrete relevant facts which first muddle it up and then fix it before our eyes: when it offers—to use a phrase of Heidegger's "the experience of unity in diffusion" (*La Vérité cinématographique*).

This difference, not only of means and form but also of signification and means of signifying, is evidence of the difficulties of adaptation and the near impossibility of adapting a masterpiece with any fidelity, that is, without distorting the expression or content of the expression. It underlines again the futility of attempting to adapt certain works whose form and means of signifying are as contrary to film expression as they resemble it or appear to resemble it. To prove the point, I need only quote the

films taken from contemporary American novels.

We know that these novels exhibit an art tending toward the greatest possible objectivity. By avoiding lengthy descriptions, by merely "sketching in" the setting, by watching their characters living and acting, these novelists get right inside them—not through an analysis of their minds but through a close observation of their behavior. Associated into a series of successive approximations, into a sequence of interconnected deductions, their actions, recorded in a system of relationships and concrete interconnections, enable us to surmise the characters' mentality and personality (in the manner of "objective reporting"). What could be more cinematic, more directly transposable (one might say word for word, attitude for attitude)? Yet this is the exact opposite of what actually happens.

The method is the same, obviously, but the means and form so totally different that the resulting structure bears no resemblance whatever to film expression.

The most obvious example of this is to be found in the film based on Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*. It is not important that it was poorly realized (or that it was adapted from the play taken from the novel rather than directly from the novel), since Steinbeck considered his story an "experiment, an attempt to create a novel capable of being transposed wholesale onto the stage, or a play capable of being read like a novel," if we are to take M. Coindreau's word for it (*Aperçus de la littérature américaine*).

The story of Lennie has all the qualities of ancient Greek drama, interpreted in terms of an everyday news item. What is important here, though, is that the characters—Lennie, George, Curly, Mae, Candy—are not described and presented from the very first chapters as if they were characters

from a classical novel. On the contrary, it is only gradually that they take shape—both physically and morally—and the whole art of the novelist consists in making them *come alive* in our minds, allowing us to *discover* them through their actions. We are made conscious of their *whole* being only by the end of the novel. As Joseph Kessel points out in his preface to the French translation, "we must guess at what the author has chosen not to communicate." A unique art compels us to fill in the empty areas, the white spaces in the picture. We in fact complete the work of the novelist. We put the finishing touches to the canvas. We add the last stitches to the fabric. Lennie's weight and height register gradually in our minds as though wrapping a certain active mentality inside a physical body and revealing attitudes, actions, and reactions presented to us always in a fragmentary and transitory style. His hands, face, and eyes appear to us only as required by the context and when they have a bearing on the action.

The reverse, then, of what happens in the cinema. Though it does reveal the characters gradually, the cinema presents them to us in the totality of their physical presence. Suppose we are shown, at the start of a film, a pair of feet trampling through long grass and hands retrieving a hare caught in a noose; we must know immediately to whom the feet and hands belong. Physical presence is mandatory in the cinema, whereas in the novel the idea is sufficient.

Consequently, from the very first images of the film, we *see* Lennie. Through his behavior, through his look of a hunted animal, we become aware of his being; we piece him together almost completely. Though we have no idea what is going to happen, we *already* know the conditions of the drama. Everything is presented to our eyes, i.e., everything which the novel was so careful to leave in shadow for as long as possible. One could almost say that all

that is left for the film to do is develop the latent drama whose circumstances are established in the very first images. Tragedy gives way to melodrama; the purpose of the novel is undermined.

The same might be said, with similar justification, of such films as *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre*, etc. If *The Grapes of Wrath* is a remarkable film, it is not because of the unique talent of John Ford but because of the fact that this work stands somewhat apart from the experiments in form of the American novel. Faulkner (with the exception, perhaps, of *Sanctuary*) does not work in the cinema. I can think of only one author whose work is evidence of his experiments in this direction and who might be adapted successfully for the screen and that is John Dos Passos: perhaps because the structure of his work, its composition, and even its expressive form are directly inspired by the cinema. *Manhattan Transfer*, which for me remains one of the best and most original novels of this century, is nothing more than a film (an extraordinary film) written, developed, and signified with words. The exception proves the rule.

I said a while back that since they are placed "in the world" in a manner both objective and concrete, the characters of a film cannot be separated from their setting. We saw how, if the action invites it, the audience can allow its attention to stray to a secondary detail. It can even pass over the dramatic events and concentrate on the setting in which these take place.⁷ But the presence of the setting does not mean that our attention is drawn to it to the exclusion of everything else. Quite the contrary: it reinforces the action; it makes it specific. In really good films, it more or less determines, sometimes even signifies, the action and frequently even becomes a character in the drama.

We have said again and again that the film image is above all an image of a space, a space in which an action takes place and which involves us in that action. However, it is not a simple relationship of form and content as, for example, in the playing area of a stage which "contains" the drama but remains outside it. When we go to the theater, we see a certain action occur within a certain framework, a framework whose essential characteristics are determined by the playwright: "Monsieur Agazzi's study. Antique furniture; old masters on the walls. A door at the back, hidden by a tapestry. A door up-stage left, opening into the drawingroom, also hidden behind a tapestry. There is a telephone on a desk. Divan, armchairs, chairs, etc." These are Pirandello's stage directions for the second act of *Right You Are If You Think You Are*.

And, in fact, the act takes place in a set like this (according to the staging which may alter, to a greater or lesser extent, the relative positions of the characters in a decorative ensemble conceived more or less successfully). However, none of this alters the drama. After all, it might just as easily take place in another setting. The place is immaterial. It is a convenient place and the set is nothing more than an *indication*. It is a conventional space suggesting the "idea of reality" (more concrete perhaps than the placards of Elizabethan theater) but it in no way provides a "feeling of reality." Besides, such a feeling is irrelevant, since the only "true reality," i.e., the only interest, lies in the drama itself; and the drama, that is, the moral crisis, tragic situation, psychology, emotions, character development, are all expressed, developed, and signified *exclusively by the dialogue*. The space contributes nothing. It contains—that is all.

In the novel, the space of the drama is quite often a "signifier." It contributes in some measure to the course of events, makes the action clear and more or less

defines it. However, as we have seen, it is always fragmented, always incomplete. The author does no more than describe what has a bearing on the plot development. The reader's imagination has to do the rest.

Conversely, in the cinema the space is presented—relative to the particular field of view—in its "existential" entirety. The setting is presented as a concrete reality with all the elements comprising it. Everything is actually and objectively present.

One could never say that between the objective reality of the space and the no less objective reality of the events taking place in it, there is always a connection between signifier and signified, since, though the setting may indeed contribute to the signification of the drama, it does not always do so and it does not do so necessarily. It is a question of genre and style (expressionism or what have you), not general aesthetics.

It is no less true that there is *always* a more or less determinative connection between the two, in the sense that space, contrary to the way it is used in the theater or in literature, is always *involved* in the action. Indeed, space can exist only by virtue of and for the benefit of the action and is presented to us with and at the same time as the action. Not only are the drama and space of the drama inseparable, but they are inconceivable the one without the other. The space actually composes, through the shapes of the set, the plastic material helping to represent the action, to "construct it in images," at the same time as it establishes the framework within which the action is played out.

Carried along by the same action, led by the same rhythm, the setting, objects, and characters form one narrative reality—the "film space," that is, a space organized and prescribed by the drama, structured and ordered with a view to the expression and signification of the drama. This space—let

us call it the "image of space"—is a "whole" resulting from all their intrinsic and extrinsic interrelationships.

The cinema, as we shall see, is a language of objects. Now, the objects belonging to the universe of the drama are, in some way, involved by it. They all (or almost all) contribute to the action. In this respect, the experiments with multiscreen projections conducted by André Bazin are significant.

"In *Le Jour se lève*," he reports, "Marcel Carné makes the furniture in Gabin's bedroom play an important part. This furniture is simple and sparse; it is what one would expect to find in an impoverished worker's garret. Yet, when the film has been projected and I ask people to tell me what the pieces of furniture actually are (there are only six pieces, including the bedside table), they normally do not remember the large Victorian chest of drawers, which is plainly visible. I have conducted the same experiment more than a hundred times with more than ten thousand audience members; it has failed only once—which greatly surprised me—and then it was simply because I projected the first three reels, with the result that everyone saw the chest of drawers. I think that the explanation (easy to deduce from an analysis of the *mise-en-scène*) must lie in the fact that the chest of drawers is overlooked because it is the only piece of furniture which *does not fulfill at any moment* in the film a psychological or dramatic role; in short, it *signifies* nothing. It is such a well-made film containing such a wealth of detail that the audience's complete attention is necessary to appreciate the symbolism of the *mise-en-scène* and the abstract value it gives to the objects. With the effect that the audience, far from being distracted by the chest of drawers (whose sole justification is the realism of the setting) finally comes to ignore it completely. On

the other hand, the people to whom I projected only the first three reels were not obliged to concentrate in this way. The other pieces of furniture had not all completely assumed their value as signs gradually conferred by the action; they were still on the same mental level as the chest of drawers and, therefore, though the latter had been visible for a period three times shorter than if the whole film had been projected, there was no reason for it to be overlooked (*Connaissance du cinéma*).

As a general rule, what makes cinema and literature two apparently contradictory means of expression is the fact that their basic structures contain functions and significations which are never homologous and never transposable. One cannot make the meaning of a phrase or group of phrases correspond with the meaning of a shot; nor can one expect to obtain the same signifying value in both. By the mere fact that a different method is used to say the same thing, it says something completely different: another aspect is understood and another meaning is expressed.

The novel inevitably always moves from the abstract to the concrete, since it generates in the mind of the reader a "representation" through a complex of conventional signs. The "message" of literature is never immediate but (invariably and uniformly) *mediate*.

The cinema, on the other hand, moves from the concrete to the abstract. It *directly* presents its purpose, that is, the concrete representation of the world and its objects. Then it *exploits these direct data as instruments of mediation*. Which is why we said that though the cinema is *primarily* a language (to give the adverb a sense of qualitative priority), it is not so genetically.

If literature is indeed an art form whose primary ingredient—language—is a previous, independent reality, the cinema is not (and could not *become*) a language except

insofar as it is an art. Since it is primarily a method of recording and reproduction, it is quite possibly neither art nor language and might have value only in what it reproduces.

The teaching film and didactic documentary (which have no other purpose than to present a reality whose power derives from itself, attempting meanwhile to present that reality as objectively as possible) cannot be described as language or work of art—even though certain craft skills are required to conceive and produce them. They signify and explain nothing *in themselves*. When what is represented is incapable by itself of conveying sufficient information, a commentary linked to the images takes on the task of explaining them. If there is a "signifier" here, then, it is the text, not the images. Conversely, when documentary presents an original and personal vision of the world and its objects, that is, when it becomes an *eye*, it also becomes a "poem." And as a poem it is organized, dialectically composed; in other words, it becomes language.

This is what makes the cinema (genetically speaking) *primarily* a means of expression. Only because the expression is developed and organized in time does it become language. In the cinema—as in every other means of expression—our access to ideas is through and because of emotion, whereas in the verbal language our access to emotion is through and by means of ideas.

It is clear that the "indefinite" image whose effect and consequences we examined a while back, that is, an image as inorganic and impersonal as possible, does not exist *in fact*. It is merely an abstraction. All film images necessarily contain the structures of the objects they reproduce. However, since these objects are organized *within a frame*, the film image can never be inorganic and impersonal. The frame (necessar-

ily chosen by the filmmaker) itself creates a complex of precise relationships between the objects inferred by its very existence. In this way, it becomes a determining factor whose importance and significance we shall examine in the next section.

Structures of the Image

Shots and Angles

As we have said, the *shot* (comprising a sequence of snapshots of the same action or object from the same angle and in the same field of view) can be considered the smallest unit of film. And so it is. However, this notion of the shot is connected with the history of the cinema.

When, after D. W. Griffith's first explorations, the cinema began to become aware of its resources, i.e., when the technique of recording scenes from many different points of view became commonplace, the technicians were compelled to give names to the different shots in order to distinguish between them. To do this, they used the position of the main characters as reference, dividing the space up into planes perpendicular to the axis of the camera, describing, if you like, the distance from the camera guaranteed to be in focus.

Let us be clear about our terms: everything within the range of the lens is called the "field of view": the closer the shot, the narrower the field of view. Furthermore, before 1915 (with very rare exceptions) shots were static, since only 35-millimeter and 50-millimeter lenses were available. Thus whenever a director wished to shoot a scene from closer in or farther away, he was forced to change the camera setup and move the camera closer to the actors or farther away from them. Each different shot required a different setup.

If the shot is relative to the position of the

actors vis-à-vis the camera (and, by extension, the audience), one can see that there would be as many possible positions as points on the straight line of the optical axis. Nevertheless, to make their definition more convenient, the various shots are generally divided according to the following scale:

1. *Long shot*—containing a general scene far away from the camera. In *Alexander Nevsky*, the German knights beginning their charge in the distance and galloping toward the camera, are in long shot.

2. *General view*—encompassing a general scene closer than a long shot but whose field stretches quite far into the background. These sorts of shot can really be used only in exterior work.

3. *Establishing shot*—the same as the previous but whose space is limited by the set (interior of a train station, dancehall, or huge room).

4. *Wide angle*—similar to (3), but with a smaller field of view, where the characters are both nearer and less numerous.

5. *Long medium shot*—framing the characters from head to foot. With more than one character, some may be framed in the "American shot," while the others remain in the background. The term refers only to the main characters.

6. *Close medium shot*—frames the characters from the knees up.

7. *American shot*—frames the characters from the waist up. This shot description, used exclusively by French directors, became current in 1911. It was first used in an article by Victorin Jasset studying the use of these shots in films from Vitagraph and claiming the superiority—already obvious at the time—of American cinema.⁸ In the United States, the term *medium shot* describes this kind of shot and not the long medium shot as is generally thought in France.

8. *Mid-shot*—frames the bust.

9. *Head and shoulders*—speaks for itself.

When two faces are contained in the same frame, the term *close two-shot* is sometimes used.

10. *Closeup*—frames only a part of the face, the rest remaining out of shot.

Clearly these terms may be used to refer to details or objects taken in medium shot, mid-shot, or closeup, when the director wishes to isolate them for the purpose of emphasis.

By *angle* of the shot, we mean the angle from which the scene is recorded by the camera. The same scene may be shown from face on, from the side, from above or below, as well as from near or far; and the characters may be shot in profile, from the back, or in three-quarters. Shots taken from below or above are called *tilts, upward* or *downward*.

Obviously the angle of incidence is wider the closer the object to the camera. A downward tilt on a distant scene (such as the top of a hill looking down onto a battle raging in a distant valley) is wider than a downward tilt on a head-and-shoulders shot (framing, for instance, a dog sleeping at his master's feet). However, as we shall see, sharply angled tilts must be justified by a dramatic or psychological element in the film.

Up to 1923, close shots were always made on the horizontal, "at eye level." Downward and upward tilts were practically unheard of except in wide angles. It was Jean Epstein who first "dared" to give the camera relative independence. Liberated from the need to be descriptive, shots became language. In a way, they became the filmmaker's "judgment" of his characters. Thus analysis stole a march on narrative while reinforcing the camera's "ability to be everywhere at once."

After *L'Auberge rouge* and *Le Coeur fidèle*, the use of sharply angled tilts quickly became widespread; the "signifying" closeup also. With Murnau (*The Last Laugh*) and

E. A. Dupont (*Variety*), the subjective shot pioneered by Abel Gance in *La Roue* (1922) became an important component in the drama, and the alternation of analytical and descriptive shots assumed a permanent value with Eisenstein and Pudovkin (*The Battleship Potemkin* and *Mother*, 1925-26).

Of all camera movements, the simplest is obviously the *pan*, which is identical to the vision of a stationary man turning his head to the right or left or letting his eyes travel slowly upward or downward. The camera remains in a fixed position and pivots on its axis.

The traveling (or *tracking*) shot can mean several different things. It describes a "moving" shot, i.e., one which records the countryside from a moving train, car, skilift, whatever. The camera remains in a fixed position and moves with the vehicle on which it is fixed. This type of tracking-shot is as old as cinema itself (Alexander Promio's *The Grand Canal at Venice*, for instance). The term is used more generally, however, to describe the "dollying" movement of the camera, mounted on a platform which moves on rails or rubber wheels. This allows the camera, for instance, to travel alongside two characters walking down a road; the camera's movement, however, is independent of the movement of the characters. In other words, it may move either in front of them or let them catch up so they are more tightly framed or, inversely, follow them and catch them up. Or else it may follow them laterally. The first director to use this kind of tracking shot — moving with the actors' movements — was Griffith in 1909.

A more recent technique is the fixed-circle tracking shot, moving among static characters (in a restaurant or the stalls of a theater, for instance), in which the camera captures the behavior of some of the characters in the drama or "picks out" the movements of one

of them. It was used for the first time by Murnau in *The Last Laugh* in 1925.

The hand-held camera was sometimes used for this effect, notably by Abel Gance in *Napoleon* (1927), but it was soon abandoned because the effect of walking was to produce an unpleasant jerky sort of shot. Nowadays we find unwatchable any tracking shot where the frame is unsteady or shaky. The most important quality of the shot is to maintain the frame in perfect axial stability, whatever the movement being recorded.⁹

However, right up until 1930, whatever form of camera platform used, the camera could move only horizontally. In order to follow more complicated movements (such as going up stairs, any movement up or down) and to achieve greater fluidity, the Americans invented and built, after the advent of talking pictures, a piece of apparatus called the "crane," which made movement in all directions possible. A shot is said to be "overhead" when the camera moves around the actors, follows one out of the group, goes up stairs to follow another, comes back down, and moves in space as though it were flying. The crane is a telescopic jib extending from twelve to thirty feet and pivoting, both horizontally and vertically, on an axis mounted on a truck. At the end of the jib, an articulated platform supports the camera and the technicians. Clearly the combined movements of the camera, platform, crane, and truck allow for any number of possibilities. The crane was first used by Lewis Milestone in *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1930. From then on its use became widespread and the "overhead" shots in *The Cranes Are Flying* (M. Kalatozov) and Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1959) are particularly striking.

Today, because of the extensive use of moving shots, the camera is almost always mounted on a dolly — a sort of "minicrane." The maneuverability of the dolly — adapted

to the requirements of small sets—allows for all the movement combinations of the crane, but on a smaller scale.

However, moving shots have at the same time greatly altered the aesthetics of the cinema, particularly with regard to storyboard and editing. We may say at this point that while the shot and the setup are identical in static shots, it is not so in tracking shots, which, by the very fact that they move, contain successively different "fields of view." The characters and the setting, recorded during the camera movement, are captured in long shot, in medium, then in head and shoulders—as we see in Welles's films. And since by its very definition a shot is of fixed spatial determination, it is absurd to speak in terms of a single shot when dealing with a tracking shot.

It is quite wrong to say (as some critics have) that Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, shot entirely with a moving camera in eight complicated setups, is composed of eight shots. It is simply (to reuse an old formula) to confuse the units of shot and setup!

Generally speaking, one can say that the tracking shot is a series of successive shots (with practically every frame corresponding to a different point of view), in the same way as the circle is a succession of straight lines.

If the "field of view" is the space within the frame of the image, then the reverse of that is the *reverse angle*, in other words, a setup taken in the opposite direction but relating to the same shot. For instance, if a character seen face on is *one angle*, then the same character seen from the back is the *reverse angle*.

The alternation between one shot and its symmetrical antithesis is called the *shot-reverse shot*. Let us use, as an example, a man and woman sitting facing each other. An establishing shot might frame them in profile; another might frame the woman from the front and the man from the back.

But if their conversation requires that they be isolated from their background (for instance, a restaurant), to show more clearly their respective reactions, one might use a medium shot framing the woman in three-quarter front profile *on the left side of the frame*, with the man appearing in three-quarter rear profile on the right. The reverse angle would show the man in a three-quarter front profile medium shot, but this time *on the right side of the frame*, with the woman's shoulders in the foreground on the left. This alternation might be continued, if required, as follows: A-B, A-B, A-B, etc.

It is obvious that the shot-reverse shot, which in the example shows an inverse symmetry of 180 degrees, might easily have a less obtuse angle relationship—120 or 130 degrees, for example. This is called the *semi-reverse shot*. However, at 90 degrees it is no longer a reverse shot: the two characters are shown in profile. Of course, they can be completely isolated from each other by being shot in closeup, but then the spatial relationship is lost. For which reason, the technique is seldom used.

The shot-reverse shot technique lends itself to misuse for the fact that it provides easy solutions. The ill-considered use which mediocre directors put it to, shooting interminable conversations in what appears to be a dynamic way, has brought this device into disrepute. However, for directors who use it with discretion, it remains a valuable technique.

Moving shots have enabled the "new cinema" to use the *whole field of view*, giving back to space its objective reality more generally than the shot-reverse shot technique, which condenses and fragments its object. The "shot-in-depth" appeared for the first time in *Citizen Kane* in 1942.

The use of depth-of-field is not all that recent, but it was Welles who gave it new significance.¹⁰ The oldest example, to our

knowledge, is found in Louis Feuillade's *Fantomas* (1913). In one of the episodes, we see Lady Beltham sitting in her box in the theater; she fills the foreground as she looks at the stage shown in the background, on which an actor is playing a melodrama based on the adventures of Fantomas. It is this which gives the lady the idea of inviting the actor to take the place of the real Fantomas, who has been condemned to death. It should be added, however, that this complicated shot is only a "reminder." There have already been several more or less connected shots, showing us, on the one hand, Lady Beltham in her box and, on the other, the action being played out on the stage.

If a technique is to be judged from the standpoint of its dimensional complexity, then the most extraordinary shot-in-depth was achieved by Griffith in the part of *Intolerance* which deals with the sack of Babylon, at the moment when Cyrus's armies are scaling the fortifications of the city. During the first shot, on the palace steps, when the first attackers arrive from the left, we see, several hundred yards back into the frame, twenty or thirty groups of individuals acting and reacting in various ways—some preparing to defend themselves, others panicking and running away, others still quite unaware of the drama, going about their business unconcerned. It is obvious, however, that this can only ever be a *descriptive* simultaneity. While someone is doing one thing, someone else is doing another. Naturally these actions relate to the same general action, the same dramatic scene, but they have no other connection. In Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (1930), there is also a simultaneity of actions, but these are already interacting dramatically.

Citizen Kane (also William Wyler's *Little Foxes* made around the same time) tries to make us see not only two or three characters following different actions simulta-

neously but also those two or three characters *reacting differently to the same cause* which we know secretly connects them. In this way, the simultaneity of the most diverse patterns of behavior, while establishing an obvious dramatic unity, points up the respective psychologies of each of the characters and does so, moreover, in a way that is both objective and concrete.

This innovation was made possible by the use of short focal-length lenses (18.5 millimeters), lately developed, in which the perspective distortion emphasizes, as we have said, the contrast between foreground magnified out of all proportion—and background. The opposition of form thereby reinforces the opposition of action, and the respective position of the characters underlines the dramatic relationships in the film.

Naturally this means of expression in no way denies the relevance of using shots separately, whose meaning and purpose are quite different. Moreover, it must be obvious that the simultaneity of scenes being played out in different locations (otherwise known as *parallel action*) can only be suggested by alternating events with successive fragmentation.

Nevertheless, the preference of directors these days, with or without depth-of-field (the cinema tending to emphasize the ambiguity of beings, the world and the objects in it rather than carving them up as it did previously with a kind of primitive Manichaeanism), is to capture the scenes, even dissected and fragmented, in all their apparent complexity. Which means that the classical formula of well-defined and clearly delineated shots is not as important as it was. We mentioned it only because the "liturgy of the cinema" has turned into a sort of transcendental canon to be obeyed as though it prescribed the fundamental prerequisite for the cinema to exist—though all it has ever been is a mere practical convenience.

In effect, when an image shows us a face in *closeup* on the extreme right of the frame and, in the rest, in *mid-shot*, two or three people behaving in a particular way, others in *long shot* and, in the *background*, someone coming into the room, we are hard put to define the shot according to established terminology. How might we describe it—establishing shot, long shot, what?

It would seem correct to call it an establishing shot, but (as we indicated with regard to the long medium shot) it becomes necessary, in that case, to describe precisely the relative positions of the characters, it being that they are all of equal importance and that the man entering from the background causing such different reaction might very well be the *main character*.

The shot description informs the cameraman as to the importance of each photographic field of view, but it ceases to be an indication of the director's ideas. Since this is written "in depth," the whole field of view has to be described, not just one particular part of it. Classical terminology is therefore valueless (although the term *shot* retains its meaning). Indeed, the shot can be said to show an action placed in a frame and containing a single *undifferentiated* field of view.

Generally speaking, a change of shot involves a change in the field of view and, inversely, a change in the field of view produces a change of shot (however gradual or continuous). Obviously this is not a general rule but a fact which certain exceptions are obliged to prove. Say we see, in medium shot, someone strolling in Paris; if the background suddenly changes (using back projection) and he continues to walk but this time in a forest, then the shot remains the same though the field of view has changed. Inversely, when in a fixed frame (a huge set, for instance) a character walks toward the camera from the background, that character is constantly altering the shot

as he walks forward, though the field of view remains the same.

We are justified in saying that there are as many changes of shot as there are changes in planes of focus in the course of the same take—the shot being determined, to repeat, by the position of the character or group of characters relative to the focal length of the lens.

It is still true to say that the organic unit of the "take"—described by directors of silent films as the "shot"—retains its unity, whatever the camera movements or planes, angles, and fields of view included in that "take." We are not objecting to the organic unit, merely to the term *shot* used to describe it. It is neither a shot nor a sequence but, quite simply, a number corresponding with a number in the shooting script.

However superficially tempting, the description "shot sequence" suggested by some of the younger critics is unsatisfactory.¹¹ For there are few (if any) shot sequences in which editing (or at least its principles) has not played a part. In these supposed shot sequences, the camera is in continual motion (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Rope*, etc.). It is a constant change of angle and point of view. In fact, instead of editing by joining end to end different shots taken at different times and different places, the editing takes place in the camera, producing the same sequence of shots in one single continuous movement, in the course of one single take. This method makes the sequence more difficult to direct, to keep in focus, but the result often gains in fluidity, in formal unity and dramatic continuity. However, though the execution may differ, the principles of editing (to which we shall return later) remain the same.

We would describe as *sequence* a series of images involving scenes happening in one place or setting, whatever the changes in angle or field of view (i.e., shots) included during the course of the "take" rel-

ative to those images. Thus, just as a novel is divided into parts, chapters, and paragraphs and a play is divided into acts and scenes, so a film divides up into sequences and shots. A group of sequences may form a part, but except in certain cases (*The Threepenny Opera*, *Wells Fargo*, etc.), this division is avoided as much as possible and the tendency is to unify the film into a homogeneous whole, whatever the intended duration of the scenes and number of places where they take place. So dividing a film into parts is merely a technical convenience, grouping together sequences occurring at the same time.

The division of the film into shots and sequences determines its overall structure. However, though this division must be sensed, it must not be too overt. The art consists in creating a unity—except when some form of punctuation becomes necessary. The forms of punctuation most widely used are the fade, the wipe, and the dissolve.

The *fade out*, followed by a *fade in* to the next sequence, indicates a long time lapse between two sequences: a "supplied" time affecting the represented action (in contrast with ellipsis which suggests the passage of time without it being apparent).

The *dissolve* (which joins the first and last images of two successive sequences) generally indicates a fast time change, a time lapse not affecting the action, whereas the *wipe* (which makes the images disappear to the right or left as though pushed out by the following images) usually indicates a change of place. Of course, these definitions are arbitrary and there is nothing to stop a dissolve or wipe being used to whatever purpose one wishes. They may, however, vary in length (anything from eight to forty-eight frames, i.e., from a third of a second up to two seconds—it is unusual for them to be longer). Once it was fashionable to give unusual shapes to wipes—circles,

checkerboards, triangles, for instance—but this method of moving from one sequence to another (so obvious and contrived) broke rather than punctuated the continuity of the action. Wipes are scarcely ever used except in films with only this type of stylistic extremism to recommend them.

Though they are forms of punctuation, wipes and dissolves also make it possible to move from one sequence to the next without making bad cuts (which become unnoticeable) or jump cuts between badly matched movements. But then they are only being used for the sake of expedience.

As we have said, what is important in a film (besides the aesthetic properties, which we shall study later on) is the feeling of *continuity*, combining shots and sequences, which is achieved by maintaining the unity and coherence of movement. Logical or dramatic continuity is established in the script, but there is also a *dynamic* continuity which can be considered here. This particular *continuity* has always been most difficult to achieve. Indeed, in the early days of cinema, the very short-length films were only able to show a simple action carried from beginning to end in the space of the single reel (the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* and *La Sortie des usines Lumière*). However, as soon as filmmakers tried to tell a story, in other words, as soon as they needed to introduce changes of scene and time, they were obliged to use the narrative techniques of the theater, i.e., successive tableaux.

Each "tableau" represented a sort of miniature episode. The sole point of view was that of a spectator sitting behind the orchestra pit, and "jumps" were made from scene to scene according to the images illustrating the various stages of the adventure, the only difference between it and the theater being the fact that there was no need to lower the curtain to move from one scene to the next, particularly

since there was sometimes a subtitle in between the scenes to explain or comment on the action. Fragmented in this way, the action was developed discontinuously in sets made from painted flats in which trompe l'oeil and false perspective depended on the unity of the point of view. When the director wished to "follow" a scene, passing from one tableau to another, he had to "retake" the action, with a very considerable overlap. Thus in Georges Méliès's *Voyage à travers l'impossible* (1904), the fourth tableau shows a crash site. We see Professor Maboulouf's car hurtling down a slope. It crashes through the wall of a house at the bottom. Tableau 5 presents the interior of the house. The occupants are sitting at the table happily chatting away. Suddenly the car crashes through a wall, causing panic among the terrified guests, who jump to safety.

The method of narrative was extensively used right up until 1908. However, the first feeling of continuity was provided in 1902 by the man who must be regarded as the originator of film narrative, the American Edwin Stratton Porter. It was a file describing the different stages in a large fire which inspired this innovator (who until then had been a cameraman with Edison) to tell a story through the simple collation of scenes, strung together in some sort of logical order. There being no dramatic element in the story, he invented a mother and her child caught in a fire in their house and saved at the last minute by firemen arriving in the nick of time. In fact, these were the only images he invented for the purpose. Thus *The Life of an American Fireman* was the first film whose meaning depended on the combination of a series of scenes. The images had a dual purpose: to trace the action and, more important, to transfer the action into the following image, thereby creating the story through the succession. Of course, they were all long shots (except for one closeup

showing an alarm bell—the mainspring of the dramatic action), but a large variety of images showed the fire engine speeding through different locations with the effect of holding back the resolution of the drama, creating however crudely what was later to be called "suspense time." Also for the first time, *The Life of an American Fireman* showed an action longer in reality than the projection time of the film: an abbreviation, in the same sense as a play.

Subsequently Porter believed that he would achieve a better result if he were to film, from beginning to end, a story conceived for the purpose, each shot being considered as a necessary element of the whole. A friend of his suggested that he take as a theme the plot of a very successful play of the time: *The Great Train Robbery*. Shot in less than a week in the autumn of 1903, this film may be regarded as the first narrative conceived in purely cinematic terms. Its influence proved to be immense. It became a model for future directors of what film was and how it should be used. It was and was to remain the paradigm, the archetype, of film, right up until Griffith's contribution, which refined and extended the principles of editing first established by Porter.

It must be admitted that though there is great variety, the "views" in Porter's film are all long shots. Many of the scenes are still "face on" to the camera—as in the theater—but several (the posse's pursuit, the forest fight, the attack on the engineer, the robbery of the passengers), shot in actual exteriors, are developed in terms of depth and exploit the respective distances of the characters from the camera. Though the movement in *The Great Train Robbery* is created more by the action it represents than by the variety of scenes or shots, the cinema's elementary possibilities discovered their first formal demonstration in this film.

The experiments of Smith and William-

son carried out in England at much the same time were to produce similar results. Though its influence lasted for several years, only theatrical convention could paralyze the development of an art which had already established its first principles at the beginning of the century.

In 1908 the best films—burlesques and chases—merely presented series of wide-angled shots whose sequence was, at least, defined by the mobility of the action. The rest were made up of disconnected and static tableaux. Actors performed as though they were on stage and used conventional mime to convey what they could not say with words.

The fundamental contribution of D. W. Griffith was his refusal to accept this stylistic tyranny. Believing that the maneuverability of the camera allowed for movement toward or away from the characters or even around them, he had his actors perform in a space unrestricted by the narrow confines of the stage. This space could be as large or small as circumstance and the dramatic intensity required.

Filming his heroes in closeup or long shot, face on or in profile, from the back or in three-quarters as from successive points of view, he put the audience right in the middle of the action, among the characters of the drama, *within* the space of the drama. *By seeing objects from successive points of view, the audience in fact perceived them in the same way as if it were able to move around them.* The impression of spatial reality consequently became an established fact. Needless to say, this impression was in no way intended or planned, since, at the time, its possibility had not even been suspected by the most eminent psychologist. Griffith merely intended to produce a greater impression of reality by following both the logic of the drama and the logic of an observer free from all restraint. His inspired intuition persuaded him to exper-

iment, however, and this effect was the unexpected result.

As André Malraux observed,

as long as the cinema remained merely a means for reproducing characters in movement, it was no more of an art than sound recording or photographic reproduction. Within a limited space—generally the stage in a theater, real or imaginary—actors performed their parts in a play or farce which the camera did no more than reproduce. The birth of the cinema as a means of expression (as opposed to reproduction) can be said to date from the breakdown of the *limited space*; from the period when the scriptwriter conceived his narrative in terms of separate shots, when he began to think not of photographing a play but of recording a succession of moments, of bringing the camera closer (thereby magnifying the characters where necessary on the screen) or taking it away but, most of all, of replacing the theatrical stage with the “field of view,” the space circumscribed by the screen—the field into which the actor enters and from which he exits and which the director chooses instead of being imprisoned in it. The means of reproduction in the cinema was the moving picture but its means of expression the succession of shots. . . . Thus it was in the separation into shots, in other words, in the freedom of the cameraman and director within the setting, that the possibility of expression in the cinema originated—that the cinema as an art was born. (*Psychologie du cinéma*)

It is an undeniable fact that the cinema as an art was born in 1915, i.e., with *Birth of a Nation*, Griffith's first successful film, the cinema's first masterpiece—in the same way that French literature can be said to originate in *La Chanson de Roland* and literature itself from the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*, or perhaps the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

To return to the subject, however: shots and tableaux shot separately had to be as-

sembled. And this sort of assembly, consisting of putting the shots and tableaux end to end in some sort of logical succession, is found for the first time in films shot around 1899. But then shots came to take the place of tableaux. Clumsy repeated actions had to be avoided; along came *editing*, which, at its most basic, merely ensures a continuity of movement from one shot to the next.

When we see an official commemoration in a newsreel, it might be presented in the following way:

- A. The president arrives in a limousine (long shot).
- B. He gets out of the limousine and shakes hands with the local dignitaries (medium shot).
- C. He walks with the dignitaries toward the war memorial (pan).
- D. At which he lays a wreath (closeup).

These images, spliced together, reconstitute the event as well as restoring its different phases. The movement begun in A is followed through in B, then in C and then in D, following the pattern of its development in reality. It is a continuity rather than a "discontinuity."

Previously—indeed, right up to 1925—filmmakers made sure that shot changes were covered by a change of angle. From a face-in longshot they would cut to a side-on medium shot or a three-quarters head and shoulders, and so on. In this way, if the relative positions of the characters were not exactly the same in cutting from long to medium shot, the change in viewpoint would disguise the variations. This made editing much easier, and poor films avoided the problem anyway by cutting subtitles in between the majority of shots. In fact, the scenes were shot in an order not automatically the same as the order of the action and, as yet, the continuity girl (or script supervisor) did not exist.

For practical reasons, scenes set in the same place are always shot at the same time, whatever their eventual position in the film. Nowadays, however, the script supervisor, sometimes using Polaroid photographs, is there to ensure that the actors' positions and setting of the props are such that the transition from, for example, shot 235 to shot 236 is perfectly continuous, though each might be shot separately several days apart—especially since, after 1925, *movement matching* became general practice.

When shots are matched, not to exploit dead time, that is, the hiatuses in the successive phases of a movement, but to cut into the action and continue it into the next shot, this is called *movement matching*. Discovered by German directors (Murnau and Dupont) and American directors (King Vidor, Howard Hawks), adopted by the Soviets (Eisenstein and Pudovkin), *movement matching*—still called *overlapping movement*—has made film continuity considerably more flexible. We shall consider this in greater detail when we come to the principles of editing.

In the above example, concerning the newsreel, it is clear that shots cemented end to end do indeed restore the different phases of an event; none of them can give a specific meaning to what it reveals.

Aesthetically speaking, *editing* (or *montage*) is not so much the effect of matching images according to a logical continuity as of giving the images a meaning beyond that of the information presented in them, creating a new power deriving from the juxtaposition of two or more shots which then assume a value they could never have outside that association. Through *montage*, shots in a sequence behave in the same way as words in a sentence where subject, verb, and object only begin to have meaning when they are related to each other.

This meaning can be obtained through the juxtaposition of shock images which es-

tablish in the audience's mind an idea not directly connected with the objects represented (Eisenstein) or through purely cumulative juxtaposition—the effect always being greater than the sum of its component parts (Pudovkin). Two shots following each other during a pan or a tracking shot may produce a similar effect. Aesthetically, editing and montage are two entirely different processes nowadays. As with the opinion which holds that the shot and the take are identical (which, as we saw, does not hold water), the notion that editing and montage are one and the same really applied only in the silent cinema. At that time, only associations between static setups shot separately, then matched in editing were conceivable—the use of the tracking shot being the exception rather than the rule. But though not all editing is necessarily montage, any relationship between shots is automatically governed by montage.

However, the importance of montage, that is, the importance of signification obtained by juxtaposing images, has been exaggerated out of all proportion—so much so, in fact, that this signification is held, in some quarters, to be the essence of film signification, the only valid signification.

Do we need to mention that except for certain experiments in form regarded by the experimenters themselves as mere shots in the dark, no serious theoretician has tried to base the expressivity of film exclusively on montage? Also, the fact that this extreme systemization (like its counterpart, moreover, which nowadays seeks to deny the role of montage) has always resulted from the prejudices of certain critics who set themselves up as champions of an idea or defenders of a theory and, by that fact, create a dogma as stupid as it is inflexible.

Let us state categorically at this point (before we come back to it in greater detail) that signification achieved through the *associa-*

tion of shots does not have as its corollary the negation of the shot or a purpose in rejecting it for having no intrinsic signification. Quite the contrary. Signification achieved through the relationship of two shots connected together presupposes a primary signification, that of the images themselves. Signification produced by montage is *differentiated* (linguistic). Through montage, an image suggests, implies, something other than what it reveals, but what it reveals must *already* have a meaning (a psychological or, quite simply, descriptive signification) which contributes to the development of the action or our understanding of the drama.

In montage, the closeup—particularly the closeup of a detail—plays an especially effective role. However, it has not always played the role by which we know it today.

If what we mean by *close-up* is the simple effect of magnification, then its use is as old as cinema itself. The "big heads" (*grosses têtes*), as they were then called, suddenly appearing in the midst of a uniform sequence of long shots, had been used by Méliès in his films around 1901, and the alarm-bell in *The Life of an American Fireman* is, without doubt, the first closeup of an object recorded on film. The big heads, however, whose sudden appearance created an effect of surprise, were more associated with the "animated portrait" than with film expression. Only with montage, as we have seen, did shots assume a meaning relative to each other. These shots—which were almost all discovered, tried out, and applied by Griffith between 1909 and 1910 in innumerable short films—only became connected, organized, and structured into a coherent whole from 1911 or 1912 onward. Thus to say that Griffith was the first to use closeups does not mean that this magnification effect had not been used before him, merely that he was the first to turn them into a means of expression, elevating

them to the level of *signs*. There is no evidence in any film (even Griffith's) before 1911 of the use of the closeup for any purpose other than description. The closeup as we know it was to make its débüt as late as 1913, in *Judith of Bethulia*.

Yet when films (apart from Griffith's) began to use the closeup more extensively, they most frequently did so in a very odd way. Since, in those days, only the actor was capable of conveying nuances of meaning, he had to exaggerate his acting as in the theater, where he would have to "cross the footlights" or distort his features to make visible his more subtle changes of expression. But there was no continuity between long shot and closeup—only repetition. Thus in a trial-scene supposed to show the defendant in the dock listening to the verdict with his head bowed and his teeth clenched, the whole proceeding would be in long shot. Then, by means of a kind of dissolve achieved by closing and opening the iris, the camera (from exactly the same angle) "went looking" for the defendant and brought him back in closeup (an iris placed in front of the lens enclosed the image in a progressively tighter circle and opened up again on the next image becoming wider and wider). That meant that the defendant could be seen making the same gestures and playing the same scene: bowing his head, clenching his teeth, etc. Then the whole action would be repeated in wide angle, even in a medium shot, in the continuity of the action.

Thus the closeup was merely a way of showing the audience, from closer in, what it had already seen and highlighting details which might have escaped its attention. It was merely an addendum with no place in the overall movement of the film—which explains our constant irritation when we look at old movies.

Moreover, the closeup was not a straightforward image presenting an actor's face over the whole surface of the frame, chosen

from among various other elements, characters, or objects around him. The face was isolated by a circle, the area around which remained black (sometimes white—but only rarely); and this result was achieved by photographing the iris enclosing the face—or else through a mask. All of which makes it easier for us to understand the meaning of the word *closeup*, which, as we have seen, refers literally to the framing of the significant detail: "enclosed and brought forward."

Ince and Griffith were the first to incorporate the closeup into the dramatic action of their films. They never used it as mere repetition. Thenceforward, the dramatic action was developed, cutting from wide angle to medium shot or from medium shot to closeup—and the whole scene was followed using shots as different as they could be, each contributing to the progression of the action.

Both Ince and Griffith frequently used the closeup to suggest cause through effect or to suggest a scene not shown in its entirety but whose most noticeable features became a kind of symbolic representation. In *Avening Conscience* (1914), inspired by some of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, Griffith, using closeups of details, suggested the thoughts, the internal conflict, the psychic behavior of his characters: details such as the handkerchief being twisted by a hand under the table while the young man, overcome by emotion, falters in answering the judge's questions; such as the pencil the judge taps on his desk signifying his impatience; etc. In *The Fugitive* (Thomas Ince, 1914), there is a scene showing a group of Texas Rangers playing cards in a saloon somewhere in the Far West. One of them is accused of cheating. During the ensuing fight, as the table is jostled, the cards are jumbled up and a bottle of whiskey is overturned. The men, as they carry on fighting, roll around on the ground and disappear out of shot. Instead of following their movements

in a pan, the camera remains stationary and continues to film the empty table, the scattered cards and the bottle draining away its last dregs.

In contemporary films, these kinds of signification have become debased currency, and when they are used it is as clichés. However, at the time, they were inspirational, contributing not only toward making the cinema an art but toward making the suggestive power of moving pictures understood.

Of all the theoreticians of the cinema, it was without a doubt Jean Epstein and Louis Delluc who were the first to stress the importance of the closeup—the first theories obviously being sketched out from the evidence of the films they had seen. The following extract from Epstein's *Bonjour, cinéma*, published in 1920, brought home to a whole generation the potential of the cinema:

The closeup must be included or else the genre becomes willfully limited. Just as a stroller might stop to take a closer look at a shrub, insect, or stone, the lens must include, in a view of fields, a closeup of a flower, a fruit, or an animal: some detail of living nature. In truth, I never walk in the solemn, upright manner our contemporary cameramen seem to adopt. I examine in detail; I sniff; I touch. Closeup, closeup, closeup. Not the normal views recommended in the tour guides but natural, indigenous, photogenic details. Shop windows, cafés, scruffy kids, the tobacconists', everyday life conducted completely unconsciously and therefore with the full range of their realization—a fairground, engine exhausts, fog, etc. . . .

The closeup alters the drama through its impression of proximity. Pain is put within reach. If I stretch out my hand, I am in contact with the inner being. I can count the lashes of the suffering. I can taste the salt of its tears. Never before has a face been so close to mine. It follows me even closer and yet it is I who am follow-

ing it, face to face. There is truly no space between us; I absorb it. It is within me even as the Holy Sacrament. My faculty of vision is at its keenest.

The closeup restricts and directs my attention. As an index of emotion, it compels me. I lose the right and means to let myself be distracted. Present imperative of the verb to *understand*. Just as oil is potentially present in land where there is test drilling, so photogenics and a whole new rhetoric conceal themselves. I only have the right to think of this telephone. It is a monster, a tower, and a character. The potential and range of its message. Around this pylon our individual destinies revolve. They come and go like pigeons into an acoustic pigeon loft. Down the wire passes the illusion of my will, tantalizing laughter, a number, a pause, a silence. It is a perceptible limit, a solid connection, a transmitter, a mysterious transformer from which all the good and all the bad may spring. It has the appearance of an idea.

Beyond these definitions (to which there should be no need to return, which should enable us from now on to use the terms *shot*, *sequence*, *tracking shot*, *montage*, etc. without the risk of confusing the reader), certain psychologists who have become interested in the cinema (late in the day, perhaps—though this does not invalidate their observations and judgments) have seen the need to extend the vocabulary of the cinema (already quite rich in neologisms and technical terms of all kinds) and have added some of the terminology used in their own discipline.

Some of the definitions they suggest are useful, notably the necessary distinction between the *cinematic effect*, concerned with the recording and reproduction of reality through the use of moving pictures, and the *film effect*, which has to do with the aesthetic organization of these moving pictures toward a specific signification. On the other

hand, to use an expression such as *filmophany* to refer to the range of cinema's means of expression, considering their aesthetic qualities or the results achieved by them, seems to me fruitless. M. Etienne Souriau's use (in *L'Univers filmique*) of the terms *diegesis* to refer to "all that is intelligible within the narrative, in the world implied or suggested in the fiction of a film" and *diegetic* to refer to "any event concerning the characters of a story which involves them in a change of position within the space contained in the narrative" would seem to be tautologous with the words *drama* and *dramatic*, which, etymologically speaking, are quite equal to the task of fulfilling M. Souriau's definitions—indeed, do so in a way that is clearer, simpler, and more easily comprehensible; not to mention the fact that *diegesis* and *diegetic* (to pursue a dietary metaphor suggested by the sound of these words) are, by reason of their muddled ponderousness, particularly indigestible.¹²

The Frame and Its Determining Factors

Shots and angles, which are the product of a choice, a slice of the external world, have a common denominator: the frame of the image (or, alternatively, the screen, which is merely the frame enlarged many times over).

First it must be acknowledged that the film image is essentially different from the photograph or painting in that it never appears by itself and, generally speaking, its qualities are those of the sequence to which it belongs. Only rarely does it signify by itself and therefore does not concentrate the attention exclusively on its structures. It does not relate these back to the frame and is not "centered" in the same way as a painting. From this point of view, the screen appears like a window opening onto a view. The boundary delimiting the vista does not

exist phenomenologically except as part of the window; the vista, in fact, stretches beyond it.

The same is true when I see a film projected. The impression I get, related to my previous experience, is reinforced by the fact that the image, revealing a vista bounded by the screen, is succeeded by another image revealing yet another aspect of the same vista and a new image is about to show me what, as yet, remains outside the field of the frame. And sometimes a tracking shot or a simple pan progressively reveals the continuity of the vista like a descriptive survey reproducing the movement of my eyes. It is what is known as the screen effect,¹³ a psychological mechanism studied in particular by M. Michotte Van den Berck. He maintains that changes of setting in everyday life

happen, either through the intervention of a visual obstacle (a curtain or door) or through a perspective change as we come out of a room or when someone else enters it or else simply by shifting the direction of our eyes or opening our eyes as we wake up. In all these cases, there is displacement of a screen (curtain, door, eyelids, etc.) or of an object previously hidden or a combination of them both. There is a resulting blurring of the common line of demarcation separating their retinal images and the image of the revealed object sharpens progressively with the successive addition of new sections. For which reason we might assume that the object begins to exist from the moment it becomes visible and then becomes stronger by a process of continuous creation; and, inversely, that it becomes progressively fainter as it is covered up again. It is manifestly not so; objects appear to us permanent; they preexist their appearance and remain behind after their disappearance; the action of the screen merely renders them visible or invisible. . . . The screen effect in this way ensures

objects of a continuity of existence, a phenomenal permanence, and our acquired experience merely serves to confirm this previous information. (*Le Caractère de réalité des projections cinématographiques*)

This proves M. Sèvè's point and allows us to state with him that "the shot delimits but does not define." Especially since the film image, as we have indicated, tends to become detached from the surface on which it occurs. Whereas the image in a painting or photograph (which suggests dimension through the effect of perspective) gives the *impression* of relief while remaining fixed to the surface, the film image, through the movement it reproduces, accentuates this impression turning it into a genuine *sensation*. Relief and depth, perceived as they are in reality, make the screen appear as though it were an aperture opening onto a real space rather than a flat surface.

Here, M. Michotte's observations, the result of many years of research in the field of experimental psychology, are proof of a notion which up to now has been mere conjecture. As he says,

as soon as a technique can be successfully applied to separate the constituent features of an object from the surface which acts as its support, the notion of dimensionality immediately assumes the obvious and sometimes even unexpected features of reality. This result may be achieved by several different methods, among which there is one (particularly interesting from our point of view) which consists in setting up an interaction between the constituent features of the object. The antithesis between the movement of the shape and the immobility of the screen acts as an agent of separation which frees the object from the surface in which it was included. It is, to some extent, "materialized" and assumes an independent existence; it becomes a "corporal object."

One very simple test, used for many years now (reference to it can be found in a work of Von Recklinghausen dated 1859), proves our point. The shadow of a solid object made of wire—parallelepiped or cube, for example—is projected onto a screen. Observed from close up, the shadow gives an impression similar to that of a simple perspective drawing traced onto the screen; but, for the object to become real, all that is required is to spin it and, in certain viewing conditions, it actually becomes impossible to distinguish the moving shadow from the metal object itself.

This experiment is important in that it reproduces precisely what happens in the cinema, where the behavior of the characters, their gestures and changes of facial expression, even the simple transfer of inanimate objects, must obviously eventuate in a similar effect—but undoubtedly with even greater success because of the greater complexity of the images and complicated interaction of light and shadow and, perhaps, due to a certain extent to the effect of past experience. Once again, here is an unusual phenomenon associated on the one hand, as we have seen, with the peculiar structure of perspective images and, on the other, with the rules of organization which ensure that the object remains distinct from the projection surface. (*Le Caractère de réalité des projections cinématographiques*)

Confirming, moreover, our observations concerning the freeze-frame, M. Michotte adds that "one can prove the point by stopping the film suddenly during projection. Immediately, the impression of relief, its reality, is lost and is replaced by the unreal dimensionality of a simple, flat perspective image" (*ibid.*).

It does seem, however, that it is not just the *represented* movement, i.e., the movement of the characters—or the objects themselves during a tracking shot—which

lends the impression of relief and "materiality" but just as much the movement of *images in succession*. Indeed, the image of a static object—a detail closeup—provides the same impression of relief. It is only when *the same photograph* is repeated without alteration that the sensation of collapse and flattening occurs. It seems, therefore, that compensation plays a considerable part in this effect, creating, as it were, a consistency in terms of the movement of images in succession (different from each other in some particular), whatever the movement or lack of movement in the object represented.

Whatever the cause and although in the cinema material objects are presented to the eye as though contained in a space seen through a window frame, once those objects become an image—an image composed within a frame—they relate to the frame and are associated with it phenomenologically. It is easy to prove.

When I look at a view through a window, I see a space limited by the aperture of the window, but if I wish to extend my field of vision all I need to do is to stand closer to the window. If I want, I can move to the right or left and in this way discover, by looking through the median, the space hidden from me when I was directly in front of the window. The window serves as a screen and conceals the view, but its borderlines are only those of the window frame.

The same is true when I look at an image reflected in a mirror. The image I see face on to the mirror is not the same as the one reflected back to me when I stand to one side. These two images, however, are coexistent. An observer standing face on to the mirror will see the image I was seeing when I was in the same place, whereas the image I am seeing now is the one seen by an observer standing to one side. The mirror does not reflect a single image but a multi-

tude of images, all of which depend on the position of my eyes relative to its surface. The images are not part of the mirror in any phenomenological sense and are merely relative to the observer. In other words, the mirror presupposes all images but does not dispose of any in particular.

There is no such thing in the cinema. Whatever the image projected, I see it and only it. It would be of no use to me to sit on the extreme right or left of the screen; all I would see is the image composed within and in terms of the frame. My only gain would be that I would see the image distorted.

Thus the film image is phenomenologically associated with its frame. It is all too obvious that the reality it seems to record is independent of the frame; not so the representation of that reality, however. Since the represented objects are produced by virtue of that representation, as image data, they become by that fact subordinate to the image-making data, i.e., the dimensions of the frame.

We have seen that at the level of perceived reality, there is no essential difference between a chair and the image of the chair, so much so that in the cinema I am actually seeing the *real* chair through the image presented to me of it. Nevertheless, it is still an image I am seeing. As represented data, film images prove to be similar to the "direct images" of consciousness but, as representations, they are aesthetically structured forms. It follows that though the limits of the screen are no more than a repository for represented reality, they become a *frame* for the representation. With the result that when we look at a film image projected onto a screen, we find ourselves:

A—in front of an image projected onto a flat surface organized within a frame or being organized relative to it.

B—in front of an image perceived as a real space as though through a window frame.

A—a *directly* perceptual level which presents the image to us as it is, enabling us to perceive the *structured content*. Since we are perceiving a “complete entity” ordered within a frame, we cannot help but associate instinctively the shapes thus represented with the limits of the frame.

B—a perceptual level concerned with cognition, associated with logic, experience, and judgment. We are aware of the represented content knowing that the setting stretches beyond the limits of the screen. We know that the space seen through the frame and *limited* by it is in no way *delimited* by it.

In other words, the frame is no more part of the image than it is of the represented reality. Rather it is the other way around: the image is the product of the frame—at least as far as its compositional structure is concerned.

Where many theorists and critics of the cinema and indeed many psychologists have erred has been in considering only one of these contradictory aspects, one or the other but always one without the other. Now, the logic of contradiction suggests that they are interconnected and mutually complementary, that they create, by their very opposition, film reality, an independent reality involving many other contradictions. From which we may deduce, provisionally at least, that the structure of film necessarily involves and presupposes two levels of composition: *dramatic composition* (or “represented reality”) organized in space (and also, of course, in time) and *aesthetic* or *plastic composition*, which organizes this space within the limits of the frame, regardless of the field of vision. (The organization of time, which involves rhythm, is related to another level of composition which we shall examine further on.) It is understood that the organization of space (or plastic structures) is always subordinate to the expressive requirements.

It has been our contention that shots and angles are defined by the frame. This leads us on to other considerations. If, for instance, I look up at my bedroom ceiling, at the corner between the ceiling and the walls, I am not seeing it in terms of an upward tilt, as I might in the cinema. This is due to the fact that I am in a fixed position in space and lines forming the setting are carried through beyond my field of vision. It is also due to some innate regulating mechanism which manages to preserve the balance of my perception, ensuring that the position and direction of the objects I perceive remain constant. This mechanism has been the object of study, particularly of gestalt psychology. It is connected with the Brunswick constant, which argues that the apparent dimensions of objects do not diminish in inverse proportion to their distance from the observer in the same way as the laws of perspective (which, incidentally, are quite arbitrary) would suggest.

Thus if the angle of tilt of a look toward a ceiling is more clearly noticeable in the cinema, it is only because the image provided by such a look is registered within the frame of the screen, because the image is composed relative to the frame.

The frame—of a more or less rectangular shape (Academy, Vistavision, CinemaScope)—is a quadrilateral whose actual dimensions depend on the size of the auditorium but whose *forms* are invariable. All the lines of composition in the image are thus related to the vertical and horizontal axes of this quadrilateral which serves as the *absolute standard of reference*.¹⁴ Consequently, the lines marking the junction of the ceiling and the walls included within the viewfinder no longer relate, as they did before, to the space I occupy, i.e., my field of view, but to the quadrilateral whose invariable dimensions indicate the angles formed by lines relating to it. In this way, I have the distinct impression, from the sim-

ple play of angle relationships between the lines of the represented content and the horizontal-vertical axes of the frame in which the content is presented, that my view is being directed in a specific way.

The angles (downward and upward tilts) become apparent, therefore, only by virtue of the axes of the frame. The same is true of shots. However, before we examine this even more remarkable differentiation, it would perhaps be useful at this point to say a few words about the aesthetic requirements of the frame, passing over the cardinal importance it has from the cinematic point of view.

Modern mathematics teaches us that an observer must necessarily stand in the $n+1$ st dimension if he wishes to take in all the elements which make up a being or an object with n dimensions. Thus it would be impossible for infinitely flat beings moving over a surface to pass inside a circle, whereas a being which develops three-dimensionally would have no trouble in reaching the inside without having to cross the line which makes the circle.¹⁵

An observer in the fourth dimension would see solid bodies simultaneously from all points of view. He would see all the images reflected by the mirror, all the aspects of the chair—which allows us to hypothesize that solid bodies, in the so-called fourth dimension, are “open” in the same way as the circle is open in the third dimension.

However, when we consider objects in space, we see them in their three-dimensionality, even though we ourselves are in that same space and not in the fourth dimension from which we might consider the other three dimensions. However, as we indicated, objects are displayed to our eyes as though part of a two-dimensional image, insofar as our visual impressions derive from an image which forms at the back our retina, i.e., on what is virtually a surface

(like a screen). In other words, we are always in the third dimension relative to the objects we see. We are “outside” them even though we are *inside* their space. Perception of the third dimension derives from the accommodation and convergence of binocular vision in a state of constant interaction, allowing, of course, for our experience of the space in which we move and are constantly reexperiencing.

In the cinema, however, we see an image which has been seen by a single eye: the lens of the camera. We know that the impression of reality is produced by the movement of the characters within the represented space. Yet if we wish to see this space as a “whole,” we must stand outside it and feel as though we are “above it,” allowing us to dominate it in the same way as we dominate the circle drawn on a flat surface. However, it is beyond our power to move into the fourth dimension—which, in any case, is beyond our perception.¹⁶ But we have the option of going to the opposite extreme: transferring space into a different spatial field. And this is possible only by virtue of the frame which limits and defines its own content, which dissociates the content from our immediate space and transfers “its” space into an imaginary area “on the other side of the screen,” which allows us to register the content, to “transcend” it by situating it in a space which we accept as not contiguous with our own.

Moreover, camera movements are *above all* perceptible by reason of their association with the fixed limits of the frame and the image itself is plastically arranged according to the quadrilateral which has the function of a compositional parameter. Obviously these movements are also perceptible vis-à-vis the static elements of the image, set, or location. In the case of Cinerama, where the image “surrounds” the audience and overlaps its field of vision, these camera movements become the

only possible reference, but in that case any comparison with noncontiguous space becomes impossible and any effects relating to the frame are preempted, since the frame can no longer be perceived. Of course, it is perceptible to an audience sitting far enough away from the screen, but there again the effect of Cinerama is complete only when one is near enough to the screen to be surrounded. Then the movement of the camera gives the impression of real movement and the audience really believes that it is *inside* the represented space. However, as we have said, in real space we are incapable of choosing or isolating a specific part; the field of vision is presented to us in its entirety. Thus in Cinerama the dynamic impression is more striking, but no more can be signified than by the compositional resources of the image, by the interaction of angles and shots. The aesthetic qualities of the cinema are abandoned in favor of pure "sensation."

The presence of the frame is essential not only in composing the image but also in "moulding" the space according to various points of view, in "objectifying" the space and creating the notion of transcendence, which must be present if it is to be perceived. In Cinerama I am in the represented space; the impression of movement means that I experience the space but I can move only within its area, in a single direction, never *relative* to it, i.e., in all directions, on all levels, from all angles, for then I would feel as though I were *inside* the space, as it were, taking part and, at the same time, *outside* it, as an observer. Ubiquity is denied me. And this is one of the most important assets of the cinema, its expression and its power.

We shall not make too much of the fact that in painting there must always be a frame. Without it, the picture is inconceivable, regardless of the compositional coordinate. The landscape painter who sets his

easel down before a particular view must also "objectify" that view in order to represent it realistically. Let us suppose that in an effort to create the ultimate in realism, our painter tries to reproduce everything included within his field of vision. He must realize that in the foreground in front of him, his canvas is standing on its easel. Logically he is forced to include them in his painting; also his arm holding the brush and the brush applying the paint. However, in the scene represented within the canvas, he must reproduce again the canvas which he represents himself as painting and, naturally, the hand of the painter holding the brush. And in the scene represented in the painting, another scene representing the painter painting. And so on, in a recession to infinity, like those advertisements in which a black man is shown holding a tin of cocoa on which there is an advertisement of a black man holding a tin of cocoa, etc.

We stated that the frame of the image is the *absolute standard of reference* for the whole of cinematic representation. Indeed, the horizontal and vertical axes—which are fixed—constitute the directional axes of the image in the sense of height and width. However the axis of depth—which is the axis of the camera lens—is constantly mobile. One of the essential properties of the film image is this constant mobility of one of the three variables relative to the two others, something which never occurs in real space, where all the variables are altered relative to each other.

Of course, this is also true of represented space, but in the representation the variables of space relate back to the invariability of the frame. Let us suppose, for instance, a long shot showing a village with a clock tower in the middle. If we track forward, the village appears to move progressively nearer to us. It is obvious that *within this space* the three coordinates are being altered simultaneously. As we get closer, the

clock tower gets bigger. However, this enlargement of dimensions experienced by us the audience as a movement forward is translated on the screen as a linear displacement, i.e., by the "enlargement" of the clock tower. We are moved forward according to the axis of depth, and the objects grow in size proportionately as we are moved toward them; yet relative to the invariable frame, these objects quite simply occupy a wider area. The overall impression is that the space is being *extended* in order to occupy the invariable position reserved for it. It follows therefore that the film image has two distinct referents: a spatial referent—*the represented reality*, which establishes the horizon or special axis along which the location, set and movements of the characters are arranged; and a *representation* referent—the frame, which is the *absolute* referent.

Whatever the variable or invariable positions of the represented elements whose dimensions vary according to the axis of depth, these elements relate to the invariable coordinates of the frame which are the main factors of composition in the image. If a longshot of a cavalry charge and a closeup of a face are juxtaposed, the rule of common proportionality obviously no longer applies. In the latter, the field of view extends to 50 centimeters, in the former to a kilometer, and yet they both relate to the same dimensional unity—which means that not only does a sensation of enlargement or diminution follow but, alternatively, a contraction or extension of the space, according to and proportionate to the changes of shot. Each has a different spatial coefficient, correlative with the field of view and the invariable frame, which produces a confusion of sorts (not the least of the resources of film: a huge rock shown in long shot can be confused with a pebble in closeup). "I can no longer tell whether I am looking at the Milky Way or a drop of water through a

microscope," Blaise Cendrars was writing in 1919.

It is also one of the reasons why the closeup is so particularly significant. The chosen object, taken out of the context of many associations, has no direct relation except with the frame, which limits its space, and with the internal elements with which it is composed. In isolation it becomes an "entity" perceived relative to its constituent elements, whereas, as part of a sequence, it was swamped by the endless associations between the sequence and its constituent elements.

It is obvious that plastic values are only perceptible in fixed shots where the permanence of the setting confirms and justifies the compositional structures. In moving shots, the continual alteration of the image has the effect of disguising the presence of the frame. However, since this alteration is apparent only through its relationship with the frame, the geometric and plastic associations deriving from it are perceptible to the audience. They influence its emotions and are part, for better or worse, of the expressive and signifying qualities of the moving image.

It is axiomatic that be it in painting or film, the specific effect of the frame is due to the fact that it constitutes a "formal unity" with the objects it contains. It reduces to a common denominator objects which, in reality, have no direct connection with it.

To sum up: A shot is a complicated resource. It is a group of actions and movements chosen from among other related actions and movements. The association of one shot with others (before or after) establishes new relationships. By introducing a fragment of reality among other fragments of reality, the resulting continuity creates a unit of units. The shot thereby forms a new reality by creating an association of *intention*.

By the simple effect of the frame and the choice it implies, the most basic cinematic recording allows for the interpretation of reality and the simultaneous presentation of a state which, normally, we are unable to appreciate because it is confused with the mobility of the world and material objects. And this fragment is quite unique in that it has its own time and space unrelated to the time and space which governed it in reality.

The film image captures intrinsically a unique movement which relates to all other similar moments, i.e., to all the "possibilities" of the same kind. Through and by the film image, the representation of a single aspect, a single moment, reveals the "essence," the eidetic *en-soi* (in-itself) of the objects represented. In the cinema, as we have said, present time involves all time; the particular involves the general and the concrete involves the abstract.

In the theater, the stage presents a three-dimensional space. The difference between its two levels (behind and in front of the proscenium arch) separates two distinct worlds: on the one hand, a real world and, behind the proscenium, a *represented* world; a true reality and an imaginary reality. Yet the stage and the auditorium are part of the same physical space. The proscenium arch is only a conventional boundary line and the actors, living out fictitious lives, in a world made up of painted flats, nevertheless act in the same space (if not the same frame) as that in which the audience sits.

In the cinema, we are seeing a moving image projected onto a flat surface which becomes "separated" from that surface and is presented in a spatial replica, i.e., in a place detached from our own by a frame which defines and composes it. However, the represented content is not a "represented" reality. It is a reality (conventional or not) captured in its concrete existence, an image with which we feel some sort of

direct communication as if perceiving it as we might the objects of which it is the image.

Thus represented reality is both the *same* as and *different* from actual reality: the same, as "represented content," since the image datum is the image of reality; different, as "representation," because of the image-making properties which structure the image datum and refer it to a noncontiguous space with different dimensional associations.

Thus the film image is the same as reality and is yet different from it, in the same way as the image reflected by a mirror. In fact, the mirror image is the antithesis of reality, because it too seems to occur within a world "on the other side." And it seems this way because it does not reflect reality but a "duplicate" of reality. When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we do not see ourselves as we are—we see ourselves in reverse: left becomes right and vice versa; the fellow looking at me looking at a self who is me is not me but someone else inversely symmetrical.

The film image, on the other hand, is not a symmetrical inverse. It is a likeness. But a likeness structured in a space with which I can only communicate with my eyes and which is not just the "image of space" but "another space" altogether: *imposed* space.

Moreover, insofar as it is an analogon, the image makes reality unreal by considering it aesthetically, by "nullifying" the objects of which it is the image in order to present the image as an image. To be more accurate: as a concrete object, it reinforces reality, since it is the image of that reality, but it nullifies it as objective reality by giving it a structured form to distinguish it from what it is in actuality.

Now, in the cinema, though "reality is removed" from reality, though it is placed within "another space," we *are part of that reality*; we associate ourselves with that

space, whereas it is only convention or our own willing suspension of disbelief which allows us to participate in the "represented" reality of the stage whose action unfolds in the same physical world as our own.

This participation is due to several factors, specifically camera movement and changes of shot. Since everything happens as though we were moving in the represented space, we accord to it an identifiable "reality" and we "include ourselves" in it.

The frame presents reality objectively and makes each of us, the audience, attentive observers "outside" the drama. It establishes a sort of alienation between the characters and us, an alienation accentuated by the impossibility of contact or communication. A man walks to the foreground from the back of the set. He comes toward me—so it appears—but just as he is about to stretch out his hand, he disappears outside my field of vision, out of shot. He will never be able to touch me. He cannot step outside "his" space, a space with which he is aligned, on which he depends and without which he is nothing. There is a world between us.

I am everywhere at once, thanks to the mobility of the camera and the multiplicity of the shots. All I have to do is take part in the game and let myself go. I am "swept along." Not just captivated but literally "captured," absorbed into the strange and fascinating space which the screen reveals. The hero of a film is suddenly closer to me than the fellow in the next seat—so much so that he nearly touches me. I closely follow the movements and changes of position of this character or that; I move, see, act with them, like them and at the same time as them; I take part in their drama (which temporarily becomes my own). I am no longer an audience member but well and truly an "actor." I know that I am in the cinema but I feel myself to be in a world presented to me through my eyes, a world

which I experience "physically" by identifying with one or other of the characters of the drama—with all of them in turn. That is the same as saying that in the cinema I am both *inside* and *outside* the action, *inside the space and outside it*. With the power of ubiquity, I am everywhere and nowhere.

Yet there has to be a balance between these contradictory effects. It is clear from this that film perfection—or, at least, effectiveness—rests on a knife edge, the more so for the fact the receptivity of the audience is a long way from being the same in all cases. It depends on the taste, sensitivity, education, cultural knowledge, and mood of each individual. Needless to say, this perfect balance is achieved only very rarely. Alienation, the impression of nonreality, even of artifice, becomes more pronounced as the image becomes more complicated, as the effects of the framing become more convoluted, the more the aesthetic qualities take precedence over the immediate content. By the same token, directing and editing which are overelaborate or broken up, a kaleidoscopic vision of the world and its objects, also destroy the perceptual reality of the content. Unless, of course, these effects have some other *justification*. And, in my opinion, it is this *justification* which is the key to the problem of an aesthetic of the cinema, the condition of compositional qualities and stylistic system, of whatever kind. We shall need to take a long hard look at this when we come to consider the problems of film construction.

Besides, all the audience has to do for the image to appear to him as an independent representation, external to him, is detach himself from the action, abandon his interest: he sees the film but no longer feels anything; he no longer participates.

Participation and Identification

These participation phenomena are also

quite subtle. Beyond the effects we have considered, it is obvious that audience participation is more active and immediate the closer the position of the audience to the screen—within certain limits, of course, and provided the image, while exerting maximum influence on the field of vision, does not extend beyond it and is capable of being recorded *within its frame*. In that case, mobility and intensity of content become more important than the compositional values (though dependent on them). The impression of reality becomes very clear.¹⁷ On the other hand, sitting at the back of the auditorium means that the image is further away not only geometrically but psychologically as well. The image is perceived at that distance almost always as an *external reality* set into a world which it cannot entirely replace, though the auditorium might be kept in complete darkness. In addition, the feeling as "representation" is made even clearer, more conscious. The content is dominated by the container.¹⁸

From which it is but a short step to R. C. Oldfield's observations concerning the relative size of the screen in its relations with the psychological constants we mentioned previously:

It is an extraordinary experience to sit at the back of a cinema and hold up a matchbox in front of one eye (closing the other) so that it blocks out the screen completely (this can be done by holding the matchbox at arm's length). If it is held a little to one side, it is extraordinary to realize that everything within the limits of the screen appears in the same dimension, as though included in the contours of the matchbox. The shapes on the screen seem to have the dimensions of reality (even larger) when seen from the back of the auditorium. The matchbox has the dimensions of an amateur snapshot. The mechanism of constancy ensures that the apparent size of the screen and the shapes on the screen is maintained, despite the

distance between it and the audience. The feeling of satisfaction and reality would seem to depend on the impression of size provided by the apparent dimensions of the screen. ("Perception visuelle des visages animées," in *Revue de Filmologie*, nos. 3 and 4)

All this (apart from the conclusions he draws) is true enough—but only at the level of pure perception. Indeed, it would seem that many psychologists fall into the trap of considering perception as an isolated phenomenon containing all its own solutions, like a fact involving consciousness only in its structures and not at the level of comprehension. Now, there is no perception which does not involve the effects of memory or habit and does not depend on individual memories relating to actual experience—at least so far as the adult individual is concerned—which is the case for the question which interests us.

It is clear that the constants of size contribute a great deal to this effect. However, it is equally obvious that an audience member seeing a film (even from the back of the auditorium) is not visiting the cinema for the first time. He *knows* from experience that the screen is much larger than the audience. Thus a closeup covering the whole surface of the screen containable in a matchbox is not only perceived but also *recognized* as infinitely larger than the people sitting in the first few rows of the stalls, fifty of whom might be fitted into the same matchbox. The feeling of size suggested by the shots is therefore relative to the *clear idea* of the relative dimensions of screen and auditorium in relation to the position of the audience.

Though it is a function of similar psychological notions, the Brunswick constant is less responsible for this feeling than simple judgment relating to experience. Comprehension is not alien to perception; it is its consummation.

The same is true in everyday life. When

I see the Eiffel Tower from Montmartre, it is no bigger than my pencil stub but it *appears* in its relative size; and this impression is associated with my experience of space more than with a phenomenon of pure perception. At least the idea is complementary to the perception and is part of the process of being aware of the object in view.¹⁹

Nor has this dimensional relationship between screen and audience much to do with the impression of reality provided by film images. This is more a matter of distance, i.e., the position of the images in the field of vision (not dimension in the strict sense) and the resulting alienation.

As far as participation, even identification, of the audience with the characters on the screen is concerned—identification which occurs only with characters of one's own sex (to describe the reasons for this would involve our considering irrelevant psychological questions)—this has been explained in terms of hypnosis or hypnotic phenomena. Now, ignoring for a moment an obvious analogy, it seems to me that the problem is both simpler and more complicated.

One thing is certain: the brilliance of the screen against almost totally black surroundings produces a sort of preoccupying fascination which confines the impressions of consciousness within a frame which is clearly circumscribed. During the projection of a film, nothing is (or can be) perceived except what is presented on the screen. Certain parts of the auditorium are sometimes not completely blacked out (light is let in through the exit doors, etc.) but any extraneous light is overwhelmed by the luminosity of the screen and, because it does not attract any attention, once noticed it is forgotten, somehow expelled from our consciousness, which is concentrating on the development of the film.

Thus it is not possible, during the projection of a film, to preserve any connection

at all with direct physical reality. There is no point of reference to act as reassurance that the film is merely a sequence of images, in other words, a nonreality.

We only appreciate the image content relative to what it presents to our eyes. It becomes both something to be compared and a term of that comparison, taking the place of a reality which we have ceased perceiving. Naturally we are conscious of sitting in a seat because we never lose consciousness of our self, any more than of our body (and any notion of weight which the screen is incapable of providing merely reinforces that consciousness); but, though we *know* ourselves to be in a cinema, we perceive an image which becomes a substitute for all other perceptions and gives us the almost total illusion of real perception. In this way, we are confronted with a quasi-reality whose very mobility involves us and seems to stand as proof of the authenticity of that reality. Our consciousness is demanded by this "action," whereas our physical being is demanded by the "space" affecting our faculty of vision. Thus we are dealing with an *effect* somewhat similar to hypnosis in its "captivation" of our consciousness but also and more specifically with a *state* analogous with dreaming (midway between actual dreaming and daydreaming) by virtue of this "perceptual transfer" in which the imaginary takes the place of reality.

We have seen that the mental image presents a reality both visualized and recognized as absent. If, as I write these lines, I think of my car in the garage, I can see it perfectly well, mentally—or, at least, I can see a certain aspect of it—but I am seeing it as not present. It appears to my consciousness as an image certifying the absence of what I am thinking about—more especially since, in so doing, I do not stop perceiving the world impinging on me from all sides.

The mental image is therefore a product of the will standing in opposition to our normal perception of the world and its objects and which, though coexisting with it, becomes more isolated the more directly in opposition it stands.

Now, when we dream, the fact that we are asleep means that we stop perceiving consciously. The images forming in my mind through an extremely complex mechanism of "relaxation" or "release" are of the same order as mental images. Inasmuch as they are effects of consciousness, they are produced in much the same way. Yet they do not stand in opposition to the perception of direct reality: they act as substitute for it, becoming thereby a pseudo-reality in which I become caught up and involved, believing in it implicitly. Everything happens in my consciousness *as though* I were really living out the imaginary action, so much so that if an outside perception reaches me, I integrate it into the dream: the drums of a boys' brigade band beat out the tattoo at an execution and a banging door becomes the sound of the falling guillotine blade.

In contrast with the mental image, the film image is objectively present; but, like the mental image, it is the image of an absent reality, a past reality of which it is merely the image. Its concrete reality is that it is *fixed* to a support and is thus objectively present and analyzable. The reality recorded on the celluloid strip is at all times capable of being projected. In this sense, projection is a kind of "actualization," in the same way as the mental image.

For the filmmaker, inasmuch as his work is the manifest expression of his thoughts, his subjectivity, his way of seeing or feeling, the film becomes a means of perpetuating (or at least of fixing for his own consciousness) a unique moment of his self.

Thus the film image purports to be the

same as the mental image as conceived by Taine and the Associationists: an image fixed for all time *inside* our memories, capable at all times of being recalled and reconstituted as it is by our consciousness—with the one difference that memory in this case is a strip of celluloid.

Finally, for us the audience, the film image serves as a substitute for reality in exactly the same way as the mental image when we dream. That the images are less vivid in the cinema, where we never lose the idea of being present, does not mean that the phenomena of participation are any the less pronounced—with this obvious distinction, however, that in the dream state the imaginary is created by me, whereas in the cinema it is externally induced and imposed on my consciousness.

As a kind of perceived reality, it is presented to me as an objective reality; but since *I know* this reality to be imaginary, I can always choose not to accept it or associate myself with it. In a certain sense, I enjoy greater freedom with it. My participation is always the result of an act of will, a voluntary submission on my part.

In any case, audience identification (which is merely an excessive belief in the film reality) implies a kind of self-renunciation—if only for the duration of a film—in order to identify with the "other person." This transfer process, in practical terms *catharsis*, presupposes a religious frame of mind—religious in the deepest and most universal sense of the word.

Of course, the cinema is not a religion and has nothing by which it can lay claim to being a religion. For that matter, *catharsis* in the cinema is only a more complete form of the *ecstasy* we described at the beginning of this treatise, an ecstasy which might be described as *active*, in the sense that it involves the identification of the being with its object, a "double" taking the place of the

ideal Self. This religious frame of mind, forecast by Eisenstein (on which the bases of his aesthetic were founded), is beginning to be studied by psychologists from the phenomenological point of view.

As well as the phenomena we have just examined which *enable* audience participation to take place, let us take a look at the *mental activity* which leads the audience to identify with a particular character on the screen or scene in the film. It is our belief that this activity is not just "willed" but that it is separated in intention from a kind of primary passivity which actually allows it to exist.

When the film image is perceived as an analogon or, failing that, a sign, it is perceived, in the strictly sensorial sense, as a signal, i.e., a series of stimuli provoking pre-determined responses. This signal rouses our consciousness and keeps it at the alert. It informs us that "something" is about to happen even before the why and wherefore can be specified. In this context, each shot is a surprise effect, a pure emotional shock sparking off a number of elementary reactions. With the shots changing from minute to minute, the film is a continual "catalyst," beyond the emotional value of its content.

Since the meaning of the image only becomes apparent through the continuity, the film appears as a series of unpredictable "future events." Even when we guess the ending, we can never predict the successive stages of its development.

Whereas perception of reality always orients itself toward a future which it tries to predict, the sole aim of film perception is to understand a particular scene as it takes place. Not needing to anticipate an unforeseeable reality or to protect itself against a harmless future, it is *passive* but also *devoid of any anxiety*. It appeals only to immediate memory.

However, though the perceptual frame of mind may exclude the imaginary, it must

not be forgotten that, throughout, film requires the audience to "structure" ideas and follow relationships from shot to shot and sequence to sequence. Thus logical relationships are what govern audience *anticipation*. They change the audience member from being *passive* to become *active*. Reason is constantly active—but on data which is *experienced* rather than received, accepted rather than discovered.

We must now take a closer look at the nature of this participation. Audience participation suggests the development of a similar process, whereas "identification" is limited to what might be called a "projected association." In fact, when we see a film, we never allow ourselves to be transported by external impressions which otherwise we might tend to imitate; we do not "internalize" the actions of the actor. On the contrary, these are personal tendencies which are "externalized" and *related* to the actor. It is not so much a matter of the individual's "assimilation" of the character of his counterpart on the screen but a "projection" made possible by film perception.

The potential for mimesis acts here as a catalyst: we discover in the deeds of a hero the fulfilment of an otherwise inhibited "desire" and we "graft" onto them motivations not fully realized in actual reality. It is as though it were a kind of motive projection of an unrealized action onto the action realized in the film: our "intention" is liberated by becoming totally subservient.

Gliding through a world which offers him no resistance other than that required by the dramatic action, the hero "embodies and consolidates a power built from discontent and dreams." He therefore becomes a kind of substitute whose transferred responsibility is the fulfillment of our Self; he *assumes* the Self I was not capable of *being*.

It is not the situation lived out by the hero which is experienced by *me*; it is "part of my

subjective self" which is actualized by *him*; through him I am able to fulfill a desire. I perform his exploits (that is, *my* exploits) in my mind; I live them *in him*, through him, without ever losing sight of the fact that he is *he*, different from me, similar only in what I would like to be and am not.

Whereas a confusion between "self" and "other" might be inevitable in the case of audience identification, in the cinema all that happens is a simple correlation of behavior in a given general situation: the beating a hero gives the villain is the one I would like to give a certain enemy of mine except that my sense of propriety—or weakness—prevents me.

The audience acts and reacts *with* the actor, but the less this projective association applies to one particular character in the drama and more to all of them—or almost all of them—the less the audience will identify with the actor.

When I become involved in the action of a film, I associate myself with the behavior of each character in turn. I share temporarily their point of view and their motivation; I graft onto their actions the motivating impulses of actions I might take or wish to take in similar circumstances which they perform *for me*. It is only when they behave differently from the way I would behave in the circumstances that I am able to dissociate myself from them. In this instance, my willingness to be involved in the action of the film acts against them—which does not mean that it is any the less considerable.

In any case, it is not I, as an individual, who identifies with the hero; it is an unfulfilled wish, an ideal Self which I recognize in him.

It is all "as though" the actor were *our double*, the embodiment of our intentional Self. We never act or feel as though we were *he*. We never stop seeing as someone "else," unless, of course, the camera—used "subjectively"—shows us objects as one

presumes he would see them. In which case, he must disappear in order that we might believe we are "in his place"; but (as we shall see in greater detail when we come to consider the conditions of the subjective camera) he must already have a place in the action so that we can ascribe to him a vision which, for us, appears no less objective than all the others. We are always aware that this vision is "his," though we experience it as our own.

In fact, the audience member is unaware of attitudes adopted spontaneously—or, more precisely, he is unaware of his act of adoption: he feels its effects and attributes them to film's "hypnotic powers"; and indeed to some extent this is true (with this proviso, though, that film "releases" effects it does not "produce"). Though the depiction of any accompanying movement helps create an understanding of the actions we perceive and though the audience must have—or have had—the appropriate intention, it is easy to see that an understanding of film data (a deep understanding gained by being involved) is merely a way of recognizing the data or recognizing oneself in them. Since we only recognize what we already know, it is clear that a total association of the mind with the action and motives of the film is the result not only of the cultural level of the audience (concerned entirely with intellectual comprehension) but also and more especially of its *intentional* capacities, i.e., its interior world. Someone who has never had a dream can never appreciate the significance of a dream, and we never project our own motives onto the actions of "someone else" except when these happen to coincide. They must have been experienced—if only in the imagination. A film is a mirror in which we recognize only what we present to it through what it reflects back to us: all it ever reflects is our image.

Might this be the reason why the man-

in-the-street prefers pure action or spectacular films? Just as in sports events, the required intentionality is essentially at the physical level: the hero is not the "representation," the "projection," of the various complexes recognizable in him; he merely presents what he is, in other words, what the audience is and, in return, all the audience has to do is respond in a most basic manner.

Which might also explain why it was the poets who first discovered, lauded, and praised the aesthetic potential of film and went on to endow the simplest images with the richness and magic of their dreams. Canudo, Delluc, L'Herbier, Epstein—and Cendrars, Aragon, Cocteau, and Colette—had enough poetic vision to see beyond poetry.

This identification, involving me in an adventure experienced by someone else—so much so that I feel as though I am actually experiencing it myself—lets me do so *risk-free*. It lets me be committed to situations from which I can voluntarily withdraw, thereby "experiencing" several adventures at once without ever being tied to one exclusively.

In real life, any one of these actions would involve me in a series of consequences from which I could never hope to escape, since I could never hope to delete experienced time. On the other hand, the possibility of *going back in time* is constantly on offer in the cinema, where the length of time of an imaginary event is canceled out by the duration of the film—during which I have managed, even so, to become involved in all the narrative variations of any potential situation, having "quasi-experienced" it without having to suffer the consequences.

We should add that it is not just with actions and behavior that we are involved like this. Evocative effects also invite our involvement; some quite extraordinary effects are produced in this way—the image-

provoking responses similar to those we would have in real life.

I saw *Nanook of the North* for the first time (at least as far as I can remember) in September 1922. It was reasonably warm in the cinema that was showing the film; and yet I was surprised to notice that once or twice during the film I was turning up the collar of my coat; I might even have blown on my fingers. Obviously I was not cold; I was merely thinking in the same way as a man in the cold: the blizzard howling over the icy wastes, the images of snow and high winds had caused my defense reactions to respond as though I were cold.

This sort of reaction is described in the problems raised by Albert Michotte: audience participation in a film—if it is to be regarded as a mimetic phenomenon—cannot be explained in normal psychological terms. On the contrary, understood as a projective association, it is merely a phenomenon similar to recollection when stimulated by an external factor. The film image merely takes the place of the mental image with all the force of its credible reality.

Thus, via different routes, we reach similar conclusions to those proposed by Mikel Dufrenne: "The work of art is in no way within us; we are within it." If film reflects what we present to it through what it offers us, by revealing an action onto which we can project ourselves, it shows us what we are, since we "fulfill ourselves" in it. In M. Dufrenne's words, "the presence of the aesthetic object, just like the event, allows me to come to terms with the first principles which I carry within me." We might add: it allows me to understand the intentionality which I hold in reserve and which characterizes me, the tendencies of which I was only dimly aware.

André Malraux contends that arts which act merely as a catharsis for the author or audience—arts of "sublimation"—are really "anti-arts." If this is so, the cinema is an

excellent example of an "anti-art." Yet the value of a film is always relative to its aesthetic purpose — which is to provoke this catharsis, not only by means of a moving or gripping content but in the way it is produced. Since emotion is the prime mover of all works of art, art is achieved when the emotion is the *product of an intention successfully* (i.e., convincingly) *executed* and not just a reality incidentally impressive in itself. What matters (which is the reality of the work of art) is not the *represented* reality but the *signified* reality, not what is revealed or narrated but what is *expressed*. A film memorable only for its story or its (social or moral) message independently of the form in which its whole meaning *ought* to be communicated cannot be a work of art. Whatever the validity of the message, art is its own servant: in other words, art can only serve its own means of signification. To quote M. Dufrenne once again, "the work of art is not illuminated by an external light through which a world appears: it generates its own light, which is expression."

M. Lucien Sèvè has the following to add: "the cinema is different from all other arts which seek to reconstruct (even photography which creates an image) in that it gives us, as Dziga-Vertov explains, a 'documentary interpretation of reality' rather than an 'interpreted reality.' Which is why it manages to bypass the classical paradoxes of aesthetics, in particular, the Gordian knot of realism." However, to consider only the object of the process is to deny the value of everything but the reality one is trying to interpret. True, our primary interest is in whatever it contains that is authentic or moving. It is of no consequence that it is beautiful or ugly, unusual or commonplace: what is important is that it be real and moving. Yet it is always presented in terms of values which structure it in a particular way and which may discover, even in banality, an opportunity for composition or visual-

ization such that the content, formalized by the representation, becomes, so to speak, the product of the representation in respect of its genuine signifying or emotional properties. And if it is frequently difficult to dissociate the ugliness of a content from the originality of the form which presents the content to our eyes (as sometimes happens in painting), it is because the purpose of painting lies exclusively in its formal values requiring it to reject unsuitable data, whereas in the cinema the image-making properties which validate the image data never stop them from keeping (even at its most banal) the obvious power of an intrinsically moving reality. There can only be contradiction — in other words, "formalism" — when the content is lifeless, without emotion of its own, i.e., when the form has nothing to recommend it but itself.

In the end, though film presents us with an interpretation of reality (not an interpreted reality), above all it provides us with the *means* to interpret that reality — with the effect that the process is dependent on the means (wherein lies the art of film, varying according to the work, genre, or creator under consideration).

It is easy to see, even from this general conspectus, that the cinema provides the social scientist with an amazingly useful research tool. What is more, several contemporary psychologists have been working in this direction (René Zazzo, for one), abandoning research which might have resulted in the discovery of "an aesthetic essence during the phenomenological description of a concrete process dialectically observed." It is true that they had absolutely no idea of the possibilities of this kind of aesthetic.

One might also deduce that in certain respects the cinema might become a marvelous analytical and psychotherapeutic tool. Dangerous in the wrong hands but nevertheless very appealing! Ignoring the

fact that a vast majority of films produced by genuinely creative artists (Chaplin, Stroheim, Murnau, Welles, etc.) reveal, far more than any poem or novel could, the inner selves of their creators—their neuroses and obsessions—most frequently without their being in the least aware of it.

In conclusion, since the film image is both *represented data and a specific form of representation*, we might make the following claims—which would justify as well as refute several apparently contradictory definitions.

1. Reduced to represented reality, the image *means* nothing. It reveals. "Content" is presented for what it is. It is self-signifying—that is all.

2. Nevertheless, as an image it symbolizes, generalizes, and refers all concrete reality to the abstract. It becomes "transcendent" by being the analogon of a reality with which it stops having any phenomenological association. Consequently it becomes the *sign* of what it reveals—and thus, it might be argued, in its way the sign (image of the pince-nez) and the signified (pince-nez) are one and the same, with the rider that the term *sign* is used here in its psychological sense—*separate from the meaning generally attributed to it*.

3. Through the effect of the frame, every shot is a slice of objective reality, a choice necessarily organized within the frame and ordered relative to it. Structured in this way, represented reality becomes a compositional form—which may or may not be complicated. This "formalization" is the equivalent of transformation. Reality is transformed.

4. Through the effect of movement imposed on them and movement which they

themselves reproduce, the images become "detached" from the surface onto which they are projected. The represented objects then appear to assume a "materiality" in a space enclosed by the frame and situated beyond the screen. Presented according to dimensional relationships which are both invariable (the frame) and constantly differentiated (the shots), reality is literally "transposed."

5. The frame, angles, shots, and resulting compositional forms constitute the representational resources, in other words, the "image-making data" through which the represented reality becomes the "image data."

6. A "represented object" can only appear in the guise of a representational form. Now, the representation has a particular meaning, through what it represents and through the way it represents it. It signifies. Through it the *signifier* (image of the pince-nez) becomes a *signified* (downfall of the ruling class).

Thus the image signifies symbolically and plastically, through the organization of its own structures, which are defined by the forms of the "content" placed within a frame; dialectically, through association and implication, becoming a *sign* (in the linguistic sense) in the development of narrative; and, ultimately, through *rhythm*, which is subordinate in this narrative to relationships of time, length, tonality, etc. and which we shall consider further on. Consequently the film image presents an image of reality which, though similar to the reality it records, is nevertheless different from it. *It is a mental transposition through which reality is transformed while preserving all its formal aspects.* One might say, to be more precise, that it is *trans-figured*.



Rhythm and Montage

The Beginnings of Montage

Origins and Discovery

Since the nature of the film image is that it moves, there can never be "still life" in the cinema—only static objects whose lack of movement depends, even so, on a succession of images which present them to our vision. Naturally this mobility can never be perceived as such, only experienced in its effects.

Take, for instance, an extreme closeup of a static object. If we look closely at each of the frames of this shot, we see that none of them (though representing the same object lit by the same lighting) is exactly the same as the others. However consistent the photography and uniform the printing, we may notice a tiny white spot on one or a black spot on another; we may see that one of the frames is a little grayer than the others or slightly less gray, etc. And this effect is so universal that we may confidently state that the object we see does not really exist in any of the frames of the film. The product of an interchange between them, it is different from both the real object we see through these images and the many still photographs which reproduce it. It is movement alone which presents it as we see it and produces not *its* image but *one* "average" image which has no reality other than a photographic reality, an image which does not exist as a photograph but as an "essence" both concrete and objective. Of course, what is perceptible in a static

object becomes obvious when the object is in motion. But when it is seen on a screen, that object does not exist objectively in any of the individual frames.

Jean Epstein has written: "The screen is where the actor's thoughts and the audience's thoughts come together to assume the material appearance of an action." But we would be mistaken in believing that this is specific to the cinema. A novel exists only inasmuch as it is read. While it is merely a collection of printed words, it is nothing, at least no more than a series of images reproduced on a roll of film would be. The novel only "exists" in the consciousness of the reader; painting must be seen and music must be heard.

Art—as we have said—can only be effective as a relation between the mind which conceives it and the mind which "receives" it and which, prompted by a form determined by the artist, adapts its emotions and its "imagination" accordingly. The same, moreover, is true of perceptible reality. Any "object" assumes as *necessary* the association between the perceptible data and the subject perceiving them.

There is no need to stress this point further, since no knowledge, no judgment, and consequently no aesthetic principle could be founded on any other tenets. Thus to claim, as have certain commentators, that the wonder of cinema "cannot be explained in terms of the integration of meaning and form but is the product of the relationship formed by this form-signification system with the public" is merely to find a means

of establishing common ground. The wonder of cinema, as of any other art form, cannot be explained except in terms of the integration of meaning and form, supposing *a priori* that there exists a subject sensitive and willing to perceive it.

If there must be an artist for there to *be* a work of art, there must also be a public for it to *exist*. It goes without saying that in the main argument of this study and in all the ramifications which it has prompted, we have presented this relationship not merely as necessary but as an established fact.

What is clear is that since the form of film makes its appeal through its most signifying aspects, it acts according to processes involving the mechanisms of perception. But this is quite another problem. It is obvious that in the film-audience relationship, it is not a question merely of seeing and reacting emotionally as one does before a painting or during the performance of a symphony but of *understanding*, i.e., structuring and piecing together ideas from the perceived objects, as one does in reading from the words. Film cannot exist without there being a certain succession of images, but neither can it exist without an internal logic which, in the same way movement establishes links between frames, establishes links between shots. In other words, cinema cannot exist without dialectic.

In a film, the meaning of the world and material objects is subject to an intentional meaning involving the reality in a more or less unforeseeable train of events. Objects are caught up in a sequence of time which may, at any moment, be altered from its course or even halted in midcourse. They are no longer "themselves," free and independent; they become elements of discourse. And the point at issue is knowing whether they are *merely* elements of discourse or become elements of discourse by virtue of a narrative based on their concrete reality.

We shall have the opportunity to return

to this problem later on, but for the moment let us say that in one way or another the audience must constantly be thinking or, if you like, *totally* perceiving (in other words, experiencing, judging, and recognizing) if it wishes to grasp the meaning of the implications and suggestions continually being offered to it. Its attention, as we have said, is constantly on the alert. It draws on previous experience, previous knowledge of the world and material objects and, in many cases, its culture. The audience "sees" only what it understands—consequently the film which it imagines (or infers) from the evidence in front of it. Though the audience can have no say in the images imposed on it, it alone interprets and makes sense of them.

But if film expresses itself in terms of movement, i.e., in terms of actions and a logic constantly projected into the future (a "future" which is *present* all the time since we follow it in its development), it must necessarily imply a sequence of time and therefore an organization of time, i.e., a *rhythm* which becomes apparent only at the moment the film begins to fulfill its aesthetic function.

Whereas harmonious organization of proportion and plastic composition were part of the cinema from its earliest days—in the first Italian spectaculars and the "films d'art," i.e., around 1908—the notions of rhythm were introduced much later on. Though Griffith achieved a great deal with his experimentation during the period between 1910 and 1914, employed in such films as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* (1915–16), as did Thomas Ince in his first great films (*The Aryan*, *Battle of Gettysberg*, *The Evil Star*, etc.) and, of course, Mack Sennett with his burlesque comedies, they were all only intuitively aware of the possibilities of rhythm. It was only in the 1920s that these possibilities became recognized and studied seriously.

Though overdue, this was quite a natu-

ral development, since if film is movement, it is bound to be movement of something. And expression in terms of the transformation of a "space" would not be possible unless the transformation had been previously planned. So it was natural for filmmakers to feel the need to master completely the architectural forms before chancing their arms with the organization of time. In fact, this "rhythm" is established in the cinema through the arrangement of the various elements included in the frame according to precise, predetermined intentions, in other words, through the "framing" more than through a setting arranged ahead of this process, as in Expressionist cinema.

The plastic structures determined by the framing exert an influence on the audience's emotions. They draw its attention to a particular component of the image or a character or object with a specific position within the frame; they establish relative proportions between different characters and between characters and objects, thereby pointing up the dramatic or psychological meaning of the action, creating circumstantial relationships. And by determining an overall impression, they allow the audience — without its being conscious of it — to relate to the represented action the emotions which the representations generate within it. To organize an image, to compose it aesthetically, is to emphasize what is to be signified and to contribute to the signification. The "imagistic" qualities — however pictorial they might be — become cinematic in the sense that they are signifiers in their own right (though in virtue of the action).

As Jean-Pierre Chartier points out,

The choice of point of view in a 'realistic' film is a convention every bit as important as the expressionistic use of a set, a *mise-en-scène*, or a lighting plot. But this convention is perfectly suited to the

cinema; it does not inflict on the film the weaknesses we recognize as peculiar to expressionist works. So long as the subject is captured in the natural spontaneity of life, *we will believe in the image* because we will see it as a particular point of view of a reality existing independently of the viewpoint which the film presents. Moreover, the conventional choice of a point of view of the subject to be represented *does not mean that our attention has to be interrupted* as with expressionist conventions. On the other hand, observing a scene from a particular angle suggests that the same scene might be observed from a different angle. Lastly, the viewpoint which each shot suggests is only valid relative to the viewpoint chosen for the preceding shot and the shot to follow. (*Art et réalité au cinéma*)

The film movement which will occupy our attention from now on appears in many guises. One such guise is the movement of represented objects. This is nothing more than recorded movement, mechanically reproduced. Yet it must, nevertheless, possess a certain rhythm; it must be altered or extended according to the requirements of the moment. Since it depends on the acting and dynamics of the action, i.e., on the *mise-en-scène*, it will be studied in greater detail later on, together with the "internal" movement governed by the dramatic structure of the film.

Another guise is the rhythmic movement determined by the type of shot — pan, track, etc. — and, even more especially, the dynamic relationships which each shot maintains with the preceding and succeeding shot. For instance, there are relationships of scale (long shot to closeup, closeup to medium shot, etc.), relationships of intensity (amount of movement included in an establishing shot relative to the amount of movement included in a close shot, etc.), plastic relationships (structure of an image

relative to the structures of the adjoining images, etc.), and relationships of angles and framing, which generally govern the plastic relationships.

The association of two images—even static ones—already determines a certain movement, albeit through the opposition of their structures. The transition from one to another causes a dynamogenic relationship involving a certain rhythm which, naturally, becomes associated with relationships of movement when the images are themselves dynamic. The interplay of structures and their formal relationships in the narrative of the film is a quality intrinsically capable of signifying by itself with greater or lesser effect.

We shall come back to this question, but first we must trace the historical development of *montage* in order to be able to place the problem of rudimentary visual rhythm under the general heading of *rhythm*.

Editing (*montage*)—which, technically speaking, is nothing more than the laying end to end of different shots (or different “scenes,” to use the terminology current in 1910)—is as old as cinema itself. Yet in Méliès’s films, for instance, the purpose of piecing together one scene with another was to create a succession of discontinuous and independent “tableaux,” to replace what in the theater are called “transformation scenes.”

As Georges Sadoul points out, “The dramatic value of montage is contained in essence in the fact that it makes it possible to achieve the three effects which are the very essence of the cinema: (1) the use of the camera as an eye, observing objects from close to or far away, alternating close-ups with long shots; (2) following a character’s movements from one location to another; (3) alternating episodes occurring in different locations but contributing to the same overall effect.” According to Sadoul, it was in England, in Brighton to

be exact, that montage was discovered, appearing around 1901 in the films of two former seaside photographers turned filmmakers, G. A. Smith and Williamson. Other historians, myself included, have it that it is to the American Edwin S. Porter that the cinema is beholden for this innovation. But since the majority of films of this time no longer exist, one can only make judgments from the scripts which these filmmakers used, and this task is rendered all the more difficult by the fact that the scripts are rather crude and elementary. Whatever conclusions one may draw, it is an indisputable fact that these three filmmakers are responsible for the advent of montage.

In 1900, Smith produced a series of short films unique in being composed of nothing but closeups. Moreover, these were collated and catalogued under the collective title of *Humorous Facial Expressions*. Having begun with “animated portraits,” Smith was to realize quite quickly the advantages of alternating long shots with closeups of a particular significant detail. “Smith’s development followed such a logical course,” Sadoul writes, “that it is not beyond the bounds of reason to presume that he was the first inventor of montage.”

The first of these films was *The Little Doctor* (1900), in which two children are seen administering medicine to a cat, who we assume is ill. A closeup shows the cat’s head as it swallows a spoonful of milk. Subsequently Smith justifies these closeups by making them seem optically inspired. In *At Last, That Awful Tooth*, he justifies the closeup of a decayed tooth by first showing the patient scrutinizing his tooth through a magnifying glass. This technique was to be copied in many other films, such as *Grandma’s Reading-Glass*, *What We See through a Telescope*, etc. Zecca copied it in France the following year, producing films such as *La Loupe de grand’mère*, *Ce que l’on voit de mon sixième*, *Par le trou d’un serrure*,

etc. And, after Zecca, Nonguet in 1905 (*Ce que je vois de la Bastille, L'amour à tous les étages, etc.*)

In *Mary Jane's Mishap* (1901), Smith finally shows, in a rapid succession of shots, a dramatic scene developing in several locations: an explosion in the kitchen propels Mary Jane's body up through the chimney and back down to earth. We see in succession:

1. *Long shot.* Mary Jane in her kitchen.
2. *Closeup.* Mary Jane polishing shoes.
3. *Closeup.* Mary Jane tries to light her fire.
4. *Long shot.* Mary Jane takes a can of kerosene and empties it over the fire – explosion.
5. *Long shot.* Mary Jane pops out of the chimney onto the roof.
6. *Long shot.* Mary Jane's body, tattered and torn, falls to the ground.
7. *Long shot.* Final scene in the cemetery.

Following the action at its various stages and showing it in various different shots, the idea of *montage* and *continuity* were presented for the first time.

Yet, however considerable the discovery of these techniques (and accepting that Smith was the first to make use of them), it must be acknowledged that though the closeup was no longer a "trick effect," it was still only a method of enlargement, the possible means of showing a passing detail from closer to. There was as yet no real signification nor any marked increase in intensity in what the closeups revealed. They merely emphasized a particular effect.

The Attack on a China Mission, a kind of reconstructed newsreel of the Boxer Rebellion (1900), contributed the first use of "crosscutting." Instead of juxtaposing long shots with closeups, as Smith had, Williamson juxtaposed, for the first time, scenes oc-

curing in different locations but contributing to the same overall action. In one scene we see the mission surrounded by the Boxers and the missionary's family hiding in the house. In the next scene we see the sailors commanded by an officer on horseback setting out to rescue them. Then we see the mission again, this time burned down, then the sailors arriving in the nick of time to save the missionary and his family.

By shooting on location in natural settings unhindered by the restrictions of the stage and the attendant scenic limitations, Williamson was able to move his actors wherever he pleased. Indeed, the actors were able to move not only from side to side but also backward and forward. In *The Attack on a China Mission* the officer who first appears at the bottom of the garden lifts the young girl up onto his horse and gallops directly toward the camera. We mentioned that this same effect was used by Lumière in *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (The Arrival of a Train in the Station), but there it was used in a documentary-type film, a real movement filmed by the cameraman and not a movement specially composed for the camera.

In his later films, Williamson (like Smith before him) generalized the technique and tried to use it systematically, sometimes even with the aim of creating surprise effects. That explains a film such as *The Big Swallow* (1901), which shows a character becoming angry at the fact that he is being photographed and marching right up to the camera so that his mouth covers almost the entirety of the screen. The character then opens his mouth and appears to swallow the photographer and his camera.

Generally speaking, Williamson achieved his shot changes not by editing but by moving his actors from the background to the foreground (from which we can see that the use of the shot-in-depth, like editing, is as old as cinema itself).

Also in 1901, Williamson produced *Stop Thief!* a short comic film which really represents the first "chase film." In showing the hero being pursued, he, like Smith in *Mary Jane's Mishap*, gave a certain continuity to his film using the same characters in different locations. At this stage, editing is still merely the joining together of different scenes, but now the duration of each scene is determined by the duration of the movement represented in them—which constitutes a considerable step forward from construction in terms of "tableaux."

Later on, companies such as Sheffield and Gaumont took up the techniques of these pioneers and universalized them (particularly the chase films), adding a dramatic element. Thus we have films such as *A Daring Burglary in Broad Daylight* (1902) and especially *The Attack on a Stagecoach* (1903), which appeared a few months earlier than Edwin Porter's *Attack on Grand Rapids*.

By reason of the shot changes brought about by the mobility of a thrilling action full of incident, it is highly probable that these first chase films are the real source of the cinema as an art. Sadoul is mistaken in attributing the origins of comic chases to the English cinema. With the exception of the short film by Williamson (which, in any case, is a reworking of a theme used over and over again by cameramen working for the Lumière brothers), comic films were few and far between in the English cinema before 1904. The chase (which was to serve as a model for a whole batch of films produced during the period 1904-7, particularly in France) was first used by Wallace MacCutcheon, a producer with Biograph in New York, in a film called *Personal* (1904). The film was distributed (though not produced) in England by Gaumont Ltd. Distributed in France by Gaumont (the parent company) under the title *Rendez-vous par annonce*, it gave rise to an extraordinary number of similar films produced by Zecca,

Alice Guy, Lucien Nonguet, Hatot, and many others from Pathé or Gaumont. *Dix femmes pour un mari* (Ten wives for one husband), shot in 1905 by Georges Hatot from a script by André Heuze (and which was the first French chase film) was a precedent for a whole series of comic films featuring actors such as André Deed (*Gribouille*), Georges Bataille (*Zigoto*), Clément Mige (*Calino*), Onésime Bourbon (*Onésime*), Prince (*Rigadin*), and many others besides, including Gréhan and, of course, Max Linder.

It is not impossible that Edwin Porter, at that time the chief producer for Edison, might have known Smith's and Williamson's films. But, though the Brighton pioneers were the first to establish the elementary principles of editing, it was Porter with *The Life of an American Fireman* who first used those principles to create meaning. And this was a most significant advance. For the first time, a closeup (showing the alarm bell in a fire station) assumed dramatic significance. It was no longer the simple enlargement of a detail but the dramatic emphasis of an object which was the key to the resolution of the drama. Admittedly, the other shots were all long shots. But the recent discovery of a print of this film (which we had the opportunity to view a few years ago at the Cinémathèque) provides us with the proof which Sadoul had been contesting up until then, namely, that though Porter's film does not show a variety of shots, it does include a variety of "points of view." In fact, several images taken from different viewpoints show the fire engine careering through the town. The overall impression is one of amazing authenticity (for the time) and almost rhythm. A further effect of these various images is that they increased the anxiety of the audience, holding back the resolution of the drama and thereby creating, in a very primitive fashion, what was later to be called "suspense."

We have also spoken of *The Attack on Grand Rapids*, which might be regarded as the first cinematic film (though it too comprises almost all long shots). The action here is taken right to the limits of the field of vision (as though on a wide stage) and each shot becomes part of a sequence. Many of the scenes are still played face on to the camera, as in the theater, but there are a few (the chase, the fight in the forest, the attack on the engineer, and the robbing of the passengers) which are developed in terms of depth and which rely for their effect on the relative distances of the characters from the camera. Porter used the panning shot for the first time, imbuing it with dramatic significance.

In the last sequence, the posse is out of sight. Have the bandits, shown as they divide up the booty deep inside a forest, managed to give it the slip? All at once, as though in answer to this question, the camera pans imperceptibly to the left and reveals, in close shot, concealed behind a large clump of trees, the posse, which has just arrived on the scene and is dismounting. The final reverse angle shows the bandits in close shot. The posse rushes in from the background and, after a short struggle, takes the baddies prisoner.

In 1905, Porter added to these first principles the extension of contrast and parallel action. The plot of Williamson's *Attack on a China Mission* consists of two simultaneous actions contributing to the same overall effect rather than actual parallel action (which consists of two actions developing simultaneously, influencing each other dramatically or symbolically). In *The Ex-Convict*, Porter opted for what we know nowadays as contrast cutting. In this drama, which shows the problems of an ex-convict being refused work by a wealthy industrialist, the American director contrasts scenes showing, on the one hand, the luxurious interior of a bourgeois home and,

on the other, the miserable hovel of the ex-convict. This use of editing in a sequence of comparison where the dramatic development depends on alternating scenes brought the technique one step closer to the art it was to become some years later.

After *The Ex-Convict*, Porter shot another film which also made use of contrast cutting. *The Kleptomaniac* is the story of two women, one of them poor and the other rich, caught in the act of shoplifting. The rich lady is set free and the poor woman thrown in jail. In this way the dramatic progression depended on parallel narration of the circumstances—their causes and effects. *The Kleptomaniac* is perhaps the most interesting and accomplished of Porter's films; it was certainly the most advanced film of its time.

Such schematic story lines appear infantile and elementary to us in the context of complex modern films. However, we must remember that the practitioners of this new art had no tradition to draw on. They had to begin by expressing such simple themes as these as clearly as they could, by visual means rather than by illustrating the "great themes of literature." In many cases, Porter was not without a certain wry humor; the scales in the hand of Justice over the courthouse are very definitely tilted to one side.

We must, however, stress that these films proved the exception rather than the rule. Their novelty was misunderstood and their influence did not become apparent until the films of Griffith. Only from 1910 did their innovation pass into common currency; only then did a few directors (particularly those working for Vitagraph) begin to develop beyond the realistic and social tendency which they had introduced.

Griffith and the Soviet Schools

To catalogue Griffith's contribution to the cinema would involve writing up the

history of four or five years of production and analyzing in depth a good thirty films at least. Though he cannot be credited with the invention of either editing or the closeup (or certain other techniques perfected by him), at least he was the first to use them with some sort of coherence and turn them into a *means of expression*. The meaning of space, the variety of points of view (shots and angles), first saw the light of day in his films, and we can see the kind of control in editing which he had already achieved by 1914 when we look closely at the famous interrogation scene in *A Rich Revenge*. It is enough to remember that the basic syntax of film language was almost exclusively mapped out by him and that visual rhythm is the result of his experimentation and inspired intuition.

It belongs to the historian to trace, through the short films made by this genius, the continuity of an effort which was to culminate in his first masterpieces and put into perspective the often inspired discoveries of his predecessors. But whatever tribute one may pay to the very first pioneers, it is no less true that the cinema as we know it—finally aware of its artistic possibilities—came into existence in 1915. It came into the world with *The Birth of a Nation*. For the first time, rhythm was used methodically (though completely intuitively) by an artist who saw it as the necessary foundation for the emotive expression of things and not by a theorist trying to elaborate a set of rules. The theorists (Europeans for the most part) did not take account of this development until the 1920s because *The Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, and *Broken Blossoms* were not seen in Europe until after the First World War—in 1919 and 1920, to be precise.

In *The Birth of a Nation*, the contrast of long shots and close shots provides the action with its characteristic tone and color. Take, for instance, the close shot revealing,

in the lee of a hill and in front of a tumble-down shanty, a family huddled around a few hastily tied bundles; the camera pans away from them and reveals a vista of armies on the march across the prairie, while here and there we see wisps of smoke from the shells of burned-out houses. The Yankee colonel, with drawn sword, leads his troops into battle (long shot); he arrives at the front line (medium shot) and plants the Yankee flag in the muzzle of an enemy cannon (midshot). A Confederate dashes out of the trenches (medium shot followed by a pan) in order to rescue a wounded Yankee soldier (close shot). With his bayonet, a soldier finishes off an adversary lying on the ground (midshot). Another soldier finds a familiar face (that of a former friend) lying among the enemy dead (medium long shot). A hand (closeup) shares out coffee grounds (medium shot) to the men while the battle rages around them (long shot and wide angle). Soldiers unceremoniously bundle dead bodies picked up from the battlefield (long shot) into a cart already piled high with corpses (medium shot); etc.

In a series of faster and faster crosscuts, we pass from sequences showing the town of Atlanta in flames to scenes of terror in the Cameron farm, returning to the battle scenes and scenes of brother killing brother. And so on.

In the final sequence, at the end of which the Camerons, holed up in a tiny hut, are saved in the nick of time by the Ku Klux Klan, the parallel editing is made to fit a clever quasi-musical rhythm based on the associations of time between the constituent parts of the narrative. For instance, we cut from a wide angle showing the besieged hut to shots becoming ever closer revealing the Camerons preparing for the fight. We see the face of one of them, the actions of another, etc. From the Camerons, we cut to the ride of the Klansmen: wide angles, medium long shots and tracking

shots with the horsemen riding toward the camera or away from it. A series of closeups and extreme closeups picks up the galloping horses' hooves, the flying mane of one, the neck of another; and once again we see the whole cavalcade crossing the prairie, a stream, and then a road. We return to the hut: the shots revealing the Camerons and the battle become shorter and shorter, sharper and sharper, jerkier and jerkier. Back to the ride: the movement becomes quicker and quicker, and the tempo of the succeeding shots becomes more and more staccato, almost imitating the beat of the horses' hooves at full stretch. And the crosscutting is kept up until the final crescendo with which the film is resolved.

In this way Griffith proved that, in the cinema, images signify less by what they show (whatever the quality and dramatic significance of the objects represented) than by their organization and arrangement and less by their arrangement even than by the associations of time between individual shots and between the shots and the overall theme.

Toward the end of 1915, Griffith started work on a film whose subject was based on the report of the Federal Industrial Commission, set up to look into the 1912 strikes and the Stielow affair (a striker was accused of the murder of his boss). However, almost as soon as he had finished the project, he decided he wanted to open out the debate into a wider field of reference, into a huge fresco whose action, covering four epochs, would show the effects of intolerance—social and religious—through the ages. And this was *Intolerance*, completed in July 1916. The first (unedited) version of this film was eight hours long. It was cut down by Griffith to three hours and forty minutes.

Enlarging upon the technique of cross-cutting and parallel action, Griffith, with four separate story lines to maintain, was

to jump continually from one to the other and follow, through time and space, the course of four tragedies whose events, related thematically to one another, contributed cumulatively to the overall theme. The stories described the struggle between the high priests of Baal and Ishtar which (according to legend) brought about civil strife among the people of Babylon and the deposition of Balthazar by Cyrus; the struggle in Judea against Christ and the Crucifixion; the struggle between the Catholics and Protestants under Catherine de Médicis culminating in the St. Bartholomew massacre; and the struggle between bosses and workers in 1912, the armed repression of strikes and the accusation of murder made against a striker incapable of proving his innocence. These four stories were treated in such a way that the transition from one to another was made without disturbing the development of each. In other words, each story was taken up not where the action of the previous story had left it but where the dramatic consequence of the following story led it.

The film begins with the modern story. Reaching a certain point in its narrative, it is abandoned and the parallel action in Babylon is taken up—at the point it would have reached had it begun *at the same time*. After a few epic scenes, the action is continued with a similar transition to the Nazareth episode, from where we return to modern times to find Catherine de Médicis, then back to Babylon and so on throughout the rest of the film. As each episode is resumed, it is continued for a shorter and shorter time, with the effect that the tragedies appear almost to be taking place simultaneously. We witness Cyrus's assault on the walls of Babylon, Christ carrying the cross to Calvary, the fierce fighting on the tragic night of St. Bartholomew, and the young girl's desperate drive to delay the execution of her fiancé. Chariot wheels are

intercut with car wheels; the crucifixion is intercut with the building of the scaffold; the storming of Babylon by the Persians is intercut with the corpses of St. Bartholomew in a kind of deliberate whirling confusion—somewhat crude perhaps in its thinking but spellbinding and inspired from the lyrical point of view.

The strike scenes, the barricades and the squads of soldiers, swept along by a rhythm and an inspiration strongly reminiscent of Victor Hugo, had a considerable influence on Soviet filmmakers. The grandiose aspects of the spectacle are overwhelmed by the rhythm and control of a language matched only by that in *The Battleship Potemkin*. We also think of the enormous tracking shot with which the Babylon episode opens, where the camera (secured in a moored balloon) gradually descends, taking in a wide panorama, then tracks forward to the steps of the palace, slowly travels up them, discovering, as it advances, the vast dimensions of the set and the huge crowd, ending up at the feet of Balthazar surrounded by his concubines. One is forcibly reminded of the first sentence in *Salammbô*. And the siege of Babylon, the battle and Cyrus's armies with their hundreds of chariots deployed over the plain as far as the eye can see, remain among the most beautiful images of the cinema.

Though it took some five or six years for it to become apparent, the influence of this film was considerable—not just on the cinema but also on literature. The Anglo-Saxon novel with its achronological constructions and variations in time and space (which made the reputations of writers like Dos Passos, Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, and many others besides) owes more to *Intolerance* than to anything else.

Nevertheless, at its most general, the editing technique employed by Griffith (though complicated for its time) was concerned merely with relating shots accord-

ing to an appropriate rhythm. Symbolism appears only by virtue of the narrative. Griffith's primary concern was to tell a story in the best way possible and consequently to introduce the audience "into" the drama, turning them into actors in order to appeal to their emotions, making them participate in the action as though actually experiencing it themselves. At this point the cinema was still preoccupied with narration and description rather than with signification. The aim was to make the audience feel rather than understand. The parallel with Hugo and Romantic poetry becomes all the more apt when one considers that even where the problems of moral or social order are concerned, ideas are treated in such a way that they appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect.

Abel Gance, having had the opportunity to see Griffith's films during a trip he made to New York in 1919 to promote his film *J'Accuse*, was able, before any of the other European directors, to apply the lessons of the master and also achieve a certain competence of his own, turning the time value of images into a type of coherent system, the actual basis for all film expression. *La Roue*, produced between 1921 and 1922, was significant in this respect. It might even be said that this film was the springboard for the avant-garde movement in 1924 and the enthusiastic experiments into the nature of rhythm.

Before we come to the theories, we must first retrace the steps which the editing principle took in Soviet Russia, also following the precepts established by Griffith's films. While Gance and the French avant-garde were basically committed to the type of rhythmic expression which led to the extremism of *montage court* and the pretensions of "pure" rhythm, the Russians, pursuing a more intellectual line, became stuck in the groove of "cinedialectics."

The first Russian theorist was the direc-

tor Geo Bauer, whose researches, similar to those of German Expressionism, were aimed exclusively at the sets, lighting, and pictorial qualities of the motion picture. Editing (of which he was always aware) was for him merely a convenient method of linking information concerning the setting and of developing a plastic rhythm within a relative time sequence.

The theories of montage were embodied in the films of Dziga-Vertov, a former cameraman, at that time in charge of the propaganda and newsreel films of the newly constituted Soviet regime. Rejecting everything which for him was theatrical artificiality (studios, actors, staging) and *scorning composition in front of the camera*, Dziga-Vertov, along with his friends Kopalov and Belakov and his brother Michael Kaufman,¹ documentary filmmakers like himself, established the Kino-Glaz (the Kino-Eye) on May 21, 1922.

The declared intention of this school was to *capture reality in the raw*, to take images of life itself, thereby reverting apparently to the principles of the Lumière brothers—passing over the twenty-five years or so of aesthetic research. The director, concealed by the (would-be) complete objectivity of the camera, recorded a series of documents around a vague theme which served as a general guide. Any art consisted quite simply in “framing” the shots, putting them into some sort of order and joining them together. Any signification resulted from the meaning which the facts assumed when associated with each other in this way. Recorded as they happened, they were “directed” and transformed through the part they were made to play within the continuity. It was merely an art of structure. Perceptible reality, however real and objective (even chosen with a particular purpose), became a mere power of abstraction dressed up as concrete reality. The intended objectivity was, in the final

analysis, nothing more than an illusion, a myth.

This systematized effort was doomed to failure because of the obvious impossibility of composing after the fact. Countless permutations were available to the editor, but all of them were missing elements which had not been foreseen at the outset. Nevertheless, the explorations of Dziga-Vertov had a considerable influence in the USSR and indeed the whole world. They emphasized (perhaps in a rather extreme way) the importance of editing and stimulated Soviet filmmakers to place man in his social environment, to explore and insist on the role and influence of the environment and to create “truth.” Moreover, they gave birth to the newsreel and played a major part in the development of the documentary.

Parallelling the work of Dziga-Vertov, a body of young theater directors—Gregory Kozintzev, a set designer at the Moscow Opera, the playwright Leonid Trauberg, the art critic Sergei Krzhitsky, and the stage director Foregger, a disciple of Meyerhold—got together to form a school concerned as much with the cinema as with the theater: FEKS (the Factory of the Eccentric Actor), founded on July 9, 1922. The intentions of this group could not have been further removed from those of Dziga-Vertov. They were more interested in reaffirming the role of the actor and the set design and in absorbing all the techniques of set design, taking artificiality to its extreme of abstract caricature closely connected with Caligariism, but Caligariism biased in favor of the comic and the burlesque. The depersonalized and dehumanized actor became a mere puppet, a kind of symbolic automaton expressing through his mechanical gestures and attitudes a profound sense of parody directed against particular kinds of social mores or particular psychological “types.” It was the art of Pierrot, Harlequin, Panta-

lone, even Punch and Judy and the burlesque characters of the music hall, transposed with greater flexibility and diversity into the cinema, and more particularly, the theories on the theater propounded by Krizhitsky and Foregger based on an aesthetic of the cinema—theories which were really nothing more than the rehashing and systematization of the caricature productions put on by Meyerhold between 1914 and 1915 at his "experimental theater" and by Nikolai Yevreinov at the Crooked Mirror; theories which had already been applied in the cinema by Hansen, Zozlov, and the other directors who from 1916 were designated under the collective title of the Crooked Lens. Editing was nothing more than a convenient technique allowing contradictory attitudes or contrasting burlesque details to stand in direct opposition to each other; but it was also a means of cutting elliptically into the logical continuity of an action, condensing and schematizing it.

Steering a course between the two extremist groups (still represented even nowadays: for instance, Soviet burlesque films, not usually seen in the West, are almost all directed according to the precepts of FEKS) which because of their excessive categorizations did not really survive was the school which proved the most productive, most serious and influential: the Experimental Laboratory founded and directed by Lev Kuleshov. Surrounded by his pupils Vsevolod Pudovkin, Boris Barnett, Vladimir Vogel, Sergei Komarov, Anna Khokhlova, Doronin, etc., Kuleshov, previously an assistant to Bauer, began with the idea of teaching acting and directing. However, the study of the means by which film is constructed (namely editing) led him to discover—or more accurately to demonstrate experimentally—the potential of image relationships.

His first experiment is famous in the an-

nals of the cinema. From an old piece of film shot by Bauer he took a closeup of the actor Ivan Mozhukhin, deliberately showing his face at its most inexpressive and vague, and had three prints made of it. He then joined the first print to a shot of a plate of soup standing on a tabletop. The second he joined to a shot of a man's corpse lying face down on the ground and the third to one of a half-naked woman, stretched out luxuriously and invitingly on a couch. Then, joining all the "object-subject" pieces end to end, he projected the whole thing to an unprepared audience. Every one of them declared his admiration for Mozhukhin's talent for "expressing so marvelously, one after another, the feelings of hunger, pain, and desire." Since Mozhukhin had in fact expressed nothing of the kind, Kuleshov had proved that the audience was seeing things which did not really exist. In other words, by linking their successive perceptions and relating each detail to an organic whole, the audience was constructing logically the necessary relationships and crediting Mozhukhin with the expression which, in the normal course of events, he might have expressed. They were transferring to the actor the responsibility or equivalence of their own feelings.

Thus by following in the normal way the continuity of a movement or an action, it became possible for every audience member to construct "ideas" from one or two primary elements. Anyone could develop the thematic continuity of a structure using the shots as a series of reference points and could deduce the logical relationships. A state of mind or a particular feeling could be conditioned by a rudimentary stimulus of the emotions. The film—at least its affective or dialectical development—could be constructed within the audience's mind from the formal organization of the images.

The linking of shots in the continuity of an action thus proved to be similar, in re-

spect of the mechanism of consciousness, to the succession of static images in respect of the visual perception of movement. Each shot became expanded by an idea or meaning not contained in it but implied by its association with other shots. Consequently the same image within a different continuity (or different place within the same continuity) could (potentially) assume a completely different signification.

No one of course disputed the fact that the images of a film could have meaning only by virtue of their relation with the mind of the audience. However, what was unknown was what might be called the "psychological capacities" of these relations. However, from the moment it became established and analyzed, it proved to be controllable. And since the audience member was automatically experiencing this mental process, it became possible to anticipate, plan, and direct it: in a word, to appeal directly to his mind and mentality by prompting ideas generated by a series of affective stimuli organized into some kind of pattern.

Thus the cinema showed itself above all to be an art of association and suggestion. It became possible to invest a concrete image with a temporary symbolic characteristic. As much as and perhaps more than in isolation, the meaning of the image-content depended on the image-making content. Form was able to alter content.

Vertov was the theoretician of "integrated montage." With him, the film was worked out in the cutting room, from among a quantity of documents chosen "after the fact." He did not use what we know nowadays as a shooting script, merely a few general ideas hastily jotted down on paper. Editing was, as far as he was concerned, the "organization of chance," a means of constructing with the unexpected. On the other hand, with Kuleshov it became an aesthetic principle, a technique of writing and com-

position using, of course, a basic preconceived theme and images capable of communicating the governing generative ideas of the work in question. Editing, in the technical sense of the word, was merely the execution and application of a detailed blueprint: the *shooting script*. The shot types and camera directions were described with certain effects in mind. Kuleshov's films were constructed on paper before he shot them, and the "breakdown" of the shooting script merely represented a kind of *initial editing* process. The only difference between the two stages was the material one determined by the transition from blueprint to film reality—together with the alterations and pruning which such a transition necessarily entails.

Montage (editing) as it was understood in the United States was merely a means of telling a story. Regardless of the rhythm or signification they might produce, images were assembled in the same way as bricks one on top of the other to construct a wall. Kuleshov, in his attempt to codify rhythm, succeeded in creating a time sequence relating the images to the dynamic of the action—only a metric system as yet but one already carefully calculated and worked out.

In both cases, the Russian directors contributed the potential of montage as a creative force to the capacity for arousing emotions explored by Griffith, Gance, and one or two others. And the experiments conducted by Kuleshov paved the way for the first theories of the cinema based not on vague theatrical or literary speculation but on an analysis of the functional capacities of a specifically filmic means of expression.

The Consequences of the Kuleshov Effect

It would be wrong to assume, however, that images are capable of creating ideas deriving from them exclusively or from

their unusual associations. What in fact happens is that an association of ideas is generated by the juxtaposition through which and by means of which the audience is able to *recognize* or relive an experience from his past—nothing more. A child as yet unaware of any sexual drives will be unable to understand the meaning of the "Mozhukhin-woman on the couch" association. The structure of the film cannot give him that understanding; it cannot generate it in his mind; the very most it can do is create anxiety in him. Only adults will be able to understand, immediately connecting this association with what they know of the subject of physical love. When an audience—by reason of an unusual shot—is confronted by an image it does not recognize or an unfamiliar association, its consciousness suddenly tries to associate this unknown entity with something known or similar, in order to make a mental classification: which is, after all, merely the equivalent of normal perception. (As we have already indicated, *to see is to recognize*; discovery is only relevant for something unknown which must then be immediately put to the test—which occurs less and less frequently as one gets older.)

Once again, film images are merely a complex of stimuli "actualizing" ideas or emotions by relating to our consciousness effects associated with some previous experience. Moreover, if we look more closely at the Kuleshov effect—similar in many ways to perceptual structuring—we see that the process involving the audience's consciousness is less cinematic than first appears. In the Mozhukhin-naked woman association, for instance, the association is perceived, generally speaking, as it appears. The two characters express absolutely nothing; there is nothing to tell me that the man loves or simply desires the woman and nothing to say whether the woman is upset or flattered by his atten-

tion. It is purely and simply the man looking-woman looked at relationship which evokes and *signifies* the idea of desire. I feel an emotional response because this idea (presented to me so forcefully) releases in me the emotional reactions associated with it, which I then project onto the man, who I *presume* necessarily desires the woman he is looking at. In other words, the association defined above is an *idea in images*, images similar to those which might somehow have represented the idea in my mind. The idea has *already been structured* and it is merely brought to the surface with the effect that, through the medium of film, I perceive a *concept*; I react emotionally to the idea, not to the reality. In the same way as with words, the process is from the abstract to the concrete, except that, unlike words, it is not possible to conceive of "an imaginary picture," since the film provides all the necessary images. Though visual, the process is antycinematic in the sense that it works from the idea to the emotion instead of the other way around.

The Kuleshov effect (the basis of film language) really becomes filmic only when the onlooker-looked-upon association (subject-object in its wider implications) is conducted at the level of a *concrete* emotional relationship. It then becomes emotion suggesting idea and not idea provoking emotion leading us back to the pince-nez in *Potemkin*, where the emotional effect becomes the idea, whereas here it is the idea becoming the image.

If images do not create new ideas, then neither must they illustrate concepts. They must suggest ideas which are *accessible* but which have yet to be structured in the audience's mind: however unusual the idea which the images present to me, it is immediately recognized and *discovered* from among my past experiences.

In spite of this, in their speculation on the Kuleshov effect, the Soviet filmmakers

came to consider image-ideas as though they were *signs*. "By assembling these image-ideas, it should be possible to develop ideas dialectically and create a kind of discourse where the images, concerned only with communicating ideas independently of their immediate content, might be made to conform with the logic of the discourse." Such speculation—founded, one might add, on a specifically cinematic effect—could only result in the negation of cinema itself.

If, for instance, I take a shot from a single setup of a man throwing himself in despair from the parapet of the Pont de l'Alma into the river Seine, I am covering an all-embracing reality, a concrete unity. However, I have the option of fragmenting this unity, shooting (in closeup) the man climbing over the parapet, then a falling body (in medium shot), and lastly the man struggling in the water as he drowns (closeup). It is not that I have lost sight of the concrete reality in this sort of fragmentation. I have merely chosen the analytical method instead of the single-shot method.

If, on the other hand, I choose to show only the details, I can film a man (or even part of his body) climbing over the parapet (not necessarily the Pont de l'Alma), then a body falling from a wall (possibly the battlements of the Château de Pierrefond), and finally a drowning man struggling in the waves of a river in flood (possibly the Rhône). I thus recreate—or create—a fact and express an idea: a man is committing suicide by throwing himself into the river. Whatever the idea, I am creating a link between these three different images, a link translated in the audience's mind by a "unity" constructed from their logical associations. Yet the "reality" remains purely conceptual. The concrete fact is of less importance than the idea. It serves merely to signify the idea and is merely *represented*. Each of its images is a mere signifying

schema: a man is climbing over a parapet—a man is falling—a man is drowning.

I might easily continue in this vein and develop all my ideas using mere image-symbols. However, there is a danger which lies in the fact that though the linkage might be guaranteed as far as the ideas are concerned, passing from one image-sign to another, the association of the represented objects making up these images will cease to have any meaning. There will be no positive development of logic of representation or else the representation itself will be continually liable to distortion. The development of ideas can only take place at the risk of damaging the image-data deprived of their living content and dissociated from perceptible reality and their own potentialities.

Imbued from the outset with an obvious emotional content, these images become nothing more than conventional signs; each "cell" becomes a mere hieroglyph and the film a huge jigsaw puzzle. In their more extreme form, they do not need to be projected onto a screen; a better effect is achieved by simplifying them and codifying them on paper. They are turned quite simply into the ideograms of primitive writing.

This is how Pudovkin, wishing to signify in *The End of St. Petersburg* the sudden turmoil and chaos of war, opens the sequence with the explosion of a shell, scattering earth all over the screen. It is a marvelous symbol. Yet much further on he signifies the October Revolution in the same fashion. It would be acceptable (at a pinch) were the same idea to have been represented by *another image*, but unfortunately he uses the *same image* representing the *same shell burst*—which it clearly is not any longer. The image merely becomes an abstract sign used in a context outside the living reality. It distorts that reality by the introduction of an element completely alien to it.

We intend to come back to these details

when we have studied rhythm in its widest sense in order to discover how far we are justified in speaking of rhythm with regard to the cinema.

Cinematic Rhythm

A Look at Rhythm

For Littré, musical rhythm is a "regular sequence of strong and weak sounds," a presumption unjustified for two reasons: that relationships of time are at least as important as relationships of volume and that, if these relationships are regular, then there may be cadence but not rhythm.

In the words of A. Sonnenschein, "rhythm is the feature in a sequence of events in time which produces in the mind which perceives it an impression of proportion between the durations of the events or groups of events which comprise the sequence." To this definition might be added that of Francis Warrant: "a sequence of events occurring at intervals of duration variable or otherwise but governed by rules is what constitutes rhythm." However, it was E. d'Eichtal who formulated the simplest and most broadly based definition: "rhythm is in time what symmetry is in space." Also Vincent d'Indy (whose definition is really only an echo of d'Eichtal's admirably clear and precise formulation): "rhythm is order and proportion in space and time."

Yet we must agree with Pius Servien in pointing out that rhythm is *perceived periodicity* and in using the term *symmetry* in the sense of "co-modulation" or harmonic proportion. With the effect that though, in the words of Matila Ghyka in his *Essai sur le rythme*, "the Vitruvian theory of proportion and eurhythms is now no more than a transcription into space of the Pythagorean theory of harmony or musical intervals as

can be seen in the *Timaeus*," we may alter E. d'Eichtal's definition and say that—within certain limitations—co-modulation is in space what rhythm is in time.

Whatever it may be, rhythm, as Herbert Spencer puts it, "occurs wherever there is a conflict of irreconcilable forces." This being so, if, as Gaston Bachelard assures us, "there is a functional need for the contradictory interplay of functions," then rhythm is a kind of dialectic of time rather than a continuity whose intermittent variations distort for us the normal flow of time. In fact, it develops according to a pattern of alternating tension and rest—the expression merely of a constantly renewable conflict.

Moreover, if rhythm is rhythm only insofar as it is perceived, its framework is inevitably the limits of our sensory capacities. In other words, the complex of relationships constituting rhythm must be perceived as a whole to which each of its parts can be directly related. And this is possible only inasmuch as our memory is capable of doing this, by involving a process of "persistence of image" (auditory and visual), similar, as an effect of consciousness, to retinal persistence at the physiological level.

Thus rhythm can be perceived only insofar as it is governed by our consciousness. Only relationships of time of the order of seconds or fractions of seconds relating to a whole lasting as much as thirty seconds can be perceived as rhythm. Obviously, each *rhythmic period* may also be rhythmically related to subsequent periods in the film, poem, or melody, but the actual rhythm of the whole work—the sum-total of all these relationships—can never be perceived as such. It can only be *understood* as a *rhythmic lapse of time*, i.e., as the overall curve of a modulation gradually followed through its various perceptual effects accepted as *rhythmic*. For, though our perception may "retain" a duration of less than a

minute and grasp the relationship of these interrelated parts, it is utterly incapable of performing the same task for the work as a whole. Thus the notion of rhythm cannot be accepted as anything but an intellectual process which reconstructs mentally the perceived relationships in order to abstract an approximate general "idea."

By the same token, we can speak only metaphorically of, for instance, the "rhythm of the seasons." The seasons do indeed manifest a rhythm from the intellectual point of view and "relative to the cosmos," but it is a rhythm in which we are also involved, dominating us—the effect of which being that we are incapable of recognizing it as such except in terms of an abstract concept (one, moreover, which is entirely anthropocentric).

The ancient Greeks Pythagoras and Plato proposed the human body as the ideal model for eurhythmy. And it is true, as Matila Ghyka indicates, that the "two psychophysiological cadences of life (heartbeat and breathing) do provide us with, on the one hand, the basic notion of 'measure' (the normal pulse rate of the human heart, eighty beats per minute), of order and the relative notions of 'fast' and 'slow' and, on the other, through the rhythm of breathing (a perfect rhythmic phenomenon with its tension, release, and rest), the reflection and accompaniment of the waves of emotion of which the rhythms of verse and music are the sound-expression" (*Essai sur le rythme*).

Rhythmic form is by and large created in our minds by virtue of the purpose which gives it direction. We recognize this purpose in music, since it is composed for that express purpose. But a purpose of this kind does not exist in the rhythmic whole which we organize in our minds from isochronous beats. The whole can only exist by virtue of a causative intention. What happens, then, is that we establish the pur-

pose in our minds *beforehand* as a pattern to be projected onto the sounds and we rediscover our purpose through the sounds by arranging them into the preconceived pattern. Thus, in this case, rhythmic form does not reveal to us the purpose of which it is the expression; on the contrary, it is a potential or imaginary purpose casting into rhythm a form devoid of expression.

These relationships of time resemble—or so it would seem—the spatial structures of gestalt. This arrangement is the product of a necessary choice and a formal organization dictated by a series of analogies or relationships which together form a whole. Thus feeling and form appear to complement each other—both created intuitively by our minds and in a manner that is purely arbitrary for the reason that they do not really exist.

Lastly, when the beats are too slow or too fast and we are no longer able to arrange them, the reverse effect occurs. Between each of them (if they are too slow) or between small groups of them (if they are too fast) we introduce a rhythm, with the result that the beats then serve as a measure punctuating the suggested rhythm, preferably with strong stresses.

In the comparison Ghyka draws with organic rhythms (heartbeat and breathing), he sums up as follows: "these two currents, both punctuated with a periodic signpost, a discontinuous sequence, illustrate each in turn the two kinds of possible rhythm: homogeneous rhythm, which is static and completely regular (cadence in the strict sense of the word, or *meter*), and dynamic, asymmetrical rhythm with an unexpected groundswell, a reflection of the breath of life itself, or *rhythm* in the strict sense." All the same, I fear that our learned writer, though he correctly distinguishes between rhythm and meter, falls into the trap (doubtless because meter and rhythm in music are pretty much one and the same) of confusing *meter*

(or measure of time) with *metrics* (or measure of rhythmic cadence). In our view, therefore, it is essential to be clear about the meaning of these two terms.

As Ludwig Klages has said, "rhythm is a commonplace phenomenon of life, to which every living creature, including man, subscribes. Measure is a human fabrication. Rhythm can appear in its most perfect form in the complete absence of measure—on the other hand, measure can only exist relative to rhythm" (*Vom Wesen des Rhythmus*). *Measure* is nothing more than a practical convenience. It is the process of ordering rhythm intellectually, a means of observing it, of giving it a fixed framework within which and by reference to which it may promote its expressive mobility. Thus measure regulates rhythm without however submitting it to an autocratic rule for fear of harming its spontaneity. Indeed, rhythm is by no means subject to measure; rather the reverse is true, rhythm using measure as a point of reference in its free development. Thus it is wrong to say, as does Henri Delacroix, that measure "allows rhythm to be formulated and constructed" (though admittedly it does make it easier for our consciousness to perceive it). However, since measures—relative to each other—are perfectly isochronous, we are of Etienne Souriau's opinion that each measure is a unity "within which adjustments to the time sequence may occur."

Be this as it may, measure, originally used to regulate rhythmic flow without circumscribing it within a narrow framework, allowing the stresses to fall on a particular measured phrase, finally came to control rhythm itself. The divisions of rhythm had to coincide with the divisions of measure and the stresses had to fall on the downbeats (or strong beats). In this way, rhythm became *subordinate to measure*—which explains the pervasive confusion of the two. This was also a characteristic of classical

verse, where the rhythm had to be confined to the verse line and could not carry over. It was only with the introduction of enjambement that the rhythm of verse was able to break the bonds of this poetic strait-jacket.

Vincent d'Indy complained that "the identification of rhythm with measure had a deplorable effect on music. It was one of our most unfortunate inheritances from the seventeenth century, a century which produced so many mistaken theories. In this way, rhythm, subject to the restrictive demands of measure, very quickly became impoverished to the point of the most hackneyed cliché" (*Cours de composition musicale*). Besides, melody had to be composed of equal themes subdivided into phrases which were also equal, thereby forming the *grid* in which the recurring patterns of stress could coincide with the accents of the measures. This "mechanical" rhythm was perfectly suited to dance tunes, where stress patterns are necessary, but employed in the symphonic form it led to mind-numbing monotony. We ought to add, however, that this technical skill (at which Bach and Handel were past masters) allowed rhythm to become more flexible by overcoming its restrictions.

Cadence is nothing more than the "index" of rhythm, that is, of recurrent patterns or stresses. Of course, cadence is not rhythm, but it supports rhythm in that its equal beats must be regulated according to certain relationships and certain laws. A total irregularity of cadence would mean that there would be no rhythm strictly speaking. Moreover, the repetition of uniform beats (but with variable tonality and pitch) is a sure means of inducing hypnosis or hallucination (Oriental music, voodoo, etc.).

Metrics is the notation of the natural measures of rhythm, as distinct from the proportional measure of time. It is the arithmetic expression of periodicity. Notation of

this kind does not claim to record the whole expressivity of rhythm (for instance, it cannot take account of the relationships of sound quality, pitch, and tonality); it transcribes its basic feature—measured periodicity. It measures cadences, i.e., proportions in time.

Mathis Lussy has said: "remove the intonation, i.e., the different pitches of the sounds, from a page of music, write down all the notes and rests on a single line of the score, and what you have is the rhythmic design, the skeleton of the music, its bone structure." This design, this notation, is what I call metrics, a notation which can be expressed in seconds or fractions of seconds relating either to the measured bars or to the basic phrase. Interpreted in this sense, metrics is of no practical use in music—and this is why it is confused with the metronomic units governing the bar. This is how it has been interpreted in this study—our interpretation being directly adaptable to film rhythm in the same way as to verse rhythm. We should bear in mind that we are not referring to linear representations—graph or sine-curve—like those dreamt up by Etienne Souriau, which are a kind of graphic transcription of the qualities of a piece of music, an "approximation" rather than a metric system.²

To sum up, we are of Matila Ghyka's opinion that "*rhythm derives from the action of proportion on cadence.*" Yet it is not equal to the sum of its parts. It is not the simple addition of related times or related pitches; it is the effect of such an addition, a synthesis not an aggregate. And by the same token, metrical analysis can take account only of the rhythmic diagram not rhythm itself.

Just as the criterion of good musical rhythm is that it should flow continuously (albeit intermittently), developing beyond the discontinuity of the measure yet dependent on it, the criterion of good film rhythm is that it should be a modulation whose uni-

form progression and uninterrupted continuity transcend the fragmentation and discontinuity of the shots, while at the same time dependent on them. As we shall see further on, all we can ever really perceive are relationships, differences and discontinuity. Thus pure continuity could never constitute rhythm. *Rhythm is a development whose continuity is guaranteed and defined by the discontinuity which makes it apparent.* It is the harmonious development of a series of self-generating beats whose very quality as beats is based on a difference of time.

It is nevertheless difficult to understand Matila Ghyka's distinction between discontinuous series (whole numbers), characteristic of relationships perceived in time and continuous series (irrational numbers) which characterize spatial relationships. In fact, to claim that "therefore there are proportions of continuity in time" is to state merely that these proportions can be transcribed into arithmetical or algorhythmic terms. Obviously, Matila Ghyka can see proportion in music only in terms of interval relationships, in relationships of pitch in the notes which make up the melodic line. Doubtless he is correct if he is meaning "proportion" in the sense of a modulation which cannot be expressed except by continuous series. But there is just as much proportion in recurrent patterns when these occur in asymmetrical beats, in other words, when rhythm is *rhythm not measure*—any relationships of time or dissimilar lengths being transcribed in terms of a proportional relationship in the broadest sense of the word.

In my view, *proportion* cannot be applied to what in the rhythmic arts is understood as *rhythm*—only to *harmony*. What may possibly be compared with rhythm is Vitruvian *analogia*, harmonic proportion, in other words, repetition, the *cyclical* development of certain themes and proportions (which is what makes us think of architecture as a

symphony of relationships, a dynamic unity) rather than the proportions themselves. On the other hand, the recurring patterns of rhythm are comparable to analogia even though they do not require, as does analogia, a "proportional" relationship in the mathematical sense.

Ghyka recognizes moreover that "just as we can move from discontinuous rhythms to proportion, we can move from the latter to rhythm, since the recurrence of the same proportions brings us back quite naturally to 'perceived periodicity,' introducing a new discontinuous identity." On the one hand, he is correct in stressing that the rhythm of space is reversible whereas the rhythm of time is not: "a building is seen differently from left to right or from right to left. In the arts of time, on the other hand, the aesthetic effects are irreversible; like life and its most outstanding manifestations—psychological time and organic growth—they have a predetermined direction" (*Essai sur le rythme*). We should add as a corollary that in the spatial arts we move from a direct perception of the whole to an analysis of the individual parts, whereas in the arts of time the whole is constructed as the parts develop. This is why a comparison of rhythm and symmetry can be valid only in the abstract sense of proportion and why we could never subscribe to Francis Warrain's view that "music is to time what geometry is to space." Indeed, though music does structure periodicities relating to an *objective* measure of time (cadence, meter, measure) it creates, through its rhythm, an *impression of time* (*experienced* time with all its psychic effects) *independent of the real time of the phenomenon which produces it*, whereas geometry is incapable of creating dimension independent of the area it is measuring. Nor can architecture create a "space" different from that to which its proportions relate. Thus, though rhythm develops in time *in*

the same way as proportion in space, we must agree with d'Eichtal that "rhythm is in time what symmetry is in space" (with all the more reason that, in this definition, the word *rhythm* is used in its most general sense) and deny vehemently that music is to time what architecture is to space—accepting that their respective forms will inevitably produce different results.

In fact, just as symmetry is essentially related to space, so rhythm is associated with time. To speak of symmetry in time is, as Meumann says, "to confuse the visual diagram of transcribed rhythm with living rhythm—which, as it develops in time, is in essence the very antithesis of symmetry." Indeed, be it a relationship of time or pitch within a given period or a proportional relationship within a given space, rhythm is essentially *dynamic*. Musical harmonies, considered as such (i.e., as vertical structures: chords) and architectonic proportions are doubtless similar in type to rhythm, but they are not rhythm. Being static, they could never be anything but "fixed"—to borrow an image of Schelling (who described architecture as "petrified music").

Through all its different forms and usages, rhythm remains a *unity*. As Dom Mocquereau indicates in his famous work on Gregorian chant, "there is only one overall rhythm whose laws based on human nature are always to be found in any artistic creation, musical or literary, of any race, at any time." If there is one feature common to all the different forms of expression, it must be rhythm. Only through rhythm can there be any cross-fertilization of the arts.

"In the beginning was Rhythm," as the conductor Hans Von Bulow said, paraphrasing the Bible. And in the light of this quotation, René Dumesnil recalls that, according to Renan, the Greek word *lógos*, which the Vulgate translated as *verbum*, also meant "relationship" and "proportion."

Moreover, the words *rhythmos* (numerically measurable length of time) and *arithmos* (numerical relationship, hence our term *arithmetic*) meant both "number" and "cadence." Lastly, *universe* or *cosmos* implied rhythm and proportion, the harmony of numbers in the Pythagorean sense: "Wise-men, O Kallikles, say that friendship, order, reason, and justice are what keep the sky and the earth, the gods and men together; this is why we call this unity the Cosmos, in other words, order" (Plato, *Gorgias*).

Which gives us grounds to suppose that the first verse of John's Gospel does not mean, "In the beginning was the Word (of God)," as the theologians have always held, but "In the beginning was order and harmony" (i.e., *equilibrium* in the static and absolute sense of the word or, if you prefer, the *Absolute*) which any reasoned reading of the text would support. However, without going into purely verbal metaphysical details and returning the argument to human proportions, we might say, along with Marcel Jousse: "In the beginning was rhythmic action." Which is all we need to know for the purpose of this present study.

All action, all work, in fact, is automatically organized and recorded in a rhythm—the farmer's rhythm, the blacksmith's rhythm—not counting collective actions coordinated in the same way, reducing the individual effort. This was how the rowers on the Roman galleys worked—in time with a rhythm laid down by a drummer, or even a musician or poet. And it is well known that the only purpose served by military bands is to keep the marching soldiers in step with an appropriate rhythm, thereby cutting down their fatigue. Since all rhythmic efforts aim toward getting into step (executing equal movements in an equal time), they obey the law of least effort, and all organic rhythms aim to be integrated in a more general rhythm, to submit to an adjusting system.

For Marcel Jousse, it is all to do with the laryngo-buccal action governing vocal utterances, which is what produces speech.

The Avant-Garde and Pure Cinema

During our examination of ways in which the idea of rhythm developed, we mentioned that the main body of experimentation was undertaken by two schools of cinema: the Soviet school, which, with Kuleshov as the guiding light, attempted to promote symbols and image-ideas, and the French school, which, with Gance as the guiding light, became committed to the notion of pure visual rhythm and signification relative to the time value of the images.

In this respect, Gance's *La Roue* marks a decisive turning point in the development of the cinema. Taking Griffith's discoveries and metric montage one stage further, this film introduced in certain sequences (the runaway train and the death of Norma-Compound, etc.) an accelerated rhythmic form produced by a montage of shots becoming progressively shorter and shorter. The brevity of the shots and the pace of the tempo brought out further the rhythmic possibilities of film and, from then on, the number of theories and hypotheses proliferated and brought into being a movement later described as the avant-garde simply because its sole purpose was that of experimentation.

As Jean Epstein recalls,

it was the most significant period in the general development of the French cinema and the most productive in terms of new techniques added to this new means of expression, the most fruitful in terms of technical and theoretical discoveries which to this day remain a source of instruction and which were to plot the course of the evolution of the talkie—the first golden age of cinema in France, during which it suddenly became aware of

its own resources, conscious of its own character, its own will, and its capacity for becoming an independent art form. (*Esprit du cinéma*)

If the truth be known, this type of aesthetic and technical experimentation had begun some years earlier. The pioneers had not waited for rhythm to be discovered before experimenting with signification through the image, but they had done so in a completely different sense. Jean Epstein, who had himself lived through this period, reminds us:

We were struck by the great similarity between dreams and film: the power which they shared [however unequally] for representing an imaginary, fantasy world. Yet this primitive cinematic unreality was generated almost entirely by factors beyond the actual tools of the cinema, by a fantasy world of sets and operatic artifices. Now, what these first filmmakers had to understand and realize was that the capacity at their disposal for transforming and sublimating reality could be included within the mechanism and optics of the camera. The camera, endowed henceforth with intrinsic magical powers, therefore became not just an artificial eye adding to the limited powers of our natural vision but also an eye associated with a mechanical imagination and as it were imbued with an automatic subjectivity. Méliès himself had taken the first halting step toward this discovery when he replaced, with the dissolve-in-the-camera, the cumbersome trapdoor he had used to make the devil appear and disappear in his sets.

However, one of Abel Gance's first films (*Le Professeur Tube*) is a great deal more significant in this development. With an apology for a script (upon which we must refrain from passing judgment since it does not really concern us at this point), this film added to the range of cinematic techniques the personal vision of the lens, the fantasy world created

within the camera itself, the subjective language of the machine. Abel Gance is one of the greatest (if not the greatest) name in the whole of French cinema, to whom we owe many other discoveries, none of which has ever surpassed the above in importance. For within the short space of this one-reeler which otherwise might seem mere trivial and contrived comic effect, Gance established one of the most fundamental conditions of the language of movies, to be explored later by the French, Scandinavian, and German cinemas: to endow the lens with living biased, active qualities (in the modern idiom "committed").³

In chronological order (and in order of importance), the second great name to add to the list of founders of language and visual style peculiar to the cinema is undoubtedly that of Marcel L'Herbier. Right from his earliest efforts, L'Herbier also tried to force the lens to represent objects not as they normally appeared but in the light of a personal, psychological, and poetic interpretation. Herein, without a shadow of doubt, lies the essential characteristic of the young French cinema, distinguishing it from the American cinema (from which, it must be admitted, it borrowed a great many techniques). . . .

One scene in L'Herbier's *El Dorado* gives us a marvelous example of the subtlety of expression which one or two filmmakers had achieved by 1921. The sequence in question (which holds up even nowadays) is of a dance in a Spanish nightclub. The focus becomes progressively softer, gradually making the dancers lose their differentiating characteristics, with the effect that they stop being recognizable as distinct individuals and become fused into the overall visual thematic: *the dancer* – an element of the film anonymous from then on and impossible to distinguish from the twenty or even fifty identical elements which, taken as a whole, form another generality, another abstraction. Not specific fandangos but fandango *in general*, in other words, the structure in visual terms of the musical rhythm of all fandangos.

Here the filmmaker succeeded in giving, with the minimum of concretization and particularization, a plastic form of numbers in action, of music which, through the schematic transcription of a dance onto film, became transferred from the realm of hearing to that of sight. This symbolization of the image remains one of the purest examples of pure cinema. In addition, *El Dorado* in its overall quality was one of the first films of the new mature period of the silent cinema in France. (*Esprit du cinéma*)

What is this cinematic purity? As often happens with innovations which have in some measure been predetermined, people knew what it was not going to be before they knew what it was. It was defined as antitheatrical and beyond literature. It was hoped that, released from the yoke of the theater and the novel, pure cinema would blossom forth of its own accord. Meanwhile any possible confusion was avoided by another definition which, though he did not coin it, at least gained some reputation for Louis Delluc. The idea was that any cinema worthy of the name would be within certain limits the geometric location for anything "photogenic." Though the intention was to underline the aesthetic characteristics, the problem was not even touched upon. Obviously the word *photogenic* was being used to describe features of people or objects which cinematic reproduction was able to transfigure and enhance. Yet this enhancement was being made at a purely empirical level. Filmmakers were searching for it haphazardly through their lenses, angling as it were for miracles. What was involved? How did the process occur? Did it conform to any rules and, if so, which ones? The quest of the filmmaker had encountered the first of the great mysteries of the cinema: photogenics.

Mysteries are here today, gone tomorrow, replaced by others. Soon the directors and cameramen who were vitally interested in their profession realized that photogenics depended (perhaps not ex-

clusively but generally speaking) upon movement: either of the object photographed or of the play of light and shadow with which the object might be presented or, then again, of the lens itself. Thus photogenics appeared above all to be a function of mobility. . . . (*Le Cinéma du diable*)

In the final analysis, the quality that the cinema bestowed on what it represented—and which was called photogenics—was intrinsically predicated (or so it seemed to be) on the basic structures of rhythm. For this reason, the problem had to be approached and studied on its own terms. The relationship between short scenes and larger general scenes most clearly apparent in terms of the andantes and crescendos of Griffith's films and particularly well illustrated in Gance's *La Roue*, reveals affinities between the cinema and music. The analogy is well documented. Emile Vuillermoz, the music critic, wrote as early as 1919: "composition in the cinema is without a doubt subject to the confined laws of musical composition. A film is written and orchestrated like a symphony. The 'phrases' of light have a rhythm of their own."⁴

The "word had been made flesh." While Delluc, who was to some extent the leader of the French movement to renovate the art of the cinema, was declaring that "we must create a cinema which owes nothing to the theater, or to literature, but depends exclusively on the quality of its moving pictures," critics and filmmakers, looking to music as the source of visual rhythm, were declaring for their part:

Léon Moussinac: "If we attempt to study cinegraphic rhythm, we can see that it has an obvious counterpart in musical rhythm. . . . It is also why the cinegraphic poem as I see it will be closely related to the symphonic poem, the images being to the eye what the musical sounds are to the ear . . . the subject matter will no longer be the

main feature of the film; it will be the general theme or even better the visual theme. . . And we shall say: it is from rhythm that the cinematographic work of art derives its order—without which it could never hope to be a work of art" (*Naissance du cinéma*).

Abel Gance: "there are two kinds of music—the music of sound and the music of light (I mean the cinema); and the latter is higher up the scale of vibration than the former. Does this not mean that it can act on our senses with the same power and subtlety?" (*Le Temps de l'image est venu*).

Germaine Dulac: "only music is capable of stimulating the same sort of impression as the cinema and we are able, in the light of the sensations which it offers us, to understand those which the cinema of the future will offer us. The cinema does not have any clearly defined boundaries; which might lead us to conclude, in the light of known facts, that the visual idea, a theme dear to all filmmakers, is inspired by musical technique far more than any other technique or ideal.

"Music which provides us with that special transcendence of human emotion, which records the manifold states of our souls, is predicated on the movement of sounds, just as our art is predicated on the movement of images. Which helps us understand what the visual idea is, the artistic development of a new form of sensitivity.

"The 'pure' film we all dream of making is a visual symphony of rhythmic images which the feeling of the artist alone coordinates and projects onto the screen."

Fernand Léger: "The future of the cinema, like that of painting, lies in the interest with which it can endow objects, fragments of objects or totally imaginary fantasies.

"Where painting goes wrong is in the subject matter.

"Where cinema goes wrong is in the script.

"Freed from this dead weight, the cinema can become a huge microscope reveal-

ing things which have never been seen or felt."⁵

To dispense with the script—in other words, story and anecdote—and turn the cinema into visual music (self-expression in terms of a self-significant rhythm) was the aim of a whole generation of artists and experimenters in the period between 1920 and 1925. Yet this search for pure rhythm, for an expression which would be for the eye what music was for the ear, was not just the effect of Gance's film or Emile Vuillermoz's ideas, nor of aesthetes desperate to free the cinema from its theatrical yoke. The movement, developing all over Europe, was urged on in particular by painters—notably Vicking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann and Hans Richter in Germany and Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Picabia in France. However, the first of these was undoubtedly Léopold Survage.⁶ Guillaume Apollinaire, who staged an exhibition of this painter's work in 1917, went so far as to say that Survage had "invented the new art of painting in movement." *Colored rhythm*, as he called it, "was on the point of being shown to the public via the cinema—that tremendous propaganda weapon—when war interrupted his plans." Survage had published in Apollinaire's review *Soirées de Paris*, in the July-August 1914 issue, a statement which defines the originality of his discoveries. It is fitting that we should quote from it at length because our endeavors in this study are directly derived from it. Survage writes:

colored rhythm is not an illustration or an interpretation of a piece of music. It is an independent art form (though based on the same psychological premises as music).

Its similarity to music. What determines the affinity between music, sound-rhythm and colored rhythm (which in my opinion is best illustrated in the cinema) is the way in which the component parts

fit together in a time sequence. Sound is the basic ingredient of music.

The combination of musical sounds, obeying the law of the simple relationship between vibrations of simultaneous sounds, forms musical chords. These become combined into musical phrases, etc. Yet music is always a means of making different sound vibrations fit together *in time*.

A piece of music is a kind of subtle language with which the composer expresses his state of mind or, to use a convenient expression, his internal dynamic. The performance of a piece of music causes us to experience something similar to the composer's dynamic, and the more sensitive the listener (as would be a listening device) the greater the intimacy between him and the musician.

The basis of my dynamic art is *colored visual form* (serving a similar function to that of sound in music).

It is composed of three factors: (1) genuine visual (abstract) form; (2) rhythm, i.e., movement and change of form; (3) color.

Form and rhythm. By abstract visual form, I mean any generalization or geometrization of a form, an object, or our environment. In fact, the form of these objects is complicated and at the same time very simple and commonplace—for instance, a tree, a piece of furniture, or even a man. . . . The more these objects are studied in detail, the more they defy simple representation. The method we suggest for representing the irregular form of a real body in an abstraction is to relate it to a simple or complex geometrical form and these transformed representations are, relative to the forms of objects in the external world, what musical sound is relative to sound in general. Yet this is not enough to represent a state of mind or stimulate an emotion.

A static abstract form communicates relatively little. Rounded or pointed, elongated or square, simple or complex, it produces nothing more than a very confused *sensation*: mere simple graphic rep-

resentation. Only by moving, changing, or coming into contact with other forms can it be inbred with the power of rousing emotion. It is in terms of its role and purpose that it becomes abstract. By changing itself in time it sweeps away space; it comes into contact with other forms as it changes; they combine together and develop side by side or in opposition, following the rhythm imposed by the particular cadence which is the expression of the author's soul (sometimes happy, sometimes sad, sometimes dreamy and pensive) bringing them into balance. Yet the balance is temporary and the process of change starts all over again! And this is the reason why visual rhythm is similar to the sound rhythms of music.

Rhythm fulfills the same function in both art forms. Consequently, in the plastic world the visual form of solid objects is of value to us only as a source or means of expressing and stimulating our inner dynamism, not as a representation of the significance or importance which the objects in fact assume in our lives. From the viewpoint of this dynamic art, visual form becomes the expression and product of a manifestation of form-energy, in its own context. And the same is true of form and rhythm—which are inseparable.

Color. For our eyes (the apparatus by which we perceive light waves) color is the cosmos and at the same time the energy context produced in terms of colored matter, through either natural or projected light.

Psychologically, what affects and influences us is not color or sound in their absolute, isolated states but the alternated sequences of colors and sounds, which means that because of its ability to move, the art of colored rhythm increases the power of this alternation, already influencing ordinary painting, but only as a group of colors simultaneously fixed on a static surface with no change of relationship. Through movement the nature of these colors gains a power higher than static harmonies. In this respect also, color

is associated with rhythm. It stops being a mere accessory of the objects and becomes their content, the very essence of abstract form. The technical difficulties in producing cinematic films are contained in the projection of colored rhythms.

We must remember that for a short three-minute film, between one and two thousand images must be recorded. And that is a great deal! However, I do not claim to compose them all myself. All I do is show the essential stages. Clever draftsmen will be able to guess the intermediate images whose number and therefore cadence I indicate. Once the plates are completed, they will be projected through a triple-color projection lens.⁷

Survage's plan never came to fruition (though a series of plates had been prepared to this end during the first few months of 1914). However, the idea did gradually gain ground. In 1922, the Swedish painter Vicking Eggeling⁸ went into production with his *Symphonie diagonale*, which had been in the planning stage from 1917. The principles were the same as those expounded by Survage, except that Eggeling used lines and geometrical designs in black against a gray or white background.

After Eggeling came Hans Richter with *Rhythmus 21* (1924) and Walter Ruttman with his *Opus* (films 1, 2, 3, and 4, 1923–25). These were abstract films utilizing visual rhythm through the movement not of graphic signs but of one-dimensional geometric shapes, of white, gray, or black surfaces moving and changing and interacting to a metronomic cadence and beat. In this animated geometry, based both on music and abstract painting, squares, rectangles, triangles, diamonds, circles, and spirals wove complicated balletic patterns.

As Germaine Dulac wrote with typical enthusiasm,

we think we are moving ever closer to a practical knowledge of the precise rela-

tionships between two or more intensities of vibration and movement. . . . Once we have collected all the relevant information, we shall be in a position to move beyond empiricism toward the strictly accurate selection of harmonies and developments.⁹

In France, Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy with their *Ballet mécanique* (1924) and Henri Chomette (René Clair's elder brother) with his *Jeux et reflets de la lumière et de la vitesse* (1926) were following much the same direction but in a more concrete manner. Léger was using geometrical shapes, found objects (kitchen utensils), and people, making them all conform to a kind of clockwork rhythm with the effect of making their movements appear mechanical and to repetitions bringing out the obsessional quality of the objects and the silliness of people's movements. And Chomette was exploiting the actual movement of objects (the métro, buses, pleasure boats, etc.), creating the most extraordinary effects out of their relative speeds.

To put these efforts and advances into perspective, we must not forget that the period itself was a high point of artistic endeavor. Cubism was in the ascendant. Kandinsky, Braque, and Picasso were being discovered. Stravinsky was astounding the musical world with the harmonies of *The Rite of Spring*, and Mallet Stevens and Le Corbusier were revitalizing architecture. In another connection, the crazy world of Dada was paving the way from Surrealism, while Pirandello and Lenormand were intellectualizing the theater which Jacques Copeau and other of Stanislavsky's disciples had rehabilitated. In the background, Bergson, Freud, and the doctrine of relativity were changing our view of the world, while Marcel Proust and Paul Valéry became the demigods they have remained ever since. A whole movement, begun before 1914 but stifled by the war, took root

and gained the seal of approval of a cultivated audience which hitherto had been hostile to modern art. In this light, Debussy, Renoir, and Cézanne came to be regarded as classical.

Attracted spontaneously to the cinema, writers, painters, and men of the theater believed that visual rhythms were the very essence and expressive purpose of the cinema. Their mistake was in wishing immediately to create "pure" art, "pure" rhythm; grafting the innovations of Cubism, Surrealism, and all the other isms of the time onto the motion picture; for in doing so they created an art which was the exact antithesis of cinema. They were merely disinterring the corpse of the "film d'art" of 1908 contained in a different coffin which, under the justification of art, tried to force the cinema into the straitjacket of theatrical staging. However, the polemics multiplied, dividing the supporters of "absolute" cinema or "complete" cinema (which, strangely enough, was imitative of music) from the others.

"The cinema is the art of melody and harmony of plastic movement," as Pierre Porte stated in the rear guard of the main theoreticians, "an art which proclaims movement in space and time, finding it even in living creatures where it might least be expected, distorting or converting it but always magnifying it."¹⁰ To which Henri Fescourt (one of the few to see things in their proper perspective) replied: "Visual music is a possibility which the cinema of tomorrow might explore, not something which has already been achieved. In none of its present forms could the cinema be likened to music before any other art form."¹¹

Emile Vuillermoz contributed the following in 1927:

There are basic, exceptionally close relationships between the art of assembling sounds and the art of assembling measures of light. The two techniques are

strictly similar. We should not be too surprised that they should both depend on the same theoretical postulates and on the same physiological reactions of our organs to the phenomena of movement. As a matter of fact, the optic and auditory nerves have the same capacities for recording wave patterns.

Thus in the composition of a film we can find the same laws as those governing the composition of a symphony. . . Only a few artists are capable of appreciating the pathos of a complex of lines and volumes and hypnotically turning as though intoxicated by the magic potion of light. It is impossible to describe, but at least we are able to imagine these interchanges of surface and relief and the *pizzicati* of dazzling light patterns which a musician of silence might make sing out triumphantly on the screen.¹²

We must establish common ground between these equally valid but contradictory viewpoints. It is abundantly clear that there is a close association between film and musical rhythm, that the same laws governing the composition of a symphony also apply in the composition of a film. However this takes account of only the rhythmic structures, that is, any relationships measurable with a chronometer or "unitary measurement" of film (a second, or twenty-four frames, or 0.45 m), not those relationships which are *felt* or perceived as rhythm.

Vuillermoz says: "As a matter of fact, the optic and auditory nerves have the same capacities for recording wave patterns." His error, shared by a great many filmmakers, is the source of the enormous confusion which exists with regard to the rhythmic capabilities of film from which the theories of the avant-garde and the experiments described above derive.

Nevertheless, Moussinac was already observing that "though our eyes can appreciate the difference between colors and between shapes and between relative dis-

tances in perspective, they cannot appreciate rhythmic developments in the movements they perceive—they cannot see movement in movement.... If musical adaptation currently seems to us necessary most of the time, it is because we do not perceive rhythm in film or (when it does exist) do not perceive it very well and because (an effect of the movement in the images creating rhythm) in order to please ourselves we try to find it in music." But he adds: "Why are our eyes always less sensitive to rhythm in the cinema than our ears? One supposes that it is mainly a question of education" (*Naissance du cinéma*).

Of course it is a question of education. Yet there is a threshold of perception which our eyes cannot cross, which means that subtle relationships of time are totally alien. Whereas our ears can pick up differences of time of as little as a tenth of a second and wave patterns of pitch and tonality of as little as a coma (81/80), our eyes cannot perceive relationships of any less than a fifth of the duration of a relatively short shot. And though our minds are able to discern a certain difference in time between relatively long shots or between successive sequences, they remain incapable of evaluating it in any precise sense—unless the difference is very marked as, for example, when the time of a shot is doubled or tripled, in other words clumsily. And where our ears are able to perceive effortlessly as many as twenty different notes or beats every second, our eyes can tolerate only with difficulty and for a short period image sequences of a sixth of a second.

As Ernest Meumann points out, "in experiments conducted to measure the relative sensitivity of the senses in estimating time, sight proved to be the most obtuse." And David Katz is able to state that "in no area of the senses is there such acuity as in the area of acoustic" only because the ear

is the organ of rhythm par excellence. It is designed to perceive not only relationships of sound but also relationships of time. And though it cannot perceive space, it is at least able to perceive spatial "dimension" through relationships of pitch and, particularly, sound direction.

The eye, on the other hand, is designed to perceive space and spatial relationships. It is the organ of proportion par excellence. If it perceives relationships in time, these are always subject to the requirements of a certain framing. In other words, it is by referring to spatial data that the eye is able to evaluate the relative duration of objects. It cannot confer any meaning on these time relationships, though because of their structure, movement, or intensity, the represented objects *already* have a certain meaning conferred on them *a priori* by the space in which they are found.

To return to Ruttman's or Vicking Eggeling's experiments, it is clear that the eye is able to perceive relative durations from shot to shot because the relevant geometrical shapes become altered within these durations and because the relationships of time are always clearly marked. Yet what is most significant is that these relationships in themselves convey absolutely nothing. They do not provoke any feelings or any specific states of mind. For instance, if we stretch a spiral for two seconds and distort a cube or diamond for three seconds, this relationship has no external justification. There might just as easily be three seconds of spiral and two seconds of cube or they might follow each other in reverse order. I have performed the experiment many times with my students at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC) and before audiences at cinema clubs. A film is projected right side up, then backward, in other words, putting the last image at the beginning of the sequence: the result is exactly the same. These pure

movements are not without a certain *decorative* value, but in whatever order they follow one another, the relationships which bind them together are shown to be absolutely *gratuitous*. We can perceive a certain rhythm; in other words, we are perfectly aware of a relationship of proportion between successive shots, between relative durations of moving shapes, but this relationship in no way gives rise to any particular emotion, since simple visual pleasure clearly cannot be described as emotion (and, besides, it is a pleasure which is the same whatever order the shots follow one another). The reversibility of this "rhythm" is proof of its lack of signification, its emptiness: the absence of *potentiality* and *non-determinism*. It is inconceivable that any feeling of actual duration (or indeed any measure of time) should be communicated via these abstract durations, devoid of any deep emotional *qualities*.

Although two chords placed in a particular relationship of time already contain an emotional content by virtue of the simple relationship of pitch and tone (since all sound matter has intrinsic signification as well as signification in terms of its rhythm), the relationship of abstract forms or sketches still appears aimless.

Thus it is established that visual rhythm becomes deprived of the power to move and signify from the moment the forms for which it provides the rhythm become deprived of objective signification and primary emotional force. The mobility of an abstract sketch is an intellectual emotion devoid of direction and effective power. It is a "catalyst" incapable (even "potentially") of creating emotion, since the potential of the movement is contained in the *gratuitousness* of its design. In brief, *visual rhythm contributes nothing in itself*. It *creates* nothing. In other words, "pure" rhythm does not exist in the cinema any more than it does in literature. Only in music does

pure rhythm exist and there it is the music itself.

Thus it is a trap for the unwary (albeit an attractive one) to consider our visual perception of film in the same terms as our auditory perception of music—for the two reasons we have just described: the inability of our eyes to appreciate even moderately subtle relationships between shots and the lack of expressivity of these relationships considered for what they are.¹³

Provided they serve merely to indicate these limitations, the efforts of the avant-garde will not have been in vain. However, we must point out incidentally that though theories which prove valid do so through their application, i.e., through more or less intuitive experimentation, preconceived ideas and theories worked out *in abstract* most often founder on the rock of their rigid dogmatism.

Three aesthetic movements whose aim was to turn the cinema into an *art*, carefully reasoned and elaborated, came into being between 1908 and 1924. Between 1908 and 1912 there was the film d'*art*. With the cinema considered as the natural heir to the theater, it was felt that its form should conform with the rules of classical drama and theatrical presentation. Between 1914 and 1924 there was Expressionism. Related to the rules of painting and the plastic arts, the criteria of excellence for film expression were the balance of line and volume and the architectonic composition of a given space. Which is the reason for the exaggerated importance of set design and lighting. Between 1920 and 1927, the French avant-garde, which considered the cinema as an aspect of music, was to elevate it the level of the visual symphony.

Though they were on the right track, these experimenters were too hidebound in their thinking, seeing only one side of the question and maintaining preconceptions based exclusively on the aesthetics of pre-

vious art forms (aesthetics which, predictably, were completely alien to the immediate requirements of film). However, at the same time, the Americans Griffith, Ince, and Sennett and the Swedes Sjöstrom and Stiller managed to protect the cinema from the golden rules of Art (with capital letter) and lay down the real foundations for the art of cinema.

We shall see that Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's theories were valid only when they took into account the nature of film, its specific conditions and requirements. When they tried, consciously or otherwise, to follow different directions, they failed miserably.

It is obvious that if film provides nothing more than the faithful recording of a dance, then here the only possible rhythm is that of the dance itself. Yet the relationships of the various durations and shot intensities helping to make the dance intelligible inevitably create a rhythm independent of the rhythm of the dance—to sustain, amplify, or even counterpoint the choreographic rhythm which is the *subject* of the visual rhythm. We have only to think of "musicals" (the films of Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen, and Vincente Minnelli) to see how true this is.

The only conclusion we can draw from this is that there is absolutely no connection between the rhythms of film and music. In music the same notes recur over and over in different forms (there are only ever twelve notes in a scale). The keys, made up of variously arranged groups of notes, produce obvious emotional effects. Signification in music is created using the infinite variety of these sound patterns which only have meaning in themselves and through their association. "Representationally" they mean nothing. On the other hand, in the cinema, the meaning is provided by the images, i.e., by the meaning of the representation; or rather (to put it more simply) by concrete objects. The rhythm is an *adjunct* of this signification; it alters or transforms

but does not make it up (we have already seen that it is incapable of doing so).

Naturally, film development is similar to the melodic development of a piece of music. Yet, though the structure of film may reveal certain relationships of time, generally speaking it is devoid of recurring patterns. Only occasionally, when a particular condition warrants patterns of this kind, is there actual perception of rhythm. On the whole, film development is one of *rhythmic flow* within which the irregular sequence relationships cannot be *effectively perceived* because of length of the intervals and the visual limitations we have described.

Only in relationships from shot to shot (because of the relative brevity of the images) can there be actual rhythm. When it comes to relationships from one sequence to another, we can experience rhythm only as a series of harmoniously balanced proportions. In this respect we might compare visual rhythm with the open rhythm of plainsong or, more precisely, with the flowing rhythm of serial music. Whatever the case, it is still the rhythm of a *given signification* and not *rhythm providing its own signification* through unintellectualized material. Thus we would do well to avoid comparisons with musical rhythm, since it is based on recurrent patterns and tonal relationships with absolutely no meaning in the cinema.

Film rhythm is far more connected with the rhythm of verse, in which patterns of stress are produced in more or less regular alternations with words whose meaning changes from one minute to the next. Film articulation, which is by nature asymmetrical and has nothing (except in exceptionally rare cases) to do with the metric beats of classical verse, is rather associated with the *free rhythm* of poetic prose.

Though film is presented primarily as an objective reality organized within a certain space, it is in time that it achieves its most

direct expression, its most obvious signification. "Time" in the cinema is not produced, as in music, by rhythmic form but by events being followed through in sequence. It is a time experienced by characters objectively presented to us, not a sequence of time formulated and conditioned by pure rhythm. However, though this sequence of time may not be produced by *the rhythm*, at least it develops *within* a rhythmic form conditioned and justified by the dramatic reality whose constant development it is continually altering.

Endowed with a materiality, a weight, a density which ensures the concrete existence of figures and objects, their static (or spatial) quality is in inevitable conflict with their accompanying movement. Thus to all intents and appearances, film rhythm is not free, whereas musical rhythm (the rhythm of sounds with no concrete reality to promote and therefore no static qualities) has no other referent than its formal needs. And yet (to state it more clearly), this referent has itself to be referred to an established body of physical laws: interval relationships, correct or incorrect harmonies, tonal requirements, and many others besides—with the effect that the "free" rhythm of music is in fact *constrained*. On the other hand, film rhythm, subject to the constrictive weight of spatiality, to everything which rhythm entails, is not subject—as far as the objective description of material objects is concerned—to any formal law or *externally imposed* rules.

Film rhythm is linear. It is the rhythm of narrative, whose continuous flow never repeats itself. Since its content is continually moving and changing, its patterns take as reference a certain representational form rather than the represented data. The same movement intensity is produced by different movements, the same time sequence by different actions, the same framing by contents without direct associations. As we

have said, it is the free and "continuous" rhythm of rhythmic prose, never imposing a metric system on its cyclical forms but rather allowing its own requirements to dictate its terms of reference. The infinitely variable terms of these forms render visual rhythm virtually indefinable.

Whereas music deals with the *same* qualities reinterpreted in *different* forms, the cinema is exclusively concerned with *similar* qualities recognized in *dissimilar* forms. And for this reason we cannot speak of the cinema in terms of good or bad rhythm (if rhythm is to be understood as conforming or otherwise to certain rules or *fixed* forms). The principles of visual rhythm do not transcend (even potentially) all their applications but are inherent within each of them. *Rhythm exists by reason of what has to be put into rhythm.* It can therefore be judged only in its applications, not as a body of so-called absolute standards. Yet, at the same time, one or two genres quite consciously involve the use of a specific rhythm. Clearly a psychological film does not have the same rhythm as, say, an epic; it would be foolish to think otherwise.

Be this as it may, rhythm is good or bad only by virtue of its content. We sometimes draw certain conclusions from a film we judge to be outstanding, a perfect harmony of form and content, which are then expanded into generalizations. This enables us to apply the good/bad schema to all films, to pronounce a particular film "good" for having carefully implemented the rules which have, in fact, ruined the film, being inappropriate to its content—a futile exercise. We have said it once but it cannot be too often repeated: systematization is the death of art; it merely produces arid academism. Aesthetics (which must always be on its guard against legislating *in abstract*) becomes replaced by simpleminded and pretentious aestheticism.

A work of art is good (within certain lim-

itations) if it achieves its aim following a harmoniously balanced development. In this way it at least satisfies the *basic* needs, the fundamental aesthetic requirements. All the critic needs to know is the *wherefore* of this harmoniously balanced development. At this juncture we shall not be dealing with this particular problem. However, we must point out that when images are absolved of the need to narrate, film time, now liberated from the limitations of concrete time, can become the same as the "experienced time" of music and visual impressions can become pure emotion.

Rhythm can then be similar to that of a fugue or a particular symphonic movement. It can be used recapitulatively, contrapuntally as a refrain, making the images appear as though they belong to a lyric ode or choreographed dance. Which is precisely what happens in certain short films, poetic documentaries and others, whose aim is not narration but description (which they achieve most artistically). Most of Robert J. Flaherty's films (*Nanook of the North*, *Moana*, *Man of Aran*, *Louisiana Story*) include sequences of this type, and we can imagine long passages (evocations, dreams, memories) in rather more dramatic films handled in the same way. Therefore the nonmusicality of film rhythm is not the consequence of a particular limitation (except of course in cases where the rhythm is the agent *creating* the emotion) but of the most general characteristic of films dealing with a narrative subject rather than subjective impressions (though rhythm in this case, before it becomes *perceived periodicity*, involves relatively short periods and clearly differentiated relationships).

Whatever the case may be, we shall see that film rhythm, though it never exists as pure rhythm (as in music), is nevertheless the most flexible and complex of all the rhythms. The most flexible by virtue of its extreme freedom; the most complex be-

cause it is unique in the fact that its development happens *simultaneously* in space and time. And also because (and we must never forget it), though the verbal code is ordered for the purpose of intelligibility and the musical code for a sensory response, the film code is ordered for the purpose of intelligibility *through* a sensory response. And for this reason film rhythm must appeal both to our reason and our emotions and must allow a certain content reach that "emotional intellection"—which, after all, is its final purpose.

Rhythm and Montage

Before we come to editing and its principles, it is well to remember certain basic facts, in particular that all we *actually* perceive are relationships, differences—generally speaking, *discontinuity*. "We can only know what is in the process of taking place and continually varying—not what is in a state of constancy," as Ebbinghaus observed at the beginning of the twentieth century. "If physical contact, gestures, temperatures (provided they are not extreme), smells, noises are repeated or continued indefinitely, we stop perceiving them. Conversely, whatever causes a change—a novelty—almost always reaches our consciousness with a particular intensity" (*Précis de psychologie*).

Rhythm can really exist only within and in terms of *discontinuity*, though the feeling we experience is one of continuous development as, for instance, in the cinema where the continuity of movement is achieved through a discontinuous sequence of static images. Cicero wrote two thousand years ago: "We observe a rhythm in falling raindrops, because of the gaps between them; we cannot do this in a river. There is no rhythm in what is continuous."

Besides, rhythm is a relationship not so much of quantities as of qualities. We said

that in essence it is dynamic. In fact, relationships of time or intensity generate a "movement"—an idea of movement—between their components, their intervals or their actual proportions. Which is why we can speak of "spatial rhythm"—since static forms, through their interrelationships, create a kind of movement in the mind of the observer.

Moreover, rhythm is *form*, in the gestalt sense, unique by virtue of the special arrangement of its components and, in the final analysis, nothing more than the extension in time of perceptual "forms" (except that rhythmic form is the expression of a will, a *purpose*), a medium where perception, unexpectedly and in spite of itself, follows its natural preferences.

From a more general aesthetic point of view, we should note the following: film cannot be regarded separately from its form as, for example, in music, where (within certain limitations) a symphony can be said to be an ideal distinct from the interpretations which it presupposes. All the more so in view of the fact that the film object can exist only in terms of a given form—its expression and the film's way of *being* "ideal" is contained in its perceived reality.

In the same way as with words, ideas suggested by a film are extrinsic to it; they do not form part of *its being*. Nor do they constitute an ideal being, since they are dependent on *this same* form—the film. Though they are extrinsic to it, they are presented *within* the film. They are only active insofar as the sign, without being a conventional substitute (far from it, in fact) is a concrete reality more or less involved in the train of events. The meaning "transcends" what is perceived but is inherent and implied in it. And the audience gains access to the meaning by recognizing in a particular object an ephemeral *sign* and therefore a signification. Thus the film image demands a certain mental activity, and only

when this has taken place can it become what it really is. The implied idea is dependent on a process of consciousness, an intellectual act which, though it is never "thinking" in the strict sense, analytical reasoning, is a kind of synthesis, discovering if not preestablished concepts, then at least experienced emotions, acquired knowledge generated by perception and memory, i.e., "developed" perception, like the process of mental transference and its related structures. Which is why this type of thinking has come to be considered inferior, thinking "before the fact" of words; but, as Raymond Bayer has pointed out, "magnificently supporting the most cerebral of thinking with its associations, the sequence is not . . . an association of images; nor is it purely and simply a sequence of images directed toward a specific meaning. It turns each of us into *diviners of meaning*; it is our whole thought process and mind beneath each image. . . . It requires us to be alert so that our interpretative thought process can be in a state of continuous creation" (*Le Cinéma et les études humaines*).

So there is no less creative activity in the audience toward the images it perceives than in the reader toward the words he has to decipher. In simple terms, mental creation is not *imaginative*, as in reading (we do not have to "imagine" the facts *imposed* on our consciousness); it is *ideative* and for that reason more consistent.

We might (almost) agree with Ingarden that "the layer of the work formed by the significations, without being necessarily identified with an actual psychological content, is not forced to be an independent ideal but is relative to the subjective processes of consciousness" (*Das Literarische Kunstwerk*). Except that in the cinema, since film presents itself as actual reality, the layer formed by the significations must maintain a constant relationship with a living content with which—obviously enough

—it is not necessarily identical but with which it must remain in direct contact. Film cannot signify something outside its content of reality (although it can suggest it quite powerfully). Film meaning is rooted in perception; it is the expression of an “intentional” existence, constituting the immediate reality of the film and thrusting us, through the emotions it determines, into a world potentially contained in the film.

As we have said, all potentiality in the cinema is referred back to a specific transcendent form, a form deployed *within* this potentiality, as though contained *within* it and extending beyond it, an ideal extension. Moreover, unlike in painting, the *analogon presents* rather than evokes the represented quality. It is the presence of the reality in the viewfinder without actually being the reality. It can be detached from it without remaining apart other than as an image; in other words, it is both represented and representation (and yet is nothing more than the latter). It is as though it were the “duplicate” of the reality in the viewfinder.

If, as we say, represented objects cannot exist without some form of representation, we must clarify our position (something we should have done somewhat earlier) and avoid any possible confusion. There are, in fact, two ways (completely contradictory) of interpreting “representation content.” On the one hand, it is the *subject* of the representation, i.e., the reality in the viewfinder which, insofar as it is reality, is previous and extrinsic to any representation (this is why we made the distinction between *represented* and *representation* in our remarks concerning the frame and its implications). On the other hand, the “represented” can mean the *product* of the representation. Obviously it is in this sense that we are using it when we refer to the represented, through its representation, as the “duplicate” of the reality in the view-

finder—even though it is “something else” by virtue of the representation (framing, composition, etc.).

In the first place, we are talking about film creation; we are “taking the place” of the filmmaker. Conversely, in the second, we are considering only what we see on the screen; we are “taking the place” of the audience. And it is vital to determine the point of view adopted—that of the creator or that of the audience.

In this respect, we must point out that as far as we can tell, it is only for the audience that “significations” are related to the subjective mechanism of consciousness. For the creator, they have an ideal, independent existence—literally his “purpose.”

We must now review one or two observations made in earlier chapters and elucidate certain points to enable us better to understand the various implications of editing.

As we said, no perception is capable of grasping the whole of an object, since our position (whatever it might be) can only give us access to one specific aspect and, however hard we may try, we cannot perceive it except “from the outside,” since its nature as an object is to be outside us.¹⁴

As Mikel Dufrenne so rightly points out in his *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*,

“as long as we are content to experience the presence of the object, any perception which provides sufficient evidence of that presence is adequate; and, conversely, as long as we wish to know the object in its truth, no perception is adequate to grasp it in its totality and explain it, to set it, through its necessary relationships, in its context. Thus there are two levels—one where perception is always valid without the imposition of a norm; and the other where it is always ineffective. There is no level of fulfillment in perception because, as soon as our perception makes us aware

of the presence of an object (and unless we adopt the aesthetic attitude) it is overtaken either in the direction of action or intellection. Now, the aesthetic object appeals only to our perception; it has no utilitarian or knowledge value and, for that reason, must have one or more special perceptions reserved for it. However, this means that perception does not merely provide us with its presence but also its truth and this truth is the truth of a perceived object. Consequently, ideals do not imply ideas: *the nature of an aesthetic object is not that of an abstract signification but that of a perceptible object which can only be produced in our perception.*¹⁵

We have seen that the cinema allows one or more of these special perceptions. A sequence of closeups showing an object (or action) from several consecutive angles means that the object (or action) can be shown almost simultaneously in its most significant aspects. In some way it presents us with the truth inherent in the object and becomes, as it were, an *exploration* of our consciousness—if not total, then at least more complete. Finally, beyond the immediate truth, it guides us toward the “essential” truth of the object transcending and eclipsing what is perceived.

“To turn the aesthetic object into the ideal limit of perception,” Dufrenne goes on, “is not to exclude it from what is perceived but to state that it is a norm by which perception can operate. And doubtless this can only be so because it has an ‘en-soi’; as M. de Schloezer so rightly says, if music can be reduced to what is perceived, ‘all interpretations are equally valid’; but if music cannot be reduced to what is perceived, in cases where it transcends what is perceived, it is always in terms of what is perceived.”

Which leads us back to the phenomenon of perception, one of the utmost importance since it is the sole basis for the study

of aesthetics. Any conclusions one reaches leading to the establishment of rules or principles may vary according to one’s predilection for, on the one hand, realism and, on the other, a certain idealism. We shall see that—at least to our eyes—the perceived object is not independent of perception and that its meaning is limited to the one it has for us; the object as such is strictly relative—*correlative*, to be strictly accurate. More than ever, aesthetics refers back to metaphysics.

However, for the time being let us confine ourselves to the fact that since film is an invariable form (in contrast with theater and music), it is obvious that it is in the perception of this form that its aesthetic reality transcends what is perceived. Yet the purpose of film is not, as in painting, to be an art object revealing its deepest meaning through a specific form in which each object is captured in its most significant aspect and where what is perceived, excused from the need to become either action or intellection, achieves the ecstasy which is the aesthetic attitude itself. The purpose of film is to be a perpetual “developing time”; a present “in the process of happening.” Thus it is not a question of capturing the object in an aspect which enables it to attain for itself the maximum possible signification but of involving it in a narrative reality through which it assumes, by virtue of its relationships, a specific meaning—its *temporary* truth.

Since the world on film is a represented action and since film perception is one extended not just by contemplation but also by intellection, one might say (in a very general sense, of course) that in the cinema any perception which provides sufficient evidence of the presence of the object fulfills its function. Since the object can find its true meaning only in its relationship with the world, the aesthetic attitude relates not to the object but to its relationships. Aesthetic perception refers less to the

intrinsic truth of the object than to its extrinsic determinants. It has less to do with what it signifies *in itself* than what is signified *through it*, less to do with what it is than what it becomes, less to do with what it represents than what it suggests.

"When an audience sees the opening shot of a sequence," Cohen-Séat observes, "it does not necessarily experience the feeling of incompleteness making it want to see the front of a situation presented entirely from the rear in order to understand it better. The presentation of the object in successive slices adds nothing to each immediate datum; nor does it subtract anything; it contributes something else. . . . It is not, as in the perception of reality, an incomplete aspect—as it were, *one of the many data contained by the object* offered in each aspect, each profile: from the expressive viewpoint of its total essence, it is a complete object" (*Problèmes du cinéma*).

Even so, when it is no longer a question merely of seeing the world and its objects in their narrative reality where only dramatic continuity and relationships of facts are important but of recording specific details, observing them more profoundly since they are perhaps the decisive factors, no one will gainsay the filmmaker endowing them with a meaning produced entirely by his personal vision, his discovery in them of a *potential* signification. In this sense, the object must be filmed from several aspects but on condition that it be *with a view* to certain relationships and not a meaning which can only come from it or the images presented of it. In this case, aesthetic perception exists in the signifying truth of the represented content as well as in what is signified in the relationships of the images presenting that content, since in this instance—to return to Cohen-Séat—"the chosen details accumulate, like half-truths, whose aggregate alone presents the whole truth." It is a question of exploring

the object *through the optics of the film*, i.e., significations which the object assumes relative to the scenes in which it is involved and significations which the scenes assume relative to the object.

In any case, the aesthetic attitude in the cinema has nothing to do with "contemplation" (though sometimes it may have) but rather "participation" or, perhaps, *active contemplation*.

It is comforting to see the similarity between the conclusions reached by an aesthetic theoretician of Mikel Dufrenne's acumen as he analyzes the nature of the aesthetic object in its most general sense (with no reference to film) and those we have reached in our study of this effect. He says quite specifically:

The perceived object is transcendence contained in potentiality, not just in the sense that consciousness is transcended toward it but also—and it is possible that M. Merleau-Ponty has not drawn sufficient attention to the fact—that it embodies a truth always hidden from perception (even though perception remains dimly aware of it); direct comprehension of the object always involves the explanation of its objective nature. And if the perceived object is not only real but true with a truth which perception announces but is unable to grasp, then it involves it as a concept.

Thus the perceived object has an ambiguous status: it is the object I perceive because it is present in my sphere of reference but at the same time it is something else; it is the alien reality my perception is unable to grasp appealing to a knowledge with no apparent connection with perception—which in any case obliges me to doubt pure fact, to throw my knowledge off-center in order to de-subjectify it. Which is to say that perception has in it an obligation toward truth and must be cognizant of its own limitations. A theory of perception must take into account these limitations and follow

a path to a thought process which tests the truth of the object whose presence is experienced by perception; it must give priority to the en-soi [in-itself] at the expense of the pour-nous [for-us] (meaning the en-soi not necessarily in the Kantian sense) to prevent its *esse* being reduced to a *percipi* without letting it slip beyond the bounds of knowledge.

I wish merely to point out that as far as I can see, the *esse* of an object cannot be confined to a *percipi*. Its sole *raison d'être* is a correlation between a phenomenon which transcends it and a *percipi* which turns it *into an object*. However, we will come back to this problem.

Let us turn our attention to actual editing technique and begin with a most important point. Because film rhythm is experienced primarily by virtue of the effect of editing, it is easy to conclude that it is its natural consequence, which is justified in a certain sense but completely mistaken if by this we mean creation in its entirety. This misinterpretation gave rise to a number of films between 1922 and 1926 which claimed to be rhythmic because they presented an action broken down into an infinite number of silly little bits—confusing rhythm with speed and assuming rhythm to be a simple matter of metrics.

In fact, editing (besides the fact that it allows the film to be structured) gives the filmmaker the opportunity to define the proportions in terms of time of shots and sequences, i.e., their relative lengths. But rhythm is not made up of simple relationships of duration. A film is not rhythmic because someone has decided arbitrarily to edit a series of shots according to a predetermined metric pattern. Rhythm has more to do with *relationships of intensity*—but relationships of intensity contained within *relationships of duration*.

The intensity of a shot depends on the amount of movement (physical, dramatic,

or psychological) contained in it and on the length of time it lasts. Indeed, two shots of the same length, that is, the same *actual duration*, may provide a *greater or lesser impression of duration* depending on the dynamics of their content and their aesthetic characteristics (framing, composition).

For the same action (a battle, for instance, such as the Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky*), a long shot contains more movement than a close shot. Yet this movement may be more intensely communicated through a medium shot. Consequently, though a long shot might be the same length, it will give the impression of being longer because it is less intense. However, if, by reason of the number of varied movements it contains, it demands a greater degree of attention and therefore a longer perception time, then it will appear shorter.

Since the important factor in rhythm is not actual duration itself but the *impression of duration*, it is this quality and it alone, not a predetermined metric length, which serves as a referent. Generally speaking (but without laying down hard and fast rules because of the infinite number of variables involved), we may say that for a *given length of film*, a dynamic long shot appears shorter than a dynamic close shot; but a dynamic close shot appears shorter than a static long shot which also appears shorter than a static close shot. In other words, the more dynamic the content and the wider the framing, the shorter the shot appears; the more static the content and narrower the framing, the longer the shot appears.

If we wished to create the impression of equivalent duration with these shots, we would have to give, for instance, twenty seconds to the dynamic long shot, fourteen to the dynamic close shot, ten to the static long shot, and six to the static close shot. We would not of course be creating equal durations but rather durations *proportional*

to the interest and signification of the content. It is this interest and it alone which can and must determine the shot relationships, calculated *in terms of the impression of duration which they produce and not by virtue of their metric length.*

Since we cannot be absolutely sure of the impression we are likely to obtain (because of the many constantly variable factors involved) it is only a posteriori, i.e., at the editing stage with the image on the moviola, that we can judge it at all accurately, from which we might deduce that it is in fact at the editing stage that the rhythm of the film is *laid down* (even though, strictly speaking, it is not creation but adjustment). In other words, film rhythm is never an abstract structure controlled by formal laws or principles applicable to all kinds of film but, on the contrary, a structure rigorously determined by the content. *It is solely through the action, through its epic, dramatic, or psychological movement, that its supporting rhythm may be perceived as rhythm.* Otherwise it is unjustifiable, ineffectual form without content.

From which proceeds a whole series of relationships which signify less *by being proportional* than are proportional by virtue of an internal signification. Relationships of time reinforce relationships of meaning or value but they never determine them. And this is where film rhythm differs essentially from musical rhythm where duration and relationships of duration are self-signifying contents—their one and only referent being the sound fabric which produces them. For the rest, there are many analogies to be considered, such as the following observation by Meumann:

A sufficiently large number of sound impressions seems to flow much faster than two or three sounds of the same intensity and quality, following each other with an objectively equal speed: a sound

sequence flowing sufficiently fast appears to possess an added intensity; a single intense sound, when it becomes part of a series of weaker sound impressions, always tends to present the appearance of a time change: generally speaking the time which follows it appears to be extended.

A period of time filled with a sufficient number of simple sound impressions appears much longer than an equally long "void" when it comes first—and less when it comes after. If the impression with which it is filled naturally attracts our attention, it seems shorter. (*Aesthetik des Rhythmus*)

Of course, the cinema is in no way concerned with measure. Shot changes are not regulated by isochronous beats, though unity of time is ensured by the constant speed of the projector, a rate of twenty-four frames per second. It is a uniform cadence which governs the continuity of the movement at the same time as the rhythmic unity of the film. Clearly this is mechanical speed—like musical measure—but a tempo guaranteed by the individual film within this fixed structure. Thus the term *meter* in the cinema might refer to that quantity translated into metric units: one second = twenty-four frames = thirty-six inches (in 35 millimeter). And yet, as we know, this speed has existed only since the advent of the talkie. In the days of the silent cinema, it was sixteen frames per second. It became extended to twenty-four frames per second solely for reasons of sound recording, to make sure there was sufficient film to take high-frequency sounds without there being superimposition or saturation, so that a silent film projected in cinemas equipped with sound projectors is completely distorted. There is distortion in the rhythm and the movement, as though a 45 rpm disk were to be played at 33 rpm, or vice versa. Thus silent films should be projected at their normal speed. All that is

needed is to change the gearing of the projectors—something many cinema managers are loathe to do.

Forms and Theories of Editing

Editing consists, as we have seen, in assembling various scenes end to end, cutting them where necessary and giving to each its appropriate time sequence. This purely technical stage in the filmmaking process is of the utmost importance. The whole rhythm and balance of the film depend on the editor's doing his job properly.¹⁶ And yet it is nothing more than finicky and difficult hack work—a job potentially creative but never really creative (except in very rare cases), since it is not at the editing bench that the film is made.

What then is the source of the notion that editing plays a determinative role in film language? Quite simply—as is always the case—a verbal misunderstanding. If any editing technique may be considered creative, it is montage (as used by the Russian Formalist school), i.e., what is produced by the association, arbitrary or otherwise, of two images A and B which, by their juxtaposition, determine in the mind of the audience an idea, an emotion, a feeling not contained in either independently of the other. Yet, though the results are not necessarily the same, the effect may be achieved through the movement of a tracking shot or even through the positioning *in the same frame* of two interrelated actions taking place at the same time. In each case, the technique simply relates two images A and B—or, more precisely, juxtaposes the facts, objects, or events contained in A and B.

Certain purists of film language will argue that with the exception of the last example, it is not *juxtaposition* at all (since the images follow one another in sequence) but *superimposition*. In my view they are mistaken. Though not *juxtaposition* in

space, it is most certainly *juxtaposition in time*—we might say, similarly, that the twelve chimes of a clock are juxtaposed, since they are not superimposed. If this were so, we would not be able to tell them apart.

We have already stressed this point: montage (which is the basis for film language) is nothing more than another form of language morphology where subject, verb, and complement have meaning only by virtue of their interrelationship. Verbal expression is merely the "editing of words" (and there are more or less able word editors: compare, for instance, Corneille and Campistron). With this very important distinction: words are closely connected with speech; they have to be uttered. Images, on the other hand, have to be created. Also, words relate only to concepts, whereas images relate to concrete facts, which explains their direct emotional power and their problems in existing.

Though to a certain extent editing can be said to be the art of expression and signification through the association of shots, such that this association stimulates an idea or feeling, it could never be said that all shot changes and image associations produce the same effect. As Barthes was so careful to point out, "one can imagine purely epic sequences without signification but not purely signifying sequences."

Moreover, editing *first and foremost* guarantees the continuity of the film. By organizing the succession of shots, it provides each sequence with a meaning it would not have were it organized differently. However, this is dramatic or psychological meaning grafted onto the linear development of the narrative and not symbolic or allusive meaning—which, although it occurs quite frequently, is nevertheless entirely accidental.

Be that as it may, Eisenstein and Pudovkin (showing the way to almost all the So-

viet filmmakers) attempted, as the silent cinema began to decline, to turn this symbolic expression into the absolute form of film language. The logical development of the action was, more often than not, merely a linkage, a thematic basis on which to build montage effects. Even so, they both put montage to quite different uses.

If, for instance, I say, "Le jour n'est pas plus pur que le fond de mon coeur" ["The daylight is no purer than the depths of my heart," from Racine's *Phèdre*], it is obvious that I am expressing an idea, a feeling presented and signified only by the phrase as a whole, by the interrelationship of the words, their mutual association within the organization of a narrative and comparative verbal development—a development comparable with "horizontal montage." The term of comparison enriching the phrase might be compared with the visual symbol produced by the juxtaposition of images. Here metaphor becomes *added* to description, *incorporated* within its linear development, sublimating it by providing it with a specific meaning. It is in this way that Pudovkin uses the image-symbol. He introduces it into the logical continuity of the action and makes it conform to the narrative requirements (though it almost always maintains its primacy in the signification of the narrative). In fact, it is this form of montage which has predominated and will always predominate in any film whose purpose is to develop a dramatic or psychological theme or, more generally, a narrative reality whose modalities require progressive and continuous development.

Conversely, in Eisenstein's case, though the image-symbol is encouraged to follow the development of an idea from a specific description, it does so in a continual deviation outside or alongside the description. Editing, for Eisenstein, consists in creating, by juxtaposing two images, a shock emotion (consistent, of course, with the meaning

of the action) with the purpose of determining an idea and, subsequently, a series of ideas in the mind of the audience—which ultimately allow the film to be brought to its emotional or dialectical conclusion.

Unlike horizontal montage, here the symbol is not an image within the continuity whose purpose is to illuminate or alter the meaning of the action; it is quite simply the aftereffect of the shock emotion, crystallized onto the "image-content" and becoming temporarily a symbol of the idea stimulated. The chosen image is not charged with meaning through an association with the texture of the drama; it stands in antithesis to it, causing a collision from which an idea originates, the result of the logical association of otherwise unrelated facts. We can see right away that instead of being involved in the actual narrative and becoming subordinate to the continuity, it uses them for its own end. Indeed, without being exactly subordinate to the symbol, narrative and continuity merely serve as a framework within which it can operate. The dialectic does not exist in the psychological or dramatic development of the action; it exists in the sequencing of the ideas arising from the action. In Eisenstein's words, it is the "path of knowledge traced by the dynamic clash of passions and applied to the specific techniques of film."

It is these concepts which provoked the numerous theories based on montage, held to be the key to the whole of film expression (justifiably or not according to one's interpretation of the effect—but certainly unjustifiably in the extreme form described above—extreme in the sense that one would have preferred Eisenstein to have established the bases of a general aesthetic system instead of categorizing a very personal system of stylistics). However, though the meaning of a continuity depends on the ordering and arrangement of shots, the meaning, signification, order of

the editing are established in the *breakdown* (shooting script). Construction, action development, even rhythm are elements determined at the theoretical stage of the film's conception.

Though created after the fact, editing is the result of certain guidelines deliberately and intentionally chosen beforehand. If the director has to shoot scenes which are not in the script (thereby changing his shooting script) he always plans shots from which he can expect a specific signification. Thus it is not the editing which is important as much as the *guidelines for the editing*. And these guidelines are included under the heading of "editing" for the reason that they really apply only at the editing stage. To put it more exactly, *they are the formal structures whose selection and organization are the basis for the whole film dialectic*.

Obviously the margin of evaluation should be sufficiently wide to allow for any last-minute alterations, but the "dialectic of editing" exists, *in intention*, at the breakdown stage (as indeed does the direction *itself*). Both exist prior to their execution, in the same way as the score of a symphony preexists any future performance of the symphony.¹⁷ Direction and editing are only secondary creative acts, that is (within more or less rigid but necessary limits), determined by the requirements of the script.

Whatever anyone might claim to the contrary, there never was (nor ever could be) a creation after the fact, except in certain extreme cases whose exception, in fact, goes to prove the rule. In other words, as long as it responds to the intentions of the filmmaker, good editing exists *a priori*.

The long laborious disputes between the "theorists of editing" and the "theorists of the breakdown," which started as a consequence of Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's ideas and resumed recently over Orson Welles's films, are (in the main) as futile as they are laughable, since the breakdown

and editing are merely complementary aspects of the same thing. The one is intention, the other application; and the one cannot be found without the other. The only difference lies in the fact that as well as being previous to editing and direction, the breakdown describes character and situation development; it organizes the structure of the narrative.

Naturally, structures may change with techniques—as well as with current styles. Forms used now have little in common with those used previously. As the cinema becomes the expression of an increasingly evident psychological development, it tends toward a greater narrative fluidity. The more extensive use of tracking shots, depth-of-field, and a less fragmented style have changed the rules of editing in a marked way. Yet it is no less true that the general principles still hold good and, though the forms we examined initially, established toward the end of the silent era, relate in particular to sequences of static shots, they are still valid in cases which justify the use of such techniques.

Among these forms there are four which provide the basis for all others—themselves merely the combination of basic forms whose purity in any case was quite unique. First there is *narrative* montage, whose only purpose is to ensure the continuity of the action—whatever the ideas expressed or suggested by the scenes described. This is the type of editing generally used in films which "tell a story." Then there is *lyrical* montage, which, while ensuring the narrative or descriptive continuity, exploits the continuity in order to express ideas or sentiments which transcend the drama—the kind of editing used by Pudovkin. Then there is montage of *ideas*, or "constructional" montage (which Vertov made his own), the only form in which a whole film can be worked out in terms of editing, i.e., *a posteriori*—but which can

only really be applied in newsreels. And lastly there is *intellectual* montage, as used by Eisenstein—less concerned with ensuring the continuity of the narrative than with constructing it and less with expressing ideas through this narrative than with determining them dialectically. Needless to say, we mean *ideas* here in the psychological sense—concepts which may perhaps contain judgments in the event of stimulated emotions but are never opinions merely communicated or suggested by the images (since the purpose of art is not to formalize thoughts but to promote an act of consciousness and stimulate thinking).

We intend to come back to narrative montage, since this kind of editing is employed in almost all films. However valid as signs the images in this type of montage, as a technique it can be said to be invisible for the reason that it never violates the logic of the concrete. As André Bazin observes, "the whole aim of shot fragmentation is to analyze the scene according to its material or dramatic logic. It is logic which makes this analysis imperceptible; the audience's mind quite naturally accepts the viewpoints shown by the director because the geography of the action or the movements of the dramatic interest justify them" (*Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*).

In this kind of montage, we might say that "a perception which provides sufficient evidence of the presence of the object fulfills its function." Whether it is elliptical, allusive, suggestive, or descriptive does not alter the fact that its sole purpose as a form is to inform. It attracts our attention in order to focus it more precisely onto facts in which each object involved is a "complete object" in its need to be there, even though it might reveal a single fleeting aspect fading away as it fulfills its purpose. In point of fact, the objects are there solely in order to contribute to the progress of the action. They become symbols only so that the action can become more easily understood. Signification exists

less in the aesthetic pleasure of a particular moment than in the moment itself, in the dynamics of the flowing narration of an action which then becomes rhythm. The narrative rhythm and the rhythm of the actions are swept along by the same impetus; and though the shots may not be particularly fast in themselves, the narrative rhythm is almost always lively, with nothing impeding its progress.

In lyrical forms, it is a different situation altogether. Though montage contributes to the development of the narrative, its form is analytical rather than descriptive. Its purpose is to inform but also and more especially to sublimate and magnify. The most significant scenes are broken down into a series of extreme closeups, in such a way that the editing can present the scenes from every angle. However, it is not so much a kaleidoscopic analysis with nothing to add to our understanding of the drama as a particular method of filming the objects, turning around them in order not to lose any of the information which they might potentially reveal, in the service of a development which follows their movements in all their phases and presents all their aspects almost simultaneously. The selected features, assembled into a complete unity, constitute a genuine *exploration* in which there is less concern for specifying the quality as a sign a particular object might assume than for sublimating its actual *signifying* power.

As we have indicated elsewhere, the closeup provides a tactile, sensuous impression of objects. However, in isolating them, to some extent it turns them into symbols: the object becomes the living representation of the concept which it evokes, an analogon in its pure state. The closeup may be said to be more abstract at the intellectual level the more its content is perceived by the senses. Nothing is more concrete than what it shows, but nothing is more abstract than what it implies.

If it is true that we are conscious of the object only through its relationship with the external world and if the object is relative to our perception of it, the object may be said to be fundamentally subjective. Now, the object in closeup is filmed relative to its own component parts and to the frame limiting the field of view. Required only to structure a series of relationships within the same objective unity, perception becomes more important than intellection. The object (which becomes to some extent "interiorized") is *experienced* and *felt*; there is no requirement for it to be *understood*. Intellection belongs only to the concept which it represents.

Moreover, emphasis on a particular detail is always the consequence of a personal vision. The filmmaker translates his emotion by communicating it through a "magic formula"—a sort of greater awareness of the world and its objects. In such a way that, as the audience *experiences* the object, it also experiences at an intimate level the vision of the filmmaker. Subjective identification is more complete than in all other film forms.

When Pudovkin shows us in *Mother* the half-sozzled husband returning home, resolved to pawn the clock for a glass of vodka, the scene breaks down as follows:

—In the first place a *descriptive semi-establishing shot* shows the location of the action: we see the father staggering up to the clock while the mother, following him with her eyes, shows that she understands what he intends to do. Then we have:

—*Midshot*: the father standing in front of the clock, looking at it.

—*Midshot*: the mother looking anxiously at her husband.

—*Close shot* (tilted steeply down): the old man's hand picks up a chair and carries it over to the clock. He climbs up onto the chair (we only see his boots).

—*Close shot* (another angle): the old man's boots. He climbs onto tiptoe.

—*Closeup*: the man's face reaches toward the clock face. He stretches out his hands and prepares to unhook the weights.

—*Closeup*: with a cry the mother rushes out of the field of view.

—*Extreme closeup*: the old man's hands try to unhook the weights.

—*Midshot*: the mother moves toward her husband and tries to stop by pulling at his coattail.

—*Close shot* (tilted slightly upward): the mother, pulling with all her strength at the old man's coattail. The old man responds by kicking her.

—*Extreme closeup* (another angle): the hands clenched on the coattail pull him in all directions at once and make him lose his balance.

—*Close shot*: the man's hand manages to unhook one of the weights. At the same time, his torso is swaying.

—*Close shot* (slight downward tilt): the old man's legs on the chair. The chair slides out from under him.

—*Closeup*: he holds onto one of the clock weights with one of his hands while his head disappears from shot.

—*Close shot* (tilt downward): the old man, having fallen, is stretched out on the floor (we have not seen him fall—the cut between shots has removed the time it has taken him to fall. We see, by his side, a chair and the broken clock, its face and its weights.

—*Extreme closeup* (from floor level): part of the clockwork rolls across the floor spinning to a stop.

Needless to say, all these shots are cut on *action*. Their sequence reconstitutes the whole event in a *continuous* development. However, from the point of view of information alone, this action breakdown is en-

tirely ineffective; it *tells* us nothing more. To describe an action as short as this, a single shot would have been sufficient, two or three at the outside—in order to separate object and subject, cause and effect. Thus it is clear that the intention was not so much to analyze the scene as to transpose it, to present an “ideal” translation, to invoke it through a reconstruction of its most significant features.

This is not at all the language of a novelist aiming at maximum economy and removing any redundancy from the expression of his content. On the contrary, the creator is lingering over each phase in turn, glorifying and extolling it in such a way that despite the numerous shot changes and therefore an obvious cadence, the rhythm is extremely slow. The camera moves lovingly around the objects, exploiting them to the full but never going any further. The action is incidental. It is an art relying on the most insignificant event to create a “theme.” Instead of being followed in its linear development, the drama merely strings together the special acts or moments. The dramatic construction is lacking, yet the film is not constructed like a novel: it is a series of “paeans” accumulating one on top of the other—in the same way as in an epic poem.

What is more, Pudovkin quite clearly reveals to us his intentions in his book *Film Technique*:

Filming may be no more than the fixing of an event occurring in front of the lens; it may also be a specific representational form of that event. There is quite a considerable difference between the event itself and its appearance on the screen. It is precisely this difference which makes cinema an art. Guided by the director, the camera sets out to eliminate what is superfluous and direct the attention of the audience in such a way that it will see what is important and characteristic. . . .

When we wish to understand some-

thing, we always begin with an overall look and then, through the most intensive examination, increase our understanding with an increasing number of details. The particular, the detail, always brings added intensity. And this is what determines the form of a film, its peculiar ability to present a particularly vivid representation, correct in every detail. The power of film representation is allied to the fact that, with the camera, it attempts to delve as deeply as it can into the heart of each image. The camera rummages, as far as it can, into the innermost recesses of life; it attempts to penetrate where the average observer casually looking about him never goes. The camera goes further; it seizes and eternalizes on celluloid everything it sees. When we linger over a real image in life, we have to make an effort and spend some time, moving from the general to the particular, concentrating more and more until we begin to notice and appreciate the details. Film saves us this effort through editing. The film audience is the ideal observer. And it is the filmmaker who enables this to happen. In the revelation of a hidden detail, there is an element of perception, the creative element which turns man's work into art, the only element capable of giving the spectacle its ultimate value.

Showing an object as everyone sees it achieves *nothing*. We should not look for subjects taken in with a general and superficial glance but something which gradually reveals itself to those more inquisitive and attentive who see things in greater depth. This is why the greatest artists, technicians who have the deepest feeling for the film medium, give depth through detail to their films.

Certain critics (notably the editorial staff of *Cahiers du Cinéma*) have taken a stand against this intensive fragmentation, condemning it *in principle and by definition*—which is quite absurd. In fact, it is up to the filmmaker to know what he wants to

do and up to the critic to discover the reasons why. It is certain that in films which exploit a dramatic or psychological narrative, fragmentation of this kind is totally out of place. In these conditions—but only in these conditions—the sarcasms of our critic friends are justified. However, the condemnation of a form inappropriate to a particular genre should not involve the wholesale condemnation of the form itself. This style is appropriate only to a limited number of films, poetic films being by definition far less frequent than straight narrative films, but no one would think of condemning Claudel or Péguy on the basis that it is wrong to write as they do.

Apart from editing techniques which produce rather different effects, we might include in these lyrical structures the films of Eisenstein and Flaherty. The succession of separate "themes" in *Man of Aran*, for instance (the broken boat, the shark hunt, the storm) and in *Louisiana Story*, (the landscape, the crocodile, the oil derrick) forms the actual stuff of the film. And if *The Battleship Potemkin* seems to be made up of a series of successive paeans, it is because its action is dispersed over time and space. In any case, the continuity in both of them is not directed just by a dramatic action but also by the dramatization of a sequence of significant moments.

Dziga-Vertov's precious montage of ideas operates in a completely different fashion. We mentioned that in the beginning Vertov set himself the task of *capturing reality in the raw*, using his art above all to order selected documents and assemble them in such a way that a new idea should spring up from several *objective* and *independently* interrelated facts. As far as its general principles go, this type of montage is identical with Eisenstein's; it is different, however, in its aims and applications.

Though it is impossible to construct a film *a posteriori* (with obvious exceptions),

it is somewhat different when it comes to newsreels, since the creative process itself is reversed. Instead of beginning with an idea and assembling the necessary materials to express it, the newsreel editor starts with a mass of material from which he makes certain selections, with only a very vague intention at the back of his mind. Then, with this raw material and through the possibilities it suggests, certain ideas relating to this intention can be expressed, something like a poet who, instead of creating his rhymes and verse with a view to a predetermined theme, expresses his ideas or emotions through the rhymes which pop into his head. As we know, this is a frequent occurrence in poetry. Unfortunately, images cannot be used in the same way as words, for while words come very readily to mind, images cannot—unless they are so willed. For this reason, the margin of potential creation is not as great.

To sum up, using documents taken from news footage, the editor juxtaposes facts which are clearly authentic but have no signification other than that which they verify. An idea is thus expressed—but one which obviously does not exist except through this relationship.

Suppose I wish to make a film which has as its theme the 1939-45 war. From the news footage available, I select an image of Hitler posturing in front of an eager rally somewhere in Nuremberg in 1936. Then I choose another image of Berlin in flames and the allied armies marching into the capital in 1945. The mere juxtaposition of these two real facts will immediately promote not the simplistic idea of cause and effect but the feeling of a tragic relationship and causal sequence. By continuing to use this editing technique with images not directly related but linked nonetheless in some logical association or other, I will be signifying ideas with images which I myself have not created but through which I can express my

intentions (within the limitations of the editor's skills). Though they retain a value of their own, real facts can be considered in this respect only as primary material for a dialectic supported entirely by a constantly distorted authenticity.

Obviously we are not including in this category newsreel editing whose sole purpose is to reconstruct the atmosphere of a particular period, considering the facts completely objectively, i.e., relying on the purely documentary value of the scenes filmed and not using them to "construct" ideas. Examples of this type of film would be *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) and *Ceux du guetto* (*Down in the Ghetto*). Yet films like the famous *Why We Are Fighting* series (1943-44) are in direct line with Dziga-Vertov's principles.

The inevitable consequence of these principles is to create an "ideal" space and time. The Nuremberg 1936-Berlin 1945 relationship unites completely separate spaces and times. However, the art lies in making the difference in time and space so imperceptible that the *impression* is created, by cutting from one image to the next, of moving from one place to another within a short space of time. It looks *as though* the Allied armies are marching into Berlin immediately after and as a direct result of Hitler's posturings. The effect is still crude, but the feeling created is of a homogeneous and continuous space and time. In other words, through the power of editing, we *forget* the historical and geographical situation of the actual facts and concentrate entirely on a signification both arbitrary and logical imposed by the direct association of the actual facts.

Of all the forms of editing, this is far and away the most abstract. Not only is it concerned solely with putting together ideas or emotions produced intellectually, but because its references are actual news events, it can only operate in respect of pure infor-

mation devoid of any emotional qualities other than its content. Moreover, newsreels are in large part filmed in long shot; and we know that the special attributes of the wide angle are quite different from those of the closeup. Indeed, because it has nothing in it other than logical information, the wide angle turns us into pure observers of the objects it puts in front of our eyes and distances us from the drama it presents, by interposing an actual distance between us and it. We participate on a purely intellectual level. We are moved by the action and by the resulting facts, ideas or feelings and hardly at all by the objects as "objects," nor by the way they are presented (unless the plastic qualities of the image provoke an appropriate emotion—clearly not the case in this instance).

In the long shot, the individual component parts are eclipsed by the vast number of interrelationships between them. And there are so many of these that for each point of each "object," all the relationships of that point with all the points of each of the different parts of the whole must be considered; it is this issue which, in our view, gestalt psychology has not sufficiently examined—and which means that the relationships between objects are definitely more important than the objects themselves. A whole is necessarily superior to the sum of its parts; and it is obvious that identical elements may have as many different significations as ways of being organized, since the associations are differentiated in each different instance.¹⁸

Thus in the wide-angle shot, since relationships of movement take precedence, perception is directed toward *comprehension* rather than consciousness released from intellect; with the effect that though in the closeup, comprehension must *first of all* pass through emotion, here emotion is the *result* of comprehension. The intellectual ideas take priority. In the case of closeups, where

each brings its own perceptible quality, our understanding does not depend on the objects perceived but on their *successive* relationships; they are always different forms set in opposition and juxtaposition according to a suitable rhythm; the intellectual process is *one of analysis*. In the wide-angle shot, the intellectual process is *one of syncretism*. The shot has duration only to allow the audience time to study it more closely, as well as any transformations caused by the movement. The rhythm is as much part of the content (acting and direction) as the editing, whereas in the case of closeups, it is a function of the editing alone.

Obviously the above applies only in the case of static shots. Later on we shall see that in moving shots and shots using depth-of-field, the sensory qualities of the closeup and the intellectual qualities of the long shot can easily be combined—although to different ends.

To sum up: whereas the closeup is more concrete in perception and more abstract in intellection, the wide angle is eminently concrete at the level of logical understanding, particularly since it encompasses a more homogeneous section of time and space, a more "objective" reality. Which means that in the framing there is not a difference of scale between the long shot and the closeup (as is generally believed) any more than a wider or narrower field of view. Since each creates its own appropriate *form* using the represented content, each acts differently on our perceptions and thus on our consciousness, emotions, and understanding. A subject shot first in a style mainly made up of long shots and then in a style made up principally of close shots will produce two completely different films—although they might both follow the same dramatic plot and the same editing sequence. The story will be the same, but the impressions, emotions, ideas, and feelings expressed will be utterly different. The

values will be transformed, altered, inverted by the differentiated qualities.

These questions are of the utmost importance with regard to the composition of the shot and the organization of its relationships to a preestablished effect. We have no need to mention that most filmmakers are completely unaware of them, though one or two apply the principles quite intuitively. At the same time, it is our view that this kind of knowledge would greatly increase the technical resources at filmmakers' disposal and save them from committing mistakes. Genius is not usually found among sleepwalkers; quite the opposite: in the greatest artists (the Rameaus, the Leonardo da Vincis, the Eisensteins) the practice of art is inseparable from theory and aesthetic research.

Let us now consider "intellectual montage," which is related to the principles of Dziga-Vertov in the sense that it is also concerned with expressing and signifying through image relationships rather than through a purely cumulative continuity. It is different, however, in that, though they are part of an actual reality, facts related in this way are always seen *subjectively*. They are reconstituted and developed in epic terms.

Now that this essential difference has been established once and for all, we should point out that Eisenstein did not formulate *one* theory of montage but several, whose different applications often produced contradictory results. In this light, we might divide his theories into categories according to their most significant aspects: *montage of attraction*, absolute or *cinedialectic montage*, and the most usual Eisensteinian form which I shall call *reflex montage* (for want of a better term).

What then is "montage of attraction," which, though it may be merely an accidental mutant of Eisensteinian montage, might give us the key to Eisenstein's theories? To

find out we must examine Eisenstein's work in the theater and say a few words about Japanese theater, whose forms were to lead him to discover the possibilities of montage long before he ever discovered an application for them in film. As he points out,

In Kabuki, the Japanese are showing us an extremely interesting type of ensemble—the *monistic ensemble*. Sound, movement, space, and voice do not accompany the Japanese actors and do not even parallel each other but are treated as elements of equal significance. One cannot speak of accompaniment with regard to Kabuki theater, just as one could not say that, in walking, the right leg "accompanies" the left leg, or that both of them are accompanied by the diaphragm. The patter of Ostuzhev is no more important than the color of the prima donna's tights; the clash of cymbals is equal to Romeo's soliloquy; the cricket on the hearth is no less important than the cannon fired over the seats of the auditorium. By appealing to our senses, Japanese actors stimulated every sensation of which we are conscious. Instead of *accompaniment*, Kabuki reveals the process of transfer between one material and another, between one category of stimulation and another. (*Film Form*)

Let us now examine the techniques used by Eisenstein in the theater. His own first show at the People's Theater (*proletkult*), where he started as a scene painter and set designer, was the production of *The Mexican*, a play taken from a short story by Jack London. The story is as follows: Some young Mexicans are trying to secure enough money for their group to carry on their revolutionary activities. One of them arranges a boxing match to raise the necessary funds. They ask the local champion to offer his services for a small percentage of the take. The revolutionaries are to pocket the rest to cover the expenses of their orga-

nization. However, during the bout, a young fellow actually beats the champion and wins the victor's purse.

Out of this little short story, Boris Arbatov was able to make a piece of propaganda. Smishlayev undertook to direct, and Eisenstein was chosen to design the sets and costumes. However, during rehearsals, remembering what he had read of Kabuki theater, he conceived the idea of an "active" production departing completely from tradition. The center of interest, the pivot of the drama, was the boxing match. Normally, scenes of this kind take place "in the wings." (The audience does not see the bullfight in *Carmen*.) And in this context Smishlayev wanted the match to take place offstage, showing it merely through the visible reactions of the actors. However, Eisenstein's idea was not just to show the match but to put the actual boxing ring in the middle of the auditorium in order, as he said, to make the audience part of the action, making it experience all the emotions of a real boxing match, making it concerned as to the outcome of the fight as much as with the characters.

It was an original idea. Smishlayev agreed and delegated to Eisenstein, almost entirely, the responsibility for this particular scene. The circular shape of the auditorium—a former circus—made it possible to set up a ring in the middle. However, the main interest was not that they replaced "proscenium theater" with "theater-in-the-round" (not really a novel idea anyway); the ring was not to take the place of the stage (which, through the proscenium, was connected to one side of the ring). There were two centers of interest and two playing areas: the stage, where the action in the psychological sense took place, and the ring, where the match, which had such a bearing on the dramatic action, was fought. It was a kind of montage before the fact, with each of the two actions achieving its

full significance only relative to the other and the tension thus created becoming the real production of the drama.

We must accept that if theater does not represent facts, if it does no more than follow and describe the psychological consequences of certain facts, it is only because of a practical limitation—since all representations are bound, within the rigid framework and narrow confines of the stage, to be fabrications. And we must agree that a boxing match, inherently stageable (involving only the two fighters and the referee) was easier to stage than, say, Le Cid's great battle against the Moors.

Nonetheless, the aesthetics of the theater are based on this limitation. Moreover, the art of theater is predicated on unity and concentration. Though it "involved the audience in the action," in the final analysis this double staging did no more than dissipate the dramatic interest. It is not possible to follow two actions happening in two different places in two different fields of view. One must keep changing focus from one to the other, with the result that one is bound to lose something—the overall theme, the idea, the play's message, the Mexicans' revolutionary struggle—by concentrating on the boxing match, which, for all its contributory importance, is of secondary interest. Not merely is it placed on the same level as the drama; it ends up taking its place. And this was not Eisenstein's intention.

And if, as Eisenstein wished, the audience was in the same state of mind as the characters in the drama, it became superfluous for the actors to communicate emotions which were already being felt. The dramatic interest thereby lost all its relevance. In the effort to "objectify" feelings by making them accessible to everyone, they succeeded merely in making them even more intensely subjective in the minds of the audience. It was a brave experiment in theater, but for that very reason it ruined

the play as a play. However spectacular Eisenstein's work, it inevitably led to a "detheatricalization" of the theater. The real experimentalists—who brought theater into a new age—were, of course, Stanislavsky and, apart from his eccentricities, Meyerhold.

In *The Sage*, Eisenstein tried to "create a new spatial relationship between the audience and the actors." In his adaptation of an Ostrovsky play *A Sage Is Always Wiser than Himself*, all he retained of the original was the subject matter. Changing this comedy of manners into a social satire and an antireligious polemic, remodeling the structure of the play on the *Commedia dell'Arte*, he made his characters into clowns and acrobats and staged the whole thing as a circus show. The original comedy disappeared behind a kind of absurd spectacle with uncles and nephews, aunts and their lovers—but the characters were revealed in a constant antithesis between words and deeds. In this way the character of Glumov (a kind of *Tartuffe* figure)—behind the mask of caricature—was incredibly complex. One of the most significant passages in the show was the scene where Glumov made love to his aunt Mamayeva, declaring his "irresistible passion" in order to steal her fortune. He balanced on a tightrope for the whole scene, and his physical position was supposed to indicate the moral situation he was treading—a very precarious one, a tightrope.

Sometimes, on the other hand, fortuitous "happenings" replaced interior monologue, showing what the characters might have wished to conceal. The dialogue was not just between characters but between moral and physical actions; and, where necessary, it jumbled up the plots like a kind of juggling trick, adding to the satire by parodying itself. Under the guise of burlesque, it was a series of themes "playing off each other," whose meaning exploded from these reactions. The idea did not exist in the

facts nor in the dramatic expression but in the relationship of themes. This also was montage before the fact. It was theater supplemented by circus, music-hall and ballet techniques. Even the cinema was pressed into service, Eisenstein having decided to present a short film showing Glumov's actions and thoughts over the period of a week, which was supposed to contrast with the situation of the character acting on the stage.

It is this way of relating elements which Eisenstein calls "montage of attraction"—which (prize fights or tightrope walking) are secondary actions capable of signifying certain ideas through their association with the main action. Heralded as innovative (which they certainly were), these experiments could not conceivably have led anywhere else. The limitations of the theater proved they could not contain the ambitions of the young director. So he had to look for a more suitable means and expression and he found the cinema.

In May 1923 (the moment Eisenstein switched his attention from the theater to the cinema), he published in the avant-garde review *LEF* (*Levy Front Iskousstva*, or Social front of art), edited by Mayakovsky, a manifesto of his theories. Intending to apply them in the cinema, he wrote:

In our conception of the theater, attraction is the specific moment during which all elements strive together to determine in the mind of the audience the idea one wishes to communicate, by putting it in a state of mind or a psychological situation which actually provokes the idea. The moment can be planned and calculated so as to produce a shock emotion.

Attraction has nothing to do with acrobatic or comic turns, which are self-contained, nor with conjuring tricks, whose sole purpose is contained in the correct presentation of the trick. On the contrary, attraction is based on audience reaction.

Applied methodically, it makes it possible to use "active" staging. In place of the static reflection of an event—in which all the expressive possibilities are kept within the limits of the logical development of the action—we are suggesting a new form: the free montage of attractions, arbitrarily selected, independent of the actual action (yet selected in view of the meaning of the action), every element striving to establish an ultimate thematic effect. This is the montage of attractions.

We have just seen, in respect of the theater, the dangers inherent in this solution. The main objection as far as the cinema is concerned is that such a technique is valid only inasmuch as it exploits living (in the dramatic sense) elements from which it can draw an emotional power as well as a concrete symbolic signification. It becomes invalid as soon as it starts using symbols *arbitrarily selected and applied* to reality instead of being *implied* within the reality. Eisenstein was frequently to fall into the same trap, excessively systematizing his discovery, using it sometimes to "de-animate the animate," thereby resulting in a kind of abstract formalism making the selected elements fit the Procrustean bed of his arbitrary framework.

In his first film, *Strike*, which describes a strike in a metal factory and its repression by the soldiers of the tsar, he contrasts shots showing workers being machine-gunned and shots of a bullock being slaughtered in an abattoir. The effect is stunning. Yet, though the idea is signified, the dramatic truth is canceled and the authenticity betrayed. In fact, the whole action takes place in the factory and the streets, not in abattoirs arbitrarily and illogically introduced into a scene equally alien to them. Thus it is only a trick of the director imposed on the film for the sole purpose of provoking an idea to support the drama.

In 1924, this type of editing had novelty

value. The audience, overwhelmed by the intensity of the movement, lost sight of the dramatic logic and could grasp only the dialectical logic. But an audience would not react like that nowadays because it would immediately see through the artificiality of this kind of juxtaposition. Exclusively obsessed by the "idea," Eisenstein was to act quite frequently in this way, disregarding the authenticity of the narrative—if not the authenticity of his facts.

Though, strictly speaking, there is no montage of attraction in *October*, the odd deviation toward this form is noticeable, with Eisenstein tracing out what he was later to call "cinedialectics," an even more intellectual and arbitrary aspect of editing. For example: at the Second Soviet Congress, during the attack on the Winter Palace, the speeches of disapproval from the Mensheviks are intercut with shots of hands playing the harp. The idea (literary in the extreme) is to give the Menshevik speeches the tone and appearance of lyrical whining, mind-numbing blabbering. However, though the idea is valid (if perhaps a trifle forced), we are left wondering what the harps and harpists are doing in the objective, concrete reality of the meeting.

In the same film, just as Kornilov prepares to march on Petrograd at the head of the White Army, an image shows the general sitting arrogantly and forcefully (one might say Napoleonically) on his horse. The impression is reinforced by the angle of the shot—an upward tilt. Yet Eisenstein does not stop at this; he juxtaposes an image revealing, from the same angle, an equestrian statue which confirms and reinforces the ludicrousness of the posture. All well and good. But what is this statue doing in the logical continuity of the action and, more particularly, on the Russian steppes?

Elsewhere we see Kerensky in one of the huge rooms in the Winter Palace. He says a

few words, walks around a bit, waves his arms, and looks at himself in various mirrors. One of the shots revealing the tiny man lost in the vast proportions of the room adds to the impression of overwhelming solitude and neglect around him. However, on one of the chimney breasts in the room, there is a statue, a bust of Napoleon. And predictably, Eisenstein is quick to contrast it with different shots of Kerensky posing arrogantly in front of the mirrors. This association is possible because the statue forms part of the setting. It is included in the space of the drama, involved, as it were, in the action—particularly since Kerensky passes backward and forward in front of it, looking at it. Suddenly, however, the doors open with a loud crash. The Winter Palace has been taken and the Red Guards are breaking into the rooms. Kerensky has no time to escape. Now, at the very instant the doors burst open and the revolutionaries run in, a single shot shows Napoleon's bust lying shattered in fragments on the floor. Who dropped it? No one—except Eisenstein himself. Yet it would have been easy enough to incorporate the symbol into the concrete reality: Kerensky might have accidentally knocked it off its pedestal as he rushed past the chimney breast, waving his arms. Then the sequence would have been as follows: the bust is knocked off; the doors burst open; Kerensky makes his escape; Napoleon lies shattered on the floor. So simple that Eisenstein, mesmerized solely by the idea, never thought of it or did not care about it (or had not foreseen the effect in the script and had to create it after the event).

Shortly before this scene, we have seen Kerensky enter the Winter Palace surrounded by his ministers. As he climbs the huge staircase leading to the imperial apartments, we are shown a series of shots intercut with subtitles indicating Minister of War, Minister of Navy and Air Force, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of the

Interior, Major-General, Dictator—pointing out, not without irony, that he has given himself most of the portfolios. But the staircase has only thirty steps to it; he only reaches the first floor. Thus we are seeing—from different angles—Kerensky repeatedly climbing *the same stairs*. The idea is to signify the futility of his action, his vanity and absurdity: he is climbing but getting no further up the stairs. And yet the reality is fabricated. One might say that it does not matter, since one stair looks like any other and the constant change of shot cancels out the most obvious reference points. Further on, when Kerensky reaches the first floor, an upward tilt shows him in such a way that one of the statues above him on the balustrade appears to be crowning him with laurel—a dictator in the fullness of his power. In this case, the irony is all the more effective that the image is not out of place—because Eisenstein was using a statue which was *actually* part of the setting, an object with a real place in the real space of the drama. He was *using* reality, *interpreting* it instead of *falsifying* and *invalidating* it. The shot is not—to use a medical metaphor—a foreign body introduced into the objective, factual reality, whereas in the examples previously cited the contrast is made always to the detriment of reality.

On several occasions, Pudovkin tried similar effects. In *The End of St. Petersburg*, he shows a boss shouting orders down a telephone and, between two shots of the boss, he interpolates a shot of the statue of Peter the Great in an assertive and tyrannical posture. But the statue is *actually* in a square in St. Petersburg and we have already seen it in context earlier in the film. Though the comparison is no less arbitrary than for Kornilov, at least the position of the statue makes the association not beyond the bounds of possibility. On occasion (rarely, it must be said), Pudovkin “does an Eisenstein” better than Eisenstein himself.

For instance, in the last part of *Mother*, the ever-swelling tide of strikers and protesters, after freeing the prisoners, surges onward, bursting through all the barriers in its path. And Pudovkin intercuts these shots with a series of images showing the River Neva carrying pack-ice breaking up as though the river itself is bursting triumphantly from its frozen bonds. But we are in St. Petersburg and the River Neva is part of the location. Even better: the strikers stream down the promenade and cross the river over the iron bridge over which the Cossack soldiers charge to cut down the strikers—an iron bridge whose angularity and rigidity are synonymous with the blind, pitiless military force of the armed cavalry.

One lesson to be learned from the foregoing examples is that one cannot use “simile” in the cinema unless the term of comparison is part of the space in which the original scene takes place (if it is not involved in the drama in some other way).

The image of the statue alongside General Kornilov is rather as if Eisenstein were saying: “Arrogant, ambitious, self-interested, Kornilov sat his horse *like* Napoleon himself and already considered himself an emperor.” But in this verbal sentence the image is entirely conceptual. It is an appeal to the consciousness, or memory, of the reader. It is not on the same level as description. On the other hand, in the cinema the image is on the same level as the image of reality—by reason of its being an image itself and, as such, every bit as objective and concrete as the first. But it is the image of another reality set in another time and another place. The two images cannot coincide. Though there may be identification or association between the two on the intellectual level, there is conflict between them at the level of objective reality. Not because one is the image of a *real* action and the other of an *unreal* statue but purely and

simply because the statue is not included in the framework of the action, because it is not *involved* in the drama. Since it is alien to the concrete fact, it cannot be made to conform to it. It is, quite simply, different.¹⁹

We all know the film cliché of showing a gaggle of cackling geese in a sequence of two or three old crones gossiping on their doorsteps. Suppose the action happens in a large town: then the image of the geese is arbitrary for the reason that geese are not normally seen waddling around town streets. Suppose, on the other hand, the action happens in the country: then the comparison is perfectly possible, even if the geese are in a completely different place. Suppose, however, the old women are to gossip on the edge of a farmyard and the geese are shown in the background, then the relationship is direct, realistic, and symbolic—all at the same time. Everything becomes true.

We should point out even so that if the intention is to emphasize the metaphorical nature of a comparison, then the two elements must be presented *separately*. A panning shot, moving in one movement from the old gossips to the geese, would be equally effective. To use an example quoted by Eisenstein, when in *Earth* Dovshenko shows us a woman in labor just as the funeral of the young Kolkosian is taking place, we accept the event as pure coincidence. What we see, as an audience, is the woman lying in bed in her izba. We might read a symbolic signification into this association but there is nothing to support it. It is not expressly in the film (though of course it might be implied). Conversely, had Dovshenko shown the woman *isolated* in the countryside and intercut this shot with the burial scenes, then and only then would the image, made abstract by its presentation, be associated with the idea of fertility, becoming its emotional equivalent in our minds, thereby underlining the pantheistic theme,

the general idea Dovshenko was attempting to communicate.

It will be argued that Dovshenko's method of presenting scenes objectively gives the audience more freedom. It is free to see the symbol (or not and, if not, its appreciation of the primary factual level of the film will not be affected). And yet, Dovshenko might have used an even subtler composition and juxtaposed *within the same frame* the pregnant woman (shown in foreground) and the funeral procession (in the background). The montage effect would then have been contained *within* the shot, and through her privileged position in the frame, the woman would have had the *same symbolic signification* (which is not the same as the image of the gossips and the geese seen in the same frame, where the gossips would be the symbol were it not for the fact that the pan "isolating" the geese in the background creates the opposite effect).

As Eisenstein says, "One cannot express heat by showing a thermometer, time by leafing through a calendar, or falling by presenting the formulae of the accelerated speed of a falling body; one must present the impression, the physical sensation produced by these phenomena." Now, a single image will never be capable of creating such a sensation, merely a relationship of images, an association, a shock emotion. Or else (and then only in certain instances) an isolated detail suggesting the sensation because it contains it implicitly, because it is its *sign*—its affective, emotional sign, however, rather than its theoretical or conventional sign.

But metaphor can be used only when it is part of the concrete reality which it is able to transcend through a special moment. This transference then becomes transcendence. It transforms reality, enlarges it and extends it. Yet if we disregard the signification of the content in favor of the abstraction and the ideas it evokes, then

we move into the realm of fantasy and artifice.

In the images of *October*, which by and large derive from montage of attraction, that is, from metaphors *arbitrarily* selected and *independent* of the dramatic action, the logic of the film narrative is broken by the introduction of *two qualitatively different shots* into a continuity with a definite succession. It is almost as though a composer tried to create harmony and counterpoint in the very fabric of the melody and achieved merely the fusion of a second melody into the first, canceling each other out by continually clashing against each other.

If, however, instead of a single screen we use several (Abel Gance's triple screen, for instance), then we have several frames and therefore several spaces at our disposal, and also several possible melodic lines and continuities. It is immediately obvious that one screen can harmonize with or counterpoint the other. And it is then conceivable for a particular action to happen, with all the concrete dramatic content, on the middle screen (the most important) and, on the side screens, *juxtaposed* (in the spatial sense) ancillary images each symbolically reinforcing the action. Then Kornilov's equestrian statue, the harpists in front of the Soviet Congress and Kerensky's bust of Napoleon all become possible. They no longer intrude *into* the drama but appear *alongside* it and, what is more, *simultaneously* with it. The intellectual effect intended by Eisenstein is instantly achieved without ever having to suspend the logic of the representation and deny the factual authenticity. Thus it was not the principle which was at fault but its application—which proved impossible in the context of normal cinema (which is melodic purely and simply, involving and requiring the laws of melodic continuity). The tools were not adequate to the ambi-

tions of the filmmaker: one cannot play a symphony on the piano.

However, for Eisenstein the interest of montage was not as a means of producing specific effects but as a means of self-expression, a way of communicating ideas: determining an idea by the collision of two images, stimulating in the audience's consciousness a series of ideas to create an affective state, then producing, with these activated feelings, a state of mind, a participation of the audience in the thoughts which the filmmaker tried to communicate—with the intended effect that, involved in the current of ideas, held by the dynamic logic, the audience might feel as though it is freely subscribing to the resultant general meaning, as though exercising its own judgment and personality instead of being swayed by the arguments being proposed. As we know, this was the guiding principle of this great filmmaker, whose work, according to Edgar Morin, forms a "coherent system in which the use and study of the affective power of images attain the level of a *logos*."

Eisenstein was himself the first to recognize this fault in himself as is evident from the following remarks:

The basic fact was true (and remains true to this day), that the juxtaposition of two pieces of film resembles not so much their *sum* as their *product*. . . . What, then was the "distortion" in our attitude at that time to this indisputable phenomenon?

The error lay in placing the main emphasis on the possibilities of juxtaposition and in paying less attention than we should, as *experimenters*, to the *elements* of the juxtaposition. . . . I really think that I was primarily seduced by what was unrelatable in the components of montage which, often in spite of themselves, forced together by the will of the editor, generate a "third term" and become correlative.

Having essentially to deal with material and examples of this kind, it was nat-

ural that our thinking should have concentrated on the possibilities of juxtaposition; consequently, we paid less *attention to analyzing* the actual nature of the juxtaposed elements. Besides, on its own this attention is not enough. Directed exclusively to the internal content of the sequence, in practice it ended up weakening the montage, with all its attendant consequences.

Where should our interest have lain then had we wished to return these two extremes to normality? We should have turned our attention to the fundamental element which determines both the internal content of each sequence and the juxtaposition of the material; in other words, the content of the *whole*, the *general unifying principles*.

The first extreme consisted in allowing ourselves to be distracted by the technique of assembly (the method of montage) and the other, by the elements to be assembled (the content of the sequence). We should have concentrated more on the nature of the *unifying principle* itself, the principle which, for each separate film, should determine the content of the sequence as much as the content which the *juxtaposition of the sequence* reveals.

But to achieve this the primary interest of the experimenters should not have been directed toward those paradoxical instances where this whole, this final result, has *not been anticipated* but emerges completely unexpectedly. We should have turned our attention to those instances where the elements are not only correlated but where the *final result, the whole*, has been anticipated and has even predetermined the individual elements and the circumstances of their juxtaposition. These are the normal, usual, most widespread instances, where indeed the whole emerges absolutely as "a third term" and where the complete picture of the way the sequence, the editing, and the content are determined becomes even more conclusive and obvious. And it is precisely these instances which prove to be typical of the cinema.

When montage is considered from this point of view, sequences as well as their juxtaposition fall into their correct reciprocal relationship. In addition to which, the very nature of montage stops being divorced from the principles of cinematic realism and serves as one of the most legitimate resources for the realistic narration of film content. (*Montage 38*)²⁰

In contrast to the montage of attraction and its unfortunate consequences, Eisenstein was to use, in *Battleship Potemkin* and subsequent films, what he called *reflex montage*, using only symbols determined by the content. In other words, a montage of significant *facts maintained and included* with the limits of the logical development of the action and appearing at the appropriate moment in a particular scene—either to comment on the scene and modify the way it resolved or to determine a particular reaction between the interrelated facts or else recall, through reflex association, a similar scene included in the preceding stage of the drama, thereby acting on the audience's nervous system and consciousness.

Thus it is clear that the subtler the relationship the more powerful it is and the deeper its implications, as in poetry, where the image is proportionately more poetic the further it is from the object, tied by a thread only as tangible as is necessary to ensure the link. It is tempting to compare if not the stylistics then at least the methods of Eisenstein and Valéry. Indeed, whereas certain poets express relatively precise ideas, putting into verse what they have already worked out in prose, describing much but revealing little, Valéry does the opposite and describes very little, apparently expressing no ideas. He limits himself to transposing impressions and sensations, to stimulating emotions. Yet, through his bold metaphors (which seem only incidentally connected to their ob-

jects), through a whole complex of fleeting images or mystical evocations, he sketches in relationships which gradually materialize in the reader's mind, thereby communicating ideas through words which do not express them.

"The shot," as Eisenstein says,

is by no means an *element* of montage. It is a montage cell; just as the division of cells produces a series of different organisms, so the division of shots—their collision, their conflict—generates concepts.

Pudovkin defends his opinion of montage as a *linkage* of shots, a sequence of fragments arranged into a series in order to *expound* a thesis. In my view, montage is a *collision*, and from the collision of two given factors *arises* a concept. From my point of view, linkage is merely one possibility, a special case.

Think of the infinite number of physical combinations produced by the simple impact (collision) of corpuscles—depending on their speed, their energy, and the angle of their trajectory, etc. Among all these combinations, there is one in which the point of impact is so weak that the collision is degraded to a single moment of both going in the same direction. This is the one combination which would correspond with Pudovkin's view. (*Film Form*)

We might reply that it is also the one combination which corresponds with the principle of dramatic unity, where cause is followed through its effects within a single unity which is its own development—with-out which there would be no *drama* (in the literary sense of the word), merely *accident*. No organized drama, no development *possible* because the two terms of comparison are too widely separated.

Eisenstein's comparison suggests (even invites) one or two "thermodynamic" comparisons which provide an opportunity to see how montage of conflicts or collisions (not easily adaptable to the linear develop-

ment of an individual narrative or drama) is perfectly suitable for the collective drama which is the object of all his films. Whether in Brownian motion or quite simply a mass of boiling water, the particles (atoms or molecules) receiving an increase in energy transform this energy into movement and therefore heat radiation. All the particles move in different directions; their movements are disordered. But these different movements, taken as a whole, form a collective unity; the water begins to boil.

It is not hard to recognize the image of the collective drama, whose single movement and powerful thrust is merely the sum of a series of more or less disordered movements impelled by the same force. We might add that the actual "drama" is no more than the following through of the consequences of the collision of two or more particles; and as far as the notion goes, we can see what Eisenstein meant when he attributed to it such remarkable powers. Lastly, we cannot help but admit that his rules of editing were created in the image of epic movement (formally speaking, they are its equivalent). Eisensteinian continuity is made up of nothing more than a series of shots or groups of contrasting, colliding shots and sundry scattered and discontinuous "conflicts." Neither facts nor characters are followed through their development in time but are seized at a critical moment which reveals them and illuminates other critical moments which taken together form the epic.

In a film of this kind, duration plays a very secondary role. Being concerned only with the eruption of a collective effect, the epic works with instant time. The action of *Potemkin* takes place over forty-eight hours, that of *October* within a span of ten days. If Eisenstein develops an action over several months (*The General Line*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Ivan the Terrible*), the film then takes on the appearance of a poem divided into stanzas, each stanza accounting for only

one moment on the curve. Eisenstein's dynamics are not those of evolution, of gradual transformation, but rather those of explosion. It is possible to follow the course of a stream or a river; it is not possible to follow boiling water. When this is compressed, it bursts its container but it does not move. It is tempting to say that Eisenstein's dynamics are "internal," localized within a static framework: *the dynamics of a definite space within a limited time.* Léon Moussinac described it very well: "An Eisenstein film is like a shout; a Pudovkin film is like a song" (*Le Cinéma soviétique*).

Movement itself is represented only in its totality when it is collective movement, never (or almost never) when it is individual. Either Eisenstein suggests the cause by showing the effect or else he cuts (except when he cannot avoid it) *the time it takes for the movement to take place.* He splices onto the shot of an action *as it is beginning* a shot showing the *consequence* of the action. For instance: a soldier raises his sabre; he is about to strike; he has hardly begun the movement when there is a cut to the following shot: the sabre has sliced into a woman's face, and her eye, slashed open, is dripping blood and aqueous humor onto her cheek, etc.

Eisenstein shows only the "pivotal points" on the movement, the moment of volition, the preparation of the action and the result of that action. This is what gives his films, especially *Potemkin*, such a dynamic power and the appearance of "compressed movement."

Obviously these abbreviations are possible only when the abbreviated action is already short. Any longer cuts in the action would make it seem that a mistake had been made. In this case, Eisenstein constructs the continuity with a kind of alternating or "broken" montage—which strangely resembles the rhythmic rise and fall of blank verse.

In the Odessa Steps sequence (ending on the shot of the Cossack slicing the woman's face with his sabre), a platoon of White Guards marches down the steps as a mother, holding the body of her dead child in her arms, climbs back up and stops; the officer raises his sabre and is about to give the order to fire. Eisenstein cuts to a short sequence of parallel action; he shows a group of civilians crouching in terror behind a balustrade. Then he cuts directly back to the conclusion. We see the woman lying shot with her child in her arms. The Cossacks march over her and continue their cold-blooded butchery.

This type of montage, which at the rhythmic level uses the rise and fall of recitative, operates at the intellectual level in a sort of reflex process (one might say, moreover, that the structure of these recitatives is based on similar memory processes). If, for instance, we see (a) a firing squad and soldiers with their guns at the ready, then (b) a man blindfolded standing against a wall, the reflex idea generated by the association of these two shots is that the man is about to be shot. The complementary shot would show the execution. Eisenstein does not. He keeps the audience's imagination and therefore expectation in suspense. Just as in the example from the Odessa Steps sequence, he cuts to a parallel action, both to allow *time* for the execution to happen and to create a more or less violent contrast with the first action. After which he shows the result: we see the firing squad marching away. Needless to say (and we shall return to this fine point later), he *always* shows the two parts (a) and (b) interconnected in space and time, i.e., within the *same frame*, either at the beginning of the sequence or, as in this case, as a sort of coda.

In contrast with these abbreviations, Eisenstein sometimes uses their corollary, which is an *extension of time*—but only when it involves a collective movement de-

serving emphasis as, for instance, the famous Odessa Steps sequence. However impressive these stairs leading down to the port might be, they comprise scarcely a hundred steps in all, divided into ten successive flights. Now, the shooting, the chaotic rush of the crowd, and the slow march down of the White Guards lasts so long that we might believe the stairs to be three or four times longer than they are. Yet this extension is *imperceptible* because our attention is held by its increasing intensity. Apart from the fact that the steps and landings all look alike, offering no point of reference, we are seeing not merely *one* line of White Guards marching down the steps but *two or three*, so that each line allows the theme to be repeated and therefore time to be extended *in a logical fashion*.

However, this is not the case with the equally famous drawbridge sequence in *October*. The revolutionaries, ridden down and machine-gunned by soldiers of the White Army, attempt to cross the drawbridge over the Neva to the far side held by the Red Army. But the Whites set the levers of the drawbridge in motion and the two halves of the bridge begin slowly to separate, thus cutting off their retreat. However, the crowd presses on to the last moment, leaping over the ever-widening gulf. A young girl has been shot in the act of jumping and her head is resting on the moving part of the bridge. After a series of wide-angled shots, a sequence of shots from different angles getting progressively tighter frame the young girl's body and then her head as her hair is gently pulled by the rising girders. The scene has a frightful beauty. Yet it is always the *same movement* of the drawbridge raised eight inches from zero (four shots), then from eight to twenty inches (another four shots), that is until the girl's hair hangs free and her head falls back, lifeless, to the ground.

As Victor Shklovsky pointed out at the

time, "Eisenstein stretches time so much that the bridge seems as though it will never be raised." Here also, Eisenstein preferred to violate reality in order to reach a more intense truth, turning the image into a kind of symbol detached from its immediate context. Yet when a realistic image like this is detached from objective reality, not only does its value as a sign seem deliberately and clumsily emphasized but its power is limited to that of a mere rhetorical device, which explains why the effect it produces is contrived.

A general rule of thumb might be that with all the possibilities in front of them, Pudovkin would be likely to eliminate those with insufficient signifying power, keeping the rest, whereas Eisenstein would *choose* the one which *signified the most* and reject the rest. Less lyrical and less effusive, he is more stringent and also more direct, much crisper. And though psychological time has no part to play in his films, we can see that metric time, i.e., clock time, is a basic ingredient for his view of rhythmic development. He uses it as one would the loud pedal on a piano to increase the dramatic tension or violence of the movement. Rhythm, as far as Eisenstein is concerned, is generated by the perpetual conflict between the object and its dimensions, between the scene and its duration, in a complex of metric relationships controlled by the intensity of the content and the hypothetical meaning inspired by this organization.

If we take a moment to examine the rhythmic structure of *The Battleship Potemkin*, the first thing we notice is that though the film is a kind of reconstructed newsreel, it is constructed as a classical tragedy. The "stanzas" (or strophes) to which we referred are more precisely "acts" separated by subtitles which, because of the break with the preceding act, establishes the tone of the next. We might characterize the five acts of *Potemkin* as "Exposition," "The

"Drama on the Quarterdeck," "The Funeral Procession in the Harbor," "Odessa Steps," "Meeting the Squadron."

Each part is a whole leading to the next, repeating the previous in a different form. As the drama on the quarterdeck is happening, a group of rebel sailors (a small part of the ship's complement) shout out "Brothers!" while the marine guard is taking aim at them. And the marines lower their rifles. All the other ranks join the rebels. In the confusion of the fight, the sailors of the rebel ship (a small part of the fleet) make the same call to arms, "Brothers!" as they pass in front of the squadron whose guns are trained on the *Potemkin*. And the guns are lowered. The whole squadron joins them. From the one organic cell of the individual ship to the entire navy, from one unit of the fleet to the entire fleet. Thus the theme of revolutionary fraternity bursts out—from the actual structure of the film—from sequence to sequence.

Each act is divided into two equal parts which are in conflict in terms of movement, rhythm, and meaning. Each part is, as it were, the antithesis of the other: the first is comparatively calm, whereas the second is violent and explosive. The mutiny is sparked off by sailors being thrown into the brig. The slaughter on the Odessa Steps is the militarist reaction to the crowd taking sides with the rebel sailors. Etc.

It is worthy of note that the film itself is divided into two equal parts. The revolt at the beginning is interrupted to be resumed later on. And the caesura separating the two parts is the episode of the procession before Vakulinchuk's body. It serves both as a respite and a transition, identical to the linking between the separate parts in each of the acts. It allows the transition from the sailors' revolt to the single-minded support of the townspeople of Odessa: from the ship to the town—the one responding to the other like musical counterpoint. The two themes, the

two "contexts": ship and town, land and sea, sailors and townsfolk, disunited topographically, come together into one single unity, their common resentment. A unity shattered almost immediately by the boots and measured tread of the White Guards as they march down the steps. Then, passing from the sailors to the townsfolk and from the ship to the town, the revolutionary theme is taken up again in the contrasting theme of the slaughter, then once again returning to the revolt of the sailors of the *Potemkin* eagerly preparing to engage with the rest of the squadron. It is in this sense that the structure of the film is no more than a more generalized repetition of the structure of its parts.

If we now take a close look at the rhythmic structure of the slaughter on the steps (one of the most perfect examples of film rhythm), we must first of all consider that one of Eisenstein's main objectives was to register the rhythm of the represented action in the psychophysiological rhythm which that action implied: to reveal what naturally causes pain in the rhythm of pain, what naturally causes fervor in the rhythm of fervor—the one being contained, for instance, in oppression and contraction and the other in dynamic expansion or extension, so that the audience actually experiences *physically* the sensation of the represented action, since its physiological rhythms (heartbeats, etc.) are to some extent "controlled" by the rhythm of the images.

In the episodes dealing with fraternization and revolutionary fervor, the internal dynamics are intensified as the shots become longer and longer, moving from medium shots to wide angles, as though from gasping to deep panting. Conversely, in the scenes of pain (the shooting on the steps and clearing the decks for action), the rhythm becomes much tighter; the shots, much shorter, collide with details building

up against each other in a short, tense, and jerky beat.

At the start of the Odessa Steps episode, close shots are jostled together and jumbled up in the chaotic flow of assorted long shots (the townsfolk pouring down the steps). Then suddenly the chaos gives way to the rhythmic order of the White Guards marching down the steps. A sudden change of tempo registers this jerky rhythm developing within the slower tempo of the other, constantly cutting against it. The long shots (of the crowd milling over the steps) intercut with shots of random details in the crowd, and the increasingly tighter shots (to the extreme of the boots closeups) of the measured tread of the soldiers become progressively shorter according to their respective tempo, with the one constantly intruding on the other. The detail shots of the marching soldiers (shown consecutively from different angles), standing out against the rhythmic background of the crowd like a continuous beat against a musical background, form one of the most perfect developments there has ever been in the cinema: space divided into parallel lines, into equal measures (the steps), and time divided into equal lengths (the measured steps of the soldiers) become integrated within the same uniformly repeated rhythmic measure, easily represented by means of a straight line serving as a median between the two space-time coordinates.

Within this accelerating *downward* movement, there is a sudden conflicting movement *upward*. From the confused and disordered movement of the crowd, there is a change to a slow and solemn movement back up the steps: the mother, *on her own*, carrying her dead child.

Then we are dragged back into the whirl of the crowd rushing down the steps constantly broken by the ordered marching and successive salvos delivered by the soldiers. But suddenly the chaotic and pan-

icky movement of the crowd becomes transposed into another movement, this time continuous and uniform: that of the perambulator bouncing from step to step and overturning at the bottom. This image propels the idea of the downward movement into another direction, moving from the figurative bouncing of the crowd to the physical bouncing of the baby carriage. Eisenstein writes:

From the chaotic movement of the civilians to the rhythmic movement of the soldiers, from the downward movement to the upward movement, from one aspect of movement at speed (the crowd) to another (the baby carriage), from shot to shot, a leap from one dimension to another and one quality to another. The method of exposition operates in leaps, in contrasts, in oppositions, and in collisions. Collisions from one shot to the next, one sequence to the next, one episode to the next, and one part to the next, like two rudimentary cells pairing off, multiplying ad infinitum. (*Film Form*)

The pathos of the scene is reinforced and increased by the pathos of its construction. The transition from the static to the dynamic, from calm to excitement, is determined by the transition from quality to quality, rhythm to rhythm, and intensity to intensity, in a development not merely descriptive or narrative but inviting our "active" participation in the event by making us "feel" it deep inside. But as Eisenstein goes on to indicate, "these compositional formulae are not prescriptions to be applied automatically to any particular content. They depend on that content and vary according to its requirements." Similarly, it is not possible to write a book of rules, since each film reinvents itself by the mere fact that its subject matter is different. And yet, as far as constructed, balanced, and premeditated films such as *The Battleship Potemkin*

(and indeed all Eisenstein's films) are concerned, we can accept his dictum that "just as the distribution of words and phonetic values in the structure of a poem makes it possible for us to distinguish a prosodic sentence from a purely logical or narrative sentence, so the plastic organization of images in a determinative rhythmic structure is what distinguishes the cinematic masterpiece."

However, there are limits which cannot be ignored, set by the conditions governing our perception of space and time. Relationships not perceived or imperceptible are valueless and therefore pointless. To elevate them into eternal values seems utterly foolish.

"Works of art constructed according to the golden section have an absolutely unique power," Eisenstein writes elsewhere.

It would appear that a test on the golden section has never been attempted in the cinema. All the more interesting, then, that *The Battleship Potemkin*, a film well known for its organic compositional unity, should be entirely constructed according to the golden section.

We have already noted that the division of each part of the film, as well as the whole film itself, is made *approximately* at the halfway point. Actually the proportion is nearer two to three, representing as nearly as possible the golden section. Now, the main caesura, the *zero point* at which the action is suspended, occurs at the end of the second act and the beginning of the third, in other words, in the proportion two to three.

To be even more precise, the Vakulinchuk theme is introduced not at the beginning of the third act but at *the end of the second*, adding, as it were, the 0.18 missing from the six units in the rest of the film. And the caesurae are shifted according to a similar principle within each part. (*Notes of a Film Director*)

That may well be; but is the audience

capable of perceiving the metric accuracy of these relationships? Our view is that this is *impossible* by virtue of the psychophysiological factors governing visual perception, drawn more to the image than to its duration. Obviously the audience is aware more or less of relationships of time but is incapable of evaluating *in any precise way* their metrical value. It is therefore irrelevant that they should or should not conform with the golden section: in their case, there is no gain or loss. The power of the image does not depend on how long it is, only on its emotional power, and this exists only *by reason of the content* and the *meaning* which the content assumes through this relationship.

In order to assess in terms of the golden section the metrical value of a cut or a caesura, we would need to measure the film, study it at the editing bench, apply a ruler and a compass; and this is not the purpose of a work of art—at any rate of a film. Of course, Eisenstein is speaking only of a test "on the golden section." But a test *to what end?* He has no need to prove that a relationship exists, since the fact is plain for all to see. And to prove that it exists in the proportion two to three does not advance his argument any further. The emotional power of such an image might just as easily occur in the proportion three to two or even three to four.

It will be argued that in painting and the plastic arts it is *not always easy to see* relationships based on the golden section, that sometimes the critic has to use a rule and compass. I would not dispute this. But at least their effects (however obscure) are easily perceived, since spatial relationships are immediately perceptible within the organic structure of the *whole*. Now, a film, like a symphony, is not an *immediate entity*, but a series of relationships which *gradually take shape*. Moreover, relationships of time—I repeat—are not perceptible to our eyes as they are to our ears. Such relationships, based

on the golden section, might *at a pinch* be perceptible in music (though music scarcely ever makes use of them, being a futile exercise); but it is *impossible* in the cinema.

Never is Eisenstein more lucid or so far from the mark (only he could be convinced by his argument) as when he says:

Certainly the strangest feature of *Potemkin* is that the golden section can be found not only when the movement reaches its *zero point*—when the action meets the lowest point of its course—but also at the highest point—the moment when the red flag is hoisted on the ship. And the flag is hoisted at a point determined by the golden mean! But here it must be calculated *in reverse*, according to the proportion three to two, near the caesura separating the first three parts from the two end parts, i.e., *at the end* of the third act, with the red flag also represented at the beginning of the fourth part. (*Ibid.*)

To consider the film in this way—even if it were possible—is to misinterpret it completely or to use our memories retroactively in order to reconstruct the necessary relationships. Evidence of the extent to which certain theories worked out in camera and valid only on paper can lead the unwary from the right path (particularly since the proportion two to three, inverted in a *normal development in time*, is totally inconsistent with the golden section, proportions in time being *irreversible*). Which really means that Eisenstein is giving proof “in terms of the golden section” that his last relationship is *inconsistent* with the golden section!

We might conclude from all this that though the laws of the golden section are applicable to plastic structures, to relationships of shape and volume, i.e., *within* the image (a direction leading eventually back to Expressionism), they cannot be applied to rhythm. And that though film rhythm is more complex, in that it is defined *both* in

space *and* in time, it is also more supple and less hamstrung by preestablished rules.

As we have said, film rhythm is not rhythm in time *attached* to rhythm in space; it is one *within* the other. Or, more precisely, if we were to draw a graph with relationships of space (shots, movements, plastic forms, etc.) as the x-axis and relationships of time (length of shots and sequences) as the y-axis, rhythm would be represented by the curve. Which makes it clear that rhythm (like verse) is a *consequence* and not, like music, an ordering and creative schema. Film rhythm is no more than the space-time form of an active manifestation. It is *basically determined* by the internal requirements of this manifestation and is no more than their external expression. Yet it is not an abstractly ordered form established *a priori* but the form of an action in the perpetual process of happening; in other words, a form *subordinate* to the expressive requirements of events, expressing and signifying them as though they could not exist except within this marvelously organized formal development.

The Psychology of Montage

The preceding remarks concerning rhythm and montage may be summarized as follows: the cinema has value only insofar as its images contribute to the development of a concrete reality. Moreover, with this reality as its starting point, it must elevate these images to the level of *signs*; but only provided that the signs do not lose contact with the reality from which they derive and that they transcend the reality by signifying it rather than signifying beyond it.

We must never forget that the image—of necessity the image of something—is in its essence *objective* and *concrete*. It is only by association that it becomes a sign, a power; *but it is the power, not the image, which is ab-*

stract. Yet, though the image is always subject to the personal vision and intentions of the director, it is at the level of its forms, not its essence; in its expressive purpose, not its actual existence.

It is therefore important that the logic of reality be fulfilled before any level of signification is achievable (and precisely so that this may be guaranteed). But fulfilling the logic of reality does not mean that the object must be presented in a way that is consistently objective, i.e., impersonal.

We should begin by taking issue with a school of thought which, thinking that it is possible to capture "true" reality, tries to turn the cinema into a tool of *scientific observation*, pure and simple, a machine for recording behavior. Granted, the cinema can be a scientific tool—within certain limitations. Fortunately, its conditions of existence prevent it from being this exclusively. When this is all it is, it is always to the detriment of art.

If the film is dealing with a dramatic action, then the supposed observation is merely the illusion of objectivity: the audience observes what it is meant to observe. However objective it may appear, this art form involves complete subjectivity. For which reason, the time and space of the drama must be respected and no obvious distortion or bias be allowed to intrude. However, it is an art just like any other. The more detailed the description of reality, the more the reality is damaged. We may try to confer on it all the appearances of objective reality (which is all well and good) but to speak of observation in this context is to beg the question.

Moreover, when the film is a document of life in the raw—since space must necessarily be fragmented into various fields of view—the view of the camera, guided by the cameraman, cannot help but be an arbitrary view, an interpretation of reality.

"True" reality cannot exist in art—any more in the cinema than in other art forms.

What is recorded by the camera is never more than building bricks, contributing to the overall structure. It is not possible to film structures built up "objectively" since the very fact of recording the "reality" is already a subjective process, a choice. We shall see, moreover, that the same phenomenon pertains in our everyday behavior. As Pudovkin put it, "Film rearranges the elements of reality in its own way so as to make of them a new reality specific to it alone."

The most determined of the attempts to achieve an objective cinema—notably those of Jean Rouch—are obvious proof of this. In *Chronique d'un été*, Rouch follows up an investigation of several people from several different backgrounds. The intention—to record these people "in their living reality" is commendable, but what happens is that this "approximation of truth" has nothing to do with truth at all. Rouch goes into the people's homes with a microphone and a camera; he questions them and, at the moment they least expect it, he films them and is ingenuous enough to believe that he has recorded them behaving "as they would in reality," whereas what he has done in fact is make them react to circumstances which he has contrived for them. The very fact of knowing that we are being observed, questioned and lined up in the viewfinder has the effect of making us assume (more or less unconsciously) an *attitude* of what we would like to be or what we think we are—which has nothing whatever to do with what we are: *being* is replaced by *acting*. Moreover, man is not an entity; his truth is made up of a series of multiple, contradictory appearances. For us to capture a single individual in his true reality, we would need an *invisible* camera filming him in his everyday surroundings for months on end. Anything else is self-delusion and all the more delusory for the fact that it is generally held to be true. In the example we have

given, the actual presence of the "alien" interviewer would in itself be enough to alter the behavior of the subject (even though a familiarity might have developed between the subject and the interviewer).

The man who knows he is being observed is recorded no more objectively than is a path of electrons when a beam of light is projected onto them thereby changing the path. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Moi, un noir*. We know that after filming the life of some natives in Niger, down-and-outs living from hand to mouth in Treichville, a district of Abidjan, Jean Rouch asked one of them—Robinson—to comment freely on the images he had put together. Now, this commentary (which Jean Pouillon and Jean Carta take for a "series of thoughts about himself and his life, a gradual awakening of consciousness") is nothing more than an *attitude* which Robinson adopts through his own judgment of his own actions. He grants them the meaning he *would like* to see in them—that is all. What Marie Claire Wuilleumier²¹ takes for an "apprenticeship to lucidity" is a good deal less lucid and a great deal more confused than she thinks. Robinson did not "discover something different within himself"; he made himself, with the best intentions, into a peep show. If he changed, it was not by *becoming* someone else but by acting as though he were someone else and accepting his own self-delusion, making himself out to be different from the person he actually was, with the effect that this "interior" documentary is even more mistakenly objective than more conventional documentaries. The "truth of testimony" is so elusive that it slips away just as we think we have it in our grasp. It would be wrong to deny the usefulness of such investigations; indeed, it is a psychological test of the highest possible value. And if we consider film from a strictly aesthetic point of view, it becomes immaterial whether Robinson's behavior is true or false

as long as it gives the *impression* of being true: for this impression is all that matters. However, if we believe that we are capturing "real" truth when we film in this way, then decidedly we delude ourselves. This type of film does not help men to find themselves but, on the contrary, to arrange themselves when they most sincerely believe they are revealing themselves.

We can learn the same lesson exactly from an episode in Antonioni's *Amore in città*, a film with a suicide theme for which the director used the advice of some survivors of unsuccessful suicides. But, in this case, Antonioni is perfectly aware of how arbitrary his theme is; as he says,

Had I understood the complicated exhibitionism of this type of suicide, I would not have felt so bad about it. The majority were quite happy to have attempted suicide and be in front of the camera talking about it. . . . They wanted me to believe that they wished to die, that they had done the same thing more than once and that they considered themselves unlucky to have failed; moreover, that they were quite ready to try again were they ever to find themselves in the same situation again.

I am sure this is not the case. I am sure they were not telling the truth, that they were exaggerating for some unaccountable reason of vanity or masochism. Such cases are more to do with psychology than ethics.²²

Here also the well-intentioned critics had spoken of "real truth captured objectively and rigorously with all the precision of scientific observation." And scientific observation there is without a doubt, but for a psychologist or psychiatrist, not a collector of "real" truths, for then the truth under observation is doubly counterfeited: first by the individual being observed and second by the way the facts are reported—which does not mean that the films are any

less interesting; they do, however, illustrate the crux of the problem.

Since any "recording" of reality is subjective, it follows that any method of reporting it is also subjective. Furthermore (has it been said often enough?), we can only capture a single aspect, a single feature, a single fleeting moment, a single "phenomenon from the external world." The only means of grasping "reality"—if only from the outside—without being forced to make an interpretation (unless it be our own—which is always assumed to be objective and true) is to go into the streets and look around; to be inside life and not inside the cinema looking at a work of art. Even so, this visual freedom is very limited: we can see only what is in front of our eyes, and we cannot be in places where we are not! The illusion that reality can be captured in all its reality, in its dimensions of time and space, is a trap for the unwary; to claim that reality is communicable through film is an example of either naïveté or self-delusion.

As Claude Roy so rightly put it, "To re-create reality, the cooperation of the imagination is required. The document (however authentic) is only a reflection. It is left to the poet to restore life itself (in the original sense of the word). . . . Poet, in the original sense—the *creator*, the Force whose insight discovers the truth more true than truth."²³

Thus fulfilling the logic of reality does not mean choosing one method over others but, quite simply, making use of all the methods available. To appreciate the relative merits or demerits of a particular editing technique, we have only to compare two films which use the same technique with completely different results: *The Ghost That Will Not Return* by Abram Room and *Fragment of an Empire* by Friedrich Ermel (1927-28).

In the first, in which the action is set in a mining district in South America, a cer-

tain José has been condemned to several months in prison for his part in a revolutionary uprising. He is to be let out on parole. The sequence in question shows him waiting to be freed. We see him in his cell, grabbing hold of the bars and peering outside. Now, this same movement—i.e., this *same image*—is repeated ten times in succession, so that we become aware of a deeper significance than the mere fact of José's actions: the *idea* of impatience. Thus one movement, on its own, symbolically summarizes all the others. But the audience is supposed to see José *acting* in his cell. The concrete reality is thereby distorted and forced into an abstract representation which sucks the "life" out of it and turns it into nothing more than a *sign*. The freedom and spontaneity of José's actions are violated. The audience sees actions *worked out* by the director, not actions *experienced* by a character who is no more than a robot.

However, used subjectively, the same editing technique would have been perfectly acceptable. If we had seen José *remembering* past actions instead of *performing* present actions, we might have been able to identify the mechanics of the synthesis with the mechanics of José's memory (precisely what Ermel does in *Fragment of an Empire*, also known as *The Man Who Lost His Memory*). The film describes the gradual restoration of the consciousness of a Russian veteran of the First World War who, wounded in the head, recovers his memory some ten years later as the consequence of a series of emotional shocks. As he begins to make sense of his scattered, confused, and fleeting impressions, he remembers the events during which he was wounded. He sees the trenches again, the war, the tanks and the fighting. But the reality which he *reconstructs* does not conform with the reality he had actually experienced. Not only does he see himself as a soldier in his foxhole, but he *projects* him-

self into the attitudes and behavior of his superior officers, into those of the commanding officer of his detachment and of the colonel of the battalion, of the German soldier he has to kill, and of the Prussian officer in the trench opposite. To all intents and appearances, conforming in every way with actual reality, he is physically and psychologically *himself*. Thus the mental representation takes priority over the actual reality but in an entirely justified way. The symbolism of this sequence is in no way forced on the true reality; it becomes a substitute for it. However, it is justified only because it is presented as a memory and not as an objective representation.

When, later on, he becomes foreman in a factory, the hero has reason to discipline a troublemaker; we see him running to overpower the man. Now, when he launches himself at the criminal, we see in a short montage a sequence of jumbled images *not directly connected* with the fact being objectively reported: an explosion, a speeding fire engine, a motorboat, a running mob, a policeman directing traffic, a collapsing house, a statue of Lenin, etc. A random collection of images representing, in a few flashes, the character's motivating ideas: danger, the consequences of an accident, quick movement, order, and strong will. Yet these images in no way signify the action; they are not a substitute—they merely explain it. It is as though we were in communication with the hero's confused thoughts at the very moment in which we see him act.

Of course, this mental representation is quite arbitrary and, psychologically speaking, of questionable value. It is merely a symbolic representation which, though dispensable, nevertheless contributes a great deal to the dramatic action by providing an aesthetically valid translation of the mental reflexes and does not interrupt the rhythm. Quite the contrary, in fact: it accentuates it like contrapuntal harmony.

As we have said, there are no good or bad techniques—merely good or bad ways of using them. The same techniques are used in both the above films. In the first, they are disastrous because they are *against the grain*; in the second, they are effective because they are made to submit to the demands of the dramatic truth. In the first, where the action is *subordinate* to the idea, they conceptualize and fix the reality; in the second, the action is *exploited* for the purpose of *drawing* concepts from it without ever distorting the perceptual reality. We must agree with André Bazin in his criticism of yet another incorrect use of editing technique: "When the thematic structure of a particular scene depends on the simultaneous presence of two or more elements of the action, then montage is ruled out." Incidentally, instead of "elements of the action" we would prefer to say "fragmentation into successive shots," a fragmentation which becomes a contradiction in terms, as Bazin points out in a later passage:

It is in no sense a matter of being obliged to revert to the single-shot sequence to repudiate the expressive resources or the possible benefits to be gained from a change of shot. . . . When Orson Welles shoots certain scenes in *The Magnificent Ambersons* from a single setup whereas, in *Mr. Arkadin*, he uses an extremely truncated editing technique, it is merely a change of style which in no essential way alters the subject matter. . . . On the other hand, it would be hard to imagine the famous scene of the seal hunt in *Nanook* different from the way it is, showing us *in the same shot* the hunter, the hole, and then the seal. That the rest of the film be truncated in any way the director chooses is quite immaterial. It is necessary only that the spatial unity of the scene be respected at a moment when to disturb it would change the reality into a simple fictitious representation. . . . In other words,

all that is needed to restore the reality of a narrative is for one of the shots, suitably chosen, to bring together those elements previously split up by montage. (*Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*)

But no one denies that the unity of space must be respected. Filmmakers of any worth, facing the problem of representation of a *concrete* reality, have always adopted the course which Bazin advocates, however much they may try to submit that reality to fragmentation. Proof of this can be seen in the short sequence from *Mother* to which we referred earlier (Pudovkin being one of those directors who carried this type of fragmentation to its extreme). Before dividing this scene into a number of successive stages, he took care to show us *in the same shot* the mother, father, and clock; in other words, he "blocked" the protagonists (plotted the position of each element of the scene relative to the others), thereby defining the space of the drama and the location of the action, as Flaherty did in the episode of the seal hunt.

Granted, the sequence might have opened with a descriptive shot (as in *Mother*), in which case the fragmentation would have been merely the detailed breakdown of an already established unity. Yet it could just as easily have been introduced *afterward* to bring together, in the same *objective* space, a number of details whose relationship up until then might have been only hypothetical due to the fact that the montage had created a certain ambiguity through the absence of a spatial referent: a technique lending itself perfectly to the crime film or the suspense film, indeed any film whose purpose is to alarm, disturb, or surprise the audience.

However, Bazin's remarks would lead us to presume that the almost inevitable consequence of the montage principle is that Nanook, the seal, and the hole must be filmed

in separate shots rather than a single shot; in other words, that a "pseudo-reality" must be generated — which is *absolutely wrong*.

It is a mistake Bazin makes quite frequently. Yet it seems that it is always in bad films that Bazin searches for examples of the stylistic traits he wishes to condemn or denigrate, so that in attempting to point out the demerits of a particular technique he most often is criticizing its misrepresentations or misinterpretations. Thus, while he cannot be faulted in his criticism of these misapplications, his generalizations almost always cause him to draw the wrong conclusions, leading him to hold the means of expression responsible for the misapplication (the resulting misunderstandings are endless!). What better example than the shot-reverse-shot technique, which invited his bitter condemnation? In the rare cases where this technique is used appropriately, Bazin gives his seal of approval; what point is there, then, in inveighing against the technique? Would it not be more to the point to use his invective against those who use the technique with no rhyme or reason? Less simple, perhaps, but how much more logical!

In any case, we must be careful not to confuse *real* space (divided into successive cuts or fragmentations) with pseudo-reality *manufactured* by editing, since editing does not in fact create any kind of reality — indeed is incapable of doing so. It merely creates relationships and determines ideas. This pseudo-reality is only a *fictional representation* (to borrow Bazin's terminology).

Indeed, though in limiting cases such as the "man committing suicide from the Pont de l'Alma," the reality is well and truly manufactured, the suggested idea is of a space no more abstract than if details of the same global space had been juxtaposed. It is a fictional space whose unreality is the product of our inability to relate these details to an objectively described place.

Look again at the example of *Nanook*. We

saw the hunter, the hole, and the seal in the same frame. With their respective positions in the frame established, we are able to examine them *separately* because the spatial relationships created by editing have an automatic referent in our minds: the concrete reality of which we are already aware. However, if we had never seen Nanook, the hole, and the seal *in the same shot*, then our mental representation would be *fictional*, the product of *nonobjectified* relationships: a semiobjective, semisubjective *pseudo-reality*. And the effect of constructing a film in this way is to lose touch with reality. The elements in view may be perfectly concrete, but they assume the appearance of abstractions. As we have said, the development of ideas always takes place to the detriment of the visual data deprived of all living content and divorced from perceptual reality and from the associations of what they might become.

In another limiting case (*Nuremberg 1936-Berlin 1945*), the space-time relationship is pure abstraction. However, the huge gap between the two events is perceived as an ellipsis. In the pseudo-reality produced by the montage of news events, it is not space-time which is imaginary but the secondary reality (this is not important, however, since the purpose of films such as this is to provoke *ideas*, not represent actual reality).

To sum up: the impression of authentic reality does not depend on an effect of editing or nonediting any more than on the feeling of time or space produced by more or less subjective structures. It is essentially a matter of plotting the relative positions of each character in the drama. It is not a question of imagining these relationships but of *recording* them and therefore of revealing them—*describing* them, not suggesting them (suggestion being mainly concerned with the communication of *ideas*, not *facts*). No valid suggestion can exist without relying on facts *objectively* recorded beforehand

—which is what we meant when we stated that “the logic of reality must be fulfilled before any level of signification is achievable” (and precisely so that it may be guaranteed). This “plotting of position” consists essentially in structuring the space of the drama and consequently in composing the image—less, however, in the plastic than in the dynamic sense: in distributing the forces in play according the dramatic actions and their associated significations.

It is clear that this organization of space has nothing at all to do with the impersonal objectivity we mentioned a while ago. Its apparent objectivity is merely one way of perceiving the world. Far from precluding suggestion, it intensifies it, reinforcing it with concrete facts. The idea which we infer from the sight of Nanook on his own, tugging at his fishing line, is intensified by the fact that we have already seen Nanook *actually* struggling with the seal in a *real* space. And the detail shots in *Mother* owe their intensity purely and simply to the fact that they are developing and building a scene whose concrete data have been presented to us from the outset. It is always a matter of analyzing or suggesting using a previously described scene as a *basis* rather than the construction of a fictitious reality which (at the risk of seeming repetitious) is not the purpose of montage. The same might be said of the Odessa Steps sequence and of Eisenstein's sign-images, which *become* signs and genuinely signify only insofar as they are integrated into a substantiated reality.

The fact remains that in the cinema the affective power of suggestion is always greater than that of description. Such is the case in the last image of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, where we are shown the hero trying to catch a butterfly resting on the edge of his trench. He crawls from the shelter of the trench and stretches out his arm. A closeup isolates his hand as it moves to

ward the insect. Suddenly it convulses, opens, and flops back motionless. Everyone can tell that he has just been killed.

We could just as easily have seen the lieutenant actually shot, been able to observe the fact objectively; yet (coming back to Eisenstein) through the allusion of the images we do not register the fact that the lieutenant has been killed: we react to the fact through the medium in which it is presented to us. In any event, though we are moved far more by what we imagine than by what we see, the imagination has to rely on tangible facts; it can never operate independently. Suggestion is merely one way of communicating what might have been revealed directly. And the image from *All Quiet on the Western Front* derives its value as a signifier entirely from the fact that we have seen previous scenes which enable us to appreciate the relationships between the various characters in the drama.

Elsewhere in *Notes of a Film Director*, Eisenstein has this to say:

From the point of view of its dynamism, the work of art is a process causing the formation of images in the audience's senses and intelligence. This is the essence of the truly living work of art, distinguishing it from stillborn works which communicate to the consciousness of the audience the represented effects of a creative process which has run its course, instead of involving it in the process as it takes place. . . . The strength of montage lies in that the emotions and reason of the audience are included in the creative process. The audience is forced to follow the road which the author followed in creating the image. The audience not only sees the elements of the representation; it also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image as it was experienced by the author. This is probably the highest degree of approximation there is to communicating to the audience the author's sensations and con-

ception in the greatest possible completeness, to communicating them with "that power of physical truth" which was imposed on the author during the creative process, at the moment of his creative vision. . . . This method has one more strength in that it draws the audience into an act of creation during which his personality is not in the least dominated by that of the author but fully develops fusing itself with the conception of the author. . . . The image is the one intended and created by the author, recreated by the creative will of the audience.

This view is supported by Bergson in his remarks concerning the conditions necessary for the work of art: arranging it so that the audience's point of view coincides with that of the author, eliciting its complete attention in a kind of ecstatic communion after which it "accepts the concept suggested to it and sympathizes with the feelings contained in the expression."

Though this submission of self is, as we have said, the antithesis of self-abnegation and is merely an overwhelming sense of perfection, a state in which the effect of structuring these associations, these ideas, coincides with that of abandoning ourselves—which is Eisenstein's thesis—some critics have seen in this an aesthetic of domination and magic, an art which precludes all objectivity and critical examination and whose absolutism presenting only one meaning to the represented reality obstructs the audience's right to choose freely from the ambiguity of the world and its objects.

This sort of criticism, leveled most particularly by André Bazin, has a sound basis. It is associated in a sense with the ideas of alienation introduced by Berthold Brecht into the theater and finding its resolution in the dramatic use of depth-of-field as applied by Orson Welles. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that this criticism is justified and acceptable only insofar as it is not used

dogmatically and does not claim to replace an old aesthetic principle with a new one, since this comparison is merely a precise definition of two equally viable aesthetic principles (two codes of style—to be more accurate) with two completely separate purposes.

The contrast between the two underlines (as if it were necessary) the formal differences existing in film techniques between what in the cinema are the equivalents of the language of poetry and the language of the novel. All the evidence points to the fact that the rules governing each are not the same. Whatever the content of his prose, the novelist strives to retire behind his characters and behind the apparent authenticity which all his creative efforts have attempted to create or recreate. On the other hand, the poet expresses himself directly: *with facts* instead of *through* facts. The world is his poetic oyster. Instead of putting himself at the service of the world, he exploits it. He uses it as a primary material to be rehashed and served up in a different form. He transforms and therefore directs and orders: he organizes. What he reveals to me is *his* vision of the world and not an objective reality. And in this context, what interests me the audience is not so much what he shows me but the very personal way in which he does it, which gives me direct insight into him; I am able to sympathize—or even reject—his ideas and his way of seeing the world: the things he sees are of *secondary* importance. And, as we shall see further on, this is the only way that the cinema can be used in a *genuinely subjective* sense, with the subject as the artist and the “reality” a constant objectification of his thoughts.

Conversely, in narrative art, though the style of the narrator is important, what counts above all is what he shows me, what he communicates to me in the *most direct way possible*. The form of the narrative seeks

to act as a mirror between the universe and me, whereas previously it had acted as a screen. The author is less interesting to me than his characters, which is why he must aspire to the greatest possible objectivity and present his characters as they are in the world, taking care not to reveal himself except *through* them.

We can illustrate the formal difference between these two techniques with a very simple example. Imagine that Peter is sitting at his desk; he is writing. Suddenly he looks up and begins to stare into space. He is daydreaming. Yet his eyes must necessarily be resting on something, so he is looking at—but not seeing—the lamp to one side of the desk.

If I show this scene in a shot close enough for Peter, the object of our interest, to have an important place in the frame but wide enough to include all the different objects arranged around him (a medium shot, for instance), the audience will understand perfectly that though Peter is looking at the lamp, he could just as easily be looking at his telephone or his pipe—or indeed anything. The act of looking is represented in its concrete psychological reality, according to its characteristic free will, what we would call psychological realism, the style of the novel or story. The author allows his character a certain latitude. He watches him living, while remaining outside.

If, on the other hand, I were to represent the scene as follows: (a) *Closeup*. Peter, sitting at his desk, is writing. Then he looks up with a faraway look in his eyes, which move to the right without seeming to fix on any particular object. Of course, we are not able to see what he is looking at; the objects on his desk are out of shot; (b) *Extreme closeup*. The lamp standing on the edge of his desk.

In this case, the lamp is *implied* in his look. Peter no longer has any freedom of action or free will. The only thing he can

see is the lamp which I am *presenting* for him to see. It is I, the author, expressing myself, directing the action by making reality conform to a certain expressive purpose. I am not contradicting the authentic fact; I am not, exactly speaking, misrepresenting it; I am exploiting it, interpreting it, thereby forcing the audience to see with me, like me, in a way dictated by me. With the lamp becoming, thanks to me, the direct complement of Peter's view, the audience is no longer able to believe that Peter *might* potentially be capable of seeing something else since, like Peter, it is *capable* only of seeing the lamp. Thus I become the creative Force, the lyric or epic poet praising, redefining, transforming, exaggerating: I *order* reality more than *present* it; I present it as I intend people to see it. It is well and truly an art of domination, yet the audience is willing to accede to it all the more easily that it knows I am communicating *my* vision and not *the world itself*.

Needless to say, these are pure forms and there is nothing to prevent them, if need arises, from being alternated or mixed up during the course of the film. However, for Eisenstein, only the lyric form has meaning or communicates active power, which is why his aesthetic principles are really nothing more than statements of his stylistics—which have obvious relevance but could never claim to contain all possible forms of film expression. As much might be said for the form of the novel with which certain contemporary critics have tried to align present and future visual dialectics; and it is a truism that in the cinema most theorists have based their theories on prejudices and taboos as though, in literature, the style of Proust cannot be praised without condemning that of Péguy—and vice versa.

How convenient it would be to say—paraphrasing the definitions of logic—that aesthetics "is not concerned with content but with the way in which content is ex-

pressed." And this is not beyond the bounds of possibility so long as we mean aesthetics in the widest sense. However, since the way of saying something is always part of what it says, it would be impossible to formulate an aesthetic principle appropriate to all forms and all contents. Thus film aesthetics is really concerned with defining the reasons why one form is better than another because of a particular content or a particular intention; in other words, with determining the psychological bases which justify these forms in particular given circumstances.

Up to now, we have looked at the types of editing which in one way or another exploit the juxtaposition (or collage) of fixed shots. Before we pass on to camera movements, we should point out certain psychological phenomena relating to the perception of discontinuous elements.

"In the cinema," as Albert Laffay says, "permanence is intolerable."

We must leap constantly from one viewpoint to the next, from one scale of size to the next. And yet this is still not enough. Once the angles and distances have been altered a certain number of times, like it or not the object has to change and the scene has to be shifted. . . . And yet, why should the audience, which, in the theater, is quite happy sitting in one place in front of the same unchanging perspective, wish to sprout wings in the cinema. . . . Doubtless because of the fact that since objects projected onto the screen are not really there, for us to believe (or half-believe) in them, they must be constantly changing or constantly being replaced. . . . That is one way of saying that the cinema is incapable of stopping to underline or articulate the associations of a *world*. Because of the very inadequacies of the objects it reveals to our eyes, through constant transposition, it inevitably describes a definite structure in which each object is what it

is by virtue of the limitations imposed on it by all the others—specifically, the limitation of its place.²⁴

A possible response to these subtle observations (in which, in our opinion, the author has been overzealous in dismissing the effect of shot changes on the fictional nature of the represented objects) might be that if the audience in the theater accepts the unity of the point of view, it is because the theater depends less on facts than on words, because speech is the main signifier, and because verbal mobility, acting as a substitute for action and describing the psychological mobility of the characters, transforms the immobility of the represented scenes and the immobility of the audience's eyes. Whereas in the cinema (even in talkies) words are of less importance than actions and actions must be followed in their constant mobility.

As regards movement, Jean Epstein's remarks would seem to be nearer the mark:

In our normal world of all-too-stable solids, movement—because it is a relatively infrequent occurrence and, generally speaking, with a weak effect—appears distinct from the form in which it only intermittently occurs and without ever succeeding visibly in distorting it. By contrast, in film representation, movement appears to be intrinsic to form; it is form and it makes form, its form. Thereby a new empiricism—that of the cinema—requires the fusion of two first principles: that of form and that of movement, whose separation, until now, presented implicitly as an a priori fact, indispensable to the whole science of physics. The filmmaker considers form merely as the form of a movement. (*Le Cinéma du diable*)

But of paramount importance (and an aspect neglected by a great many theoreticians) is the fact that shot movement and

discontinuity in editing appear in normal perception as one and the same thing. As René Zazzo points out so rightly, "empirically, the camera has discovered a mobility, that of psychological vision" (*Niveau mental et compréhension du cinéma*).

We know that our mind is incapable of concentrating without a break on a single object. Our attention relaxes and becomes confused. And though in everyday life we may have the impression of total constant perception, it is only because we are at the center of a homogeneous continuum and because at any moment we are capable of concentrating upon a specific feature of our surroundings. Yet though the act of perceiving is continuous, the object of our perception is discontinuous; the source of our frequent confusion is that the continuity of perception is related to perceived objects whose associations, at that moment understood as objective, are in fact (not just in our memories but also in the present) reconstructed and continually differentiated.

If I move within a particular place, a street for instance, I have the constant impression that I am seeing everything; and it is true that I have an overall view of events happening before my eyes; but I am seeing them, as it were, unconsciously. There must be something out of the ordinary to attract my attention in order that I may actually see each event in turn. Thus by shifting my attention successively from one detail to another, I see those details which seem to me essential: and it is these attention shifts, these fragmentary visions, which make up my global vision of the street. In recollection it is these details and they alone which spring to mind, evoking for me the distinctive features of the street, which then become the idea I form of it. Global vision is the effect of a succession of essential aspects chosen by our memories in the same way as, in the present, it is the effect of a sequence of impressions gathered haphazardly by

our partially attentive perception. The same phenomenon pertains in our perception of duration. As Jean-Pierre Chartier points out,

just as we feel we are seeing the whole of our environment, whereas we are perceiving certain essential features, so we think we are aware of the complete duration in what we observe, whereas we can only be aware of essential moments from which we construct a duration (of the objects) to which we attribute the continuity of our awareness. We can see examples of this in our everyday lives: I leave a friend and start to make my way home following a familiar route; I climb the stairs and open my door. Between the time I leave my friend and the time I open the door, I will not have been particularly conscious of my surroundings. I retain only the images of my friend and my arrival. In the narrative convention of the cinema, the two images are merely juxtaposed and the intervening stage removed. The audience of a film feels that it is experiencing the narrative; it places the essential moments which the shot sequence presents to it in a continuous duration, with the help of the same movement which allows it to situate, within an actual duration, the real world of which it gradually becomes conscious throughout the discontinuous shifts of his attention. (*Art et réalité du cinéma*)

Thus film shots create, simply by their juxtaposition, an idea of space and an idea of time. Yet this fictional continuum is a concrete fiction similar in every respect to real space and time which is the effect of a permanent conceptualization—only the fragmentary features presented through our perceptual field having actual concrete validity.

And yet discontinuity in editing is more sudden than in real life, where the particular moments of attention are blended into the more or less general impression. Here

also the film frame breaks up the transition from shot to shot as it severs the connection between what is represented and the rest of the field of view from which it has been chosen. To use M. Michotte's expression, from one shot to the next there is a kind of instantaneous "disappearance-creation." And as Henri Wallon indicates, "it can be said that in all the techniques of the cinema—contrary to what occurs in our perception (where everything is gradual, where everything depends on our moving)—there are shock effects" (*L'Acte perceptif et le cinéma*).

Moreover, in normal perception we are not aware of this fragmentation because it comes from us, from our situation in the world. In the cinema, on the other hand, it comes to us from the outside: it is the filmmaker making the shifts of attention on our behalf, decoding reality for us. And though in large part the purpose of the cinema is "to give us the illusion that we are present in real scenes taking place before us like everyday realities" (Bazin), its function is to replace life as we see and perceive it with a more intense and therefore more dense life. By retaining only selected moments, condensing space and time, film imposes on us a vision of the world organized toward a certain signification. To try to divest the cinema of this necessary and inevitable subjectivity is to ignore its true nature or even deny its value as art.

Yet if these shock effects exist, we may have reason to wonder, as Cohen-Séat suggests, "how the audience can accept without apparent distress such profound shocks to its perceptual system—whether or not it is already used to it" (*Problèmes du cinéma*). In our view, this shock is less real than apparent, particularly since it appears only after detailed examination during which it becomes overlooked that the perception of the film image can occur only in particular conditions, i.e., total darkness. Because

nothing can be perceived beyond it, the image is not detached from anything. So, at least, it would appear. Successive moments of attention blended into an absence of perception replace the successive moments of attention blended into a vague perception.

It will be argued that because they are not compensated by any other (even unconscious) perception, shot changes are felt even more violently. Yet this is one of the effects of psychology upon which editing is based. If the shock effect did not exist, it would not be possible to make this kind of contrast. The (aesthetic) truth is that a shock from one shot to the next must not be felt as such. It must comply with the expressive needs and thus be felt as a collision of represented effects, objects, or actions. It is justified in this way, as an emotional shock, through the emotion it aims to express.

Within the discontinuous sequence of film shots, there is no discontinuity of either space, movement, or action—merely of point of view. The cutting from one shot to another restores the continuity of the actions and reestablishes the spatial unity. And in cutting from one location to another or one time sequence to another, our attention, guided by the story line and the dialectic of the narrative, finds no difficulty in rediscovering the unity of a world temporarily disunited.

We mentioned previously that in shot relationships there is not *one* but *several* spaces. By which we meant (and it must have been quite obvious to the reader) that whereas space in the theater never changes, in the cinema each shot involves *its own* representation, that is, the point of view and *specific dimension* created by the relationships between the represented space and the invariable frame lines. The "modulation of space" is nothing more than a constant interaction of the dimensional variety of the shots (or area encom-

passed by the shots) and the unity of the space in the field of vision. In other words, we perceive the *same* space according to constantly differentiated data or, to be more precise, we perceive variable data which enable us to *recognize* the same space and it is our perceptual constants which restore the balance. If, as Piaget assures us, these constants are the product of a perceptual activity already closely connected with intellectual compositions, it is obvious that spatial unity can be found only at the level of the intellect and that the process itself presupposes a certain way of thinking. R. Zazzo's tests have shown to what extent children can be confused by these differences of form and how difficult, even sometimes impossible, it is for them to recognize the same design presented under different conditions. However, this state of mind (whose various stages have been so admirably well documented by Piaget) is not found in cultured adults—only in children (or primitive people).

Even so, it is all too apparent that the editing of a series of fixed shots establishes a *feeling of continuity* but is unable, unlike moving shots, to create the *sensation* of the continuous, since this sensation is reconstructed intellectually and not perceived as such—which means that reality appears as though it were an idea or a memory; or, to put it another way, it appears *restructured*. Whence the impression of a ready-made reality, a kind of *presentification* rather than a present taking place and therefore of a world transcending the immediate experience. On the other hand, the moving camera provides, as we shall see further on, the feeling of a present in action, giving us the feeling that we might be able to have an effect on the world or, at least, play a part in altering its potentiality.

Of course, continuity in film cannot be created in the audience's mind except by direct appeal to its memory faculty (with-

out which it would not be possible for it to have any perception whatever—not even of the simplest movement). We know that vision in the cinema (moving pictures) can be explained only by the persistence of images on the retina or, more exactly, the persistence of visual impressions on the cortex of the brain, a kind of short circuit (called the *phi* phenomenon) involving our immediate memory, as Wertheimer, David Katz, and Korte demonstrated between 1912 and 1915. "What film gives us," as Henri Wallon indicates,

is a successive series of images relating to the same object, images which we must follow one by one in the order they are presented to us and which we must integrate in order to create the representation of the object from all its aspects, the representation of a location from all its angles or the representation of a person from all points of view. However, the succession of images is the succession of specific images which we must register and weld together using our memory—our intellectual memory, no doubt, but memory nonetheless. We must not lose track of the images because it is on their succession that the representation of the object, the identification of the location and characters and our understanding of the scenes depend. (*L'Acte perceptif et le cinéma*)

As for our "perceptual expectation," which, according to Henri Piéron, directs the way we act but presupposes a certain permanence of things, it cannot be held in suspense by the continuity of the film, whose changes of event are constantly varied and unexpected. At a pinch it can be followed for the duration of the sequence, duration then describing homogeneous time. But as Cohen-Séat points out so rightly,

insofar as film signifies something, the

changes of sequence or shot become part of the development of a single situation. They suggest an analytical vision, the revelation of one through another of the multiple aspects of a reality. The various shots are just so many points of view in the continuity of a unique sequence and time. Editing cleverly exploits and appeals to our expectation by introducing the ambition or desire to turn the object round and round. The change of shot merely confirms or fulfills this need. . . . Changing the camera axis and changing the shot give us the equivalent of a voluntary change of point of view and, by giving it a form, flesh out a vague attitude on the part of the audience. This is how the audience accepts the discontinuity of film time. (*Problèmes du cinéma*)

Yet, though the effects of editing are based on perceptual phenomena, it is clear that the order of the editing, indeed the editing itself, demonstrates an obvious intentionality which puts it in the realm of aesthetics. Editing is always the product of a sequence of scenes organized in such a way that their development becomes integrated into a formal narrative. Thus our perceptual expectation must be frustrated by the filmmaker in order that the element of surprise may constantly keep us at the alert as an audience. As Cohen-Séat points out,

the point of view chosen to capture the sequence of the action is therefore the one with the greatest power of "revelation," the one most capable of maintaining the interaction of shock effects and, at the same time, the continuous tension of the dialectic. It is the perspective which in a real situation may be disregarded or may disappear and at the same time the perspective which the audience finds difficulty in anticipating because it is not even aware of its existence. (*Ibid.*)

In fact, the shot must never anticipate the action. Suppose, for instance, a café interior

with a table and two empty chairs in the foreground and suppose, *some time later*, a couple (whom we have been expecting) enter the scene and sit down in the foreground, the mistake is obvious. It is tantamount to saying, "Look, this is where they come in." If the audience is able to anticipate the action, it means that the filmmaker is leading the events. It betrays his presence (which we should be able to ignore) and destroys the feeling which otherwise enables us to believe in what is being represented. Thus shot changes must be *dictated* by the action or by the movements of the characters. In this case it is the couple's entrance into the café. The field of view taking in the table and the empty chairs must be dictated by their movements. Then and only then can the camera move closer to them to film them in medium shot or closeup.

It is obvious that though they are dictated and justified in this way, shot changes must fulfill the requirements of the drama. In *The Shadow of a Doubt*, when the young girl comes down the stairs holding onto the banisters, though a closeup suddenly breaks the continuity of the movement to draw attention to the ring on her finger, it is clearly so as to emphasize the particular detail but also and *more especially* to show that her uncle has suddenly noticed the ring (which had belonged to one of the victims of the psychopath on the run from the police). All of a sudden the audience understands *for* him and at the same time, identifying psychologically with Uncle Charlie, understands that he sees that she has also understood. In other words, the shot changes are associated and identified with psychological movements relating to the characters in the drama or are determined by the audience's interest generated by the drama; once this has occurred, the fact that they are imposed becomes irrelevant, since they coincide with the audience's attention. Thus perceptual discontinuity and visual

mobility become *potential* for an aesthetic system, a language.

This means that there can be no discontinuity in "film time." Discontinuity can exist only at the level of the image, i.e., at the level of the directly perceived forms, not the narrative structure. The near impossibility for perceptual expectation to exist is due to this discontinuity of forms of the representation and not to a pseudo-discontinuity of the represented. It is also connected with the fact that the audience, through the power of objects, can never dominate the scenes presented to it, since the director's art consists in making the scenes dominate the audience.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that in the cinema there is no perceptual expectation. Quite the contrary. However, it reveals itself differently from the way it does in reality, where the individual "centered in the world" is master of his actions. We have seen that audience participation is never more than an imaginary involvement, the projection of an imaginary self. Let us review all this in the light of perceptual expectation.

As we saw, perceptual expectation presupposes the capacity to move about. But—bearing in mind Weizsäcker's refutation of the classical division of sensory stimuli and motor responses—though it is not possible to make an arbitrary distinction between motor phenomena and perceptual phenomena, the association of a reflex movement with a perception cannot *effectively* be made except in terms of a specific need. According to Piaget, the stimuli-response relationship constitutes a general pattern linked to a signification and not a simple automatic association. The response becomes stable after several trial attempts and to the extent that it is reinforced by the repeated fulfillment of the need which guides and justifies it. It expresses the assimilation of the perceived data with an organized

pattern. In the cinema, the response is not justified or commanded by any direct need or actual activity, except an essentially trivial fulfillment. Motivated by the perception of the represented actions and by their assimilation with the tendencies of the repressed Self, it is directly "transposed" onto an imaginary action similar to the hero's—becoming, as we have seen, the quasi-idealized projection of this "intentional" Self.

Now, to refer to Piaget,

wherever there is association between movements and perceptions, the supposed association in fact consists in integrating the new element into a previous pattern of activity. Whether this previous pattern is in the nature of a reflex, as in the conditioned reflex or on even higher planes, it remains merely an assimilation, of such a kind that the bond of association is never just the simple facsimile of a ready-made relationship in external reality. (*Psychologie de l'intelligence*)

With these "ready-made" data existing here as the represented action, it is easy to see how movement, the stimuli-response bond generated by this action, inevitably becomes the carbon copy of the given relationship in the case that it is dealing with identification through simple imitation or mimicry. The organizing assimilation occurring in the association of perception and movement (whether real or imaginary) is fundamental to the process of projection-identification, upon which, as we have seen, the phenomena of participation are themselves based. In the circumstances, these are nothing more than transferred responses establishing expectation in normal perception; however, this transfer process shows how expectation becomes almost synonymous with participation.

If now we examine another side of the question, we can say in the general (rather than logical) sense of the word that associ-

ation is the awareness of a relationship linking or uniting facts with no apparent or direct connection. In this regard, William James's law of coalescence, generating "association at the level of the action and syncretism at the level of the representation," is supported at all levels by film. Indeed, in any image, represented objects are simultaneously presented. Even separate and recognizably distinct, they are associated within a perceptual unity. No association from one to the other can possibly exist; they can only coincide. Relationships—what we take to be causal relationships—exist only between objects separated in time, together creating a kind of connective pattern which involves an organizing assimilation, a potential generalization. To put it another way, association involves repetition. However, for association to exist in the cinema, all that is needed is for term B to follow term A. Once there is a potential logical relationship between the two terms, this immediately generates in the audience's mind an idea of causality. In other words, B is understood as the consequence of A, even if this is only temporarily valid. When it does not depend on the dramatic narrative, association is apparent in our minds because the objects represented are in the image of real objects. Just as in reality objects following each other are largely self-generating (apparently) in events presented successively by film, i.e., in shot relationships, our minds look for the causal link. They do so because they recognize—*think* they recognize or *want* to recognize—the image of the organizing patterns created by the causal links. *Seeing* in the cinema is not just recognizing the *object* but also comparing the film relationships with the relationships of real facts—interpreting the visual pattern as a repetition of known or tried patterns, however artificially created—which shows how accurate was Claparède's analysis (in *La Genèse de l'hypothèse* quoted by Piaget) which states that "repeti-

tion does not create association but association appears during the course of repetition (and only then) because association is the internal product of the assimilation ensuring the repetition of the external action."

It therefore follows that perceptual expectation in the cinema is based entirely upon patterns previously experienced in reality or else in film perception. Needless to say, all expectation is based upon previous experience; but in large measure, reality repeats this experience, whereas film does not or, if it does, does so according to constantly differentiated and unforeseen norms. Thus film expectation can be reduced to the comprehension of a series of relationships through simple assimilation, the associations remaining unfulfilled until the unfolding of the action confirms or denies them.

The mistake has no other consequences than incomprehension or confusion and expectation becomes a kind of artificial experience in a state of constant readjustment. A typical example of this is the marvelous sequence in *Citizen Kane*. During a celebration dinner in the reception room of the *Enquirer*, Kane announces his imminent departure for Europe. The sequence closes on Leland and Bernstein. They are talking in the foreground while Kane and the girls are shown dancing far in the background. At this moment, after a very quick and almost imperceptible fade to black, Bernstein moves toward the camera and crosses through the doorway of the room. The camera follows his movement. He goes down a corridor, walks up a few steps, and enters a huge storeroom, where crates containing statues and all kinds of objets d'art are stacked up. He shouts out: "Mr. Leland! . . . Mr. Leland! . . . I've just got a cable from Mr. Kane . . . from Paris. . . . It's just as well he's promised not to send any more statues!" He crosses over to Leland and the conversation continues (on another sub-

ject). In this way we learn that six months have elapsed between the dinner party and the receipt of the cable. Now, the *descriptive* continuity is such that we might believe that only a few moments have passed. The ellipsis is made through Bernstein's movement, from the reception room to the storeroom—but without any break in the continuity of the movement, without the makeshift transition from one shot to the next which we sometimes find in similar cases. The result is that the audience is at first confused because it does not appreciate the shorthand. It does not register the ellipsis—which is the opposite of the normal patterns on which it has based its thought processes. It is forced to make an effort and, if necessary, see the film a second time. Yet once the technique has been understood, it develops into a new associative form. From then on the audience will remember the new expression—not by remembering something experienced in reality but by remembering a form integrated into the language. It is clear that film is self-referencing, appealing to a certain culture, to a way of thinking, a cinematic *formula* in the same way that literature is self-referencing: Henri Bordeaux cannot be read in the same way as James Joyce.

For reasons similar to those we have just mentioned—reuniting form and content—we could never say that in the cinema there are long shots and closeups. There may well be if we take a tape measure or a stopwatch and measure them, but not when we perceive them. A shot lasts—or *should* last—only as long as is necessary for the expression of its content. Only through the duration of the content can the shot be perceived as a duration, i.e., the time of a movement or action. It is perceived as long only when it is *too long*, i.e., when it lasts longer than the time required by the meaning it is trying to communicate. In that case we are transferring our attention from the

narrative duration—superseded in importance by the signification—to the actual duration of the shot, i.e., to “empty” time. If we accept Katz’s formula, we find that “whenever we concentrate our attention on the passage of time it seems to get longer.” Conversely, a shot is perceived as short when it is *too short*, i.e., when its brevity renders it incapable of achieving the meaning or expression it is supposed to be communicating. Or else, when the shot sequence is very fast (as in Hollywood-type montages) because “speed is all we can perceive in shots following each other in quick succession” (P. Fraisse). And if we can accept that a particular shot is longer or shorter than the previous one, it is only because we are registering a longer or shorter action in the content of the shot.

This brings us to an obvious crucial problem. An audience versed in the subtleties of film language will understand the meaning of a shot much more quickly than one less aware. It is certain that film form has trained us to think and structure more quickly. A silent film which seemed to have a fast rhythm when first shown now appears intolerably slow. We must therefore presume that the perfect film fulfills the greatest potential in the ideal audience.

We said that film rhythm is the rhythm of something. In the light of what we have said above, we may conclude that it is the rhythm of the represented action, i.e., the rhythm of an action formalized by its expression and subject to a slower or quicker tempo depending on the narrative structures. The relationships of time between the represented and its representation are significant in this respect. This is how the sequence from *Mother* we quoted reveals a representation time longer than the actual duration of the action—even though this is created using short shots. Time stretched in this way gives the narrative an impression of slowness despite the fact that the tempo of the shots is fast. On the other hand, a film created with shots representing a narrative duration longer than the representation time gives an impression of speed—however long each individual shot may be.

Determined and created by the action, rhythm is thus dependent on the successive relationships between the “time” of the form and the “time” of the content, since the representation time is always determined by the way in which the time of the objects is translated, i.e., by a certain intentionality from which the objects derive their meaning—the actual meaning of the film.

IV



Rhythm and Moving Shots

The Liberated Camera and Depth-of-Field

The Principles of "Nonmontage" and Global Reality

Everything we have said in the preceding chapters supports the assertion that film images form an arbitrary reality altogether different from "true" reality. It would be stretching the point to assume from this that the cinema brings us into contact with an entirely new world, but it must be said that what it presents to our eyes is not (and never could be) an exact image of reality. It replaces continuous reality (or, more precisely, the homogeneous reality of our continuous perception) with a series of discontinuous fragments. It selects the framing, angles, and setups and arranges them according to their relative durations, giving them *meanings* outside the "global" future time of the universe from which they have been taken.

Obviously, continuity of time exists within a discontinuity of shots, just as spatial unity exists within a dimensional variety of the fields of view. However, it is always a reconstruction, i.e., "another" space and "another" time. It is true that the durations of a shot and its represented content are almost always the same. Indeed, they differ only when the action is too long (the filmmaker then has to select a special "moment") or when the objects concerned have no movement or discernible duration,

when they last no longer than the time to see them. However, though shots fragment reality into various "frames," it would be wrong to think of them in terms of fragments with no difference from reality than that of being arbitrarily selected. They become *something else*, another reality, for a part in isolation is never the same as the part taken in its context.

Though the effect of the frame is to limit the represented space, we have seen that it defines the image through which and by which the world is presented to us: it creates, between the elements included in the frame, a series of relationships and associations not present in actual reality. Take, for example, a street corner: a house, a pavement, a street light, a man out for a stroll. To all intents and appearances, a whole complex of geometrical and geographical relationships (place, position, size and direction, etc.) exists between these various elements. Yet they are not in isolation. They are involved in other relationships with other parts of the street and they in turn with other streets in such a way that, in actual space, the relationships between objects reflect on each other, gradually blending and merging into each other. The mobility of our vision, our very movements, make the space around us appear homogeneous and continuous. Though we may concentrate on those details which attract our attention more than others, we do not take them out of the context whose unity remains constant (unless we put a frame around them). From that moment,

the objects are literally "cut out," deprived of any direct association with the external world. Their associations, until then generated in space, become self-reflexive, as though the edges of the frame refer them back to the center like a parabolic mirror.

The consequence of this is that the image records a fragment of space whose representation, limited and circumscribed (by the frame), endows the represented objects with a series of "defining characteristics" which they do not have in actual reality. The space within the frame becomes its own "entity"; it forms an independent structure—any similar cuts having a similar effect.

Add to this that objects within a shot are related according to their relative sizes (with no necessary connection with their actual sizes, since the most divergent views are brought together in the same fixed frame) and we may say that each shot is, as it were, a "cell," a distinct space, and that when combined in a sequence, they form a homogeneous space—but one which *in no way* resembles the space from which the elements have been taken. Moreover, the relative durations of the shots and the order allotted to them creates a "continuity" whose global duration is no less arbitrary.

In this way, film continuity—generated by a succession of constantly differentiated spaces and times—creates, between these cells (or shots) a series of associations which supplement the dramatic or symbolic relationships with their content. Thus the film appears as a discontinuous space-time development completely different from the single continuum of Space and Time (that is to say, the Space and Time of our planet), even though it reflects its continuous system.

Detached from their uncertain and unstable form, the selected elements are grounded in a continuity which arranges and stabilizes them, i.e., in some way trans-

forms and transcends them. Each frame is the chance assembly of various ephemeral associations not observed in direct reality, introduced into a sequence which does not belong to the objects themselves but is the fabrication of the filmmaker.

Which is why it is supremely naïve to think that the camera—because it automatically records the data of reality—is presenting an objective and impartial image of that reality. And to say, as does André Bazin: "The aesthetic potential of photography resides in its power to reveal reality. It was not for me to pick out of the fabric of the external world the reflection on a wet pavement or the child's gesture; only the impassive lens, stripping the object of the habits and preconceptions laid on it by my perception, could present it unspoiled to my attention and therefore my love" (*Ontologie de l'image photographique*).

In fact, what is unspoiled, what the image really does reveal, is not reality-in-itself but a new appearance correlative with the direct reality of the world and its objects and with what might be called metaphorically the perception of the camera, which, above and beyond the wishes and choice of the director, automatically applies this segregation of space and therefore the reconstruction of reality, which, by that fact, stops being objective and direct.

We see the world around us; we look at film. Besides the interest (valid or not) of the story or the represented objects, our attention is repeatedly drawn to the *newness* of appearances. By the very fact that it is *presented as an image*, the reality captured by the lens is structured according to various formalizing values creating a series of new relationships and thus a new reality—or, at the very least, a new appearance. The *represented* is perceived via a *representation* which inevitably transforms it.

Bazin says elsewhere, "The primary value of the film image is not what it adds to re-

ality but what it *reveals of reality*" (*Evolution du langage cinématographique*). It is certain that the film image reveals something other than what it shows. We have pointed out repeatedly that this nearly always relates to the essence of the represented objects. But Bazin and his confederates regard this essence not as the effect of understanding but as an ideal in-itself preexisting the object in some Platonic noumenal world. It is a but short step from this to consider the phenomenon as evidence—even proof—of spiritualism, and to assert that "Far from setting us along the path of determinism (as one might reasonably presume), this art—the most positive of all, indifferent to everything but hard fact, pure appearance—on the contrary presents us with the idea of a systematized universe, ordered toward a specific purpose. We are not prompted to look for the existence of atoms in what film shows us but rather the existence of an essence beyond the purely material: a soul or some other spiritual principle. Poetry is to be found in this revelation, above all else, of a spiritual presence—which I intend to find in this study."¹

That echoes the following observation of Eric Rohmer: "I cannot hide from the fact that I confused the cause of the cinema with that of a spiritual as well as classical proposition. Whereas modern art invites us to meditate on the organic origins of mankind, the cinema (paradoxically but quite definitely) is best suited to illuminate his spiritual condition."² What Rohmer is in fact confusing is the universe of the filmmaker, ordered and directed toward a specific purpose, with direct reality, always available and contingent. He is also assuming that the filmmaker's imagination is a transcendental in-itself, which is to believe that the moon is made of green cheese.

What Bazin, Agel, and all the other spiritualists mean by the soul, the supposed essence beyond the purely material re-

vealed by film, is nothing more than an essence beyond appearances; or, to be more exact, a new appearance generated by an unusual way of perceiving. It is, if you like, an essence beyond the direct perception (or comprehension) of consciousness. We perceive what an eye—albeit a mechanical eye—has already perceived, what an image has already structured, the data of a perception not our own, an organizing plan which is not our consciousness. We already mentioned in another context that when we see a film image, we become conscious of a reality organized so that through this image it is direct reality we are seeing, thereby affected by a coefficient of unreality or strangeness—which is the source of the constantly reiterated mistaken belief in spirituality and magic. There is, without a doubt, something magical and fascinating in the effects of the process, but this has more to do with the phenomena of perception than a metaphysical in-itself. Over and over we have labored the point that film reality is a *mediated* reality. Even when there is no evidence of a director's hand, the film, the camera, the representation, stands between us and the real world.

It is clear that Bazin's deterministic and spiritualistic idealism (confused in a curious way with naïve realism) runs counter to the phenomenological methodology which he employed. More than ever, aesthetics becomes a question of metaphysics. We shall examine this further on.

In the meantime, we might describe the consequences of this kind of interpretation of the cinema as follows: since the camera presents us with the image of an "objectively pure" world, evidence of the absolute qualities it contains within it, it is clear that these qualities must be recorded *as they are*, i.e., globally, without damaging them through an organizing intention (script, editing) which might allow subjectivity to creep into its "true reality." Ideally

the camera should strive toward a kind of observation, capturing reality in its full and active essence (however contrived its dramatic structure). Thus Bazin sets up an antithesis between, on the one hand, traditional realists, who "analyze reality and then synthesize it according to their conception of the world," and, on the other, Italian Neo-Realism, which in his view "rejects analysis of characters and their actions but considers reality as a whole, not incomprehensible obviously, but indivisible." It is an "ontological choice, in the sense that restored reality is a global image" (*Défense de Rossellini*).

To prove that the methods of traditional psychology (where essence precedes existence) are not being applied, this "previoussness" is associated with the thematic structure of film. Interpreted thus, the essence becomes the "thesis" while the transcendental essence "forms part of the concrete reality," which, needless to say, "reveals" it. We can see where such metaphysical presumptions can lead. Universal propositions are held to exist necessarily, and assuming the process of consciousness to be a metaphysical reality, they are to be found in the "profound expression of concrete reality"—which is at the opposite extreme from phenomenological description.

Supposing this to be the case, if one wished to "capture the mystery of existence" in a complete moment of understanding (albeit "successively complete as might occur to someone in time"), one would be *obliged* to record the whole of the event, following it from beginning to end, including all the randomness it might involve. Now, apart from films lasting as long as the objects in them last, i.e., films with no beginning or end, or 360-degree lenses, circular screens and, of course, the ideal spectator with six pairs of eyes capable of taking in at a glance the space around him, even the most "complete" field of view is always restricted and

its duration, if not circumscribed, is at least reduced to necessarily discontinuous successive moments. At its most extreme, one would have to imagine a drama taking place in a single place and lasting as long as the projection time. Now, no situation can exist without being the consequence of another, no drama can exist which does not contain within it its own determinant factors. Its limits will therefore be arbitrary—as perfectly arbitrary as are the limits of the shot or the sequence. Taken to the ultimate extreme, the consequences of "nonmontage," of the refusal to interpret reality held to be "pure objective data," become utterly absurd. The ideal film becomes a one-act play acted out on a single set. I am not exaggerating; Bazin himself tells us: "It is not hard to imagine a film by Von Stroheim composed of a single shot as long and as close up as necessary" (*ibid.*). Cinema into anticinema!

In fact, there is only one film in the world composed "in reality" of a single shot lasting indefinitely and involving the simultaneity of a multitude of different actions collected into a single global action: the world itself. And yet, on the cosmic scale, it is visible only *sub specie aeternitatis*. God is its one and only spectator.

Since we shall never see as God sees, limited mortals as we are, we are destined only ever to catch a fragmentary glimpse of whatever it may be. And we must accept the fact. As fragmentation goes, the fragmentation of reality into shots and sequences is no less arbitrary than any other. Particularly since the reality Bazin wants to capture in its complete space-time continuity in order to receive it in the "objective purity which its essence reveals to us" is an eminently composed reality: a *dramatic reality* whose purpose and motivations are essentially subjective. Thus what Bazin means is to capture the transcendental essence of an entirely subjective construction

accepted as an impartial objective reality. It is clear where this line of argument leads! Which does not prevent Bazin from following it through: ". . . In Von Stroheim's film, reality *admits its meaning* like a suspect confessing under the relentless interrogation of a detective. His guiding principle in directing is simple: take a close look at the world, keep on doing so and ultimately it will reveal all its cruelty and ugliness. . . ." (*ibid.*)

If the guiding principle were as simple as that, everyone would be a Von Stroheim. And the world "reveals all its cruelty and ugliness" only because the filmmaker has asked it to and, where necessary, nudged it along. Von Stroheim's realism is as much a synthesis "according to his conception of the world," and his universe is every bit as stylized as Lang's or Murnau's—with the qualification that it is not the sets or the objects which are subject to his interpretation but the situations and the characters. To see Von Stroheim's critical realism (which is both sardonic and caricatural) as objective reality which of its own accord "admits its meaning" is to close one's eyes to the facts.

With "documentary" reality, as we have seen, the limits are just as great. Moreover, art is not a *submission to reality*. If it is "reality in its entirety" one is looking for, one has only to walk down the street. Each of us can at least see what he chooses.

Leaving aside these metaphysical considerations, this "soul of things" which the things themselves reveal through the direct gaze of the camera, it is obvious that the fixing of a dramatic moment within its concrete development enables its uniqueness and also its randomness to be fixed at the same time. This is another problem altogether, however. And the conditions, even exigencies of long shots and camera movements in no way removes either the exigencies or *conditions of editing*. They merely change them.

Bazin observes that montage "as em-

ployed by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Gance did not reveal the event: it alluded to it. Undoubtedly they derived at least the greater part of their constituent elements from the reality they were supposed to be describing, but the final signification of the film was found to lie in the organization of these elements much more than in their objective content." This is obvious. Yet Bazin treats it as though it were a weakness or a defect, an imperfection of language. He rejects this type of editing and any type of editing without wondering *why* it should be the way it is, and he ascribes to this form of cinema intentions similar to those of the contemporary cinema. And he could not be more mistaken.

For reasons we shall come back to, film is becoming more and more involved with recording characters and character behavior within a fictional *development*. The recording of duration—*homogeneous duration*—is therefore a *basic principle*, which is why we have shots which last long enough to capture this *signifying* duration.

This was not true of the vast majority of silent films whose aim was to record crude facts, an *acted* rather than an active duration. Since time had only descriptive value, brevity was the guiding principle, suggesting effects or causes without examining the secondary circumstances. This cursive dynamic language is the same as that of the epic (in the broadest sense of the word). The psychology of these films (and they had their fair share of it) was a "synthesized" psychology, suggested rather than described, described rather than analyzed. Moreover, it was a psychology *without duration*: characters revealed themselves through their *actions*, at a critical moment. They were presented in a state of *crisis*, through a drama or tragedy—which is why the editing styles were so abrupt, the effects so violent and decisive—just like the characters they were highlighting.

Allowing for the difference between the silent cinema and talkies and for the more flexible techniques (tracking shots, crane shots, etc.) which the cinema enjoys, when a clever director finds himself confronted with similar problems today, he uses similar techniques to solve them. And he does so because, as it happens, they are the most appropriate techniques. As we have said, the poet does not try to write his poems as though they were novels and the playwright does not write his psychological dramas like tragedies. To deny this is to ignore the very bases of language and style: to limit one's consideration of literary expression to Proust or Hugo in the mistaken belief that only by rejecting one can the other be given its true value and status. Any aesthetician worth his salt understands this.

Moreover, it is completely wrong to assume that "all forms of this montage share the same objective: to suggest the idea through the use of metaphor or the association of ideas" or to produce an "abstract result in which none of the concrete elements contain their original starting point." If such were the Kuleshov effect (interesting in its consequences but misleading in its basic principles) or Eisenstein's cinedialectics, then we have seen that these were extreme cases. We do not condemn the use of adjectives because a certain writer uses them incorrectly!

It is also wrong to say that in *La Roue*, Abel Gance "gives us the illusion of the steadily increasing speed of a locomotive without actually using any images of speed (the wheels indeed might easily have been turning on the spot), simply through the acceleration of shots of ever-decreasing length" (*ibid.*). It is wrong on the first count for thinking that the wheels "might easily have been turning on the spot." And I speak with a certain authority, having shot a number of closeups of wheels and pistons on a test

bench for my film *Pacific 231*. They all ended up on the cutting-room floor because even when only a part of the wheel or piston was in shot, it was easy to see that though moving at high speed, the locomotive was not moving forward. It was not vibrating, it was not alive; the whole thing was static. Second, though Gance's editing indeed comprises a series of closeups repeated at ever-diminishing intervals (wheels, pistons, the countryside rushing past, etc.), he *first of all* shows us some wide angles which reveal in the same frame (tracking alongside) the locomotive and the countryside—"genuine images of speed" in the most concrete and descriptive sense of the word. And these images are intercut with closeups which *supplement* the description. Then the wider shots begin to occur at less frequent intervals until finally only the closeups are left; but the "content" of each shot displays the increasing speed of the machine. We examined this form of editing in respect of the ride of the Klansmen in *Birth of a Nation*. It appears that Bazin was incapable of responding to the lyricism of this type of editing style, even though undoubtedly he was aware of its effects (unless he was ignoring it on principle as not conforming—naturally enough—to the expression of a psychological duration).

Certainly this type of editing was over-worked during this period. It was even seen as the basis of film expression on the naïve principle that brevity and the rhythmic succession of shots were perceptible as *rhythm*. When "visual music" made its appearance and its power became apparent, the sole purpose of the subsequent theories was to return film to the paths of "pure rhythm," having led it into the blind alleys of theater and painting—exactly as happens these days, considering it merely as an "aspect of literature."

What heady excitement in the speeding cars used to create this "accelerated mon-

tage"—everyone madly trying to outdo his fellow filmmakers in the manipulation of sensation! Even the extraordinary spectacle of a banquet edited in accelerated montage! One of the guests carving a pheasant, another picking out the choice pieces with his fork, someone else wiping his mouth, and yet another tossing back a goblet of wine, someone else cramming food into his mouth, then one and then the other, back to the fork, the goblet, a hand, a jaw, and the whole crazy mishmash organized (if one could call it organized) into an utterly incoherent urgent rhythm: the very model of technical idiocy—and unintentionally quite ridiculous.

As with the choice of subject matter, the use of technique is, as often as not, merely a question of style. One fancy after another. Progress is marked nine times out of ten by sticking one's head in the sand in the guise of being on the ball. It is notable that the same thing is true of literature (or painting). After the long, convoluted sentences of Proust, we had the short pithy precise phrases of Blaise Cendrars. For the last ten years, writers have been writing exclusively in a telegraphic style, after the manner of Joseph Delteil. At one time we toyed with Bergson or Freud; nowadays it is existentialism or objectivism (*à la Robbe-Grillet*). In the theater, it was thought in good taste to go to see plays by Bernstein, then Pirandello, then Sartre, and then Giraudoux. Nowadays, if it were not for Ionesco, what would there be to talk about?

We can be sure of one thing: during the period between 1924 and 1930, editing was principally *allusive*. *Suggestion* was more important than *representation*, because representation was in some way less solid, less concrete. Through the more pronounced unreality of the silent cinema, facts in themselves had merely an *indicative* value, for which reason they could (or had the potential to) disappear behind their own signifi-

cation. With obvious exceptions, the silent cinema was epic or lyrical. Words eventually gave (among other qualities) a more concrete "presence" to characters and events and as psychological realism discovered in it a form perfectly suited to the needs of its expression, it was natural for cinema to move in that direction. As a consequence, with facts taking on a more obvious and perceptible relevance (simultaneity of action, ambiguity of behavior, etc.) it became no longer necessary and even impossible for them to disappear behind an allusion, suggestion, or some other external sign. In this way, editing became essentially narrative—in other words more subtly and specifically *elliptical*.

Editing in the modern cinema not only ensures that the sequence of shots is harmonious and, of course, rhythmic, but also and more specifically it constructs the film; it ensures its development in terms of theme, drama, psychology, and time. It determines the order, the linking, the association of the sequences. Instead of components spliced together end to end as they were previously (amorphous containers uniting a group of signifying shots), the sequences have become *self-signifying*. Encompassing the reality of the scenes within its concrete development, they are as it were a series of organic cells helping to build up the film narration in the same way as the shots. There would therefore be (some) logic in referring to shots depending on the movement of the camera as shot sequences. Our criticism of the term is prompted merely by the fact that the word *shot* loses its precise meaning in this context and becomes synonymous with *take*. However, it would be wrong to assume that this form of editing preempts the allusive signification of the images. Quite the contrary. Apart from the fact that suggestion is always possible, the quality of the *sign* assumes a new validity. The difference (admittedly large) is that this

quality is no longer the effect of editing—or at least not necessarily. Instead of being the consequence of the arbitrary introduction of a closeup into a continuity, it is dependent on the *particular position of an object within the spatial organization of the field of view*. Produced in space rather than establishing itself in time, it becomes the effect of a *coincidence* instead of an effect of *association*—and yet, without contradicting the law of coalescence, one might almost say that objects previously separated in time through editing and now separated in space are present in an association of another order. Coincidence still exists, but the object in view is on a different *spatial plane* from the other parts of the field of view. There is, moreover, association of the object relative to the action of the preceding shot developing into the subsequent shot, etc.

To return to the example of the man looking at the lamp on his desk. We saw how it was possible, on the one hand, to allow his gaze to range freely over the field of view and, on the other, to *include* the lamp within his field of view. Now, with the use of depth-of-field (however slight), it becomes possible to reconcile these two contradictory alternatives. All that is needed is to set the camera (and of course the character and the objects) in such a way that the lamp is shown in foreground—in extreme closeup—on the corner of the desk, with the rest of the desk, the other objects, and the man stretching into the background. We can see from this that if the man chooses to look at the lamp, the choice is purely accidental: he has no external obligation on him to look at the lamp. Simultaneously, the lamp ("privileged" in this way) assumes the value of a sign, in the same way as the closeup previously implied by his look. The psychological realism is thereby maintained, and the reality of the scene (let us give Bazin his due) is captured globally in its real space and time.

The preceding remarks suggest that at no other time has editing (montage) been more important. Yet as Bazin and his disciples are quick to point out, "It is no longer montage. This definition of structures, ellipses, and cuts, as well as movements and positions, is part of the shooting script." And I am in complete agreement, particularly since, in my view, they are one and the same thing. As I have already said and am likely to say again: the shooting script is editing in theory, *mise-en-scène* in theory. It is the film "on paper." The three processes, script, direction, and editing, are different only from the technical point of view. *Mise-en-scène* is already contained in the shooting script, which plans and conceives the shots "with regard to a certain editing"; there is already editing in the filming of shots "with regard to certain associations"; and direction is carried through to the editing stage, which completes the film. By including the "vagaries of chance" within the conditions of the *mise-en-scène*, the script-direction-editing combination turns these three successive processes into different aspects of the same creative process.

What clouds the issue of editing in many people's minds is the conventional American (and occasionally French) use of a technique consisting in shooting each scene first in long shot and then in a series of close shots taken from various angles. With so much covering material to hand, the editor has considerable freedom of choice. He can construct the film as he wishes. This is what is called "covering the scene," and it can be constructed in as many ways as there are shots.

Needless to say, this is not what we meant by editing, an *assembly-line* process in which the various functions—script, direction, editing—are divided up in order to make the process as streamlined as possible. Good or bad, a film mass-produced in this way for the mass market could never

be the expression of an *artist*. In this study, we are examining the resources of film as they are used and understood by the *creative individual* filmmaker. All we are doing is writing out culinary recipes. How many critics and theorists assume, however, that these prescriptions (and we do not condemn them for their *utilitarian* value) are *fundamental principles*—the perfect example of the muddleheadedness dominating the profession at the moment.

What we understand (have always understood) by the term *editing* is the process of splicing shots together according to a *premeditated intention* in such a way that each scene or part of a scene is given its predetermined place within a continuity, according to its angle, framing, or movement—all of which have also been predetermined. The idea is not to film the same shot from various different angles in order to choose the one which gives the best effect, to "cover oneself," as one might say. Each shot presupposes *one angle alone* which fulfills an internal *need* and not any old angle chosen completely at random. And each shot has its own natural and *necessary* context which gives it its meaning and justification. Thus editing and scripting are two complementary aspects of the same creative process. Anything else is pure fantasy.

To conclude our remarks on the problems of nonmontage, in the knowledge that Bazin's ideas were generated by the films of Orson Welles (and, in particular, *Citizen Kane*, whose long shots "invalidate the very idea of montage"), we may be best served by putting the question to Welles himself. In an interview conducted by Bazin himself, Welles had this to say:

For me, everything which goes under the name of directing is a huge confidence trick. In the cinema, there are very few people who can really call themselves di-

rectors and very few of them who have ever had the opportunity to direct. The only directing of any real importance takes place at the editing stage. It took me nine months to edit *Citizen Kane*, six days a week. Yes, I edited *Ambersons*, even though some of the scenes were not mine—but my cut was eventually changed. The basic editing is mine, and when a scene works it is because I cut it. . . . As for my style, my vision of the cinema, editing is not one aspect; *it is the aspect*. Directing a film is an invention of people like yourself: it is not an art, or at best it is an art for one minute a day. That minute is terribly crucial, but it happens only very rarely. The only time one can exercise control over the film is in the editing. . . . The images are not enough in themselves: they are very important but they are only images. The most important element is the duration of each image, what follows each image: the whole eloquence of the cinema is constructed in the editing room. . . . I do not believe that the editor's job is a function of the brevity of shots. It is a mistaken belief that the Russians spent a lot of time on editing their films because their takes were very short. One can spend just as much time editing films with long takes because it is not enough merely to splice together one scene after another . . .³

To be fair, we should acknowledge that Bazin's condemnation of montage was less concerned with the "process necessary for constructing film" than with "effect-montage." Yet the title "effect-montage" came from the fact that the juxtaposition of two shots A and B with the consequence of an implication X (signification, suggestion, or allusion) could be achieved in the silent cinema only by splicing together two *fixed* shots. Now, what matters is not the shot but the detail contained within it: object (or fact) A associated with event B. In other words, what matters is *the actual association and not the method by which that association*

is achieved (though there is evidence to suggest that the method is important).

We have just seen how effect-montage (or its equivalent) is achievable within a single shot merely by highlighting the object. In this context, Susan's glass in *Citizen Kane* represents the most skillful use of the technique—and is almost as famous as the pince-nez in *Potemkin*. However, we have also seen that in such cases the simultaneity of the two terms A and B precludes—almost entirely the *associative* qualities of the montage effect. Since it is no longer “created” (being directly perceived), the A/B relationship loses the qualities associated with its (real or apparent) causal links. B is no longer (or can no longer *seem to be*) the consequence of A. From being implicative, the sign becomes syncretic: Susan's glass is, in some way, the sign of the shot of which it is part or else the “signifying area” of the background against which it appears to stand out. The implication is no longer the product of the association of object B (closeup) with context A (following or preceding it) but of the A/B context (which constitutes the shot in its entirety) together with another (real or imaginary) context. In other words, if the sequence were to be edited conventionally there would be: A. Susan lying in her bedroom (midshot). B. The glass on her bedside table with the spoon and the sleeping pills (close shot). The suggested idea is related to Susan's attempt to poison herself. The idea is *generated* by the succession of the two shots. By this fact the glass *implies*, by association, the idea of poisoning. Consequently it becomes the *concrete sign* of the idea, its temporary symbolic representation.

In the single-shot setup there would be: Susan lying in her bedroom and, in foreground (in extreme closeup), the glass on the bedside table—which means that the idea is no longer generated by the association of successive terms: it has an *immediate*

structure. And the consequence of this is that the glass no longer implies the idea of poisoning; it is its *proof*. In this respect it remains a *concrete sign* but a sign (or symbolic representation) of a *fact* rather than an idea.

Though there must be an association of some kind, it is clear that the way in which it is produced alters the content of its signification. Thus if signification is the consequence of form, it would be impossible, generally speaking, for one form to replace another.

Let us turn our attention to another aspect. The extension of time is achievable without resorting to the splicing of two fixed shots. The camera may discover, at the end of a short pan or track (in foreground or closeup), an object whose allusive meaning may have an effect on the events being described.

The main difference lies in the fact that in editing, so to speak, there is a sudden break in the continuity, cutting from A to B, which explains the sometimes inevitable *shock effect* (surprise, contrast, antithesis, etc.). On the other hand, with a tracking shot the transition from one element to another is made *gradually*: B follows A—it becomes an adjunct rather than a contrast or at least, though the *meaning* of object (or fact) B may be contrasted with the meaning of event A, that contrast exists only at the level of what is being signified. The object is *included* within the concrete whole. Its quality as a sign becomes *differentiated* from the object, whereas in effect-montage it is so bound up with the object that the object becomes a mere “support” for an idea. To reiterate: in relationships achieved through nonmontage, the effective power of the concrete is much greater; objects are endowed with a weight and density hitherto denied them: the sign is at the same level as the object without ever becoming identified with it. And this makes it, if not more allusive, at least more subtle.

It may be said that the whole semiology of film logos derives from the implicative or allusive significations which rely on relating specific objects or events. Now, though these relationships are not always the *product* of montage, they are—or they reflect—its *spirit*. Thus editing does not necessarily mean the cutting and splicing together of film but this signifying form. It is in this sense that we use the word.

Among these various relationships, the *reverse angle* is one of the most interesting and typical characteristics of the cinema. We have already considered our attitude to the shot-reverse-shot technique. The use which hack directors put it to is no less clumsy than any other misused or over-used technique. However, the reverse-angle principle has nothing to do with the pingponging backward and forward, more or less quickly, of two fields of view in direct opposition to each other. The reverse angle of any point of view is, in simple language, the diametrically opposite point of view—or at least the opposite angle seen according to a variable latitude. It is the "fourth wall" revealed and considered objectively. The single shot is theatrical space (three walls) and without the reverse angle we have the view of someone sitting in the stalls. As soon as there is movement in the point of view, within the space, there is cinema and therefore a reverse angle. Which provides us with a first principle: that every angle is necessarily the reverse of some other angle, even though that other angle may not actually form part of the sequence. Merely because there are so many potential angles, the "other" angle is in fact implied within the whole. And the pseudo-aesthetics of nonreverse angle (a corollary of nonmontage) boasted by a certain type of cinema is sustained only by a verbal nicety!

Barring an interpretation that the cliché of pingponging should be avoided (in which case the shot-reverse-shot is a cul-

prit), there is no film worthy of the name which does not cultivate and exploit the reverse angle. Antonioni's films—which proclaim this aesthetic principle—are full of them. There are almost as many reverse angles in these films as in the various shots of that paradigm of a film in one shot, *Rope*—which is saying quite a bit.

We need look no further for proof than the example of the single take which acted as the springboard for some of Bazin's thinking. I leave it to him to explain:

Now, this dramatic reality was in fact made more concrete through a studio build, not spread across several sound stages but constructed in its entirety in the courtyard of the Billancourt studio. In this vast complex, each important element of the build (the caretaker's office, the laundry, the staircase, the printing-house, Batala's office) . . . had its real place around the courtyard, the center of which became the geometric location of the whole action. Another significant fact: the paving of the courtyard was concentric.

It is easy to understand then that, though the shot-in-depth is the only logical way of shooting a scene when the action occurs in one of the peripheral elements of the set, the pan is the camera movement specifically imposed by this general layout when the action is shot from the courtyard.

That explains the final breathtaking master stroke of the *mise-en-scène*, the perfect harmony crystallizing the whole spatial universe of the film: the 360-degree "backward" pan following Lange from Batala's office, through the print shop, down the stairs, and out into the courtyard. It is at this point, however, that the camera leaves him and, instead of following Lange, turns back on itself and, keeping close to the walls of the courtyard, ends up framing Lange at the opposite end where he joins Batala and finally kills him. This wonderful, apparently illogical camera movement is perhaps

justifiable in other ways—psychological or dramatic (it produces an impression of giddiness, hysteria, and creates a certain suspense); but its *raison d'être* is even more profound: it is the pure spatial expression of the *mise-en-scène*.⁴

This camera movement, used by Jean Renoir in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* corresponds perfectly with the director's intention. What is disturbing is that Bazin chooses this type of *mise-en-scène* to justify his argument in favor of nonmontage as well as nonreverse angle; for, in the final analysis, if there is no editing—the camera movement being self-sufficient—it would be just as logical to justify an argument in favor of the "total reverse angle." When we follow a pan round 360 degrees, we can see that in fact every angle has its corresponding opposite counterpart, which the camera inevitably includes as it moves. This is elementary geometry. The nonreverse angle of Antonioni's films conforms pretty closely with this kind of definition. Yet, for our theoreticians, from the moment a reverse angle is not produced by effect-montage, i.e., from the moment it is not shot-reverse-shot, it manifestly can no longer be a reverse angle.

It is easy to predict the consequences of such confused theories. Frequently correct in what they describe, they are always mistaken in the generalizations which they draw from random significations. Even worse: once they have been raised to the level of dogma, they turn into a value system outside which there is no salvation—at least in the eyes of the adherents. We must confess that, for us, the cinema is not a herd of sacred cows.

As well as these dubious theories, there is the constant application of wrong definitions due to the use of inaccurate terminology. Such is the case with the symbol and the metaphor. We saw that metaphorical

comparison ("like . . .") is impossible in the cinema, i.e., in a linear continuity. It could only be possible in the context of polyvision (parallel continuities, harmonic or contrapuntal, effects, etc.). For similar reasons, metaphor itself is impracticable in the cinema. And in the category of "metaphor" we include everything to do with comparison and symbolism.

Marcel Martin writes: "what I understand by metaphor is the *juxtaposition*, through editing, of two images whose confrontation is bound to produce in the audience's mind a psychological shock whose purpose is to facilitate the perception and assimilation of an idea which the filmmaker wishes to express through the film" (*Le Langage cinématographique*).

This is a precise definition of effect-montage. And if it were as Martin describes it, any signification produced in this way would be metaphorical—which seems to us completely mistaken, since, in fact, no expression of the kind would be produced. Martin quotes as an example the opening sequence in *Modern Times*: images of a flock of sheep following images of passengers emerging from the subway and images of workers entering a factory. He also cites the final sequence in *Mother* (which we have examined elsewhere): the strikers on the embankment beside the Neva and the river itself carrying along the pack ice as it breaks against the buttresses of the bridge. We would argue that—in this case and in all others—it has to do with a comparative relationship, an association of ideas, *one of the two terms having a symbolic effect on the other*—and nothing whatsoever to do with metaphor.

Webster's definition of *metaphor* is: "A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them." The important elements of this definition for our

purposes are: (1) that the likeness of analogy is *suggested* and (2) that the word or phrase is used *in place* of another. Such is the case when, for instance, I say: a *leaf* of a book. I am not saying: "this piece of paper is flat like the leaf of a tree"; I am not putting the piece of paper and the leaf *side by side*; I am implying the comparison. For there to be metaphor of this kind in the examples given by Martin, one of the terms would have to evoke or signify the other in order for the *idea to be transferred* from one term to the other—which is evidently not the case.

Because it is "objective," the shot of the strikers on the embankment can only signify what it shows. The revolutionary movement cannot in itself evoke in the audience's mind the breakup of the pack ice, since it could just as easily evoke something entirely different: boiling water, for instance. The comparison is entirely fortuitous and exists only in the mind of the filmmaker: first because of the circumstances and second because of the concrete elements which it uses (unless a term unrelated to the represented action is introduced). Thus to say that this is metaphor is to use the word metaphorically. Now, in aesthetics as in philosophy, the first condition for being understood and for ensuring the validity of one's argument is to use words with their correct and precise meanings.

As far as symbols are concerned, the word is correctly used but its meaning is misinterpreted, since the purpose of film symbolism is to produce symbols—not merely to use them. "Symbols," François Chevassu tells us, "are a collection of signs which allow something to be represented conventionally instead of revealing it directly" (*Le Langage cinématographique*). He is right, inasmuch as he means symbol in its most general sense. However, if he is talking about film symbols he is on the wrong track completely—or else his definition is of

something to be avoided. He goes on: "Their use results in two inexcusable errors: either the symbols are crude (a woman surrenders her virginity and the petals of a rose open, as in *Les Lâches vivent d'espoir*) and nine times out of ten they do not even serve their purpose; or else they are too lavish and complicated, in which case the audience does not understand them (whips, jack-booted women, stallions, cats, etc.)."

Unfortunately, it is not just that they fail to serve their purpose: they are appalling travesties, the whole lot of them. But we are talking here of *applied* symbols, imposed onto the action instead of being *implicated* by it. Film symbols are not *conventional* signs for which you need a code book to be able to decipher them; if they are, they are either bad or false. They must be *contingent*, implicated by a moment or situation outside which they have no meaning. They do not have (indeed must not have) any intrinsic value. The visualization of ready-made symbols having signification independent of their visual context is antycinematic because it is not a *function of film language*.

Take, for example, Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou*, a symbolic film par excellence. The eye being cut by a razor after a cloud has passed over the sun cutting it in two is a contingent symbol: the meaning it gives to the action is the consequence of an image relationship produced by the action itself. On the other hand, the symbol of the piano with the donkeys being dragged along by the priests is a manufactured symbol. I do not mean that it has not been created *in view* of the film—indeed, it exists only *for* the film, but not *by* the film. It is not some "cliché stuck onto life," for at least it has the merit of being original. But it is incomprehensible—precisely because it does not have a *basis in expression*. It is the visualization of a literary concept (and how!), a filmed concept not a film concept. It is previous to the visual expression, whereas it

should *coexist* within it. In short, the shot records what has already been signified; it illustrates a concept (familiar or otherwise, commonplace or unimaginable), whereas it should be signifying *as it establishes its signification*.

Chevassu writes elsewhere: "Moreover, we are forced, by this definition, to rule out a certain number of shots wrongly considered to be symbolic: the most famous being the shot in Fritz Lang's *M*, with the murderer staring at the knives in a shop window and the reflection of the knives in the window around him. This is more an ellipsis than a symbol, enabling Lang to show the character and the object of his interest at the same time" (*Le Langage cinématographique*). Ellipsis . . . certainly not. At most it might be seen as an "epitome." However, here we are dealing with a *genuine* film symbol: a *real* fact represented objectively. But *by implication* (by virtue of the context) it *happens* that the knives *suddenly* assume a signification they do not have in everyday reality; a meaning inherent in the represented drama but one which transcends the moment during which it occurs. In other words, in the cinema, *sign* (in the linguistic sense of the word) and *symbol* are synonymous. Necessarily created by the agency of a given object, any signification gives that object a value as a sign: it becomes a symbol—a temporary, contingent symbol, however, not an intrinsic symbol. We have devoted sufficient attention to this question. However, it did seem necessary to refer to it again in order to decide what are the implications of this example from *M*—notably, that the signification which, until now, we have attributed to editing (the pince-nez in *Potemkin*) or some other relationship *within the shot* (the glass in *Citizen Kane*) may just as easily depend on a relationship between the "total data" of a shot and the total data of any adjacent shots, even the totality of the film context. We

shall gain a better understanding of this if we refer to a concrete example.

In *Peter Ibbetson* (by Henry Hathaway), the opening sequences show two children (girl and boy) living in two adjoining villas whose parents are on close terms. These two children are used to playing their games in one house or the other. But their domestic duties (studying, homework, etc.) prevent them from seeing each other as much as they would like. Now, as often as they can (even when they are not allowed to play together) they run into the garden and meet through the trellis. The passion of their childish love forces them together, but the trellis is a barrier between them. The development of the film is the development of this love, which is the eternal bond between them in their thoughts, though socially they can never be united. The trellis therefore becomes—by extension—the symbol of everything which prevents them from being united. It is the physical, social, and moral, concrete and abstract "barrier" standing in their way. Yet this trellis—which is never in any way emphasized but is quite simply there—symbolizes nothing in-itself; it is not the symbol of separation in the way that the pince-nez is the symbol of the fall of a regime or the glass is the symbol of an attempted suicide. Moreover—as in the childbirth scene in *Earth*—we *may* see in it a symbolic signification, but we do not do so necessarily. Of all the different forms, this is obviously the most subtle. Clearly it is adaptable to the condition of psychological realism, whereas symbolism produced by editing, having to conform with the needs of the lyric or the epic, has a place only in a "directed" reality.

Placing an emphasis on an object within the field of view is a more ambiguous technique, since it fulfills an objective as well as a certain subjective need. Yet none of these forms could ever be considered as su-

perior to the others. The only worthless forms are the "symbolic expressions"—which no one in his right mind would call film symbols (faded roses, turtledoves, sunsets, etc.), and these should be consigned to the scrap heap.

The image being a "signal" with an infinitely variable and ephemeral symbolic meaning, it is impossible to lay down for film any strict rules—grammatical rules—as for a code whose signs have become conventionalized and permanently fixed (always allowing for a semantic density acquired through usage). As we have said, the cinema is not a code raised to some higher aesthetic value but an aesthetic form compelled to accept the conditions of codification through its very nature as a dialectic development. That is why all the so-called film grammars, based on constantly shifting and relative principles, elevated into generalized formal laws, become outdated within a couple of years of being published—new methods based on new things to express or new ways of seeing the world come along to contradict the previous rules and regulations.

It is logical that rhythm should be "harmonious." As a consequence, our grammarians establish the a priori conditions of rhythm, stating that editing must be like this or that. In my view, there is no such thing as intrinsically harmonious rhythm, especially since it has no physical preconditions (such as intervals in music) to govern it. I only know that it must be justified by the feelings or ideas it suggests, by the involvement it invites. It becomes harmonious when it gives to the expression of which it is the perceptible form a power and force it would not have without it—for then and only then does it fulfill its purpose, i.e., its need to exist.

That is why it is not logical to cut from long shot to extreme closeup: the excessive difference in scale creates an unpleasant

shock—intensified by a jump if the cut is made in the same axis. It is normal, then, for rules to be established (rules are made to be broken), but not laws. The clever effect may be a fine thing in itself but no one would deny that the needs of the expression are far more important. If—and only if—such a cut can be justified should it be used. In short, *nothing should be discounted which proves itself to be necessary*.

It is equally absurd to categorize editing under various headings: rhythmic, ideological, narrative, elliptical, of cause, of effect, of consequence, of relation, of time, of place, etc., as the vast majority of the grammarians seem to do, since it can quite easily be found to have as many forms as ideas. Or to make up editing tables, as though editing is calculable, like sums with logarithm tables. It is odd to see a theoretician of Eisenstein's shrewdness falling into this kind of trap, dividing editing into arbitrary categories: metric, rhythmic, melodic, tonal—as though rhythmic editing (the only valid category whatever the style) did not include all the others (rhythm being a function of metrics, intensity, and tonality all at the same time).

We should add that perfectly matched cuts do not necessarily guarantee a film's value or intelligibility—any more than the absence of spelling mistakes guarantees the value of a piece of prose—not that it makes it any more intelligible for having spelling mistakes. Just as the first duty of a writer is to write a fair copy of his piece without any mistakes, so the first duty of a filmmaker is to match his cuts, unless, of course, his intention is to jump cut deliberately in order to create a particular effect—in which case it is not a mismatched cut, since the rules become altered by the requirements of the expression.

On the subject of jump cuts, I shall simply refer to the example which is always quoted in the textbooks (and always, I may

say, misinterpreted): the sequence of the stone lions in *The Battleship Potemkin*. Marcel Martin reminds us that "three stone lions, carved in three different poses (lying, crouching, and standing), juxtaposed in time, give the audience the impression that it is seeing a sleeping lion rise at the sound of a cannon" (*Le Langage cinématographique*). If this were so, i.e., if the lions were *juxtaposed*, each of them in a static pose, the result would be a series of jump cuts: we would be jumping from one to the other. In fact, the sequence is composed of five shots, not three. There is (1) the stone lion lying down; (2) a shell exploding and shattering the grill and front porch of a villa; (3) the stone lion on its haunches; (4) another shell-burst; (5) the stone lion on its feet. In this way the time (however short) of shots 2 and 4 is made to fit the time of the supposed movement of the lion, a movement we accept only because the duration makes it possible. It is for this reason that the editing of the sequence works well; if it were the way it is usually described it would probably be dreadful.

The Moving Camera

Apart from the subsidiary question of rhythm and structure, we have seen that film, through editing, is able to rediscover the mobility of psychological vision. As Edgar Morin points out,

We are constantly reestablishing not only the consistency of objects but also the consistency of the space-time framework. The audience converts parallel actions into simultaneous time, even though they are presented in a succession of alternating shots. Yet this *qualification* is also an *explanation*: succession and alternation are the actual modes by which we perceive simultaneous events or (better still) a single event.

In real life, the homogeneous space-

time context, its objects and events, are already present: perception, in this framework, does its decoding in many stages, recognizing something and adding it to its increasing store of information. In the cinema, the decoding operation is preset and, from these fragmentary series, perception builds up its homogeneity—the object, the scene, the time, and the space. The perceptual equation is the same, in the final analysis; only the variables change. (*Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*)

These observations, based on gestalt, would be sufficient to refute Bazin's arguments in respect of the perception of the "total field of vision" were it not for the fact that this obvious "conversion" (of objects presented successively) is a *conscious process*. In other words, we have the *notion* of their simultaneity; we are aware of it but cannot *experience it*: awareness is converted into understanding. On the other hand, in perception of the total field of view, this simultaneity is *already present*. We *feel* it in all its effects without being obliged to restructure it in our minds.

The same is true of movement. Editing cancels out mobility by presenting it "at a fixed point": I see objects face on, from the left, from the right, from above, from below, but each view I have presupposes an instant transition from one point to another. Movement is implied—though it never actually occurs. And it is the need for movement which is the *raison d'être* of tracking shots.

We saw how the original purpose of the tracking shot was to follow the actors, but we could stretch the point and say that a tracking shot which keeps equal distance and speed with the characters it is following is another form of static shot; it is the background which appears to be moving. That makes it possible to shoot studio "tracking shots," using back projection. Are we really seeing a couple driving their car

down a leafy lane? The camera is not moving; nor is the camera. But behind the car there is a "back projection" of countryside and trees passing by.

It was only from 1924 onward that the camera really began to move—*around* rather than *with* the characters of the drama (first appearing in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*). However, the potential of the moving camera was not fully realized until the invention of the crane in 1930. Initially descriptive, camera movements gradually assumed a psychological significance, and instead of describing the locations or following the characters, they were used to describe character relationships and construct the space of the drama.

We mentioned the amazing track forward in *Intolerance*—one of the first "selective" as well as "descriptive" camera movements. Although it describes Babylon and its teeming throngs, its primary function is to reveal the king Balthazar and the princess in the midst of his court—the end of the track has them framed in close shot.

Almost as amazing is the track, which, in the very first sequences of King Vidor's *The Crowd*, isolates the hero, a simple clerk lost in the metropolis. After a series of long panning shots describing New York and its skyscrapers (and a couple of jaywalkers crossing the busy streets), the camera moves to the foot of a gigantic skyscraper. A quick movement takes us up to the twentieth floor. The camera tracks into the center of the frame, to one of the windows on this floor through which can be seen an immense office where hundreds of clerks are working. The camera moves forward through the window, crosses the office, and comes to rest on the desk occupied by the main character of the film, now framed in close shot. A single movement takes us from the skyline of skyscrapers to one particular skyscraper and from that to one of the floors of the building, then on to one of the many

offices on that floor, and finally to one of the hundreds of clerks in that office. A sequence of separate shots could never have expressed with such simple precision the feeling of the relation of the individual to the collectivity, the man to the crowd, and all the while defining the isolation and insignificance of the individual.

The extraordinary journey of Faust and Mephistopheles over hill and down dale, through towns and villages (in Murnau's *Faust*), and the interplanetary voyage in *A Woman on the Moon* (by Fritz Lang) are among the finest tracking shots to have appeared at the end of the silent period. However, the first camera movements with psychological as well as descriptive value—and which remain some of the most remarkable in the whole of cinema—are those in Murnau's *Dawn*. There is one which takes the hero down to the marshes, where he is to meet a woman. The sinuous curve of the track following him as he walks down through the rushes, the sudden revelation of the marsh as he walks toward the woman, translate both his movement and his feelings—his hesitation and finally his astonishment—and have the effect of making the audience share his feelings, experiencing them at the same time as the character. Even more remarkable is the tram journey taking the man and his young bride from the forest to the town: each turn in the road reveals a new horizon, a new aspect, as the young couple gradually grow closer in this shared experience, the changing countryside reflecting the development of their feelings and becoming the physical expression of their drama.

Since the introduction of the crane, the terms *forward track*, *sideways track* and *backward track* no longer have any meaning—being that the camera is capable of describing the most varied of movements at the end of a crane. This is already apparent in *Dawn*. All the same, the terms do have va-

lidity when we talk of "dollying," i.e., directed tracks: toward or away from a character or object. In the first the field of view becomes gradually narrower (dolly forward), and in the second related facts and the background itself are gradually revealed as the field of view becomes progressively wider (dolly back).

For a long time this type of dollying was used to move toward a character in order to build up dramatic intensity. It differs from the straight cut in that it gradually builds up the emotion rather than suddenly drawing attention to it. However, this method of emphasizing the "crucial moment," of wringing every last drop of emotion from a scene, has very quickly become clichéd. Nowadays, the technique is every bit as absurd as the abuse of the shot-reverse-shot.

Whereas the track back always allows for the unexpected (place or situation) to be revealed from a more or less significant starting point, the track forward is always used to represent the movement of a character or else the significance of a detail, a shift of attention—as in *The Shadow of a Doubt*. This is obviously the most interesting of all its uses. Yet it implies the rapid—but gradual—enlargement of the particular detail or, better still, the rapid narrowing of the camera's field of view. In this respect the optical track (or zoom) has many advantages over the real track, in the sense that it is a good deal quicker and does not alter the perspectives. The effect of a zoom is of a transition from a two-dimensional photograph to a two-dimensional detail of the same photograph—which accurately translates sudden perceptual "realization." The straight cut, suddenly cutting from medium to close shot, translates the attention of our eyes but not the "intentional movement" of our consciousness.

Even when it is a quick movement, the real track is a good deal slower than a

zoom. Moreover, the change in perspective caused by an *actual* change of position implies—and indeed includes—a real movement. If we see (in long shot) someone sitting looking at a revolver on a mantle shelf and if there is a track from his position up to the object, it would be incongruous to see, in the course of the next shot, the man still sitting in the same place. Doubtless it would be understood that what is being represented is his mental attitude, an inclination of some kind, but this would not be clear, for attention does not involve a change in the spatial field. This form would only apply if it concerned a paraplegic imagining what it would be like to be able to move. But by the same token the optical track is also incapable of translating satisfactorily actual changes of position.

The most important thing, in all cases, is that camera movement should be justified—physically, dramatically, or psychologically. Whether it is being used to track or is static, the camera must *follow* the action of a scene and not *anticipate* it. This law (to which we have already alluded) is basic in the sense that it is a function of the psychology of the spectacle and the expression. It does not legislate over any particular style or genre but over the whole area of expression: *something cannot be described unless it already exists*. To do so is to reveal the artificiality of the spectacle and thereby negate or destroy the fantasy it is trying to create. The camera anticipating an event is like the actor telegraphing a scene in the theater.

Of course, links must be made. If a director wants to move from one scene to another without cutting (in order to illustrate a global unity), then the camera must move from one to the other. The art lies in making these movements seem natural but at the same time necessary. William Wyler was without a doubt the first director capable of giving them a clear justification, and he did so by applying a kind of psychological

or descriptive coefficient. Thus in *One-Way Street* we see, in a sordid back street, kids fighting and throwing apple cores at each other. Suddenly one of the apple cores misses its target and lands in a stream off-camera. One of the kids runs after it, and the camera, framing him in a downward tilt, follows his movement. The movement appears silly—making a great deal of nothing. Yet scarcely has the child picked up the apple core than, in the action of standing up, he perceives (the camera follows his gaze and also picks up): on the pavement, a yard or so away from him, a character who has previously passed unnoticed as he has been watching their game. And this is how the new character (Humphrey Bogart) is introduced into the action.

All the same, the redundancy of certain tracking shots can never be overemphasized: their sole purpose being to follow the movement of a character on the pretext of describing the reality of a scene. This is true of *The Old Maid* (by Edmund Goulding). We see Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins sitting in the drawing room of one of those great New Orleans houses toward the end of the last century. Suddenly Bette Davis stands up and starts to look for something apparently of vital importance. We cross the room with her, follow her along a corridor, through another room, across the hallway, and on up the stairs, down another corridor, and then finally into her bedroom, where she opens a chest of drawers and takes out . . . a handkerchief! Then she retraces her footsteps and we with her. Needless to say, the handkerchief has no significance whatsoever to the plot. If it had, it would at least have provided a reason and obviously if, during this long track, something hitherto concealed from us had been revealed, then it would have had a *raison d'être*. We might attribute some dramatic (or melodramatic) purpose to it: a mother rushing toward a crying child; the further

she has to run, the greater her distress. The time it takes for her to run can only increase her anxiety. A rather corny pretext, one might think, but at least it is a pretext; whereas in the film in question the only thing motivating the track is Bette Davis's action: an extremely flimsy pretext. To follow an action to the end in order to preserve "real time" is all well and good, provided the duration contributes a signification; for if it merely describes a void, it could do so indefinitely, and "art" would be within everyone's capabilities. Thus it is not so much the tracking shot in-itself which is of interest but what is contained in the tracking shot—what the track is used for.

The opposite of this kind of purposeless movement is a tracking shot such as the one with which *Madame de . . .* opens, which, in a single movement, describes the location and the characters and shows the behavior of the two heroes (Danièle Darrieux and Vittorio de Sica). And, of course, the tracking shots in *Touch of Evil* and *The Cranes Are Flying*.

However, as well as the various psychological aspects (which we shall examine in the next section), the obvious interest of the tracking shot is contained less in following the characters than in helping create the "space of the drama," making the characters "come alive" by moving freely around them. In this respect, there is the example of the ball or the buggy ride in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (by Welles) of which André Bazin made such a subtle analysis in his book on Welles.

Psychology of the Tracking Shot

One virtue of the silent screen is that the facts presented to us seem as though they could never have been otherwise. They are utterly unchangeable. In modern films people talk. And we gain the impression, however faint, that their speech has a power

which might at any moment be employed to change the course of events. In silent films, on the other hand, characters seem to bow to a higher force of which they are merely the visible expression. They could not be said to be acted on, for they are genuinely active; but the effect that they create is they are part of a prearranged ritual, as though their existence were justified by a *raison d'être* which, unconsciously, they are prepared to assume.

Among other reasons associated with the forms of language, this effect is partly explained by the fact that silent films—and a large proportion of talkies, too—are (or were) conceived according to norms associated with the concept of theatricality—or tragedy in the broadest sense of the word: beings existing in a given place and time, acting and reacting to a set of circumstances—most often unusual ones. Their actions are the product of a series of more or less determinative exterior and anterior influences: character, ambition, social background, material possessions, etc., with the main factor being timeless. It is almost always an escalation toward a climax, toward the resolution or denouement of a crisis. Drama therefore is simply the logical development of certain precise conditions, the chain of cause and effect, following a *necessary* and necessarily directed logic. It is the "infernal machine"—the development of a thematic structure conceived as a series of equations. The circumstances are *bound* to culminate in a crisis implicitly contained in the premises of the drama: there can be no alternative. Which is why all drama is "constructed," strictly arranged, but also why the feeling of life we gain from it is concentrated, transposed, artificial as well as representative. The drama develops with the logic of argument.

The cinema, as we have said, always presents us with the *here and now*. Now, in these films, the fact that the here and now

is always presented as one moment within a continuity whose *necessary* purpose seems previous to the moment itself, i.e., inherent right from the start and absolutely inevitable, it means that what we are seeing is merely a *re-presentation*. The scenes of a film pass before our eyes ready-made, and though they might engage our interest, they do not invite our concern.

We might go so far as to say that the irritating aspect of films as beautifully composed as *The Nibelungen*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Ivan the Terrible* is that they are so perfect, in the sense that their perfection is *contrived*, an organic structure where the actions are as much subject to a predetermined order as the forms. Thus, though we do participate to a certain extent in a drama involving our interest, we do so as we would in a dream, in something "infused" in our minds by a force created by the power of language rather than the intensity of the action.⁵ Because it is "mediated," life appears in these films as a presentation of an *experienced* reality rather than a *present* actuality. We participate in a re-presented past rather than in reality "as it is happening." In other words, we act and think with these beings through a kind of mental involvement while remaining outside the current which carries them along. Their duration is not ours, particularly since it is a duration which has already taken place, already been completed.

By a curious paradox, it is harder to remain detached from this kind of contrived film, i.e., to maintain an often necessary distance from it. Indeed, the very fact that their duration is independent of ours means that it is *imposed* on us. Introduced to a preconceived sequence of time, we are forced to submit to it. We are unable to make any active assessment of this present which belongs to what has already taken place, and we have the very clear impression that our expectation no longer applies to actions

happening before our eyes: we cannot take them in; rather we are taken in by them—we are literally *enthralled*.

It is obvious that films involved with fantasy and dreams, with a poetic interpretation of the world (lyrical, fantastic, etc.), even with the epic (at least the mythical epic), depend on a method such as this. From the moment it becomes imaginary, reality may be introduced into a preconceived space and time, in the same way that its setting may be part of a symbolic architectural structure. However, since film is neither painting nor theater, the characters must be endowed with a certain materiality, even though they may be acted on rather than active and less emphasis must be placed on plastic qualities and formal symbolism. It is the tendency to lay too much store by the *image*, considered as essentially symbolic, which robs these films of their vitality, whereas even films as carefully constructed as *Dawn*, *The Last Laugh*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and *The Blue Angel* retain a certain freedom, because they give the individual (however symbolic) and the duration (however arbitrary) a signification of obvious importance.

However, probably because it is capable of talking, the cinema is finding itself pushed more and more directly toward the expression of realism—which must inevitably lead the drama away from the arbitrary conditions of tragedy. Film is thereby forsaking the concentration of drama in favor of the linear development of narrative. Instead of plots revealing, in a limited space and time, the consequences of certain actions, filmmakers have preferred to follow the fictional development of those actions. Thus the “open” time of everyday reality, an “actuality” in which events are governed by chance rather than predetermination, starts to replace the “closed” time of tragedy, a “nonactuality” subordinate to the actions transcending it. Here also the rela-

tive takes the place of the absolute and psychological mobility takes the place of moral or metaphysical entities.

Thus film appears as a series of moments forming as they happen. Instead of being present as an a priori structure, duration is “in the process of happening.” Involved as we are in the *actual* stream of its development, we discover in ourselves the anticipatory faculty otherwise denied us: we are able to put things into perspective. Not as we would in real life, obviously, since this life of which we are part is included in a time not our own and since it is subject to conditions which we only discover gradually. However, we are able at least to step back a little and become detached from events while we observe and judge them. Though we are subject to them, it is insofar as we *live* them and not in any way insofar as their *life* is *imposed* on us. We think and act with the characters while reflecting on their actions, and we are able to do this because we are experiencing them and assessing their plausibility.

This psychological mobility naturally tends to be released by the pictorial conditions of expressionism, as unitary values of theatrical aesthetics—or at least their formalizing principles. Just as the classical forms of editing are adaptable to the needs of a cinema which “reconstructs the world,” so the moving camera and its allied fluidity of expression are adaptable to the expression of a concrete duration—which it is the avowed purpose of modern cinema to capture.

Indeed, the moving camera has made it possible to “actualize” the represented space, since the space in which we *effectively* move can only be a space *actually present*. Things are “in the process of happening,” since we follow them in their very mobility, according to their continuous development. We move *with them* and therefore act (or feel as though we are acting) *at the same time as*

them. The here and now presented to our eyes through editing is presented physically to our perception, our senses through the tracking shot. Thus the fact that, at the level of perception, extensiveness is replaced by intensiveness, structured information by information received by the senses, means that, at the level of film action, *presentification* is replaced by *actualization*.

For that reason, represented reality appears "more true." The authenticity the cinema gives to everything it touches becomes more apparent the more the drama seems to evolve in a "present" reality in which we are in some way involved. We feel we may be capable of altering the course of events. Even as we step back from the objects or the way the characters behave, we become even more involved. Instead of being forced into a fictional reality, we experience a simulacrum of reality. Our "belief" is determined by a feeling of actuality provided by the events we are watching. In a word, our participation is more "active."

It is not that these events may not be conventional nor the characters nonexistent. In that case, the lack of reality—or lack of verisimilitude—would concern the psychology of the characters and logic of the situations (the credibility of the story) rather than the truth or authenticity of the action "in the process of happening." Moreover, the artifices governing the telling of a story are less perceptible the more they are spread over the fictional duration on which they appear to depend. Involved through the modalities of the drama "taking place," we can only make our judgments after the fact. Our powers of anticipation or distination are concerned only with the "time of the sequence," never the "time of the film." Involved in the course of events, we are dragged along by them (rather than enthralled), much as we are by actions in real life.

The major difference between the moving shot and editing (or at least between ob-

jects perceived through them) will become apparent if we make a thorough examination of the representation of movement.

In everyday reality, we can only "totally" perceive static objects; we are dominated by movement. The fact that we can be in only one place at one time means that we are incapable of perceiving quickly moving objects; we catch only a fleeting glimpse of them, as we do at a motor rally or athletics meeting when we sit in the stand. Now, in the cinema the multiplicity of viewpoints restores to us not only the feeling of space but also its corollary: the feeling of movement. Editing allows us instantly to change our observation point, i.e., our position: *we move faster than the object in motion* and, for this reason, we dominate it. Movement can be "seized" only by relating several successive reference points. The function of each viewpoint is as a reference relative to the other viewpoints. However, it is obvious that though this enables us to *seize* the movement, we can never *feel* it since it is *outside* us. Yet, if instead of observing the car we sit in the passenger seat, we can then experience the sensation and exhilaration of speed. But the fact that we have no other referent prevents us from perceiving the movement in which we are involved.

This is also true of drama, that is, the behavior of characters, psychology, and situations. If we wish to perceive objects in their entirety, we must not merely consider them from various angles but also (and this is equally important) feel them; *and consequently to take advantage alternatively of both the mobility of the tracking shot and stability of editing.*⁶ I accept that for certain facts (if not the vast majority) it is enough either to feel them or observe them. However, the alternation of facts and, more particularly, the variety of levels of interest they imply suggest quite clearly that it is not possible to consider one system as better than another. Here also form is a function of content.

We shall conclude these observations on the tracking shot by adding that though, in the film image, the characters' movements and continual changes of shot tend to make us forget the "frame," this tendency is made all the more pronounced with camera movements. Continuous subtle movements from one field to another, from one angle to another, constantly alter the internal balance of the image—much more obvious in movements related to a fixed point. This is not to suggest that this transformation depends any the less on the frame; indeed, it can exist only relative to the frame. Thus if everything contrives to make us forget the frame as such, everything contrives at the same time to make us feel its effects. Instead of being an *explicit* determinant, as in certain static shots associated with painting, it is *implicit* but no less determinative; and though our perceptual consciousness tends to take into account only the reality under consideration, our perception of the image determines the way in which this reality affects us and also our resultant emotion.

No one would deny that Eisenstein's art of "representation"—*Alexander Nevsky*, *Ivan the Terrible*—though not a complete dead end, was something of a one-off. In a highly developed art, it was the swan song of the pictorial conceptions of early cinema. One might even describe this series of gestures, attitudes, stylized movements, this confusion of lines, obtuse and acute angles, oppressive and oppressing volume, as a kind of monstrous ballet. The tediousness of these films (notwithstanding the suffocating beauty of their images) comes from the fact that they are neither painting nor choreography (though they have elements in common with both). *They are, as it were, movements with nowhere to go, a static ballet.* And on the odd occasion that the movement is freed up, the film develops into a genuine choreography of a given theme. Much more than a battle, the Battle on the Ice in *Nevsky*

is a ballet based on an alternation between the White Knights and Black Knights and between lines converging and diverging as though regulated by a metronome. Another ballet on the grand scale is the final banquet scene in the third part of *Ivan*, with its alternate play of shadow and light and color, conflicting and contrasting according to the pantomimes and masquerades.⁷

We must conclude therefore that the ultimate application of this method involves the release of movement through forms rather than the paralysis of a movement imprisoned in their architecture. Now, movement at its most liberated is dance, ballet in its pure form. There is therefore no inconsistency (in spite of appearances) in saying that the only possible application of the Eisensteinian concept (besides fantasy and legend) is in dance films, i.e., in the total choreography of gesture, movement, and form, in the "symbolic representation" of some of Gene Kelly's, Stanley Donen's and Vincente Minnelli's films. More freedom, satirical force, and vivacity and a good deal less solemnity and we have films such as *West Side Story*, *Bandwagon*, and *Singing in the Rain*.

Whatever the case, be they concerned with static or moving shots, plastic or dynamic compositions, editing and symbolism are only forms of language (what else), means of expression, each with its own signification and thus its own precise use; and not specific construction techniques on which or from which an aesthetic principle might be based. At best they may be seen as a way of distinguishing various different styles. The same is true of depth-of-field—the possibilities of which we must examine in the next section.

Depth-of-Field

Depth-of-field is, in a sense, a corollary of the moving shot. Instead of the camera

moving relative to the actors, progressively describing shots of different sizes, the actors move relative to the camera within a field of view framed in a static shot.

We have seen that the descriptive use of depth-of-field is as old as the cinema itself. However, the aesthetic dimension became added only when this composition in depth was employed to create a specific dramatic signification—which was one of the major innovations of *Citizen Kane*. It was no longer a case of presenting characters with no connection other than being in the same place at the same time but of showing us simultaneously several characters *reacting differently to the same stimulus*, the stimulus being contained simultaneously (or potentially so) in the previous shots. A dramatic unity is constructed through the use of the space, and characters' behavior is illustrated by their respective position in the space. It is in fact a *psychological spatialization of the drama*: in other words, the use of an established technique for a totally novel purpose.

We know that keeping sharp focus over the whole field of view (from extreme close up to infinity) required the use of lenses of short focal length. In fact, it was during the shooting of *Citizen Kane* that the cameraman Greg Toland first used the wide-angle lenses which had just appeared. Now, the capacity of these lenses to maintain focus on objects only a foot away from the camera as sharply as on the back wall of the set produces a very "stylized" representation, since in reality (though the accommodation of our eyes is almost instantaneous) we are unable to take in with the same clarity of focus objects a foot or so from us and their backgrounds at the same time. The "rendering" of the film image is therefore that of an "intellectual" image somewhat removed from our normal perception. Which points up yet another difference: between immediate reality and the image, mediated more than ever (by the fact that these wide

angles push the perspective vanishing point even farther into the distance). Thus we can see that keeping focus on the whole field of view, by the very fact that it brings out the homogeneity of the spatial content, accentuates the association between the compositional elements, thereby giving them character and power of unity.

However, as long as extreme closeups and long shots are not framed simultaneously, this kind of focus is achievable with any sort of lens; all that is needed is to "stop down." Even amateur photographers with their box Brownies know that their pictures are in focus "between seven feet and infinity"—which is how effects of depth were achieved before the wide-angle lens. William Wyler (*The Little Foxes* and *Jezebel*) and Jean Renoir (*La Règle du jeu*) worked in this way, exploiting lateral simultaneity or depth-of-field from *midshot to infinity* rather than the simultaneity of closeups and long shots.

We are led to wonder, therefore, why it should be that with one or two rare exceptions (notably Eric Von Stroheim's films), this "depth" was abandoned between 1925 and 1940 in favor of intensive fragmentation. Some say that it had to do with fashion; others claim the influence of the Soviet cinema. Both explanations have their merit; they do not, however, explain the real reason—which had nothing to do with the almost exclusive use of lenses with wide apertures. It is nearer the mark to say that the use of such lenses was the effect of some other factor.

As we have said, all the cameraman has to do is stop down. However, to keep the same quality in his photograph he must increase his lighting. And nothing was easier before 1925, using orthochromatic stock which required lighting with arcs whose candlepower was immense. But from 1925 onward, as the panchromatic emulsions became generally available, the whole ap-

proach to lighting changed. Sensitive to red and to all visible light (as the name suggests) but unevenly, panchromatic emulsions prevented cameramen from using their arcs whose spectrum, tending toward violet, coincided perfectly with the least sensitive area of the emulsion. Thus cameramen had to start using incandescent bulbs; but these were not sufficiently powerful. More than that, the first panchromatic emulsions were a long way from being as sensitive as they are nowadays. Consequently, to get the correct exposure the lens had to be "opened up," which meant sacrificing the capacity to "stop down." This explains why lenses with wide apertures (and therefore a comparatively short depth-of-field) began to be used, why composition in depth was limited, and why of necessity editing styles were much more fragmented. That this became a routine way of shooting pictures, a fashion rather than a technique, is obviously true, but this "cause" was never more than a consequence. The minimum of technical know-how would have spared our theoreticians looking for difficulties where there are none.

Among these, Bazin should at least be credited with being the first to understand the value of the "total field of view." If I have taken issue with him on many details, it is not in order to condemn a means of expression which is quite clearly based on pretty firm foundations. I do, however, challenge certain specious inferences which he claims to draw; also his systematic generalization of the method (all the time admitting that the responsibility for this narrow dogmatism is to be laid at the feet of his disciples, not at the master's).

We could do no better in this section than run over various points in his argument. Therefore we yield the platform to Bazin to explain this aesthetic principle, which he defined better than anyone (reserving the right to interrupt where we see

fit), beginning with an examination of the scene we have already analyzed in respect of the signification of the object, concentrating this time on the expressive value of the field of view.⁸

Let us turn our attention, by way of contrast, to a typical Welles sequence: that of Susan's failed suicide bid in *Citizen Kane*. The sequence opens on Susan's bedroom seen from behind the bedside table. In the foreground, right up against the camera, a huge glass, filling almost a quarter of the frame with a small spoon and an open tube of sleeping pills. The glass almost entirely conceals Susan's bed from us, hidden in the shadows, from which we hear muffled moaning as though from someone drugged asleep. The bedroom is empty; right in the background of this emptiness: the door, made to seem even farther away by the false perspectives of the lens, and the sounds of knocking from the far side of the door. Seeing nothing more than a glass and hearing only two sounds on two different acoustic planes, we are suddenly aware of the situation: Susan has locked herself in her room in order to swallow an overdose of sleeping pills and Kane is trying to force the door. The dramatic structure of the scene is essentially based on the difference between two acoustic planes: Susan's closeup moaning and her husband's knocking at the door. A tension is established between these two poles which are differentiated by the depth-of-field. The knocks become louder: Kane is trying to barge his way through the door with his shoulder; he succeeds. We see him in the doorway, tiny within the frame, getting bigger as he rushes toward the camera. The spark has been generated between the two dramatic poles of the image. The scene is complete.

To appreciate the originality of this mise-en-scène, apparently so natural in the easy way its achieves its intention, we must try to imagine how someone other than Welles might have directed the scene.

It would have been broken down into at least five or six shots. For example: a closeup of the glass and the sleeping pills; a shot of Susan tossing and turning on the bed (with "off-camera" sounds of knocking at the door); a shot of Kane knocking on the door, creating "suspense" with the short parallel montage, i.e., a series of shots on the inside and then the outside of the bedroom, up to a shot of the door bursting open under Kane's weight, cutting on the action of Kane rushing up to the bed; and then maybe a final shot of Kane leaning over Susan.

It is easy to see that the classical breakdown formed by a series of shots analyzing the action according to the awareness the director intends we should have is contained within one single shot. Moreover, Welles's composition in depth tends to eclipse the notion of shot within a unity of composition (which might be called "shot sequence").

Bazin becomes carried away by his own enthusiasm and finds himself speculating on the substitution of the notion of the shot by the idea of the shot sequence, whereas it is obvious that they are two different styles each with a totally different meaning. First he deliberately undervalues throughout what he tries to invalidate. A classical breakdown would never be as crude as he describes it. Whatever else it might have done, the classical breakdown, alternately presenting us with Susan and Kane, would have forced us to participate successively (and almost simultaneously) in the anxiety of one and the death throes of the other. We would have been *with* one and then *with* the other. In the sequence in question, though, since we are seeing them both at the same time, we are with neither one nor the other. We are on the sidelines, obviously *interested* in the drama but in a completely intellectual sense: the significance of the glass and its relation with the rest of the scene creates a dramatic tension which grips us and in-

volves us, but it involves us as *witnesses* and not as Susan's or Kane's "double." We are involved in a tragic event without sharing the characters' feelings or responsibilities. True, what we lose in involvement we gain in a certain objectivity and detachment, and indeed this is what Welles expects of us: he is trying to capture our attention and not our feelings. The mode of expression he chooses is perfectly appropriate, but whenever he has to appeal to our *feelings*, he has to choose a totally different method. Depth-of-field is not a universal panacea; it is one technique among others, with its own specific qualities. Indeed, Bazin implicitly recognizes this when he says:

In contrast to this "realist" mise-en-scène, created in "shot sequences," captured by the camera as blocks of reality, Welles frequently uses a metaphorical or symbolic abstract editing technique in order to abbreviate long periods in the action (the degeneration of Kane's marriage to his first wife, Susan's career as an operatic soprano). Yet this time worn technique, used to excess by the silent cinema, gains a new meaning precisely because of the contrast it makes with the extreme realism of the scenes where the events are rendered in their entirety. Instead of a muddled breakdown where the concrete event is partially dissipated by the shot changes, we have two essentially different narrative styles. This fact is particularly evident in the scene where, after a series of superimpositions summarizing the three years of Susan's suffering, ending on a lamp being switched off, the screen brutally projects into the drama of Susan's suicide bid. Jean-Paul Sartre, in an article in *L'Ecran français*, correctly observed that this is the equivalent of the English frequentative tense: "For three years he made her sing in every opera house in America. Susan became more and more unhappy; every appearance was torture; one day she could stand it no longer . . ." She swallowed the sleeping pills!

This is a vital point. The cinema—as we shall see further on—already had the double narrative form: direct and indirect. All it needed was the ability to play alternately on the *feelings* and the *attention* of the audience, to give the audience an anticipatory attention relative to the action “in the process of happening” and also a certain detachment from the action—at the same time allowing it to share the feelings of the hero, putting it, when necessary, in the state of ecstasy which deprives it of the objective control provided by “anticipation.” The moving camera and depth-of-field make the audience more attentive, moving *among* the characters of the drama or with them, observing them in a present “actually happening,” whereas montage and its many by-products force the audience to see and feel *with* the heroes or in their place in a present “which has already happened.” The feeling of *actualization* does not preclude or replace *presentification*; it adds to it; there is a constant alternation between the two, in much the same way as shot-reverse-shot. Or if they are mutually replaceable, it is only when the specific dramatic moment or specific way of translating the drama (which must always be justified) demands it. And we are in complete agreement with Bazin when he says:

Contrary to what one might suppose, composition in depth is far more loaded with meaning than an analytic breakdown. It is no less abstract than the latter, but the addition of its abstraction to the narrative comes loaded with an excess of realism—a realism which is, in some way, ontological, restoring to the object or the setting the density of their being, the weight of their presence; a dramatic realism which resolutely maintains in close association the actor with the setting, the foreground with the background; a psychological realism which replaces the audience in the true conditions of perception

(which is never completely determined *a priori*).

Once again we must define our terms. These “true conditions of perception” are of *other people’s actions*, i.e., facts in which I am never involved. They have nothing to do with actions which *might* be mine, with attitudes with which I might be able to identify. They are—as we have said in a roundabout way—the conditions of an *observing* perception not those of an *active* or *participating* perception. Bazin goes on:

Under the guise of the cinematic image’s congenital realism, a whole system of abstraction was being fraudulently presented. Films were apparently limiting themselves to a breakdown of events according to a kind of natural anatomy of the action: in point of fact, reality was totally reduced to the “meaning” of the action, subtly transformed into a series of abstract “signs.” The closeup of a doorknob was no longer a doorknob with cracked enamel and discolored copper, cold to the touch, but the equivalent of the phrase “*He wondered desperately whether or not the doorknob would open.*” I am not saying that an implicit convention of this kind is not aesthetically justified; I would, however, make two observations: (1) It does not allow the audience the freedom to choose vis-à-vis the event. (2) It implicitly suggests that a given reality at a given moment has one meaning and one alone relative to a given event.

This is obvious. Yet in certain cases there is no alternative, particularly when the director is trying to make me share in his vision of the world or his personal way of seeing things. In so doing, he is not saying “this reality has only one meaning, the one I choose to show you” but “from all the various aspects of the objects I am showing you, this is the one which, for me, has meaning or to which I choose to give a

meaning—the one you see before you." In this type of film, what interests me as an audience member is not the world the director shows but the way he sees it. His testament is not a testament; it is an interpretation, a confession, a revelation. The problem is altogether different. We come back to the example of the man staring at the lamp on his desk who cannot choose but to look at the lamp because the director has so arranged the shot that it is this object—and no other—which he sees at that specific moment. This form—to go back to Bazin—"lends an extreme subjectivity to the event since each element is there because the director has willed it. Not only does it imply a dramatic, emotional, or moral choice but also and more profoundly an attitude to reality as such." Yet to conclude that "the technique tends above all to exclude the ambiguity inherent in reality" is absurd, since reality in itself is not in any way ambiguous. Only people, thinking, feeling people, can be ambiguous (which, as often as not, they are). The sole attribute of reality is unpredictability and uncertainty—which explains our "perceptual anticipation"—nothing more than an attempt to grasp immediate future time.

"Wyler's depth of field, as a narrative technique, is almost the cinematic equivalent of what Gide and Martin du Gard hold up as a model of expression in their novels: perfect neutrality and stylistic transparency, interposing no coloration or refractive index between the audience's mind and the story" (Bazin). We can only share this point of view (one which, in any case, we have been developing previously).

Until now, any disagreement between Bazin (arguing in favor of shot sequence) and myself (supporting all means of expression as long as they are justified and therefore necessary) has been founded on our respective aesthetic prejudices. However, he adds: "The systematic use in *Kane* and

Ambersons of depth-of-field would be of relatively little importance had Welles merely improved on the methods of the classical breakdown. In fact, he used it differently. *He made it force the audience to use its freedom of attention*, thereby making it experience the ambivalence of reality." And Bazin brings the point home in another study: "It is not a matter of provoking the audience, putting it on the rack or breaking it on the wheel. Wyler merely wishes to let it: (1) see everything there is to see; (2) choose 'what it wants to see.' It is an act of faith in the audience, a desire to be dramatically honest. . . . The frequency of long takes and deep focus contributes a great deal in reassuring the audience, in allowing it the means to observe and to choose and, at the same time, to form an opinion, through the length of the shots."

Now, it is my belief that this is not the case, that this so-called freedom is an illusion. Of course, the wide shot—or shot-in-depth—provides the characters in the drama with much greater freedom of movement and respects their free will. We have seen that the man staring at the lamp might just as easily be looking at something else. Yet this dramatic freedom has nothing whatsoever to do with the freedom of the audience. According to Bazin, however, since the audience is no longer "led" by the filmmaker, it will discover, through the aesthetics of the total field of view, the *objective circumstance of reality*—which, practically speaking, is impossible.

In reality, in fact, the events, actions, and objects adorning the space where I find myself are constantly accessible—to my interpretation as much as to my eyes. I present them to *myself*; I choose them and organize them as I like, making up my own script—whereas, in the cinema, as in the other arts, they are *provided* for me. The only free will exercised is that of the director, who conducts the scenes as he likes. Whether it is

done with successive fragmentations or with depth-of-field, I am forced to see what he gives me to see and in the order he has chosen. Moreover, though in visual perception the image is analogous with reality, this is only at the level of the shot. As soon as there is a sequence of shots, a *secondary* reality comes into play. This reality, a *mediated* reality, is no longer accessible to me. There is no way for me to confront it in anything like the perceptual conditions I encounter when I am face to face with *direct* reality. Believing that the two are the same is tantamount to saying that a painted tree is the same as a real one.

Moreover, all works of art are works of creation and interpretation. They require a certain submission on the part of the audience without which they have no reason for existing. The only freedom I can exercise is in choosing to remain in the cinema. If I agree to watch a film, I am submitting to *data* which are not dependent on my choice. Here as well I can find none of the objective conditions of reality, since I am receiving data which has been chosen *for* me and not *by* me.

It will be argued that it is really a question of the audience's attitude of mind, free to choose as it likes from among the elements within the frame of the image. This is no less serious a mistake than the previous.

Take the example of two simultaneous actions. Saying that I am *free* to pass from one to the other is ridiculous: for me to know that they are simultaneous, I must perceive them simultaneously, otherwise there is no reason for the simultaneity to exist (at any rate, none as far as I can see). Now, if a reason exists, it is logical for a signification to exist, which I must register if I am to understand what is going on. Moreover, if I choose to look first at one action and then another, I am returning to the fragmentation for which montage was being condemned. Naturally (and obvi-

ously this is what Bazin is driving at), this fragmentation will be *my* responsibility; it will not be imposed on me; and I will thus be face to face with the film "as in real perception." This naïveté would be laughable were it couched in less dignified language. Beyond a modicum of self-satisfaction, will I have actually gained anything? I will quite simply have sacrificed a part of the spectacle (or narrative) and my choice (assuming I have a choice) will only be a choice within a global context which is presented to me. Lastly, if I am to create "my" own film within someone else's, I have no need of that film. All I have to do is imagine it; in which case, I will always have the facility to imagine whatever I please. The only way an audience can be "free" is to become a film director—if only for itself. This way of accepting the film but resisting the impulse to be guided by it or submit to it is one of the strangest assumptions made by certain theoreticians of modern art. All we can say is that assumptions of this kind are based on a false premise; they break the necessary pact between the filmmaker and his public.

In fact, in a "total field of view" I must see *everything*, yet concentrate, at all times, on the *most important* features. But this is *ordained by the action itself* since it is this which directs my vision. Thus if the action is guiding me, I am no longer able to exercise my free will. In point of fact, the audience is *always* drawn into an image by the point at which the plastic or dramatic element achieves its maximum significance.

Among the numerous examples quoted by Bazin, let us examine the drugstore scene in *The Best Years of Our Lives*: in the foreground, a shop assistant is serving a customer, while right in the background, lost in the crowd, we can just about make out one of the heroines of the film. Our attention is naturally drawn to what is happening in the foreground. It is entirely

possible that we *might* have completely overlooked the young woman. But, in the first place, the characters in the foreground are only there as it were accidentally, whereas, throughout the film, we have been following the heroine in question and have seen her, in previous images, walking toward the drugstore; secondly, as soon as we perceive her in the background she starts to *speak*—to the shop assistant in the foreground. This simple device thus attracts our attention, and we would have to be blind not to realize it. From that moment on, it is she whom we are following, not the two extras in the foreground. Where then does the choice lie?

The same is true of the famous kitchen scene in *Ambersons*. Aunt Fanny having hysterics and George guzzling cakes and other dainties represent two equally strong poles of attraction for the audience. The dramatic tension exists in the relationship between their actions. Yet throughout the simultaneity of these actions, there are moments when our attention becomes fixed more intensely on either one or the other. If we study the film on a Moviola,⁹ we realize that these points of attention always coincide with the dominant attitude: we concentrate on whichever of the characters is speaking or behaving most energetically—on whoever is most significant at any given point. What Bazin assumes to be “freedom of attention” is nothing more than our uncertainty as to which of several events to look at—which is itself produced by an uncertainty in the behavior of the characters (assumed to be the “ambiguity of reality”). We can never predict the point at which the action will attract our interest, and this obviously forces us to be more attentive, to study the behavior of the characters in order to understand more fully each in turn; but this is because of their actions and not because of our free will.

The same might be said of the marriage

sequence in *The Best Years of Our Lives* or the barroom sequence in the same film: Dana Andrews in the foreground, initially with Frederick March and his friends, goes to make a phone call in a booth at the back of the set. The ensuing action (around the pianist) taking place in the foreground is of secondary interest. The real drama is occurring in the background and in particular between the phone booth and the worried glances Frederick March makes from time to time in the direction of Dana Andrews. Now, Bazin says:

The idea of the phone booth at the back of the set and the obligation placed on the audience to imagine what is going on, in other words, to make him party to Frederick March’s anxiety, was already in itself a wonderful piece of directing, but Wyler felt that, standing by itself in the sequence, it disturbed the development in terms of space and time of the rest of the sequence. He needed to counterbalance and reinforce it, which gave him the idea of diverting the audience’s attention with an action to *the foreground*, secondary in itself but whose plastic values would be inverse proportion to its dramatic importance. A secondary but not altogether insignificant action and one which the audience cannot ignore because it is also interested in what happens to the invalided sailor and because it is not every day that you see the piano being played by a cripple. Forced to wait (without being able to see properly) for the hero to finish his phone call, the audience is also made to divide its attention between the piano and the phone booth. Thus Wyler has been doubly successful: the diversion of the piano enables him to run a shot for the necessary duration which otherwise would have been interminable but it is, above all, his introduction of this parasitic pole of attraction which organizes and literally builds the dramatic structure of the image. Onto the real action is superimposed the actual action of the mise-en-

scène, which consists in dividing, like it or not, the audience's attention, in the necessary direction, for the necessary duration, thereby forcing it to participate on its own terms in the drama intended by the filmmaker.

It is there in black and white: "consists in dividing, like it or not, the audience's attention, in the necessary direction, for the necessary duration." Where then does Bazin expect to find this so-called freedom?

Almost in contradiction of his overzealous justification of the shot-in-depth, he writes: "Experience definitely proves that we must be careful not to identify the cinema with established aesthetic principles and, more especially, with any method or recognized form which the director feels impelled to use — to season his basic ingredients. The cinematic 'purity' or better yet (in my view) the cinematic 'coefficient' of a film must be calculated in terms of what cannot be conveyed in the same way by painting, theater, or in a novel." We could not have expressed it better.

In any case, the "collected" expression provided by a single static shot is not necessarily the effect of a shot sequence. The use of mirrors, reflecting the walls of a correctly framed field of view, has become part of current cinematic language since they were first used to effect by Henry Hathaway (*Peter Ibbetson*) and John Ford (*The Whole Town's Talking*). In one scene in the Ford film, playing on the disastrous resemblance of a shy middle-class citizen (Mr. Jones) to a mobster (Mannion), the former, who has just sat down at the back of a restaurant, is framed in midshot: he fills the left of the frame whereas, on the right, we see the whole of the restaurant reflected in a mirror. As he waits for his fiancée, he reads a newspaper and sees, on the front page, a photo of the wanted gangster. Intrigued, he takes off his spectacles and

looks into the mirror: the resemblance is uncanny. Meanwhile we see (in the mirror) another character come into frame who has also just read the newspaper. While Jones cleans his specs and puts them back on to continue reading, the other man looks at him aghast, gets up, and hurriedly rushes out of shot (to go and phone the police).

The difference is obvious: though we are seeing the whole of the restaurant, we are seeing it on a flat surface forming the background of a *tightly framed* setting. Whereas a total field of view would underline the relations between various points in a space shown in its entirety, here, on the contrary, everything is hemmed in, constricted. The space is canceled out, since it is its reflection we see. Depth is not *presented* but *represented*.

Leaving to one side the obvious symbolic role which mirrors can play in certain films (split personality, schizophrenia, etc.), the effects of a reflected image are justifiable only if they enable — as they do in the above case — the audience to *discover* an allied action or unexpected event which suddenly affects the main action; as long as they allow the integration in a single shot of the object and subject, the observer and observed, thereby emphasizing the instantaneity of the vision. This is true of *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (by John Ford), in the scene after the judgment has been given when Mrs. Mudd learns that her husband has been sentenced to life imprisonment. A warden pins a list of convicts onto the prison door: on the left we see in close shot the bulletin board with the prison guard (seen from the waist up in three-quarter profile on the righthand side) opening the panel. He pins up a piece of paper with a list of names clearly visible and closes the panel. The reflection of Mrs. Mudd's face appears in the panel glass as she vainly tries to hold back her tears. Only a shot of this kind, revealing observer and observed together, could provide such an instanta-

neous dramatic force, suggesting the presence of Mrs. Mudd without showing it directly. Shot-reverse-shot would have *stretched* this moment in time (however short) and involved a movement in space—which would automatically have dispelled the dramatic tension created in this case by the single shot.

As well as the obvious attributes we have identified in the total field and in tracking shots and by the fact that signs no longer appear as though in inverted commas, the real freedom of the audience resides in being able to discover signification in objects or see them exclusively as objects. The filmmaker trusts in the audience's intelligence: it is free to think *about* or *around* what it sees but not to choose *from* what is presented for it to see.

Now, there have been critics who have tried to assess the whole of the cinema in terms of these techniques. One of them writes: "we know that, outside aesthetics, accumulation is not really possible nowadays in the cinema; fair enough if, in the background of a wide angle, objects can be indicated which might have been isolated in Von Stroheim's day." Apart from the fact that this critic seems to bemoan the fact as well as judging it necessary, I should like him to explain why objects which *might* have been isolated in Von Stroheim's day could not be isolated nowadays (without degenerating into aestheticism). It is doubtless because it would contravene the rule of total field of view. But who has ever raised this into an absolute rule? Should a film be constructed on the basis of abstract formulae or impose its own rules and laws, using the resources necessary for the expression of a predetermined content? For what reasons should one be forced to suggest details *in the background of a wide angle* when perhaps their proper place is in the foreground? If this is not aestheticism—this *slavish* adherence to a given formula even

when it is unnecessary (on the pretext that it is fashionable and there *can be no alternative*)—then what is it?

Though the coming of age of the cinema has brought with it new methods (mostly in line with new technical advances) and though these techniques add new weight to a cinematic syntax becoming daily more complex, these are merely techniques available to the filmmaker as and when he wishes. Their value is uniquely dependent on the part they are made to play, and only when they are used incorrectly or unimaginatively do they become outmoded.

A technique could never be deemed superior to any other except insofar as it gives an expression a force or signification it could not have produced in any other way. And though it is always damaging to a film to use a technique gratuitously, it is equally wrong not to use it in circumstances when it is logical. It is therefore absurd to use one to the exclusion of the others (except in very unusual cases) or to use a more complicated technique when a simple one might produce an equally acceptable result. *All other things being equal, virtue lies in being simple and concise.*

We can be sure of one thing and this is that the sole aim of these new techniques—shot-in-depth or tracking shot—is to structure space according to a predetermined signification. And this fact enables filmmakers to join and extend all previous techniques—notably Expressionism, which in many respects is the very antithesis of the new techniques.

In fact, the main purpose of film, at the level of the shot (or shot sequence), i.e., at the level of the "cells," has been and always will be to structure space. But, just as space was once "constructed" using techniques outside film such as painting or architecture (producing the required signification through a "fixed" decorative composition, albeit containing movement), so the new

values are integrating mobility and duration into the film lexicon.

Instead of being architectonic or plastic, spatial structures nowadays are dynamic and psychological. The organization of space is less concerned with the arrangement of lines and volumes than with the relative positioning of characters and objects, with the mobility of the characters and the camera—with the effect that the composition of a space dissociated from the duration it contains is being replaced nowadays by the structuration of real "space" and "time."

Expressionism has been mentioned with regard to *Citizen Kane* and Orson Welles's other films. And rightly so. But though plastic values play an enormous part in these films, they contribute to rather than detract from the mobility of the film. Moreover, they are only values *among* others, equally important—perhaps more so. Indeed, the overall style is a kind of *psychological Expressionism* whose elements are the characters, sets, and objects, considered in the *mobility* in time of their relationships. Space and time are merely the simple relationship between content and container; they compose a homogeneous entity whose integrated component parts are mutually determinative.

Of course, the masterpieces of the silent screen and the period before 1940 had achieved this space-time unity, but psychological developments (except ones of very short duration or none at all—which was most often the case) were almost always translated by a series of successive phases, "slices of time," which were themselves relatively static. Time was "chronology" rather than "experienced duration." Now, it is this duration "in the process of happening" which the contemporary cinema tries to encompass—a duration which, before Wyler's *Jezebel* and Welles's films, had not really been attempted, except in Von Stroheim's *Greed* and King Vidor's *The Crowd*.

CinemaScope

There is not much to say about CinemaScope except that the commotion which greeted its advent in 1953 was rather short-lived. The product of a technical invention made some thirty years previously (patents were taken out by a Professor Chrétien around 1920), its interest lay in widening the screen ratio, whose proportions were quite pleasing in the days of the silent cinema (1×1.55) but with the appearance of sound and the need for the soundtrack were squeezed into the 1×1.37 ratio—almost a square (what we know as the "academy format"). And yet, though it opens out the space and frees the director from certain obligations due to the restrictions of the field of view, the extreme width of the CinemaScope screen generates not particularly aesthetic proportions (1×2.55). What is more, however good the anamorphic lens, the optical distortion imposes constraints which sometimes result in a lack of photographic "definition." Thus it would seem that the main interest of CinemaScope has been in allowing the frame to be widened without changing the film format, in other words, without having to change all the projection equipment in cinemas. However, the large format (70-mm), first tried in 1931 and eventually produced in Todd-AO, seems to have a much more stable future (though perhaps not immediate, on account of the need to alter projection equipment and cameras). The 1×2.22 format is better proportioned, and the image, since there is no distortion, is at all points perfectly in focus. We believe that the best formulae—at least the most harmonious—are those around the 1×1.80 ratio. Moreover, it should be possible to obtain a similar enlargement by halving (on 35-mm) the height of the frame which would then cover two instead of four sprocket holes.¹⁰

Now that these techniques are pretty

universally used, we may say that they change none of the "dialectic" conditions of film (though they do introduce a certain number of rather valuable possibilities). The interest of Scope would be secondary were it not that it opens our minds to the purely spectacular possibilities of film. And without wishing to be deprecating, we must admit that from the aesthetic point of view, the contribution is limited. Most important, this format allows the field of view to be organized *in depth* without having to resort to special lenses.

Framed in the normal way, a close shot (of a person or object) fills the screen (whence its isolation), which precludes the possibility of exploiting the various different planes, there being no other shots. Now, wide screen enables the director to stack up a series of actions, characters, or movements, from the extreme foreground right into the background—and this is why it is of such importance. Clearly, Scope (with a widest aperture of f4) precludes the use of the various kinds of distortion possible with wide-angle lenses, and yet it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the 70-mm frame will some day find a way around the problem.

If there is any specific shot which is impossible in Scope, it is the *isolated* closeup. We have seen that this is irrelevant as regards detail and rather useful as regards everything else. Moreover, when it is required, the filmmaker can always use part of the set as a mask (Ophuls was one of those who used this device).

Marcel Pagnol deemed the talkie to be the end of cinema and the birth of an art consisting in the recording of dialogue or plays. History proves him right. Bazin saw a great value in the use of the wide screen in that, "coming after the shot-in-depth, it has been more successful in abolishing, once and for all, editing as the main element in cinematic discourse." When Bazin says

"once and for all," he is talking of a period of a couple of months or so, for when genuine filmmakers started experimenting with it, they showed that it could lend itself to editing as easily as to any other technique. We have seen that if there is less and less fragmentation nowadays, it is only because of a certain structuration of the film space—which Scope allows but does not *impose*. It is possible to imagine a film constructed on the editing bench or comprising extreme closeups. Bazin is right in thinking that editing is not the be-all and end-all of visual expression; but to deduce that this "relates to the poverty of the classical image forcing the director to make mincemeat of reality" is to see the image merely in terms of the lenses without depth we mentioned or in terms of an exclusive use of closeups. Wide or narrow, the frame is still a frame. And whichever it is, it will always involve a certain degree of fragmentation—just as its limits impose a certain degree of organization.

Fascination and Distantiation

We saw that passivity would be unavoidable were participation a phenomenon which completely suspends the audience's consciousness—as happens, for instance, in mimesis. This is why "projection-identification," which serves as the basis for Edgar Morin's theories supporting the unconscious point of view (but not accepting pure mimesis), is some way removed from what we understand by "projective association."

As far as we can see (and we have said it before), the audience before the screen "realizes" in its imagination situations it would like to know or experience—in the same way as the little girl playing with her doll realizes situations she wants to happen. Obviously the unconscious has a lot to do with this phenomenon; but though the audience is not altogether aware of what it

is doing or why it should be acting like this, it is at least aware that it is participating: it may be unconscious of the mechanics but not the consequences. It is something like dreaming or daydreaming: an idea suddenly comes to mind. I do not know how or why, since it has not been brought there by my will. Produced by me, it is the expression of some inclination—but this is quite unconscious. And yet, if I follow the idea through or in some way let it take over, I am perfectly conscious of doing so.

In fact, "passive consciousness" in the audience is a myth. It is only seen as "passive" because the feeling of security provided by film enables the audience (as a general rule) to avoid the needs of anticipation. However, this avoidance does not entail avoidance of any other mental activity. Participation involves the conscious acceptance of the consequences of an unconscious but *necessary* action which, however obscure, is still an activity of the mind.

Yet, as René Zazzo points out, "The apparent facility of the cinema spectacle and its incredible power over the emotions give it a suggestive force which makes it unnecessary for some, difficult for others, to sustain any real effort of judgment. The feeling of reality which an audience takes from the screen may give, even to cynics, an impression of truth—which is the first step toward an intellectual as well as emotional involvement with the vision the film gives them of the world" (*Le Cinéma chez les adolescents*).

Though Zazzo's book is a study of children's mental attitudes to film, it is easy to see that this state of mind (difficult to disprove) represents the state of mind of most of the audience. But emotional involvement, the relative absence of judgment which that involvement implies, is not synonymous with passivity. The conditions of credence or receptivity (even, if you like, intellectual laziness) are not necessarily

caused by this state of hypnosis, particularly since this "laziness" becomes apparent only at the level of judgment, (i.e., thinking *about* a given piece of information), not at the level of the mental processes which organize and structure the information in its ideative development.

From the pedagogical point of view, i.e., from the attitude of the child to film, we heartily concur with the rather ironical observations of a professor of philosophy, Yvon Bourdet:

We might observe, in a lighthearted vein, that what most irritates traditional teachers and conventional parents about the cinema is what they themselves strive (often desperately) to achieve, i.e., the spontaneous attention of the children. If the cinema renders a child still, is it not putting him in the sort of conditions a teacher tries to create in order to analyze a poem or work out a mathematical problem? Fortunately, however, that is where the resemblance ends; only the external attitudes are similar; the attentive child listening to the proof of a theorem sits still in order to participate in an intense mental effort, whereas the stillness of an audience in the cinema is akin to sleep!

We may say right away that this "proof" of the evil fascination of the cinema is not to be found at the level of the language of cinema; our only (justifiable) concern is to demonstrate how this fascination operates and to catalogue the supposed self-evident results.

. . . To begin with: we should accept that adolescents are "impressionable" and "receptive." It is precisely these factors which are the basis of a child's formation and education. Do teachers complain of children's "receptivity" when they are trying to make them respond to Shakespeare, admire Pasteur's discoveries or appreciate a Greek temple or Pythagorean theorem? Have we not always preached the need for enthusiasm, for emotional understanding, for the appeal

of heroes? Do those most eager to criticize the cinema's "fascinating effectiveness" and its suspension of the critical faculty make an appeal to that same critical faculty when they trot out their life of the Blessed Virgin or the victories of Napoleon?

. . . Besides, if film did create this automatic involvement, as has been claimed, it would be pointless to deplore the fact: the only essential would be to produce "good" films. However, the problem is apparently not quite as simple as that and there is an obvious confusion here between effect and cause. If films are as they are (as in literature), it is not the filmmaking process which is at fault . . . The cinema merely makes happen what would happen in any case. "Bad" films are bad only for those predisposed by the experiences of the life imposed on them. Zazzo has proved this in a survey conducted over 14,000 adolescents (girls and boys) between the ages of 14 and 18 at school or apprenticeship in Paris (11,000) and Amiens (3,200). Zazzo was able to conclude from this that "the cinematic experience, the place the cinema occupies in the life of adolescents and the attitudes it provokes vary considerably from one sociocultural milieu to another." And in such a clearly defined way that, from the reaction of a given group, one may deduce its social class.

. . . Moreover, the phenomena of projection and identification are not specific to the cinema; they are observable in all kinds of spectacle, from the theater to religion, even teaching (this has more to do with sociology or psychology). Spectacle may be used either to induce a kind of hypnosis or, on the other hand, a lucid participation—as Bertold Brecht attempted to explore in the theater. . . . Not only does the cinema (and all the other arts) enable the audience to be alienated from what it is seeing but it also has specific qualities particularly stimulating to the mind. It is not sleep it induces but relaxation." (*La Prétendue passivité du spectateur*)

In spite of this, we do not believe that the theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* expounded by Brecht in *A Little Organum for Theater* lends itself naturally to film or, for that matter, theatrical representation. For Brecht, in fact, the audience (in the theater) seem "deprived of all activity and are, as it were, unconsciously manipulated." The only concern of this "sleeping audience moved by nightmares" is to be able to "exchange a world of contradictions for a harmonious world, an unknown world for a world of dreams." And in order to create a context where the spectacle is not "magical" but "critical" and allow the audience to be "lucid" rather than "entranced," Brecht prescribes: "the nonidentification of the actor with his role, so that he can stand outside it and indicate its fictional nature; the fragmentation of the play into a succession of tableaux with the effect of preventing the audience from "throwing itself into the story as into a stream"; the *Chorus* who forewarns the audience as to what is about to happen . . . etc. All nostrums which do nothing but sap the lifeblood of the theater. For, in the final analysis, apart from the fact that "magic" (Shakespeare, Racine, or whoever) has never paralyzed the audience's critical faculty or its "active consciousness," the purpose of a play is to create or express ideas or feelings through an action whose development "carries the audience toward a specific objective" without which it has no basis at all. The audience seems "manipulated" since it is being "led"; but this happens only if it complies; and the supposed "suspension of activity" is only an illusion. In particular, this way of assuming the audience to be a "medium" made, through the magic or words and pictures, to swallow anything and everything implies a characteristic presumption, and the desire to safeguard one's "critical independence" is evidence of a massive contempt instead of the respect which is claimed.

There is no need for the actor playing Napoleon to make me understand that he is not Napoleon, merely an actor playing Napoleon; this I already know. Yet if he spends his time telling me this, he cannot expect me to believe in the representation he is giving me, and if that is his intention, why bother with the representation in the first place? If he forewarns me of what he expects me to be surprised to learn, why does he pretend that he is surprising me at all? The supposed "demystification" of the audience creates an even greater mystification: demystification itself.

The justification for all this is quite simple: Brecht is not really a playwright in the strict sense. For him, theater is not a means of suggesting, expressing, or signifying ideas via a dramatic action followed through for its own sake but a platform: a means for putting ideas into "action" under the pretense of a drama itself devoid of any intrinsic interest. The audience is not meant to achieve reason through emotion; by instilling emotional power into the audience's reason, the playwright makes a direct appeal to it. It is not theater but social didacticism on stage. The playwright's intention is not to make his audience believe in the drama but in the ideas, which is why there is no place for "theatrical illusionism," it having been superseded by an appeal to pure thought, "direct lucidity". The crux is knowing whether the audience is convinced by the validity of the ideas expressed or by the playwright's eloquence; and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that here too there lingers a trace of mystification. Words themselves are not exactly neutral.

One can be in total sympathy with Brecht's social purposes without being taken in by his distantiation, without assuming that the ghost of lucidity is a principle of pure reason.

Whatever the case, though the perspec-

tive of theater can be kept more or less within a representation which has constantly to betray itself in order to escape from the drama it is staging, the needs of the cinema operate in the reverse direction. As Jean Carta points out, "Film fascination begins when we start to believe that what is happening on the screen is actually happening, when the accident or death being described is a real accident or death." However, when he adds, "It would seem possible to resolve dialectically the contradiction between the spellbinding powers of the image and the need for human beings to break the spell," we understand with him that the audience must be distracted from an often overwhelming alienation; however, to break the spell, there is no need to resort to Brecht's distantiation – which is achievable only through contradiction or denial of the audience's belief in what is represented.

We saw how the moving camera and the shot-in-depth may facilitate freedom of judgment. More obvious objectivity is achievable only by bringing the present and the past into conflict, when commentary is used as a kind of consciousness of the events as they take place. Such is the case with *Hiroshima, mon amour*. We shall come back to this aspect when we examine the role of speech – which, in similar conditions, may be of paramount importance. When the text casts doubt on what the image proposes, when it delivers the filmmaker's direct judgment of what is being represented, then we have Brechtian distantiation and evidence of its destructive effect.

To quote an example given by Jean Carta: "When the same sequence in *Lettres de Sibérie* is presented three times, each with a different commentary, the 'wily Oriental' described by the enemies of the regime becoming, in his friends' words, an honorable Kolkosian to be changed in the third version

into how Marker saw him (and none of them being the objective truth), we are led to distantiate ourselves from the image in order to judge its relativity," he is on the wrong track, in our view. In fact, not only do I stop believing in the objective reality when it is presented to me like this but the supposed freedom of judgment offered me prevents me from thinking freely.

If I am inclined to believe that the man in question is an honorable Kolkosian, then the director's *imposed* irony disorients me; and the same is true if I choose to take the viewpoint of the enemies of the regime. If I agree with the filmmaker, I am prevented by him from making judgments "of my own" about what he is presenting, about the judgments he is sharing with me. If I do not agree with him, this also elicits a reaction extending beyond my own train of thought. So where is my freedom? In any case, the filmmaker's text, "pumping" the image up into an interpretation which, for all its ambiguity or irony, remains a simple interpretation, antagonizes me to the limits of tolerance, since my supposed freedom has become merely the effect of an insidious mystification. The only freedom he can allow me in the circumstances is to shut up and retire behind the "document" he is showing me, maintaining his freedom to present what he wishes as he wishes (always assuming his intention to be relative objectivity). I am willing to accept the subjectivity of his vision but not of his thinking; if I were to accept his thinking, there would be no more to think about; the thinking would already have taken place.

Be this as it may, there is no contradiction between the spellbinding power of the image and a certain freedom of judgment. As many philosophers have proved, it is not possible to act and judge one's action at the same time (it can be done immediately afterward). Consequently if, in Cohen-Séat's words, "in the moments the

spectator is participating, he ceases to be the spectator of his participation" (besides the fact that this proves conclusively that participation is an *act* and therefore the opposite of hypnotic passivity), we must admit that participation is not constant. However, just as the act I perform in life does not stop me passing judgment on it, so my participation in a drama does not stop me assessing its intelligibility and the aesthetic values which affect my impression of it. Only when it is complete can I reflect on the act in which I have just participated. However short, the time on which the action "hinges" enables me to make this almost instantaneous judgment. I am both *inside* and *outside* the action; I can distance myself and become directly involved without ever losing my critical faculty, which—contrary to what is said—is not inconsistent with willing participation: it does not "resist" it but rather controls it. My active lucidity is not detached from my participation; it is grafted onto it.

Since what I associate with the hero is my own imagined Self, a secondary Self, I inevitably separate the two, constantly bearing in mind that he is *he*, i.e., someone else; a similar Self who, at the same time, is not myself. Consequently, deep down I know that I am participating and thus have the choice of not participating. My optimal participation is when I am in control of the event in which I am participating, capable at any moment of opting out.

It is a fact that film fascination resists any regular voluntary control and that this control is less the effect of personal vigilance than a relaxation brought on by the film. But who can take in the whole of a work of art at one go? A poem or symphony must be read or heard more than once. And this is no less true of film (nor should it be); a film of any quality must be seen more than once for any sound judgment to be made of it. The participating

attitude is always altered by a critical attitude on the second viewing.

All this boils down to the fact that spellbinding is caused by a sort of seizure of our minds produced by what might be called the "hold of the unknown." Since it is always being surprised, our anticipation is as attentive as it is paralyzed. In a sense, it does not really matter which it is, since we know that the action contained in the film has no consequence in reality. Our reactions are even more limited for the fact that as an activity "with the job of confronting actual reality," our anticipation proves useless. And yet it is our anticipation which enables us to "dominate" the imaginary action. Overwhelmed by it, we are paralyzed by its very existence. But again, this paralysis in no way suspends our capacity for thinking. Our judgment is free—but free to work on "what has already been decided" or, at the extreme, on "something in the process of happening" over which we have no control: *we cannot prejudge the direct outcome of these actions as though they were our own since they are not our own even though we experience them as such.* Film fascination is nothing more than the effect of this phenomenon, but participation, of which it forms a part, excludes for that very reason the distantiation which it presupposes. The impossibility of a truly subjective camera will show us that this is so.

In the meantime, it is not hard to see that to be spellbound by a film is in direct proportion to the interest in the represented drama and the inability to anticipate the outcome of the drama. As soon as we know what is going to happen and how it will happen, spellbinding is replaced by pure aesthetic pleasure—given the right kind of film. In the case of a masterpiece, the pleasure itself can weave its own spell, but a spell of a totally different kind with totally different results.

The hold that film drama has over us is

in inverse proportion to our capacities to foresee what is going to happen. Obviously this hold involves our judgment but does not suppress it, any more than the impression of inevitability which at the same time clearly indicates in what respects the judgment may be redundant or impracticable.

Yet we assume that the hold of the drama is related to the spectator's mentality. His freedom of judgment (also the validity of his judgment) depends entirely on his maturity, his culture, and, perhaps even more particularly, his acquaintance with film language. In the final analysis, if the impression of reality produced by a film may determine in immature minds the belief in actual reality which Zazzo describes, it is certainly because the spell woven by the film clouds their judgment. *Yet this would not be possible without their willing consent.*

Film hypnosis (about which we hear so much) exists only insofar as the spectator is lazy. It is not the consequence of any particular aesthetic form. The only difference—as we have said—lies (according to the narrative technique used) in the impression of a reality "which is already complete" and a reality "as it is actually happening." True, the latter form makes it easier for the spectator to exercise his judgment, but the former does not make it impossible.

Subjective Camera

The consequence of a certain choice, the film image is always colored by subjectivity. Yet this subjectivity comes from the filmmaker, the showman or storyteller. Projected onto a screen, the image is presented "as an object," which is why it may be described as objective—particularly since, relative to the represented drama, it is objective. What the camera sees is what an invisible audience would see were it capable of moving instantaneously into different

positions and looking at objects, scenes, and characters from several successive points of view.

Yet what the camera sees may also be what the characters in the drama see. This is what is called the *subjective* view, since it allows the audience to "take the place" of the heroes, to see and feel "as they do." Doubtless the terms *personal* and *impersonal* would be more accurately applied to this type of image than *objective* and *subjective*, but since the latter have become widely used, we should employ them, accepting them for what they are worth. Besides, it was only gradually that the camera's viewpoint became identified with the viewpoint of the actors. At first it was merely the reverse angle of a big facial closeup: the frightened look on the heroine's face was explained in the next shot by the cause of her fright, but seen "through her eyes" as though the camera had suddenly taken her place.

It would seem that it was in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* that this form made its first screen appearance. It may possibly have been used previously, but only in *Broken Blossoms* and other films of the time (1919) did it become conscious of its effectiveness. It gained ground in Abel Gance's *La Roue* (1922), particularly in the "blind Sisif" episode where the engine driver, temporarily blinded by petrol in his eyes, looks at familiar objects within his reach and no longer recognizes them. The sequence shows us Sisif picking up his pipe, fingering it, and bringing it up to his face (descriptive shot), then the pipe (in big closeup) as he sees it, i.e., blurred and out of focus (analytic "subjective" shot), then several other images of the same type showing Sisif looking at an object and then the object as "seen by him."

It was not until *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924) and, in particular, *Variety* (Dupont, 1926) that the subjective image passed into the language of the cinema, when the

"objective-subjective" or "onlooker-looked upon" equation became identified with shot-reverse-shot, both being used more and more extensively. However, it can be said that it was Abel Gance with *La Roue* who was responsible for the revelation of the subjective image, just as he was for the discovery of rhythm (in the musical sense). From that moment, the first theoreticians—Jean Epstein in particular—seized on the event and elevated it into a basic principle. Epstein wrote in 1921:

The sort of drama I would like to see would take place on a merry-go-round or (to be more up-to-date) a Waltzer.¹¹ The fair below would gradually become more and more blurred. Tragedy centrifuged in this way would release its photogenic qualities, adding the sensations of giddiness and gyration. The sort of dance I would like to see would take place successively in the four points of the compass; then, through the use of a pan or a revolving stage, the room as it might be seen by a couple dancing. Clever editing of a series of shots would recreate the life of the dance—twice: for the audience and the dancer, objective and subjective so to speak. I would like to be with the character—not behind, in front, or beside him but inside him; I would like to see through his eyes; I would like to see his hand coming out from under me as though it were my own hand; I would even like black leader to be cut into the sequence to imitate my eyes blinking. (*Bonjour cinéma*)

This book was published in August 1921. *La Roue* was shown in November 1922. However, the film had been two years in the making and Epstein, though he had not seen rushes, at least knew what the film was about through his friend Blaise Cendrars, who was Gance's assistant. Moreover, a certain subjectivism had been developed some time before by Marcel L'Herbier in *L'Homme*

du large (1920) and in *El Dorado* (1921). The audience was seeing things "from the outside" but feeling as the hero was feeling. Descriptive imagery was, to some extent, becoming "subjectified": the Alhambra in Granada becomes distorted as the young painter looks at it, and if the dancer Sibilla has her mind elsewhere, it is she who appears "in a blur" and not what she is supposed to be seeing. This was the furthest extent to which the subjective image had developed at this juncture and Epstein (as we saw in a previous chapter) was to record this in his writings.

Fired by this knowledge, a vanguard of young critics, attracted by these movements to create a new cinema, took the merits of these techniques to an extreme and excluded everything but the "subjective image" and "pure rhythm." Zeal and youth were the only excuses for such naïve dogmatism. Yet for those of us who remember this period, there was a certain irony in the rediscovery of "absolute subjectivism" in Robert Montgomery's film (*Lady of the Lake*, 1947) which is merely a reworking of ideas which first saw the light of day in 1925!

Without laboring the point, we must not forget that there were some of us who had investigated these problems well before the end of the silent era. It would be ungracious of our modern critics to overlook the part which their elders played in these areas and wrong of me to ignore the debt I owe to my colleagues of the time: Pierre Porte, Jean-Georges Auriol, Paul Ramain, Jean Arroy, Michel Goreloff, and Pierre Henry, whose work was published in *Cinéma*, *Ciné Pour Tous*, and *Photo Ciné*.

Some of these observations were to be restated some twenty years later by Merleau-Ponty during a conference held at IDHEC. In March 1945 (reproduced in part in *Sens et non sens*) he writes notably:

It is true that filmmakers have on oc-

casion tried their hands at introspection—almost always unsuccessfully. Daquin, in *Premier de cordée*, makes us feel dizzy when he shows us a man clinging to a rock-face, desperately and aimlessly flailing the air with his hands—but we do not feel dizzy when, in an attempt to recreate the world of the hero, he photographs the cliff below swaying and out of focus. Malraux, in *Sierra de Teruel*, makes us feel exactly how poor the pilot's eyesight is when he is shown struggling awkwardly from his cockpit, but we remain unaffected by the cut to the pilot's point of view, showing a landscape obscured by gauze. Clarence's delusion in *Falbalas* would be even more disturbing had he appeared as if incarnated in his own vision and ravings; and Becker does not convince us when he shows us what Clarence sees: a wooden doll turning into a woman. "Internal life" is more forcefully presented if it is treated strictly as a pattern of behavior and if it appears in the world with which it remains connected, however distantly or closely.

Obviously, introspection can become a study as objective as the examination of other people's behavior. Watson and the Behaviorists have supplied ample evidence of this. And yet there are grounds for disagreeing with Merleau-Ponty.

First the examples he chooses are poor ones. People feeling dizzy never see the world swaying and out of focus. This entirely "internal" sensation is not of a particular "view" of things but of an impulse toward the void against which we fight desperately, producing a feeling of anxiety. This sensation might be translated simply by showing the void stretching out below, conveying anxiety through detailed closeups to bring out the hero's distress—such as his hand clutching at a flaky piece of shale, his foot scrabbling at the slippery rock-face, the rope quivering, etc.

Moreover, the subjective image is not

necessarily (indeed is never) the whole representation of a particular "subjective view" impossible to externalize. It is completely impossible to represent a mental image, since, having become visual, it ceases to be mental. An image is only "subjective" to the extent that it relates to a preestablished character. In other words, it is not the objectification of a subjective viewpoint but, quite the opposite, the "subjectification" of a certain objective representation. The purpose is not to translate an "actual" psychological reality (which, in any case, it would be impossible to determine) but to give the audience—through an aesthetic equivalent—the impression that it is seeing or feeling "as though" it were the character in the drama.

In the same way as the flashback does not show us what the hero is thinking but what he is thinking *about*, so the subjective image does not show us what he is seeing as he actually sees it but as he is *supposed to see it*, at least it should be arranged for such comparisons to be made. Now, though the images of blind Sisif show us objects such as might be seen by shortsighted eyes, out-of-focus images do not translate the blurred vision of a character with poor eyesight (unless his eyesight is as bad as the engine driver's in *La Roue*—which is not the case, since, with eyes as bad as that, he could not be expected to drive even a wheelbarrow!). The image is clichéd. However, even more clichéd is the image in *Falbalas* supposed to translate an "internal vision." It would be valid only if it were the image of a hallucination rather than a somewhat whimsical "fiction."

In any case, the subjective image is never more than a complement to another image. It has meaning only insofar as it relates to a character already objectively described and placed. I can see "what Pierre sees" only if I have already seen Pierre, and I can share his point of view only if I can relate it to him, recognizing it as *his*.

Film expression has to do with the constant interchange between the subject and object of a descriptive view to which the subjective image lends a personal angle. But the subjective image is incapable by itself of making us share in the impressions and sensations of a character whose place we might find ourselves taking, since it is not in itself subjective. This is why the "absolute subjectivism" to which we aspired at the time is an obvious impossibility. As Pierre Porte wrote, "It would be very interesting to construct a film on the basis of a continual subjective narration. I would love to see a film where the main character is never actually seen but is behind the camera throughout with his life seen on the screen constantly through his eyes" (*Une Loi du cinéma: Inventaire du cinéma*).

This was the idea, twenty years ahead of its time, worked out in Montgomery's *Lady of the Lake*. Barthélémy Amengual reminds us:

The detective never actually appears in this cops-and-robbers film, except when he is standing in front of a mirror—since this is how events take place in reality. If he is punched in the face, the fist fills the screen and blots it out. If he lights a cigarette, two hands appear on the screen and strike a match, then the cigarette and a cloud of smoke fill the screen. When we smoke, that is all we see. The camera becomes the actor. It acts out the drama. And since it is supposed to be our eyes—the image becoming *observation* rather than thing observed—(all the other characters who talk to the hero, look into the camera, i.e., into our eyes), we are supposed to be Montgomery. The film does not quite hit the mark but is interesting because it reveals the limitations of cinematic subjectivity. This absolute (and unfeasible) identification of the hero's point of view with our own overlooks the fact that aesthetic, imaginary participation requires that the audience make a

certain leap of faith. The continual avoidance of any image of the hero contradicts the vocation of the cinema, which must allow the man to *see himself*. Last (and by no means least) this bias of subjectivity can become reversed, in an odd way, into objectivity. Since it does not allow the director to use *equivalents*, the film is obliged to show scenes in long shot—doors, statues, staircases, in short everything, solely from the *outside*. (*Le Je, le Moi, le Il au cinéma*).

Obviously participation requires the audience to make a leap of faith; however, to say that the vocation of the cinema is to allow a man to *see himself* is true only in the most general sense. The audience member "sees" himself acting, as a man, through the actor. But the very fact that he projects himself onto the actor means that he is detached, independent, and it is precisely because he is independent that he is obliged to *associate* himself with the hero.

If I read in a novel, "I was walking down the street when I noticed Irene at her front door. I ran as fast as I could and caught up with her just as she started up the stairs," I personify the "I" in a being who is me. I do not see myself walking down the street, since I can never see myself, but I experience the state of "walking" in the image of a street. Even so, I do not experience it as a direct sensation. I integrate my memories into the ideas suggested to me by the words and thereby compose an imaginary world in which I am an actor. This imaginary world is *created*, constructed, by me.

In the cinema, on the other hand, the so-called subjective impressions are *presented* to me—as is everything else: the camera moves down the street, I move with it; it climbs the stairs, I climb with it. I thereby directly experience the sensations of *walking* and *climbing* (at least this is my impression). Yet the camera is leading me, guiding me; it conveys impressions not

generated by me. Moreover, the feet climbing the stairs I can see in the frame of the image are not *mine*; the hand holding onto the banister is not *mine*. At no point am I able to recognize the *image of my own body*. Thus it is obviously not me climbing the stairs and acting like this, even though I am feeling sensations similar to those I might feel if I were climbing the stairs. I am, therefore, walking *with* someone, sharing his impressions. And his face in the mirror, different from mine, underlines everything which separates us. It proves that the presence in the mirror does not belong to me but to *someone else* of whom it is the objective reflection. Thus instead of making me identify with him, these "subjective" images alienate me still further because they end up making me more aware than ever that the impressions I experience as mine have not actually been *experienced by me*. At no point therefore am I able to believe myself to be "in him." Indeed, only the director can do this—for the simple reason that it is he, Montgomery, who personifies the detective Marlowe. When he sees the film, it is *he*, Marlowe, *seeing himself* in the mirror, recognizing the image of his own body throughout the film. Yet this is true only for him. It would have to be this way for every member of the audience. So, posing the problem automatically reveals its absurdity.

Moreover, the sensations which form the *shared* experience must be attributable to that *other* person, who we presume is behind them for them to be understood, or rather for their motivations to be recognized. This other person must therefore have a concrete existence for us to be able to use *him* as confirmation of our impressions, since it is he who inevitably accepts them. Proved not to be an experience of *ours*, it can only be *his*. And yet (except for the mirror image) we never see him. As a living, active human being, he does not

exist for us. We are therefore incapable of objectifying the sensations we feel and know we feel entirely through an intermediary. What we are supposed to accept as a "subjective experience" thereby dissolves into a vague and indistinct "nonself." We no longer know *who* it is acting in this way. A total vacuum takes the place of the "Self," i.e., the absence of the person who, in the cinema, responds on my behalf. Whereas in literature I relate "I" to myself, in the cinema it is an imaginary or willed "Self" which I project onto someone else who therefore exists as *he*. We must not forget that participation confers a feeling of *artificial* and symbolic fulfillment. The feeling, the received impression, must therefore be made to coincide with the behavior which confirms them.

The subjective image can never be genuinely subjective, except in the case of memory. Then it represents a certain personal point of view and becomes the actualization of a past reality related to someone in the *present* with concrete behavior. Commentary, performing the function of interior monologue, emphasizes the distance between past and present and transfers the image into a reflexive interiority by giving it thereby the only genuinely subjective quality it can lay claim to: the presentification of a memory, the actualization of a thought, the objectification of certain personal impressions belonging to a past already experienced. It can never be direct subjectivity experienced in the here and now by a would-be "self-spectator" identified with an imaginary being who is neither *him* nor *me*.

We have said that the flashback merely shows us what someone is thinking *about* when he is remembering. What he remembers is always seen as it happened in previous sequences or as we might have seen it had we been present when it occurred. Whatever the case, it is the point of view of

an invisible witness, not that of someone remembering.

Now, here it is the act of memory itself which ensures the authenticity of the subjective viewpoint. It is no longer a chunk of the past brought forward into the present like a brick moved from one place in a building to another but the restructuring of the past through the memory. Memory is an action through which remembered objects appear to the consciousness, which is why memories are not present *objectively*, in the chronological order of the remembered events, but as the result of a personal vision, delving into the significant moments of a previous Self interrelated and contrasted according to circumstances related to thoughts *in the present tense*. The image is of thoughts directed toward completed actions flooding achronologically and in a different guise into the consciousness. The presence of a narrator and his interior monologue transfers into the past the evocations of the past which the flashback has brought into the present, forming part of his actual Self and giving us information about him. The past is integrated into the future.

Here also—since it always has to do with some sort of presentification—the data are part of an *anterior* present. However, this fascination with "what has already happened," with the inevitable train of events, imposed by films of a theatrical nature, is removed by films "of memory," because they give it *meaning*.

Obviously, interior monologue can be made to relate to an active present. Such is the case with *Brief Encounter*, when Celia Johnston, distraught after she and Trevor Howard have decided to end their affair, is forced to listen to the idiotic remarks of her gossipy friend in the train compartment and we hear: "I wish you'd stop talking—I wish you'd stop prying and trying to find out things—I wish you were dead." This

monologue, as B. Amengual correctly observes, "is included in the reality of the drama, in the action of the present tense, just as much as the gestures and words of the characters; it is not an *a posteriori* relationship. In the same objective realistic fashion in *Citizen Kane* and *Crossfire* the narrative in the first person does not carry the story forward; it actually forms part of the story" (*Le Je, le Moi, le Il au cinéma*).

However, though narration in the first person does to some extent subjectify the events being narrated, these are not necessarily related to a "personal" past. They may be events in which the narrator has not been particularly involved and to which he is related according to his point of view, believing it to be objective.

The first film of this type was *Thomas Garner* (directed by W. K. Howard in 1933). The action starts with the burial of a factory boss. After the ceremony, at which there has been a mixture of praise and blame, the dead man's secretary—also his childhood friend—describes his character, his attitudes, his "real" life, at least as he knew them as someone who never left his side. Past events are related achronologically, and the narration is constantly obscured by the action being described. The entire film is built on the "exchange" between the actual point of view of the commentator and the past events—with the commentary explaining, complementing or judging them.

Citizen Kane is again the model of the genre—and yet the two films are totally dissimilar. In *Citizen Kane* the hero's life is reconstructed through the memories of several characters, each of which reveals Kane in a different light. What is shown is not the hero as he actually was but the idea formed by his narrators of him at a particular moment in his past; an idea welling up into their memories and replacing the real character. The fact that several past events are remembered by different characters

means that the dimensions of time become part of the "psychological space" engendered by the conflict of many different *actualized* points of view. In *Thomas Garner*, Garner's portrait drawn by his boyhood buddy is just as subjective, but there is only one narrator. Its perspective is one of a perpetual displacement in time (six months ago—twenty years ago—two years ago—ten years ago—one year ago, etc.), a past whose moments, constantly interrelated, derive from a conflict between the episodes of a man's life and one's man's opinions of another.

In short, in *Thomas Garner* the perspective is unilateral, whereas in *Citizen Kane* it exists on several axes each oriented differently in different times. The network of situations converging to reconstruct Kane's life forms a sort of present tense encompassing a certain past. However, it is not the character who is encompassed in this way, merely aspects related to whoever is looking at him. We are not watching Kane's career but the career of four or five "duplicate Kanes": Kane-Thatcher, Kane-Susan, Kane-Bernstein, etc. The time described is related not so much to the hero himself as to the characters describing him, who objectify their own lives by relating them to him. The same is true of Thomas Garner. Yet Garner is not encompassed; he is "seen." It is the life of a single narrator being objectified. It is self-referencing. We follow the modalities of a man who tells his own story by describing his friend's life. There is only one course.

Whatever the case—seen by one or by many—the hero is always seen "from the outside." His objective reality is the subjectivity of those around. Indeed, this is the very subject matter of these films, notably *Citizen Kane*: "NO TRESPASSING" reads the notice on the wrought-iron gate to the grounds of Xanadu, and we do not trespass. Kane's being remains impenetrable.

Thus it is only through the self-examination of the individual, through his inquiry into his own past, that "true subjectivity" may, as we have said, find its expression. But this puts us into the domain of the psychology of memory.

Indeed (in *Hiroshima, mon amour*) the individual "telling his story" is capable only of relating time past to time present through a duration whose dimensions become those of memory. He thereby reveals his innermost Self through the aspects of remembering, but the image of his previous Self is inevitably a reconstruction made by him, a "representation" he creates of what he was previously and which is just as arbitrary as the representation we make of someone else.

The only perceptible reality is that of *experienced* time (i.e., "as it is being experienced") rather than the image by which duration appears to the consciousness which remembers it. Yet this reality cannot be expressed, either on the screen or in any art form, since it has no other form than that of our living being considered in its thinking and acting reality. It can be translated by equivalences, by making the audience *experience* a duration "actually experienced" by the characters in a drama whose action is shown to develop, *in the present tense*, before his very eyes.

There can be no other reason than this for the criticisms of intellectualism leveled at films of subjectivity. It is not possible to involve oneself, i.e., participate *completely*, in an experienced reality developing (though projected before our eyes) within a single consciousness with meaning only for it. Participation demands that reality have meaning "for us," in other words, it demands that as we directly perceive it, we should be capable of giving it a future of some sort. When "presentified" reality is shown as an act of memory, we stop being able to *grasp* the memory process and *understand* a con-

sciousness which derives its meaning from and by that act.

It would be interesting to explain characters by showing how these processes of consciousness work. Then we would have to consider, as in *Citizen Kane*, the reconstructions various characters might make of the same event but also relate the ideas a character may have of himself and his past with those of the other characters. In all events, it would seem that emotional participation is to be found—as in *Citizen Kane*—through the representation of not just *one* consciousness but several, i.e., through the effect of their conflict, which is a *concrete* action alien to subjective individuals.

We shall come back to these problems, which would appear to be more sharply resolved in the cinema than in even the most analytic literature. Yet, as Malraux reminds us, "the novel appears to retain one enormous advantage over film, which is the ability to pass into the interior of the characters." In fact, the interior of a character is as much a contrivance in literature as in the cinema. It is merely a fiction serving to define the character, to give it verisimilitude. If it did exist, the character created by the novelist might act or think completely differently from the way the author would like us to believe. Part of Pirandello's contribution to the theater is based on this inevitable conflict. It might be argued that certain characters in novels are truer and more authentic than real human beings. This we accept—and far be it from us to cast doubt on the powers of the imagination. Besides, fiction is achievable more easily in literature in the sense that the author puts himself "at the center" of a fiction which he creates in his own image, whereas in the cinema all he can hope to record are behavior patterns or at best individual memories, which inevitably become objectified in one way or another.

The main difference lies in the fact that

literary form is pure creation, whereas film creation is once removed, its primary material being a concrete reality. The objects creating and forming part of the work of art do so only as reconstituted and reorganized forms. Whereas in literature reality is virtual, in the cinema it is present "in the flesh." We shall see, moreover, that so-called interiority may be approached in much the same way.

The big drawback of the commentary film is the constant risk of its degenerating into mere illustration for a story where everything is described and explained through words. The director shoots a mute film and avoids any problems by resolving them in the text. Commentary is valid only when there is no intention to illustrate the commentary, to develop literary ideas relying on the images in order to promote itself rather than promoting the images by retiring behind them.

The Semisubjective Image

However it is interpreted, the sole purpose of the subjective image (or what is described as such) is to show us what one of the characters in the drama is seeing. However, since this subjectivity is merely visual, it seems preferable to refer to images recorded in this way as *analytic*, reserving the term *subjective* for images which create the memory relationships we have just described.

The opposite method of representation may be called *descriptive*, since the scenes are always observed "from the outside." A good example of descriptive cinema is the sequence in *L'Éternal retour* when Marc comes into Nathalie's bedroom. We see Marc on the landing outside the bedroom. We follow his movement in a pan as he walks right. When he stops, the camera continues his movement in a diagonal downward pan, as though following his gaze, until it reveals in close shot Nathalie's face

as she sleeps. We are thus seeing Marc *watching* Nathalie. It is as though the camera were saying: "Marc came into the bedroom and watched Nathalie asleep." It does not take his place in order to show her as he sees her. The purpose of showing Nathalie asleep is to complement the initial proposition. The eye of the camera, unrelated to either of the characters in the drama, is "impersonal." A breakdown of the sequence shot from the subjective viewpoint might have been as follows: (A) Marc (*as above*) appears on the landing. *The camera pans him as he moves to the right.* He stops and looks. (B) *The camera, taking Marc's place, tilting slightly downward from the landing, reveals:* Nathalie asleep.

This method of narration, constantly opposing—or juxtaposing—the objective and the subjective or, to be more exact, the descriptive and analytic images, has been the one most frequently in use since it was first established in *Variety* (1926). When it avoided the aberration of *Lady of the Lake*, the use of the subjective viewpoint was sometimes quite sophisticated. Yet even at its most successful it could only be sustained over the length of a single sequence as, for example, the "subjective tracking shot" which opens Rouben Mamoulian's *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932). The camera (taking the place of Dr. Jekyll) tracks along an avenue of expensive houses, stops in front of one, moves into the garden, up a flight of steps into the hallway, eventually ending up in the drawing room. The guests turn round or stand stock still as Frederick March, continuing the camera's movement (which has just come to rest), takes a few steps forward (apparently out of the camera) and also stops, with his back to the camera. The ensuing shots show the character among his guests. This long track introduces the audience to the action and at the same time throws it off guard: who is this character whose place we are taking? The reply is given after a while

when Jekyll is shown behaving in an unusual way.

The amazing subjective tracking shot in *Destiny of a Man* (Sergei Bondarchuk, 1959), on the other hand, shows a sequence of descriptive shots. The hero has escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp. We see him running across fields, hiding in long grass, and then, as night begins to fall, taking refuge in a forest. As the camera takes his place, we rush headlong through the forest, experiencing the feeling of freedom which he feels as a man on the run.

At the same time, it became abundantly clear that, though this method of eliminating one of the characters throughout a film enabled things to be considered from his point of view, it did preclude the perception of any potential reaction that character may have had at the same time. It is not possible to see both object and subject simultaneously.

Moreover, in order to "experience" the feelings of a given character, all the audience had to do is be *with* the character, alongside him. Seen objectively, the character could then assume the responsibility and motivations of a *shared* point of view. Thus instead of the camera *taking the place* of the character, there were images framing the hero, either from head to toe or from the waist up, following him as he moved, seeing with him and at the same time as him. The image remained descriptive but shared in the character's points of view.

This gradual but decisive change over a two-year period between 1936 and 1938 finally found its true expression in William Wyler's film *Jezebel* (1938). It is true that the "subjective image" as such did not become redundant. On the contrary, it gained additional significance by being out-of-the-ordinary, thereby making its identity more obvious when it was obligatory to see the subject. *Jezebel* itself, a landmark in the history of the cinema ignored by most contemporary critics,¹² offers a number of examples.

This film, whose actions take place in Louisiana at the turn of the century, is the character study of a woman whose pride and arrogance lead to her downfall—the downfall both of personal pride and "class" pride. Julie (Bette Davis) is very beautiful and very spoiled. She treats her family as she treats her horses, and she tries to dominate her fiancé, a young banker (Henry Fonda) who resists and bristles against the whims and tantrums of this autocratic, slightly crazy young woman who seems possessed by the devils of sin and scandal. Finally he breaks off the engagement and disappears for a year. Deep down and in spite of her violent outbursts, Julie really loves him. His behavior damages not only her vanity but also her deeper feelings. While he is away from her, she becomes introverted; her love for him matures. And now he is about to return. His arrival has been announced. (As yet she does not know that he will return with a wife.)

The sequence in question shows her in the drawing room of the huge mansion. She wants everything to be perfect for his return. So we see her arranging flowers and changing round the ornaments, flitting about, altering everything with feverish activity. The camera, framing her in midshot, follows her everywhere. She stops, moves away, turns, spins around in a sequence of short tracking shots punctuated with various pans. Thus, as we see her acting, we feel as though we are acting with her; moreover, the agitation of the camera movements, prompted by the nervousness of her movements, conveys her agitation to the audience, which thereby experiences the same feelings of impatience and irritation and shares in her emotion.

Whereas a descriptive shot might have shown her in a totally external way, the subjective image would have forced us to act in her place without actually being able genuinely to assume the feelings we know

to be hers. We can only share in her feelings to the extent that her behavior, objectively described, provides us with a *meaning*. Then we are able to *associate* with her and project *onto* her feelings which *might have been ours* in similar circumstances—which would tend to confirm our theories about the phenomena of perception. An image both analytic and descriptive resolves the problem very satisfactorily.

What is more, Wyler endows this semi-subjective camera with dramatic significance. In the first half of the film, Bernard (Henry Fonda) is dominated by Julie. Therefore Bette Davis has the more prominent role; the camera is constantly *with her*: static when she is static, following her when she moves. She is never with Henry Fonda: he is seen (from Bette Davis's point of view) approaching or leaving *her*, and she is framed throughout in midshot or else she stands in the foreground. In the second half, the tables are turned; Julie is dominated by Bernard. The camera, previously with her, is now *with him*; and it is Bette Davis whom we see (from Henry Fonda's point of view) approaching or leaving *him*.

Of course, the film does not exactly divide down the middle. Distressed by her fiancé's infidelity, Julie is in despair. Her wild nature takes the upper hand; she becomes a bitch; she tries to make her rival's life a misery and then provokes a duel, which leads to a death. Yet all the time she loves the man she is persecuting. In a yellow fever epidemic she nurses Bernard, sacrificing herself for him, willing to pay with her life for her past misdeeds. This change is made only gradually, however, as the characters develop.

Yet Wyler goes even further. In order to flout public opinion and to humiliate her fiancé, Julie decides to go to a ball wearing a red dress when fashion and social convention demand that a respectable young girl wear white. So when Bernard comes to

collect her and is kept waiting, he realizes she is playing cat-and-mouse with him. He goes up to her bedroom and knocks on the door with the handle of his cane. A chambermaid opens the door to him. We see Julie, gorgeously attired, putting the finishing touches to her makeup. Bernard pushes the door open, walks forward a few steps, and suddenly stops. Julie, turning toward him, says nothing (seeing the cane which he is nervously twisting in his right hand).

Once the descriptive long shot had been established, there was the problem of deciding to show either Bette Davis (from Henry Fonda's point of view), in which case his reaction would be shown but not the *object* of his reaction, or else the cane (from Bette Davis's point of view), in which case the cause would be seen but not the reaction. How to show both in the same shot, including cause and effect simultaneously, the immediacy of the moment preventing the use of shot-reverse-shot?—a shot which might be not merely descriptive but analytical as well. Wyler's solution was brilliant. It is more or less what might be called an *inverse subjective shot*. Setting his camera at floor level, behind Henry Fonda, tilted sharply upward in the direction of Bette Davis, he included in his frame: Henry Fonda's hand holding the cane (in extreme closeup) and Bette Davis's face looking at the cane, frightened by her fiancé's menacing attitude.¹³ Obviously the audience is not seeing the cane as Bette Davis sees it, since it is looking in the reverse direction, but it sees it *at the same moment she does* and in the same axis. In other words, without losing any of Julie's reactions, we can see, with the same intensity as she, the object with symbolic prominence in the frame.

The marvelous ballroom sequence during which Julie, embarrassed and covered with confusion, is forced by Bernard to dance with him while everyone clears a space around her as a sign of disapproval,

is a piece of pure poetry which we have no need to examine in this chapter. However, there is a camera movement in *La Dolce vita* similar to the drawing room tracking shot, when Anita Ekberg, accompanied by a journalist, climbs up the winding staircase leading to the top of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome. Her happiness as she climbs, then her breathlessness and panting are *faithfully* translated by the camera, which follows her, passes her, comes back to her, picks her up again and carries her along, etc.

We should perhaps note that descriptive shots are capable of betraying a certain orientation or intentionality. In this case, the viewpoint of the "invisible audience" becomes identified with the point of view of the filmmaker. This technique was used from 1919 onward by Griffith (*Broken Blossoms, Dream Street*), then by Marcel L'Herbier and Jacques Feyder (*L'Homme du Large, El Dorado, Crainquebille*). The sequences in *El Dorado* which we have already mentioned are the most convincing examples.

The only criticism we might make of this way of seeing—or showing—is that once reduced to subjectivity, it translates very little except the subjectivity of the filmmaker and certainly not that of the characters—which is why it fell into disuse almost completely after 1924 when the "subjective" shot became part of cinematic usage. In *Visages d'enfants* (1924), however, Jacques Feyder shows us objects as they are seen by children between the ages of six and twelve. The camera is set up only three feet from the ground: at a child's eye level (except when the image corresponds with what the grown-ups see); but this is already almost a form of subjectivity.

Now that it has been restored to us, "descriptive subjectivism"—which is the direct opposite of the analytic shot (or is, at least, completely different from it) makes it possible for "uninvolved" images to have meaning. The viewpoint of the "invisible

audience" is therefore no longer impersonal. Showing objects "from the outside" but from a special angle defining the temporary signification of the drama or the situation, the view of the camera is "involved." In other words, the choice of the angle allows the image to be composed without affecting adversely the authenticity of the recorded reality. "Subjectivity" is contained in the way of seeing, not in the composition of a more or less hypothetical reality. The symbolism of form—lines, planes, and volumes—previously achieved through the use of architectonic techniques aimed at constructing an arbitrary reality *in front* of the camera is now produced through the way space is structured. Depth-of-field is one of the forms of this meaningful description.

The interplay of angles is particularly significant in this respect; but far from being confined to one level, as some of our grammarians might wish, the resulting expression is always relative to its context—as indeed are all film significations.

It is customary to say that a downward tilt "crushes the individual or puts him at a moral or physical disadvantage" and that an upward tilt, on the contrary, "emphasises his power." As a general rule, this is true—but so also is the contrary. In *Citizen Kane*, where the camera is almost always set at floor level (at least when the action concerns Charles Foster Kane), we can see that this symbolism expresses the character's desire for power. But, at the same time, when we see Kane surrounded by the vast ceilings and monumental decor of his palace at Xanadu, we receive the impression of suffocation and crushing weight. He is a prisoner in a world which dominates him, and his desire for power is basically nothing more than an admission of his impotence. One of the few shots which show him free, happy, young, and in command of his powers is, in fact, an upward tilt: showing him standing on piles of newspa-

pers, in the press room of the *Enquirer*, celebrating his victory over the *Chronicle*.

To sum up, the camera position provides, according to its axial relationships with the objects represented, a more or less pronounced feeling of objectivity or subjectivity.

Generally speaking, there are four distinct types of image:

A. The *descriptive* (or "objective") *image*. The camera records the drama, movement, or action from an angle capable of giving the best possible description of the events being filmed. The point of view is quite simply the one best suited for an accurate rendering of the action, and the camera remains as impersonal as possible. No special attention is paid to detail or character to produce a specific symbolic signification. The only relationships existing between objects or characters are those involved by the situation which the filmmaker chooses to record as it is.

B. The *personal image* (descriptive subjectivism or "filmmaker's point of view"). The camera records events from an angle deliberately chosen by the director in order to compose *with* reality (direct or recreated) and structures space by giving it *meaning*. *Details or characters are emphasized by creating between them particular relationships which bring out, underline, or contradict the meaning implied by the psychology and the drama, thereby elevating certain particularly significant details to the level of signs or symbols.* This compositional form corresponds at the "realistic" level (concerned with the recognition of actual reality) with what, at the "unrealistic" level, are the compositional forms produced by the organization of a set stylized or interpreted by architeconic means (expressionism – pictorial images, etc.).

C. The *semisubjective* (or "associated") *image*. Retaining all the attributes of the descriptive image, the associated image *adopts* the viewpoint of a particular character

who, objectively described, occupies a special position in the frame (close shot, mid-shot, or right in the foreground). The camera follows him wherever he goes, acts like him, sees with him and at the same time. At the limit, the character in question serves as a go-between, his point of view coinciding with that of the director. This type of image might be called a *total image*, descriptive (through what it shows), analytic (identified with the character's vision), and symbolic (through the resulting compositional structures).

D. The *subjective* (or analytic) *image*. The camera takes the place of one of the characters, previously placed in the set. It sees the world in its place and identifies with its vision. Overexploitation of this kind of image – which tends to confuse the audience instead of enabling it to define the hero's behavior and place him very precisely in the geography of the drama – leads to the sort of aberrations we have already described.

The *total image* would seem to be the most effective of them all. Indeed, an image composed *with a view* to a particular signification is always more or less arbitrary. It presents itself as an objective recording of events, but its objectivity is merely a superficial illusion. From the scene of Susan's attempted suicide in *Citizen Kane*, we can see that the image is organized so as to bring the glass in the foreground into greater prominence; no one is looking from the camera's point of view.

It will be argued that since the "invisible audience" must be somewhere, why not there rather than somewhere else? Yet it *has to be there*, since if it were somewhere else the image would lose its meaning – at least the meaning it gains from being shot from that particular angle. The image lacks a certain justification: the *psychological coefficient*. Of course, there does not have to be a psychological coefficient. In the sequence in

question, it is all the more easily avoided for the fact that the presence of an alien observer—a nurse or chambermaid—would tend to intrude in a situation requiring the intimacy of the two protagonists. Nevertheless, since the director gains by hiding behind his characters, he must ensure that the structures he gives his images are backed up with a concrete justification. The psychological coefficient—the point of view of the character, crucial if required—fulfills this function and supports even the most symbolic compositions.

A concrete example will explain this principle more clearly. In *Broken Lullaby* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1931), whose action takes place in Germany some months after the First World War, we are present at a military parade. Even though they have been defeated, the "steel helmets" march on this Sunday through the streets of a Westphalian village. The streets are lined with onlookers. The camera, at waist level on one of the pavements, tracks sideways along a row of spectators but from behind them as though trying to slip through to get a better view. Suddenly it stops: it has found a suitable vantage point through a gap left by a one-legged man. The camera tracks forward until it frames, on one side, the man's leg and, on the other, his crutch and at the top the stump amputated at the thigh under which we see the regiment, with the band leading, march past. That is the "director's point of view," you might say, since it is obvious that the image has been composed *in view* of this signification; what the camera sees does not correspond with anything the onlookers are seeing; they would have to bend down or sit behind the cripple. But the next shot shows us, behind the soldier, another cripple—legless—sitting in a little trolley and taking advantage of the occasion to sell his shoelaces and ribbons. From time to time he darts his eyes fondly past the soldier's leg toward the street, while the

sounds of the marching, the music, and the shouts of the crowd form the acoustic background to the sequence. The whole symbolic architecture of the image *intended by the director* is thus integrated into the concrete reality and is a perfect example of a *total image*, film expression in its highest form.

As we can see, this expression is produced by the relation of two successive shots. It may be produced by a single shot when the director's viewpoint is introduced by the character in question. All Lubitsch needed to do to achieve this was to show (in a static shot or track backward) the legless cripple moving forward in his trolley, panning at the moment he stops so as to reveal the opening left by the stump, and reframing the man in the foreground so that the camera takes his point of view.

It would seem, however, that the former solution is infinitely preferable—with editing playing a not inconsiderable part. In fact, the image, presented initially with no justification, surprises us as much through its unexpectedness as through its symbolic signification. Cutting back to the shot of the legless cripple then restores the situation. It is like the weight on a seesaw suddenly shifting from serendipity to verisimilitude. Now, these effects contribute enormously to film expression: they keep our attention at the alert, they constantly surprise us and move the action—or meaning—forward through a series of dialectical progressions. The latter solution (which is merely descriptive) is far more commonplace, but from what we can tell, the choice between them depends fundamentally on the choice of narrative technique.

Oblique Images

As well as images with more or less justification, there are those with no apparent justification at all. For instance, the sideways-tilted shots ("Dutch tilts") which

at one time were all the rage. They are meaningless.

In fact, what happens if I lie *sideways on* is that vertical lines appear horizontal to me but the mechanism of constancy in my perception immediately restores the situation: I recognize and perceive the lines in their normal linearity because all the directions relative to the space around me constitute a reference point independent of the angle from which they are seen. I can move my body without changing top or bottom. If I see my bedroom from a lying-down position, I know perfectly well that the position is mine. I am conscious throughout of my own body and of the position it occupies in space, inasmuch as the coordinates of my position remain permanent. *Seeing* vertical lines from a particular inclination does not alter my *perception* of them. If a room looks to my eyes as though tilted with my body, I do not recognize or perceive it as such. On the other hand, if a camera is inclined and then brought back to the vertical, it presents a sideways-tilted image. Since the frame severs all connections between its content and external space, the image (whose angle of inclination is more or less acute relative to the vertical) does not correspond in any way with reality. The basic difference lies in the fact that in reality we *see* the space as inclined sideways, whereas in the cinema the representation of the space *presents* it as inclined sideways.

However, if, instead of lying on my side, I lie with *my back to the floor*, the ceiling appears to replace the floor but *there is still verticality*. If I roll over with a camera in my hand, the image which appears to pivot around a central axis does not strike me as unusual, since it is identified with normal perception. A particularly dramatic image of this kind can be seen in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* when the English soldiers on the battlements throw vast numbers of weapons down to their fellows below.

Perceptual compensation is always made along the horizontal axis, i.e., perpendicularly to an axis whose direction is defined by the axis of our body's symmetry linked to a series of coordinates which we choose as referents, and this correlation constitutes our "spatial level."

The giddiness we feel when we are seasick has very little to do with the vertical movement of horizontal lines (which at most gives a feeling of vertigo as on a swing) but rather with their rocking relative to the vertical. A simple proof of this is seen in shots taken from the air. When the camera records a plane looping around a horizontal axis but kept in a constant straight line, we see the earth falling away beneath our feet, the sky taking its place and then falling away before the earth, which returns to its original position. Perhaps we feel a little uneasy when we see this unusual image, but we certainly do not feel sick. On the other hand, when the camera films in a plane rolling, spinning, or diving, the earth turning below round the vertical axis very quickly makes us nauseous—more so on seeing the image in the cinema than actually being in the aircraft, through the isolating effect of the frame.¹⁴

"Constancy of shape and size," Koffka reminds us—also constancy of orientation relative to a given anchor-point—"must be related to the prelogical action through which the subject takes his position in his world. If a human subject is placed at the center of a sphere onto which are welded discs of equal diameter, one can observe that constancy in the horizontal axis is more perfect than in the vertical axis. For monkeys, on the other hand, for whom vertical displacement in the trees is as natural as horizontal displacement is for us on the ground, constancy in the vertical axis is excellent" (*Principles of Gestalt Psychology*).

We know, moreover, that the "spatial level" which enables the subject to fix his

orientation depends on coordinates relative to which his eyes perceive the world. One of Wertheimer's experiments proves this conclusively:

If we arrange for a subject to see the room in which he is sitting only through a mirror reflecting it at an angle of 45 degrees from the vertical, the subject first of all sees the room "sideways inclined." A man walking round the room appears to be tilted sideways. A piece of card falling through a doorframe seems to be falling sideways. The whole effect is "odd." However, after a few minutes, there is a sudden change: the walls, the man walking round the room, the direction of the piece of card return to the vertical. . . . The impression is as though certain objects (the walls, doors, and man's body), initially established as oblique relative to the given data, were assuming the role of providing the particular orientation, adopting the vertical and playing the role of "anchor point," thereby refuting the previous data.¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty, from whom these quotations are borrowed, says that

we must take care not to fall into the realist trap of providing directions in space for the visual spectacle, since the experimental spectacle is for us only (obliquely) oriented relative to a certain level and does not therefore provide inherently a new direction for top and bottom. . . . We maintain that "spatial level" is not to be confused with the orientation of one's own body. Though consciousness of one's own body obviously contributes to the determination of level—a subject whose head is tilted sideways, when asked to find the vertical with a piece of string, will hold it obliquely to the vertical (Nagel)—it is competing in that function with other areas of experience and the vertical tends to follow the inclination of the subject's head if there are no "anchor points" as, for instance, when the experiment is conducted in the dark. . . . Wertheimer's ob-

servations show how the field of vision may impose an orientation not shared by the body. Yet, though the body, as a mosaic of various sensations, does not define a direction, as an agent, on the other hand, the body plays an essential role in establishing the level. . . . The constitution of a spatial level is merely one of the ways in which an integrated world¹⁶ is constituted: my body is in contact with the world when my perception provides me with as varied and clearly articulated a spectacle as possible and when my resulting motor intentions receive from the world the responses which they expect. This maximum clarity in my perception and action establishes a perceptual basis, a background to my life, a general context for the coexistence of my body and the world. . . . The possession of a body carries with it the power to change one's level and "understand" space, in the same way as the possession of a voice allows one to change one's pitch. The perceptual field is restored to the vertical and at the end of the experiment I can identify it without a context because I am living within it, identifying completely with the new spectacle and, as it were, making it my center of gravity. (*Phénoménologie de la perception*)

This "projection of the subject into the new spectacle" restoring the perceptual field to the vertical is in many ways similar to the phenomenon of "anchoring" on which the notion of mobility depends. Say I am sitting in a stationary train and there is another stationary train on the next platform. I do not know, as we begin to move, which train is actually moving. I have to resort to a reference point which I know to be fixed. Without a reference point, I have the impression that it is the other train which is moving—if my thoughts keep me inside my own compartment. If, on the other hand, what I see and think "carries me into the other train" (someone I recognize, a pretty face, etc.),

then I have the impression that it is "my" train which is moving. Anchoring involves (or implies) the immobility of the place which attracts my attention. It is by and from this that I regulate "for myself" the orientation of the movement.

I conducted, for my own interest, an experiment similar to Wertheimer's a few years ago at IDHEC which has the advantage of being easily repeatable. With an assistant I shot some film of the sea in calm weather, i.e., a perfectly horizontal stretch of water cutting the image at the halfway point.¹⁷ Since the experiment involves the whole image, taken as a perceptual form, all contents are equally valid, but for convenience it was judged necessary to use a clearly defined horizon. We continued the process by tilting the camera slightly to the right, so that the horizon was framed at the same point but at an inclined angle of twenty degrees. Once the film was developed, we set up a mobile screen tilted to the right at the same angle, with the projector tilted in the same way, so that the image in the frame of the camera and in the frame of the screen should coincide. Then we projected the film to various groups of students, who quite naturally noticed the unusual position of the screen but, since the projection took place in the dark, no referent outside the image could be seen during the experiment.

In the first case, the horizon (correct in the camera) and the horizontal lines of the frame showed an angle of twenty degrees relative to the ground. Now, after three or four minutes (according to the students) the horizontal was restored. The image, initially seen as tilted, was perceived as straight.

In the second case, the horizon (parallel to the ground during projection) appeared to be horizontal within a tilted frame. Now, after an even shorter period (around three minutes), the image was perceived as straight once more: a tilted horizon in a vertical frame. I might add that the majority of

the audience who tilted their heads slightly to one side in order to see "in the correct axis" were not aware of doing so. They thought they were in their normal position.

The conclusions we believe may be drawn from this experiment (repeated on several occasions) are as follows:

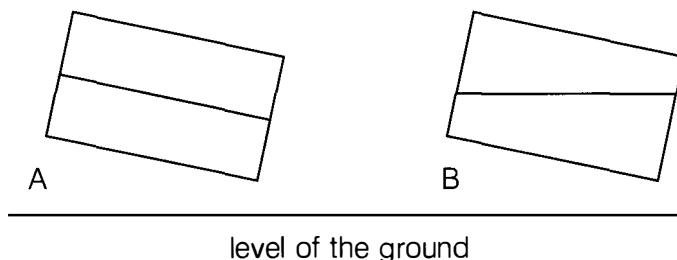
From the film point of view, the second demonstration is very important. It reveals the regulatory effect of the frame and how much the image—as a formal structure—depends on the frame (as we have maintained throughout). Whereas the line of the horizon, parallel to the ground, does not by itself confirm the tilt of the frame, once perception restores the frame to the vertical, it shows the horizon as tilted for the reason that the horizon is tilted relative to the frame.

From the psychological point of view, there is a change of spatial level and yet the represented world does not concern the audience. Though we project a certain "intentionality" onto this spectacle, we are not able completely to identify with it and transfer onto it our center of gravity, since it does not give us, as Wertheimer's mirror does, the image of our bodies and our immediate surroundings. We are not involved. Our motor intentions do not apply in the representation of a mediated world (except in our imaginations) and therefore we do not receive the responses which the real action might have received. We do not live the spectacle in the same way as Wertheimer's subject, of whom Merleau-Ponty writes: "he no longer feels himself to be in the world where he actually is, and instead of his real arms and legs he feels himself to have the kind of arms and legs he would need to walk and act in the reflected room." Moreover, though the spectacle is obliquely oriented relative to the previous level—that of the ground—this notion disappears very quickly. Our knowledge of it stops being related to a perception happening in the dark,

with the audience sitting not standing (since the verticality defined by the former position stops acting as a potential subjective referent).

At a superficial level, it would not be wrong therefore to associate spatial orientation with the visual spectacle since it is apparent that, in this case, the spectacle "itself" provides the new orientation from top to bottom.

tain reactions and the spectacle as the invitation to those reactions is established giving me tenancy of space and direct material power over my own body."¹⁸ Thus, if the spectacle does not "in itself" provide the top and bottom orientation, for the restoration of the image projected at an angle to happen there must exist (if only potentially) a similar sort of pact between the spectacle and me. A kind of exchange must begin to take place



level of the ground

In *A*, the line of the horizon, *tilted* relative to the ground, is ultimately perceived as *horizontal* relative to the verticality of the "restored" frame. In *B*, the line of the horizon, *parallel to the ground*, is ultimately perceived as *tilted* relative to the "restored" frame. We have seen that at the opposite extreme from Nagel's experiment, where the inclination of the head is what guides the inclination of the string, in this case—as for Wertheimer's mirror—the inclination of the visual field is what guides the inclination of the body.

However, "realist" conclusions do not necessarily follow from this observation, limited to a film effect, i.e., to the perception of an *image representing* a universe alien to the space inhabited by the audience. In *actual* experience, my body is *in contact* with the world: what matters for the orientation of the spectacle is not "my body as it actually is, an object in an objective space, but my body as a system of potential actions," the spatial level being set up when "a pact between my body as the power behind cer-

tain responses and the actor who actually does the responding, between my world and the world of the representation. The actor must *assume* my presence; in other words, I must project it intensively onto the represented world, since my body, as an *actual* agent, is in no way involved in this world. Thus projective association introduces the audience into a spatial level of the representation just as it introduces it into the represented universe: fiction involves reality.

Repeating our experiments—this time not with an empty landscape confirming or contradicting the orientation of the frame but with a dramatic action occurring in a natural location (the Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky*)—we noted that restoration to the vertical was even quicker (two or three minutes, sometimes less). Moreover, when the inclination was gradual and progressive (and, of course, simultaneous), including both projector and screen, i.e., the image itself, it became perceptible only beyond the angle where the audience became

aware that it was having to lean. Reality then took over from the illusion. In all our experiments, restoration beyond twenty-five degrees was practically impossible.

Color in the Cinema

The problem of recording and reproducing color, like that of recording sound, presented itself right from the beginnings of cinema. Yet even in 1895 there was a relatively satisfactory color-photographic process.

Without going into technical details (which, in any case, are outside the compass of this study), we should simply remember that, from the work of Niepce and Daguerre, Hertchell, Otto Wiener, and Seeböck attempted to photograph color directly by pressing pure silver chloride between two glass plates held together at the edges by wax (1839-40). At the same time, Edmond Becquerel, Robert Hunt, and Niepce de Saint Victor succeeded in making a series of heliochrome plates, using both electrolysis and chemical toning (1845-51). Unfortunately, these were unstable, fading after only a few hours' exposure to light. Poitevin achieved better results in 1866, and the work of Lippmann, Charles Cros, and Louis Ducos du Hauron eventually succeeded in producing a stable photographic image.

Taking the interferential method of his predecessors a stage further, Lippmann was able in 1891 to stabilize colors by suspending silver grains (several thousand per square millimeter) in a mixture of albumen and collodion (gelatine), while the poet Charles Cros (who invented the phonograph before Edison) and Ducos du Hauron, having discovered the principle of the antichromatism of filters and pigments, used a light-sensitive layer made up of colored pigments corresponding to the three primary colors, with each of the pigments (several hundred to the square millimeter)

being bleached out by absorbed radiations (1869-81). Taken up by Lippmann, who used a starch made from potatoes, this process was to result in the trichrome process developed around 1906.

Whatever else it may have done, color photography obtained by exposing light-sensitive plates or papers required such a long exposure that it put the process out of the reach of the cinema. The first films "in color" were therefore merely colored with stencils, a series of positive prints struck from the original negative being cut out with a pantograph. It was nothing more than a crude, unsophisticated coloring of black and white images (Pathécolor 1901). The first direct process was invented in 1907 by the English photographer G. A. Smith (one of the pioneers of the Brighton school) following the principles of trichromatics; but Kinemacolor (bichrome), which superimposed two images using selective filters, was abandoned around 1912 in favor of the trichromatic process developed by Gaumont (1911), inspired by the researches of Ducos du Hauron and better by far than all the others. Perfected in 1919, the process consisted of shooting three images simultaneously with three superimposed lenses, each carrying an appropriate selective filter. The three images (black and white on the emulsion) then became colored green, blue, and red by putting on a projection filter, and their superimposition into a single image rendered the colors as they were originally. It was from this moment that films could be described as "in natural color"—though they were natural only in the sense that they were obtained at the shooting stage. It was, however, a step in the right direction. Not until 1925, though, with the advent of Technicolor (Dr. Herbert T. Kalmus, 1917-19) and Keller-Dorian (patented by Berthon and Keller-Dorian) could color be regarded as a commercial proposition.

Technicolor was the first of the subtractive processes and was produced by exposing first two, then three different lengths of film, each with its own particular color-sensitive emulsions (or, to be more exact, one film sensitive to green and one film, in bi-pack, sensitive to blue on one side and red on the other).

The Keller-Dorian process used an emulsion into which a platinum matrix punched between 1,000 and 1,500 tiny prisms per square millimeter. Each of these microscopic prisms, receiving the beam of light according to the various colors of the spectrum, refracted color onto the focal plane. Unfortunately, this process—by far the best of them all—was such that no prints could be struck from the master. From the purely commercial angle, therefore, it was useless.

Between 1925 and 1940, attempts were made to refine the additive process using optical systems deriving more or less from Gaumont-Color (Francita, Hérault, Hudely, Dufaycolor, Rouxcolor, etc.) or photochemical processes deriving from Lippmann's (Agfacolor, 16 mm—very fine and tightly bunched grains of potato starch, dyed green, red and yellow, laid between the base and the emulsion, allowing the color to be separated and reconstituted). However, in the optical printer, the superimposition of three or four separate images resulted in an inevitable "color-fringing" effect, due to the difference in axis of the various lenses covering the same field.

For this reason, research continued in the line of the subtractive process. Far from being perfect, Technicolor was nevertheless used more frequently than the others (Agfacolor, Sovcolor, Kodachrome, True Color and Ferraniacolor, etc.), for the reason that prints could be made relatively easily. Using the matrices from the original negative as trichromatic stencils, as it were, perfect color stability was guaranteed, whereas,

with the chemical processes, the chemical transformation of the silver salts was bound, sooner or later, to affect the colors obtained through the photographic process. Even so, films shot in color were not really satisfactory. Their future was still in the balance until Eastmancolor came along in 1953.

In fact, Technicolor and most of the other similar processes require rather strong lighting in order to expose the three sensitive layers through the more or less complicated system of prisms. This uniform lighting, illuminating the set "from the front," killed any relief or shading. The effect created in terms of colors is one of flat tones reacting violently against each other. At best it is the type of color seen in stained glass windows, in constant conflict with the relief and volumes of the setting; at worst it is a kind of pretentious imagery with none of the simplicity or charm of real stained glass.

Fantasies in a fantasy world—particularly song-and-dance films—were perfectly suited to these tawdry splashes of color, since they were in keeping with the stylization of the sets; but, used in a realistic context, they succeeded merely in destroying even the most basic belief in the realism. In fact, color is never a uniform tone—like the red dress we have just described but a whole series of tiny multicolored bits which, reacting together, produce an infinitely subtle and variable overall sensation, a fact appreciated by the Impressionists, whose paintings are nothing more than a breakdown of the vibrations of light, revealing a greatly enhanced interaction of true colors.

Now, if the purpose is not so much to reproduce reality as to compose *with* colors, distributing them as a painter might over his canvas, then this is possible only to the extent that the color "rendition" is different from actual reality, since stylization imposed by default—or, more particularly, by mechanical means—is a barrier rather than a valid method of creation.

It was a Japanese film, *The Doors of Hell*, which changed all the ground rules. Though it had little more to recommend it than the average decent film, it was the first film to be fairly described as being "in color" rather than being merely "colored." At last the shimmering pastel shades of actual reality had found an accurate reproduction. From the purely aesthetic point of view, color cinematography came into existence with this film (not counting the one or two rare successes like *Il Carozze d'oro* and *Henry V*, which have more in common with the style of illuminated manuscripts than realistic authenticity). From the beginning, Eastmancolor brought out this authenticity and firmly established color as one of the resources of cinema's expressivity. Not only is the shading not killed by a uniform lighting but the relief of the colors heightens the overall relief in the same way as the action of light and shade. The flexibility of the color process allows for filming with greatly reduced illumination from that required for black and white.

Until now, color has been used merely to achieve greater realism. Using it for psychological purposes presents many problems, particularly since it requires the total control of a technique whose purely chemical perfection allows neither a selection of color nor an organization of the palette. Of course, there will come a time when it can be used in this way, but it is too early yet to speculate as to how it will be used—even though general patterns can be perceived in the setting and harmony of the primary colors.

Even so, it is possible even nowadays to use color for *dramatic* purposes. Though color values cannot be altered in the shooting, at least the art director has control over color when he designs the sets. And the director can choose a framing whose natural colors set off the expression of a particular feeling better than any other. What

more convincing proof of this than *Seven Men from Now* (Boetticher), an excellent Western which takes us as the dramatic tension grows from the lush green of the prairies to the unrelieved desolation of the rocks and the dryness of the sand where the final confrontation takes place, contrasting with an evocation of a bygone time in the wooden shantytown with the strange charm of its gaudily painted saloons.

This progression, this change of location, would, of course, have been effective in black and white, but color adds another dimension. The colors, both harsh and subtle, lend a tone, a tragic resonance, to the harshness of the settings which the finest black and white photography would never have been able to give, and the splendid shantytown gains its effect from the subtle color schemes of the frills and flounces of the 1890s.

However, our perception tends not to register color as strongly as it does form in its structuration of the perceptible world, but it is a happy addition.

There is a general assumption that we do not dream in color, thereby relegating color to a secondary role. Yet this assumption is groundless, especially considering that we make our mental images from thoughts, not percepts. Our mind adds an *idea* of color to the *idea* of form, but since the color is not necessarily specific to the form and since it is a creation of the mind and not the perception, it is eclipsed by the concept. We imagine it without experiencing its effects.

Be that as it may, the harmony or disharmony of colored sensations is an element of expression capable of complementing or contradicting the meaning of the film signification. The danger is in using color to compose a "good-looking" image, to make "pretty pictures," to signify through harmonies *within the shot*, tacking a color symbolism onto the formal symbolism and thereby

picking up all the faults of Expressionism in a kind of contrived Impressionism. Color expression is an effect of the discreet way it is handled. The signification must come from the dynamics of color, in other words, from their transformations and contrasts, from the ever-changing associations of form and color, emphasizing first one and then the other. Instead of creating "inherently" harmonious compositions, the filmmaker must create structures in tune with the psychological meaning of the drama.

That is why using colored sensations for psychological purposes requires extreme technical skill. Ideally, the predominating colors should be low-key rather than heavy-handed as they are at the moment. Except, that is, in the rare cases where they are produced by flexible lighting techniques such as Eisenstein employed in the banquet sequence in *Ivan the Terrible*, rather than by a uniform wash of color as in Richard Brooks's idiotic *Karamasov*—a fantastic difference between what can be done and what must not be done at any price!

The psychological significance of color depends on relative harmonies and not on the qualities of the colors themselves. Making red stand for anger, blue for tenderness, and yellow for treachery is to create an elementary if not infantile form of symbolism. In the same way that musical sounds have no meaning except relative to each other, so the relationships of various tones with a predominating tone and the resulting harmonies direct the mind toward a predetermined meaning. Since this is imposed by the dramatic situation, there can be only one harmony, one resonance, especially since, for the most part, colored sensations tend to conform with the associations given them; their symbolism is subordinate. Such is the case with the inverted significations of the whiteness theme in *The General Line* and *Alexander Nevsky*.

Or else we find, in a different form, the

toning and tinting of the silent films of 1915. Though the films of this period were not actually "in color," they were only very rarely seen in black and white. They were given a toning consistent with the overall meaning of the sequences: night scenes were tinted blue, fire scenes red, country scenes yellow, etc. Tinting (of the nitrate base) affected the "whites," whereas toning, introduced at the developing stage, affected the "blacks." Thus for scenes of terror there could be shots tinted red but toned green. And the effect had its own peculiar charm, especially since there was no intended symbolism, merely an addition to the deficiencies of the photography. Innovations in lighting techniques, made just after the First World War, put an end to this style of printing, which was gradually phased out until it disappeared entirely around 1923. The crude modern usage of primary colors, blues, greens, and reds, is a throwback to this period, with none of its naïve charm but a lot more pretentiousness.

Creating a psychological background using harmonies of color to correspond with the dramatic situation is one thing; to endow a particular color system with symbolic value is something else entirely—which leads us inevitably to the researches into the "signification of color."

"What color are our feelings?" Carlo di Carlo asks in his study of Antonioni's *Il Deserto rosso* (*The Red Desert*). We could reply that they have no color. However, according to Antonioni, "one might say that color is a relationship between the object and the psychological state of the observer, in the sense that both are mutually suggestible. That is to say, the object, with its color, has a predetermined suggestion for the observer at the same time as he sees the color which he is interested—or pleased—to see in the object."

It is true that the color of objects varies according to the intention and state of

mind of the person perceiving it. Yet, interpreted in this way, the explanation is misleading. When, for instance, we talk of a "rosy future," it is not as if we are seeing things through rose-tinted glasses. We simply associate, in our minds, the color pink with a certain state of euphoria and this is because the energizing qualities of the color provoke reactions of the same kind. In the same way, when we talk of a "black future," we associate a dark color, with obvious depressive qualities, with a melancholic frame of mind. In other words, whatever our frame of mind, *we intuitively associate an idea of color with the colors we actually perceive whose qualities are such that they determine a feeling which is genuine but, at that moment, alien to them.* This "notion of color" exists nowhere except in our minds. It is therefore untranslatable, at least into an objective representation of the world into which it could never be introduced as though it were *real* coloring. It is another example of the impossibility of using the camera in the first person.

When Antonioni translates Monica Vitti's euphoria by showing her in a room *suddenly turning pink*—a room which he has already shown us several scenes earlier in its normal colors—there is an appalling discontinuity combined with an incomprehensible psychological naïveté. Not only is it impossible for the audience immediately to enter a character's subjectivity—up to that point seen only objectively—using the device of a set suddenly taking on an "interior" color but, as we have seen, the color as such does not exist. The subjective fantasy is revealed to be pure cliché. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Monica Vitti is "genuinely" seeing the room "through rose-tinted glasses"; this does not alter the fact that the audience is still seeing the room as objectively as it has been up to this point. For that very reason, it is incapable of accepting this *genuine* color change, ex-

cept by associating it with a state of mind all too easily understandable!

Thus concrete reality cannot be transformed, in either its color or its forms, under the pretext of objectifying the subjective because, however conceivable, this transformation is presented as objective by being arbitrarily imposed on the phenomenal reality of the external world. An alteration of this kind is acceptable as subjective only *when the description itself is subjective.* As is the case with the bedtime story which Giuliana tells Valerio. Immediately understood as the illustration of something purely imaginary, the images can then take on whatever form one wishes. The sickly sweet colors which follow are perhaps not in the best of taste, but at least they are not at variance with the naïve sentimentality of the story.

Which comes down to saying that, at the perceptual level, colors are a great deal less noticeable than forms; that is why the latter cannot involve the former and are forced to be part of their supposed reality or unreality. None of this prevents the chromatic associations from creating new relationships, i.e., determining suggestions or relationships capable of changing or moulding the formal significations. Though, at the level of realism, they allow the material quality of objects to be underlined more strongly, what matters is not so much the colors as their dynamism, their relationships with the continuity, their gradual transformation in other colors.

From this point of view, colors may be worked, interpreted, selected in terms of the subject the director chooses to express. They may avoid realism and at the same time remain accurate and true to life; they may correspond with the feelings of the characters, with their drama. However, then what is being featured is the filmmaker's subjectivity rather than the supposed subjectivity of one of the characters in the story, the vision

of a creator rather than the clichéd translation of a mental image. For if, in Antonioni's films, distorted sounds are immediately recognized as subjective, it is because they are not presented, as are the images, *alongside* real sounds: they replace them—and all the more easily because sound has no concrete form, no inertia of its own.

On the other hand, out-of-focus, pseudo-abstract representations do not make us see the world through the eyes of the heroine. They merely show it out of focus, as though our eyes had suddenly developed myopia. We are totally incapable of associating this fuzzy world with what Giuliana sees because this has *not been presented to us* (whereas we have seen her listening to sounds and putting her fingers in her ears). We stop being able to appreciate the "observer-observed" relationship from the moment the observer is taken out of the context of the representation. And this absence cannot be seen as an ellipsis, for if only the "observed" part of the relationship remains, it immediately becomes identified with our own vision of the world—at least the vision the director would like us to have. As we have said repeatedly, the vision of an individual can be associated with him only if he has already been placed objectively in the setting. And this subjective vision can be understood only insofar as it relates to an objective reality already represented or examined.

Except when it concerns an objectifiable figment of a character's imagination, any attempt to represent concretely (even if only symbolically) a state of mind without any real content is bound to be unsuccessful or, as in the case of the pink bedroom, ridiculous. The only acceptable mental images in the cinema capable of being translated into film are those provided by memory, because memory relates back to an actual reality; because facts of memory, insofar as they restructure the past in the

present, are identified with the imagination, whereas states of mind associated with the notion of color are purely conceptual; and because the feelings associated with memory are registered in the facts evoked and do not depend merely on a hypothetical way of translating the emotional content.¹⁹

As a general rule, color is used to its best advantage in the cinema if its various tones and patterns are applied in order to "tell a story using color." Color may play a dramatic role to the extent that it is used as an element to explain the forces being brought together. In the same way, a spiritual development may be followed, a state of mind explained or suggested—but only "from the outside." We made this point clear in relation to *Seven Men from Now*, but there are many other examples to which we could usefully refer.

Whatever the case, color—like every other signifying element in a film—must be motivated. It must not have an independent existence which cannot be justified concretely for the audience. It must appear as though "caught," not "directed" (though, for technical reasons, it cannot help but be directed). Suffice it to say that it cannot lend itself to pictorial interpretation, only dramatic and psychological, and that symbolism, when it exists, must find its apparent justification in the production of concrete facts (like images becoming *signs* through editing but remaining, above all, part of a description of events). Whereas color in painting is the impression the painter makes on the world, in the cinema it is the impression of the objective existence of the world, regardless of the subjectivity of the vision.

Though color enables the filmmaker to make a deeper (or subtler) analysis of reality through the selection and presentation of various chromatic relationships, it also enables him to choose not to make this kind of analysis if he prefers to create a fiction

preserved from the restrictions of realism. It does not, however, enable him to make a clichéd interpretation of a character's "subjective" point of view, since the concrete qualities of the representation will always reveal the artifice for what it is. We must not forget that images of a state of mind should be suggested rather than shown and that the cinema, though requiring us to follow the interpretation of reality through the vision of a filmmaker, does not set itself the task of presenting us with that reality in its interpreted state.

Speech and Sound

Role and Meaning of Dialogue

It should be noted right away that the cinema, before the advent of sound, was silent but never without sound. Apart from the fact that speech was not necessary (or *should not have been necessary*), the odd cries, sounds, or even words suggested by the characters' description or behavior were "understood" by the audience, which had to use its imagination to provide the characters and objects with the sound qualities they might have had in actual reality and star-struck young girls credited the romantic lead with the sweet nothings they longed to hear. Since the dialogue was created by each audience member as he or she wished, it is not unreasonable to suppose that this "imaginary dialogue" was potentially one of the most poetic aspects of a film. On the other hand, silence was meaningless, powerless. One benefit of the "sound picture" was that it gave a value to silence.

Going back thirty or so years, we see that the criticisms of the first talkies were precisely those directed against mediocre silent films dressed up in a different form. Pierre Porte wrote in 1922: "However, subtitles will always be an irritating interrup-

tion to the images, making us read when we have just been watching, breaking up the rhythm of the film. When we watch a film, we always feel as though there are the images on the one hand and the titles on the other. This conflict must be resolved: *text and image must be combined and carried along by the same rhythm.*"²⁰ The major benefit of talking pictures was that the text—expressed out loud—no longer disrupted the organic unity of the film. On the other hand, film found itself forced to keep to a homogeneous development providing a more tightly constructed continuity with more precise matching from shot to shot and sequence to sequence. Be this as it may, a deluge of silly verbosity flooded the screens between 1928 and 1930.

"A film with speaking in it is not necessarily a talking film," Alexandre Astruc noted at the time; "it may be nothing more than a photographed play, a cut-price version, a technique for popularizing theater." But with the "Manifesto of Orchestral Counterpoint" (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov), published in 1928, the first theories to deal with the use of speech and sound started to see the light of day. It was noted in particular that:

Only a contrapuntal use of sound relative to a piece of visual montage offers new possibilities for developing and perfecting montage.

The first experiments with sound must be directed toward "nonsynchronization" with the visual images.

Only this approach will provide the necessary sensation leading inevitably to a new *orchestral counterpoint* of visual and aural images.

Sound, treated as a new element of montage (independent of the visual image), will inevitably introduce new and extremely effective means of expressing and resolving the complex problems confronting us up to now, which we have not been able to overcome because of the im-

possibility of finding a solution using only the visual elements.

The *contrapuntal method* to construct sound and talking films will not merely alter the *international* nature of the cinema but will raise its significance and cultural power to an unprecedented degree.²¹

This statement of basic principles echoes certain of René Clair's observations: "It is the *alternating* use of the image of a subject and the sound produced by the subject—not their *simultaneous* use—which creates the best effects in the sound and talking cinema. It is conceivable that this first principle to emerge from the chaos of a developing technique could become one of the fundamentals of future cinematic technique." And René Clair quotes some examples from *Broadway Melody*:

For instance, the sounds of a door closing and a car pulling away with Bessie Love's anguished face on the screen peering through a window at this unseen departure. This short scene—where the whole effect is concentrated on the actress' face and which the silent cinema would have had to fragment into several shots—is successful precisely because of the "unity of place" provided by the soundtrack.

In another scene, Bessie Love is lying down, sad and pensive; we feel she is on the verge of tears; her face is screwed up but disappears into the shadow of a fade and, out of the black screen, comes the sound of a single sob.

He quotes another example, this time from *Showboat*:

Some time later a shabbily dressed singer is singing in a tiny bar. The director wanted to show in shorthand this woman's climb to success. As the song continues, the singer becomes invisible and a series of quick cuts leads us to the huge concert hall where the same singer in eve-

ning dress is finishing the last few bars of the song we have been hearing.²²

Thus from 1929 onward the sound film was being defined in terms of laws which it was forced to apply methodically if it wished to safeguard visual expression from the threatening assault of speech. Even though Marcel Pagnol, as late as 1933, was able to say quite seriously that "silent films are the art of recording, fixing, and broadcasting pantomime. Talking films are the art of recording, fixing, and broadcasting theater,"²³ anyone believing in the art of film with no specific ax to grind agreed on the same principle: that the image must have priority over speech. Yet this priority was interpreted as a kind of exclusivity: words had to be excluded from the "visual data" as for instance in voice-over or offscreen sounds or contrapuntal effects. Which explains the extremism of the early days: either filmed theater or silent cinema embellished with sound effects and a few meager conversations. Contradictory conceptions were sometimes included in the same film according to the character of the sequences, as for instance in *Showboat* and *Broadway Melody*.

René Clair in *Sous les toits de Paris*, writes Denis Marion, "made it a point of honor not to break with the traditions of the silent film, avoiding synchronous sound wherever possible, disguising his conversations with ambient sound or behind glass doors."²⁴ Yet this way of not using speech, making characters who, in the normal course of events, would have talked at length to one another, exchange only a few words, very quickly becomes very irritating. Of course, there were one or two obvious successes: the fight between the young hooligans along the railway track, with the sounds of passing trains and smoke surrounding the fighters. And the argument in the bedroom: Pola, taken in by Albert but refusing to sleep with him,

sleeps on the floor instead. Furious, Albert gives up his bed to her. Since neither of them will yield, they both spend the night on the floor, separated by the empty bed. When the light is turned off, the argument continues in the dark. All we hear is an exchange of bittersweet words, over a totally black screen. Speech takes priority, justified by the darkness, and the scene gains a rather extraordinary suggestive power by the very fact that nothing is seen. However, it is not the rather bland dialogue which provides the effect but the image whose significance is based on its very absence. Far from being a negation, this "absence" is a strange affirmation of its expressive capabilities.

Even so, René Clair, like many others, was not long in realizing that dialogue was not just a simplistic way of replacing the subtitles of the silent cinema. Since it represents life, the cinema is bound to record speech, just as it records actions. The important thing was not to give priority to the verbal expression but to use it in association with the images. Now, in this film, René Clair shows his hand; he shies away from words, makes every attempt to avoid them, using them merely as embellishments. Paradoxically, he employs them to "signify" and, at the same time, deprives them of their concrete meaning, their dynamic reality. Words are grafted onto the characters as additional "signs," without ever being uttered by them. In the same way, his heroes do not express themselves. They recite words which, in theory, "translate" them, and the attempt to involve speech merely in order to "signify" without exploiting its own intrinsic signification was just another way of promoting something through its absence: glorifying speech and, at the same time, rejecting it.

Another similar error, due to an overzealous use of sound counterpoint: in *Life Is Good*, Pudovkin's first sound film, "a woman is leaning out of a train window, saying

goodbye to her husband; suddenly she remembers something important she had meant to say to him; her emotion, the pain of leaving, prevents her from remembering exactly what it was she wanted to say; she imagines that the wheels of the train are starting to turn faster and faster, taking her away from her husband before she has time to tell him what it is. And the audience, *hearing* the sound of the train pulling away and gathering speed but *seeing* the carriage at a standstill, realizes that what is being expressed is the heroine's fear, since on the screen it can see the train still not moving and the young woman still leaning out of the window of her compartment."²⁵

It would be the same thing were the action to take place in a little country station in the back of beyond. But the action is set in Moscow, in a huge terminus; there is nothing to say that the sound we hear is not coming from some other nearby train setting off rather than the train we see standing at the platform. And for this reason, the intended effect is destroyed.

The Blue Angel, which does not try to produce effects of this type or "voices-off," nevertheless uses dialogue scenes when the logic of the action requires the characters to speak. Quite simply, it is not used to excess and dialogue is involved in the signification of the drama in exactly the same way as the rest. The result is that *The Blue Angel* remains fresh, while other films have become absurdly outdated.

Jacques Feyder was getting nearer the truth when he wrote: "*In the theater, the situation is created by the words; in the cinema, the words must arise from the situation*—which means that the cinema is no closer to the theater for having annexed speech; it is as distant as ever and remains an art which is different, extended and liberated."²⁶

It was in Lubitsch's first musical comedies (*Love Parade*) and particularly in his ironic comedies (*Trouble in Paradise*) that the

potential of audiovisual signification first began to be realized—the relationship between text and images assuming a new meaning radically different from what was imagined at the time. It was no longer a question of integrating dialogue scenes into as visual an architecture as possible, of ignoring dialogue or cutting it down to the bare essentials, but of creating *signification* through the simple relationship between text and image, i.e., through the contrast, differentiation, and contradiction, etc., produced by the juxtaposition of the seen and the heard. It was, in a way, a sort of counterpoint: visual against verbal but, in place of the old-style sound effects capable of producing nothing more than a few vaguely suggested feelings, the relationship assumed a more intellectual quality, with the image-text association creating a *new idea* in the audience's mind. It was, in the final analysis, the *transposition and extension of the very ground rules for editing* onto the audiovisual plane: in addition to the idea determined by the succession of two images (or "vertical" montage—following the meaning of the film narrative), there was another idea created out of the direct relationship between the visual and the verbal (or "horizontal" montage), both significations occurring simultaneously.²⁷

Montage is meant here (and elsewhere in this study) in its most widely accepted sense: meaning determined by relationships (of objects, facts, situations, etc.) either through a direct succession of images or the total space of the field of view, with the visual content constantly referred back to the auditory. An obvious example will illustrate this more clearly.

In Frank Lloyd's *Cavalcade* (1933), which traces the development of English society from the death of Queen Victoria up to the First World War through the story of two families belonging to the English upper classes, one sequence shows us two hon-

eymooners on the deck of a transatlantic liner. The children of two neighboring families, friends for as long as anyone can remember, they have just realized their dream: to become man and wife. As fashion decreed in high society of the time, they are going to honeymoon by Niagara Falls. A wide shot shows them from the rear on the forward deck of the ship: they move toward the railings. A reverse angle frames them in close shot, leaning side by side with the railing coinciding with the bottom frame-line. They look out over the ocean (i.e., the camera), and they exchange a short sequence of dialogue. He asks whether she is happy, whether there is anything he can give her. She is in seventh heaven: "If I had to die tomorrow," she says, "I believe life would have given me everything I expected of it." Obviously she is speaking figuratively; but during the conversation the camera pulls back and reveals, just as the young wife finishes what she is saying, a life buoy tied to the railing on which we read the name of the ship: *Titanic*. Then there is a cut to the next shot.²⁸

In a different form, this is an example of the shock movement backward we mentioned in another context which suddenly turns the initial meaning of the film upside down and, in this instance, gives a tragic resonance to words with no apparent meaning. It is a perfect though perhaps rudimentary and simplistic example of film language—pure audiovisual signification. A good talkie should be composed exclusively of expressions of this kind. And if we remember the beginning of *Trouble in Paradise*: in Venice, on the Grand Canal, a gondolier is rowing and singing with great conviction at the top of his lungs "O Sole Mio." It is raining. To all intents and appearances, he is rowing a pair of bashful lovers. There he is stopping in front of the steps of a magnificent palazzo . . . but no: it is merely the

Fig. 1

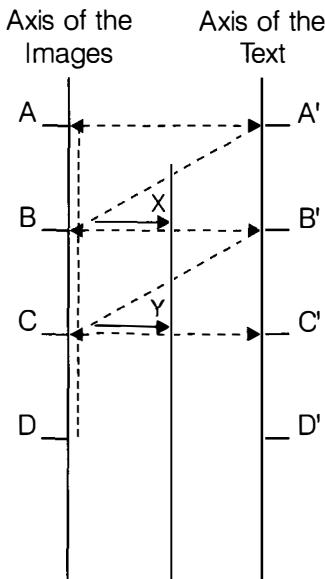
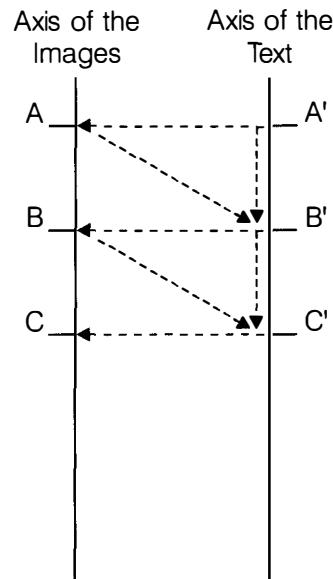


Fig. 2



local dustman on his round, disposing of garbage. The whole film is like this.

The following diagrams will help define more clearly the structure of the talking film. They are not intended to represent a strict rule but to translate schematically a general procedure.

Say we have, on the one hand, a visual continuity A-B-C-D and, on the other, a verbal continuity A'-B'-C'-D' (fig. 1). It is clear that: shot A is associated with dialogue A'. Each contributes its own special signification, and a third signification is generated by their direct relationship: AA' (which we might call the real signification of shot A).

What is more, shot B follows shot A and carries through the logical implications of the primary information of A. A certain meaning results from the A/B relationship but this meaning is corrected by the effect of the A' dialogue. In other words, the A/B rela-

tionship is, in fact, an AA'/B relationship, which produces the X signification.

Shot B is, in its turn, associated with dialogue B'. It is visually related to shot C but the signification (BB' plus X) affects C according to the BB'/C relationship. Which produces the Y signification. And so on.

It is clear, however, that, in the A-B-C-D sequence, the shots are *directly* linked together according to the logic of the drama. On the other hand, in the A'-B'-C'-D' sequence, the respective verbal data do not become more closely interrelated. Their meaning is relative to the visual implications. If B' is related to A' in a context different from the visual continuity, it is entirely possible that their relationship is meaningless and that their meaning is defined via B.

In other words, film continuity is based in essence on the visual development which forms the framework, the *structural axis*, of

the film. This does not mean that the text cannot serve as a hinge, altering or constantly deflecting the continuity, since this is precisely the purpose of its continual interventions. But the logical development and principal significations are based on the development of the images, not on verbal associations.

In filmed theater or poor talkies, the opposite is true. When (as in fig. 2) there are shots A and B on the one hand and texts A' and B' on the other, it is obvious that the logical, dramatic, psychological, etc. association develops along the verbal axis: B' follows A' and so on. An image A corresponds with dialogue A' placing the characters and the action in a specific place and time. It places them in a set, on a stage, describing movements, illustrating a situation signified *through words*, offering no—or very little—signification of its own. This is dialogue fleshed out with images. The images may well be pretty enough in themselves; they may provide a pleasant enough spectacle. But it is not what might be called film expression—which is precisely what we mean when we say of a film, "It's not cinema."

A good talkie therefore is not a film with little or no dialogue (contrary to a longstanding belief). The actual quantity of words has no meaning in this context. A film may have very little dialogue and still be a bad film. And a film with wall-to-wall dialogue may just as easily be outstanding. What counts is not the importance of the text in terms of numbers but *the part it is made to play*.

We should make an immediate distinction, under the general heading of dialogue, between two aspects which, more often than not, are considered as one and the same: "stage" dialogue and "character" dialogue.

In real life, people talk; often they say nothing, but they talk. It is part of their behavior pattern: "Hi there. How are you? Hope it stops raining soon. I've just missed

three buses and I'm late as it is, etc." Since it purports to represent life, the cinema must record speech patterns just as it records behavior patterns. Yet banal conversation is no more relevant than any other noise, unless it sets character or a state of mind. As Merleau-Ponty correctly observes, "the sort of words a character uses and the way he uses them indicates his character more certainly than pages of description." Nonetheless, these conversations, whose psychological importance is crucial, do not get to grips with the characters relative to the drama which involves them. They establish their presence but in no way explain their situation. There can be as much dialogue of this kind in a film without damaging its specifically cinematic qualities, for, though it may contribute to an understanding of the characters, it only communicates what they are, not what they think. And it contributes very little toward an understanding of the drama.

Stage dialogue, on the other hand, informs us as to the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the heroes. It is theatrical dialogue, perfectly acceptable in the cinema but only insofar as it corresponds with actual reality, i.e., with situations where it is normal for characters to talk to each other, when there is conflict or confrontation. In life, however, people never reveal themselves completely through what they say: there is an essential gap, differing in size according to the individual, between what they say and what they are. There is no such gap in the theater (at least not of this size), since characters are able to signify themselves only through their words (they have no other choice), as much to justify their actions as to enable the drama to be understood. This is not true of the cinema, where a major area of interest is precisely this twilight zone where characters can be *revealed beyond what they say*. The purpose of speech in the cinema is not to add ideas to images. When this occurs, when the information to

be understood is conveyed solely through what is said, when the text takes responsibility for the expression and signification of the plot, when what "engages" the heroes derives exclusively from their speech, then we are dealing with something entirely dissociated from film expression. Indeed, inasmuch as it is art, the cinema has no need to record significations, merely create its own.

Obviously, film techniques allow "moments of verbal expression" to be given greater emphasis than any stage presentation, and there is nothing to say that the cinema should not be used to "present" a stage play. But then it is no longer required to be an art, merely to put itself at the service of some other means of expression, to fix an already completed expression. All that is retained of it is its techniques. However, it is an application with far-reaching consequences. It is no longer "filmed theater" in the pejorative sense of the word (the camera recording a theatrical event) but *cinematic presentation applied to a stage play* (with the potential of being greatly enriched by it). Not that the cinema contributes a great deal, since its expression has nothing to do with itself but with the fact that it emphasizes, fixes, and, more especially, amplifies the meaning of the verbal expression. Films like *Hamlet* (Grigori Kozintsev), *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier), *Macbeth* (Orson Welles) and *Les Parents Terribles* (Jean Cocteau) are ample proof of this. Yet it is a means of presentation and not a means of expression. Any art there may be comes from the play.

One may well wonder how a play presented on film is less cinematic than a talkie whose expression depends exclusively on its dialogue. In fact, from that point of view it is not really less cinematic. In one respect, however, it is: a play is conceived and constructed with a view to its representation on a stage, whereas a screenplay, even one which is overdialogued, is conceived to be

represented cinematically. Even without visual significations, it is planned at least with a view to a narrative developing freely in space and time, liberated at any rate from the restriction of the stage.

Yet, there is something else which on close examination proves even more important: *the structure of the dialogue*. In the theater, everything is organized, prepared, and arranged to suit the verbal expression, since this is what contains the dramatic continuity, its substance and its expression. The play, relying on the words, gathers specific "moments of speech" (uniquely these moments) into a single time and place²⁹ in such a way that a play is no more than a series of uninterrupted conversations. The verbal exchanges go back and forth at varying rates according to the type of play, sometimes getting up to machine-gun speed. And always witty—or literary. The astonishing thing about the theater is how clever all the heroes are: clear-thinking minds and golden tongues using polished, tempered, and carefully chosen language without pause for thought or choice of words: pure intelligence. However, the source of all this, however cultured and witty, has spent six months thinking about what takes only two hours to deliver on stage, which means that the actors are "assuming" a text rather than a character. Obviously, they endow their roles with life and verisimilitude, but they cannot "live" like cinema actors because their characters and, more especially, the text does not belong to actual reality.

The criticisms of overacting, stagey, contrived acting, leveled most frequently against stage actors, can be explained more in terms of the artifice of the text and the needs of the verbal discourse imposed by the stage than by a behavioral or expressive technique which conforms quite easily with the conditions of film. It is odd that no one has noticed—at least to my knowledge—that the actor is always held responsible for what

the theater itself imposes on him.³⁰ An actor on a stage with nothing to say does not know what to do and strikes a pose. It would be difficult to imagine otherwise, for one moment of actual truth would destroy the artifice necessary for the truth of the stage expression.

It should be obvious that the above is not criticism, merely observation of certain facts. Theatrical truth is *conventionalized* truth, *stylized* reality, a series of artifices enabling us to glimpse an *essential* truth beyond the contrived reality through which it is conveyed. Yet, though these conventions are acceptable (even necessary) on the stage, it is not the same in the cinema, where the *realistic* truth is based on a feeling of true reality provided by the representation and setting of concrete reality.

Thus, whether it is all-pervasive or otherwise, film dialogue must provide an impression of life which has been lived (or at least as it might have been lived in the given situation). Nothing is more irritating in the cinema than the "author speaking" through the mouths of characters who would otherwise apparently be incapable of speaking in that particular way—at least in the given circumstances. This does not mean that film dialogue must be unstructured and banal: it must just be *spontaneous*. It must come out of the characters' mouths, not the actors' memories. Moreover, even in the most lively moments of conversation, characters must have the time to think about what they are going to say—as in real life. Mumbling, stammering, stumbling over words (as long as the audience is not aware of an *intention* to mispronounce the words) all adds to the impression of actual reality. Of course, the words must be audible. But how many directors insist on the text being "well delivered?" An actor hesitates, "dries," and then picks it up again . . . the director calls "cut" and there is another "take." He throws out

that "moment of truth" and keeps the take with the clearest delivery: what could be more artificial? The so-called New Wave may be criticized for many things, but it must be admitted that the young directors have been able successfully to free themselves from the yoke of theatrical dialogue still in use in contemporary cinema. From this point of view, films such as *A bout de souffle* are a step forward toward a complete abandonment of "fabricated" text.

It is interesting to tape record conversations with speakers unaware that they are being recorded. In *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres*, Raymond Queneau quotes the observations of the South American novelist and musicologist Alejo Carpentier, with reference to this sort of experiment. He writes:

The result is something absolutely unrealistic. Conversation has rhythm, movement, a lack of sequence in its ideas with, on the other hand, unusual associations, strange skips of thought, in every way different from the dialogue generally filling the average novel. . . . The result abounds with unexpected revelations on the real laws of spoken style.

I am all the more convinced that dialogue, as used in novels and plays, in no way corresponds with the mechanism of real spoken language (I refer not to words but movement, rhythm, the way we actually argue and quarrel, the way ideas are put together or not). We have gradually become used, since the appearance of the first "realist novels," to the mechanics of realism, to a kind of conventional stabilization of speech, which has nothing whatsoever to do with actual speech. In speech, there is something far more alive, out-of-true, out of control, with changes of movement—a logical syntax which has never really been captured.

From that we should expect, for the most part, dialogue improvised by the actors around a given theme or, at least, written

dialogue whose content and structure the actors may modify according to their own conception of their characters, particularly since, in spoken language, as Vendryes points out, phrases tend to divide into two separate halves: morphemes (the syntactical structure) on the one hand and semantemes (the signifying data) on the other. Queneau observes that "what you hear on the street is never:

'Was it not the Mets who won the World Series last year?' but 'It was the Mets who won the World Series last year, wasn't it?' . . . Lastly, the future itself is under threat. No one ever says: *'Will you go to the country tomorrow?'* (we prefer the positive form with an interrogative intonation: *Are you going to the country tomorrow?*). *I'm taking the midday train* is more usual than *I will take the midday train.*"

Film first of all turned away from theatrical presentation, then theatrical acting, then the constraints of dramatic structure, then the very notion of theatricality. Yet it has yet to free itself from the stranglehold of "well-written" (literary) dialogue and stagey verbosity. The reason why it has not done so until now is that for the most part (in France at least) the writers come from the theater. They are writers who see dialogue as the verbal development of a situation and not as a dramatic or psychological incidental supporting a visual expression—which works very well when they are not responsible for the original story, since the storytelling then becomes nothing more than illustrated dialogue based on the structures described above.

When the director does not write his own dialogue—which is most often the case—the only viable method is the one described by Louis Daquin:

In my case, when I have decided with the screenwriter upon the precise continuity of the narrative, I write a draft

which is one stage before the shooting script. By which I mean I *write the film as it will develop on the screen, as I see it*, with as much detail as possible. For this draft, I divide my script pages in two, keeping the right hand side for dialogue sketches; in other words, I note down what I want the characters to say to make clear the narrative and psychology of the protagonists. It is from these sketches that the dialogue writer writes his dialogue. Using this method, I am able to keep him within a rigid framework and provide him with a way of becoming immersed in the style I want to give the film and my attitude to it. The method helps save time and avoids misunderstanding and confusion. Of course, it must never be applied dogmatically, since it can happen that the dialogue writer may make a contribution to the structure of the narrative, suggesting an unexpected twist to the plot through his dialogue. There are great difficulties, however, inherent in this discipline which must be imposed on the dialogue writer without tying him down or taking away his inspiration. (*Le Metteur en scène et le dialogue*)

As far as commentary is concerned, the general rules are pretty much the same as for dialogue: it must duplicate the function of the image. It must not explain what is shown but remain detached, making assessments of the events and the scenes represented. The smaller the quantity of commentary and the greater priority given to the image, the better the film. Genuine commentary, detached from the film (i.e., disinterested and objective) can really be used only in short films, documentaries and poetic films, etc. In dramatic films, it most often becomes identified with a particular character's impression of certain events. While the images represent the scenes described, the narrator expresses his point of view in voice-over. This technique makes it possible for scenes with no direct logical

connection to be related with verbal associations. As we have seen, it may be used in various ways (*Thomas Garner—Citizen Kane—Rashomon*).

When it is a question of an action not involving attitudes or opinions but facts pure and simple, the text, uncovering or explaining these facts, runs the risk of duplicating what the images are inevitably revealing. A way of avoiding this redundancy is to offset (minutely) the image against the sound, so that they do not appear synchronous. A shift of half a second is most usually appropriate, but, of course, it all depends on the length of the scene, its nature and its importance. It may vary from a half-second to as much as two seconds; but, as a general rule, the commentary must always *follow* the image and not the other way around, since at the very least this would be antcinematic.

Indeed, if the explanation of a fact *precedes* that fact, the meaning we receive from the commentary is essentially verbal. The image then merely fills in the gaps, illustrating what the text has said, not as a commentary but as a *narration* embellished with images. Such is the case with a film like *Le Rideau Cramoisi* (Alexandre Astruc), which I am better qualified than most to assess, since I edited it. However hard I argued and tried to explain (we had some battles royal!), Astruc insisted that the text should precede the image. At the time (1952), according to the theories of Bazin, Leenhardt, and indeed Astruc himself, the primacy of the text was absolutely sacrosanct. Nowadays, Astruc has stopped liking his film (and, let it be said, it is the best he has made to date): "It is illustrated literature," he says (in an interview in *Cinéma* 62)—ten years to realize something which was self-evident!

By way of contrast, in a short film made in 1947, *Combourg, visage de Pierre* (Jacques de Casenbroot), the filmmaker discovers Combourg, its estate and its castle, taking

as inspiration Chateaubriand's famous text which he uses as a commentary. In this film, the text follows the images. And since these—very beautiful—images are related throughout to the text and since the perception is *visual*, we *first of all* feel an emotion toward what we see. Yet even as we feel it, it is directly transferred to our intellect to form a judgment requiring words with which to express itself. And the words are provided for us precisely as we think of them; in other words, our thoughts are moulded into Chateaubriand's actual phrases at the very moment they appear in our minds. What is more, the marvelous prose makes us feel deep down as though we are translating our emotion with the mastery and verbal precision of a Chateaubriand. We feel as he must have felt and, like him, we use words to express what we feel. Thus the emotion *precedes* the expression, whereas in *Le Rideau Cramoisi*, it is the other way around. Now, an emotion which has *already been signified* loses its power to move. Communicated through words, expressed and intellectualized, all the emotion can gain from the images is an extension or resonance—whereas it is the images themselves which should move us in the first place.

In the cinema, what must have priority is not the signified or the signification but the *continuous passage from the nonsignified to the signified, the transition from the emotional to the intellectual through a constantly contingent signification*. We have already expressed this essential truth in various diverse ways, considering it from different angles, and we cannot help but come back to it, since it is at the heart of every single aesthetic question in the cinema.

Before we examine the potentially enriching role of the verbal expression in the cinema beyond the rather rudimentary use made of it so far, it might be appropriate to say a few words about the dialogue of *ideas*, dialogue with philosophic pretensions used

by certain filmmakers to convey "thoughts" by putting them into the mouths of their characters. To my way of thinking, nothing could be more contrived. Not that intelligent people do not say sensible things (intellectuals have a place in the cinema just as much as cowboys), but if they express ideas during a conversation, it can only be in a very general and vague way. A metaphysical discussion can be dramatically structured. Moreover, the very conditions of art (allusion, suggestion, rhythm, and balance) and of the cinema in particular (visual rather than verbal progressions) run counter to the conditions of logic and accuracy imposed by the formulation of ideas. Giving perfect form to the expression of a thought (Pascal, Nietzsche, Bergson) is one thing, making a work of art another. For, though the work of art must suggest ideas through a certain consciousness of the world, it is not duty bound to describe them precisely. In the cases where it does try to formulate ideas, it merely produces poor ideas.

An excellent case in point was provided by *La Strada*. Though by no means Fellini's best film, it is still an interesting work. The general idea concerns the loneliness of a man discovering the absurdity of his existence after losing the only being for whom he had any feeling (and that a kind of amused contempt). There is a lot to think about in this film, therefore. Any criticism we might make of it would be at the level of its rather obvious symbolism. For a large section of the public, however, the most interesting thing about the film was the famous "stone throw." Let us try to explore its "hidden depths."

During a conversation they are having, Matto (Richard Basehart) says to Gelsomina (Giuletta Massina): "You're not going to believe me . . . yet everything in this world is useful for something. Take a stone, for instance. This one . . . any one. O.K.—even this pebble is useful for something. . . . I

don't know exactly what but it must be useful for something! If it isn't, then nothing is, even the stars! That's how it is. . . . Everything is useful for something. . . . Even you're useful for something, you ninny," etc. The moral of the story is the utilitarian one of "everything which exists has a use." From this it follows that nothing is useless. Yet if *nothing* is useless, the idea of uselessness becomes meaningless, since it refers to . . . nothing. Moreover, if everything which exists has a use, the notion of utility becomes identified with the notion of existence itself. Thus to say "everything which exists has a use" is just another way of saying "everything which exists exists." We plumb the hidden depths and what do we find? The tautology of a self-evident truth.

None of this would be important were it not for the fact that we are expected to interpret this stone throw as the expression of a "philosophy of existence." The heroes of the film are poor uneducated folk, and it would be absurd to have them discourse like learned professors. Theirs is a home-spun philosophy, and we understand it as such. Yet Fellini makes the fundamental mistake of trying to give a metaphysical perspective to remarks which are ingenuous—but in character. If there is any philosophy of existence it emerges from the film and not the conversations contained in it.

There are more philosophical conversations in Agnès Varda's *La Pointe courte* (1955). It is not the moment to criticize this film (whose imagery, in any case, is very beautiful and whose strange symbolism is not without interest); but what do we make of the man and woman who, down among the oyster fishermen of Sète, talk of love in a way usual only in rather reactionary literary circles? Obviously they are intellectuals—at least that is what they believe and do their best to make us believe it too. That is not the issue: were it merely a question of generalities, it would only be the preten-

tious and pompous style of the dialogue which could be faulted. However, they are speaking of *their* love for each other, and the effect produced is ludicrous. A couple of philosophers might easily discuss love from the sociological, phenomenological, or psychoanalytic point of view, but they would not be talking about any feelings between them. If they were, they would do so with extreme simplicity, knowing that to speak otherwise would betray an ill-advised immodesty, ignorance, or pretension. Varda must know nothing of how a couple of intellectuals live—or might live—to have presented them in this way. And if the film purports to be symbolic, then it is the symbolism of artificiality!

If it is philosophy we are looking for, we shall not find it with Agnès Varda but rather with Merleau-Ponty:

In a novel there is always an idea which can be summarized in a few words, a scenario which can be summed up in a few lines. In a poem, there is always an allusion to objects or ideas. However, the purpose of pure fiction or pure poetry is not just to signify these facts, ideas, or objects, for then the poem would be exactly translatable into prose and the novel would lose nothing by being abridged. . . . In the same way, a film always contains a story (and quite often an idea), but the purpose of the film is not to *make us aware* of the facts or the idea. Kant writes with great insight that in consciousness we use our imagination to help us understand, whereas in art we use our understanding to help our imagination. In other words, the idea or prosaic facts are there merely to give the creator the opportunity to seek out perceptible emblems for them and trace their visual and auditory ciphers. The meaning of the film is contained in its rhythm, just as the meaning of an action is immediately readable in the action—and film has no meaning except through itself. Here the idea is pre-

sented in its developing state; it emerges from the time structure of the film, in the same way as the idea in a painting comes from the coexistence of its component parts. Art is fortunate in being able to show how something begins to signify, *not by allusion to previously formed and established ideas but through the time or space arrangement of its elements.*³¹ As we have seen above, a film signifies in the same way as an object; neither of them appeals to an independent reasoning faculty but to our capacity for deciphering implicitly the world and our fellow men and for co-existing with them. (*Le Cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie*)

In films with voice-over commentary, usually based on the principle of the "journey-back-to-the-past," the narrator reveals what he knows, but his involvement is only relative. The events he describes are always seen "from the outside." The idea of subjective commentary happened at about the same time as films where the hero did not appear on the screen; however, whereas films *acted* in the first person proved impracticable for the reasons we described above, films *thought* in the first person opened up new and boundless horizons. Commentary, assuming the tone and breadth of a kind of self-examination, began to explore a subjective world similar to the world of Proustian analysis.

In fact, the first subjective commentary films (*How Green Is My Valley—Brief Encounter*) did not aspire to examinations of any kind. The films merely traced chronologically various facts experienced by the heroes. Once again, it was an objective reality seen from a subjective angle; the narrator testified to his actions rather than to a period in his "psychic development," and the associated events were set in the past only because the commentary was written in the imperfect or perfect tense.

We had to wait for *Hiroshima, mon amour*

(Alain Resnais, 1960) for this hurdle to be overcome. The time experienced by the characters and their memories form the essential elements of this film, and its basic subject matter, though quite important, is treated merely as a starting point. Instead of describing a character through the eyes of one or more of his fellows, as in *Thomas Garner* and *Citizen Kane*, the film centers itself on the consciousness of a single individual and therefore allows for the kind of self-analysis we have just described.

In this film, as in Proust (the cake dipped into the tea), the memory process is stimulated by a physical sensation: it is the image of the Japanese man's hand against the sheet which suddenly and quite unexpectedly brings back the image of the German soldier killed on the quayside in Nevers. Naturally, past events do not come back in the order they were experienced but in an order determined by the process of consciousness. And yet it is not exactly a "journey-back-to-the-past." Indeed, the past is re-presented in Proust in its objective reality as though it were being *reexperienced* by the character remembering it. In the film, it is the past being remembered by a consciousness in the *present*; what the girl remembers forms the actual material of her memory: it is a trace left in the present by the past but belonging to a present actually being experienced; it is the actualization of a series of sensations which she interprets as "consciousness of." The perpetual recurrence of the past, mingling fragments of the characters' lives with actions actually happening, results in the memory becoming superimposed over concrete reality, giving it profound meaning. The associations are neither logical nor causal but analogical and affective.

The difference in composition of the imagery (close shots and harsh lighting predominating in the Hiroshima location; long shots and subdued tones in Nevers) sets up

an *antithesis* between the facts, differentiating them in time as they are in space, while the commentary connects them in our minds, creating a psychological unity and giving meaning to unconnected, disparate memories. Links are drawn between Nevers and Hiroshima, between the past and the present, between memory and reality, and these reconstitute an existence. Through an illuminating act of consciousness, the present shows itself as a special moment caught between memory and oblivion.

The commentary is never explicit, made up of snatches of conversation: it translates feelings, states of mind. And if at times the situation is explained both through the image and the text, the effect is never redundant, since they are each, as it were, understood on different levels. The text is never the verbal equivalent of the images; it echoes them as a kind of interior correlation, with the effect that *something else* is communicated using the *same* ingredients; they serve complementary rather than identical functions. The dialogue extends the interior monologue. When the young woman is talking to her lover, she is speaking to herself more than to him. She is groping for an illusory certainty, reliving her past in the present, at the same time as the present takes the place of the past and becomes memory following the eternal duality of remembering and forgetting: "Time will pass. There won't be anything left for us. It will all fade away. We won't even be able to say what it was that kept us together." It is almost a state of half-sleep or hypnosis, and it takes a slap to bring her out of it, as it does to release her from the influence of the past—which explains the incantatory nature of the interior monologue. The text is music put into words. With the psalmlike feeling of its obsessional reiteration and repetition, like a verbal hallucination, it constantly reacts against the images, polarizing them. In the light of

memory, reality becomes completely subjectified as part of a dream world, and the internal conflict applied to an act of memory has the effect of turning the examination of self into poetry. "In its form, the film is closer to the structure of music than of conventional drama. It appeals less to one's reason than one's feelings," Resnais himself writes.

From a purely psychological point of view there is a certain credibility gap: the events happening in Nevers are always presented *objectively* to us as though seen "from the outside." We watch Emmanuelle Riva involved in her own actions, whereas in her past, experienced by her, she has not been able to *see herself*, since she has been at the center of her vision. However (apart from the fact that this brings us up against the problems of the subjective camera), it would appear that the real originality of the film is contained in this contradiction. It allows a greater contrast to be made between an analytic text and a descriptive image (the image being seen as an *objectification of the subjective*, as though someone could project himself into his own consciousness in order to watch himself existing).

Having said that, the field remains wide open for a closer examination of the workings of our memory faculty. In fact, we might imagine a character remembering past events filmed in the style of *Lady of the Lake*. Whereas in that film it could not be justified because it was not related to a visible character, in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, it was supported by the presence of the character. It provided the perfect justification for the use of subjective camera applied to the memory of a character *objectively placed* in time and space.

While on the subject of the commentary of *Hiroshima, mon amour*, it is clear that the literary qualities of the text (which are obvious enough) are *necessary*. The text, dependent on the point of view of the film,

has no "relevance" outside it. It is constantly related to the images without ever "explaining" them, and if the film seems "saturated with literature" as some critics have claimed, it is only inasmuch as its subject matter belongs to the art of the novel. It is not literary in either its form or its expression and is much more closely related to pure cinema, i.e., to the specific art of cinema.

Only those who know no better put this film in the same category as Chris Marker's films, where the text reigns supreme, and as *La Pointe courte*, whose ridiculous dialogue reveals literary qualities of the same type. The monumental difference is this: the dialogue in *La Pointe courte* is mediated but presented as *direct* and placed in an *objective* reality—which reveals it to be contrived and out of place. If it were a question of an *interior* monologue (or imaginary dialogue) putting a *noticeable distance* between the objectively considered reality and a subjective analysis *not actually present*, then it would be justified. It would be of an order similar to *Hiroshima*, whereas the introduction of unreal (or impossible) dialogue into a real context distorts everything. Let us not forget that the conversations between the young woman and the Japanese are very simple and natural; the text is distanced only to the extent that she is *telling a story, her story*, and therefore transposes it. It is the same contrast, the same antithesis—this time at the level of the dialogue and commentary—as we saw in *The Man Who Lost His Memory* and *The Ghost That Will Not Return*. What is true for one is not necessarily true for another.

Bazin writes: "The main ingredient in Chris Marker's films is intelligence; speech is its immediate expression; the image takes third place." This is precisely what we criticize him for! He goes on: "The image does not relate to the one before or after it but to what is said in it."³² In fact,

buried under the text, the images relate more to what *is said* than to what is said *about them* (the preposition suggesting a priority contradicted by the facts). It is not the place of the image to relate to the commentary but of the commentary to relate to whatever the image reveals; it must not promote itself by considering the image merely as a pretext for a verbal signification. The signified must not be contained in the words but as the consequence of a film signification.

Bernard Pingaud writes in his illuminating study of Resnais's films: "We are led to conclude that *Hiroshima, mon amour* proves that a self-aware cinema compares very favorably with the most complete, most liberated narratives in fiction. Whatever minor criticisms we may make of Resnais, the way he handled his actors, the way they spoke their lines, the way the film was cut or perhaps the very subject of the film, it is fair to say that *Hiroshima* represents a very considerable step forward in the art of cinematic narrative."³³

Following in this the experiments in modern fiction and the direction suggested by *Thomas Garner* and *Citizen Kane*, films are becoming more and more closely aligned with the study of behavior and real time, enabling directors to probe various states of mind and achieve a greater degree of psychological truth—beyond conventional storytelling. From this point of view, *Hiroshima* is only a halting step forward, especially as far as the use of dialogue is concerned.

It is strange to consider how closely dialogue (though free from the constraints of the stage) remains attached, in the majority of films, to the traditions of the theater where the heroes, unable to reveal their behavior except through their speech, say what they think even when it is not the truth. They lie or they are sincere; there is no middle way. And when they show themselves for what they are, it is always

through what they say. Now, in the cinema, where this convention is not merely irrelevant but to be avoided at all costs, it is amazing to see how often dialogue which is unreal is incorporated into a reality which is.

In fact, nine times out of ten, in real life, people do not say what they think. Not because they wish to lie (though that is certainly a possible reason) but purely for reasons of social convenience. They alter the tone of their conversation according to whether it is their wife they are speaking to, their mistress, a one-night stand, a colleague or work associate. Whether for reasons of self-interest, modesty, delicacy, Machiavellian subtlety, or any other moral or immoral reason, the "civilized" man changes his "angle on the world" and takes up a position according to the subject of the conversation and the character of his interlocutors.

Obviously this difference is apparent on the screen, but it is given undue emphasis through a way of being categorical or a particular attitude; a certain freedom of expression or a certain tone indicates the degree of intimacy between the characters on the screen. In the dramatic context, it is easy to guess—as in the theater—whether a character is telling the truth or not; but whichever it is, his way of thinking remains constant. This duality of *being* and *seeming*, between what a character is and what he thinks himself to be, between what the other characters think he is and what he really is (in short, this psychological density, providing the character with continually varying and contrasting perspectives), is never really reproduced in the cinema, at least in the way the characters *talk* to one another, since it is most frequently suggested in the subtle interactions between the actors, in the *mise-en-scène* or the film expression. *Visible* complexity does not have an *acoustic* equivalent. We are in the

presence of *real* beings expressing themselves in a way really seen only on a stage—even when the words they use are without literary artifice. The words are true, but their thoughts are contrived, at the very least conventional. There is a certain complexity in someone thinking and behaving like a high-society type and talking like a low-life. Talking is putting up a front; it is being oneself and someone else at the same time; it is deliberately projecting oneself onto a fictional being created for the purpose. Moreover, if the being who acts is capable of measuring and controlling his actions, so also can the being who speaks. Not only does he think of what he is saying but also of what he has just said, *about* what he has just said. It is not only Jesuits who have mental constraints. The inner voice is always there to correct or contradict what one says—also what other people say. Judgment is endless.

Thus interior monologue, which in the theater allows the hero to reveal his secret fears and ambitions but remains a convention (since it must be spoken out loud for the audience to hear it in the gallery) finds its aesthetic resolution in the cinema. Obviously, it is still spoken but as *voice-over*—heard without being uttered.

Naturally, it is not a technique to be used willy-nilly. Visual signification (a gesture or a look) is preferable, but there are occasions when a word or phrase is necessary, when what the image is capable only of suggesting has to be made explicit. Moreover, far from being structured as a text, the interior monologue may be composed of disparate thoughts, inorganic phrases (like Molly Bloom's monologue at the end of *Ulysses*), provided that it is understandable in the given context. Whatever the case, there is a potential association between what is said and what is thought. Ultimately one could imagine a film based entirely on the innermost thoughts of a character.

We are led from this to compare film development with literary forms—the cinema, in our opinion, taking the upper hand in many areas as regards psychological analysis. In fact, the novelist has two forms at his disposal: a direct style which lets the characters be described through what they say and an indirect style which allows the author to describe his characters' behavior or put himself "on the inside" of his heroes, analyzing from within their innermost thoughts. However, both of them are verbal processes—in other words, the reader has to restructure mentally what the text gives him. He must imagine the situations, conflicts, and reactions which direct perception would make more easily comprehensible for the fact that it is direct.

A novel is created in the thoughts and imagination of the reader. A film, on the other hand, is created not in the imagination but in the perception. Through the objective representation of things, the image has a liberating power which words do not have. It frees us from reality by offering it to us, or at least frees us from the need to imagine it, at the same time asking us to discover a *meaning* in it. Though it is not created through thought, it gives food for thought. Moreover, as we have indicated on numerous occasions, it always involves the processes of consciousness (association, judgment, etc.). The end result of fiction in the cinema is not, as in the novel, a fictional reality; its point of departure is a perceived reality, which it then transcends. Besides, as Bernard Pingaud points out, time in the cinema "coincides with that of the audience," whereas in the novel, "even if the reader is close to understanding the original time, he does not actually experience it; he experiences something created by the narrative which can only be vestigial."

The important point is this: the talkie enjoys all the advantages of literary, i.e., fictional expression, passing constantly from

the verbal to the visual, from description to suggestion, from something said to something seen, from an action to a thought and back again.

Anything under the heading of direct style in the novel is translatable in the cinema by dialogue and by the way the characters behave. As well as what is said, it is also how it is said and how the characters behave, i.e., the actors' acting.

At the same time anything under the heading of indirect style is definable through pure visual expression. This is the part played by editing, framing, camera movement, and the spatial organization of the field of view relative to the action and situation. It is the analysis of facts and actions in an appropriate rhythm.

By this means, the relationship between direct and indirect style is exactly the same as that between the two different modes of expression—verbal and visual—each with its own different influence on the concept. Everything in literature which takes time to register with the reader is felt immediately in the cinema.

The example of the *Titanic* is significant in this respect, but even so, the relationship is a simple one—between a known historical event and a situation to which the event lends a *meaning*.

Imagine the following situation: a man is trying to console his mistress. He does not dare (or is not able) to confront her with certain home truths, the consequences of which he is weighing in his mind. He lights a cigarette, pulling out his lighter. Recognizing it as a present which his fiancée gave him a few scenes earlier, we are directly aware of his dilemma: the lighter pricks his conscience—which is in direct contrast with the attitude he is assuming. He pulls himself together, but, as he starts to speak, he fondles the object. We guess that he is thinking of his fiancée and this thought, which makes him act oddly, gives an even

greater justification for his lover's fears, etc. Now, where it would have taken a novelist ten or twenty lines to explain the mental reactions of the man and describe its consequences, the image gives us the information instantaneously: *as he continues acting and speaking*, it draws attention to particular mannerisms, involuntary movements, the attitude of each in turn; it *exposes*, corrects, explains and very accurately fulfills the role of the novelist relative to his characters. It is able to investigate motives, point out contrasts, undermine the dialogue, and, through its associations with the dialogue, control or deflect the meaning, constantly altering it.

It is clear that there are far more opportunities offered to a filmmaker wanting to exploit the psychological dimensions of a character than to a novelist. As well as the descriptive image on which it is based, film offers dialogue and the analytic image, which provides the relationship between what is seen and what is heard; interior monologue, which provides the relationship between what is said and what is thought; and commentary (possibly the commentary of someone outside the action), which provides the relationship between commentary, dialogue, and monologue vis-à-vis what the image shows, analyzes, or suggests. A film is a complex of complexes, an overlay of allusions and associations all (potentially) related to various different significations like multifaceted, infinitely self-reflecting mirrors.

The (deliberately crude) examples we have used show very well what the cinema could be, what it is *capable* of being. Though it is a long way from the psychological subtleties of a Proust, a Joyce, or a Faulkner, its dialectical capacities are such that it will be on a par with them in the foreseeable future. It would be already were the filmmaker able to express himself through film as the writer does through words, i.e., were

the public capable of understanding the visual code as it understands the verbal code and were film not to require universal comprehension to guarantee its very existence.

In a less serious but no less interesting vein (interesting because it is immediately comprehensible—I am referring to comedy, fairy tales, fantasy), the text has never been exploited to the extent that it might have. Think of sound distortion, the potential of increasing or decreasing recording speeds, dialogue run backward to produce a strange convoluted neolanguage, changing voices around so that an old man has a little girl's voice, a construction worker a baby's, a pretty woman a deep bass, etc. A character loses his temper—instead of cursing, he barks like a dog. His neighbor shuts him up by bleating like a sheep. Animals exchange crazy ideas. André Delons wrote as far back as 1928: "Imagine the sort of satirical comedy where slapstick comedians could become dramatic characters, country bumpkins could play tragic parts, and villains could read the news. Imagine the speaking parts reversed, with a tree being cut down screaming like a woman in pain or humming a gay little tune or a woman speaking in tree creaks, coughing leaves, or tearing roots. Imagine your images of comedy and tragedy turned upside down—when a group of characters with smiling faces sob their hearts out. Imagine the opposite of everything I have said . . ." (*Le Mélange des genres*).

Fantasy films could not be better served. Merely putting words and sounds out of synch can produce the most amazing effects. A woman screams but we do not hear the sound . . . until a second later when the scream reverberates and echoes, terrifying the woman herself. A character carries on an argument with his own voice saying words he does not mean. A singer mouths her words; she swallows the sounds instead of letting them out of her mouth. Sound ef-

fects can be out of synch, early or late; sounds can be played backward or at unnatural levels. A whole universe of dissonances and discords is available to the sound recordist. Has anyone ever explored them?³⁴ Except for animation films, which generally use them for comic effects, the examples could be counted on the fingers of one hand: the rugby match in *Le Million*, the quarrel between the two capitalists in *Miracolo a Milano*, certain scenes in *Belles de nuit*, the horse in *Okraina* letting out a sigh of exhaustion are the classical examples. But they are few and far between. At the fantasy level, *La Nuit fantastique* has some extraordinary effects in it, but there has been only one director to my knowledge who has been able to use sound to its fullest advantage: Gregory la Cava. In *Private Worlds*, whose action takes place in an insane asylum, a young woman loses her sanity. She hears her own voice whispering to her: "You're going mad." Repeated endlessly, this phrase keeps recurring: murmured, shouted, screamed, from close to, from far away, on the right and on the left; with every intonation possible—anxious, hysterical, terrified—and every pitch—muffled, muted, sharp, hissed, screeched. The general psychic effect is mind-bending. The audience might easily think itself going mad. Had the sequence been stretched beyond the levels of tolerance it would have had people fainting in the aisles. I have never seen anything like it before or since. And yet . . .

The Role of Music

From the earliest days, films were always projected to the accompaniment of music. In my own memory, the silent films projected in the local cinemas had pianists improvising (more or less successfully), changing rhythm and tempo according to the pace of each individual sequence, from chase scenes to tender love scenes, jumping

from Bach to Christiné, from Franz Léhar to Wagner.

The idea of a piece of music specially composed for films did occur to some producers, but the expense of hiring orchestras to play the scores was so great that only one or two cinemas, in Paris and the provinces, were able to afford that kind of luxury. In the period between 1908 and the end of the silent era I can think of only ten scores written for films, the first being Saint-Saëns, for the *Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908). There were also (quoting from memory): *Quo Vadis* (Jean Nogues, 1912), *Cabiria* (Ildebrante Pizetti, 1914), *Birth of a Nation* (Joseph Carl Breil, 1916), *Intolerance* (Joseph Carl Breil, 1916), *El Dorado* (Marius François Gaillard, 1921), *Entracte* (Erik Satie, 1924), *Salammbo* (Florent Schmitt, 1925), *Le Jouer d'échecs* (Henri Rabaud, 1926), *Napoléon* (Arthur Honegger, 1927).

From 1919 onward, cinemas with orchestras began to proliferate and more and more scores began to be composed, but as often as not they were merely adaptations of existing works made to fit the structure of the film. The most outstanding of these were Arthur Honegger's "arrangements" for *La Roue* (1922) and Gottfried Huppertz's for the *Nibelungen* (*The Death of Siegfried—The Vengeance of Kriemhilde*, 1923-24).³⁵

In the silent era, music was indispensable, not just to accompany a dramatic movement but also, as Jean Epstein said, to "free the audience from the terrible weight of silence." Arthur Honegger observed: "To avoid being monotonous, a film must necessarily be accompanied by a noise of some kind"—which led Paul Romain to conclude that "all that is required of the orchestra in the cinema is to play harmonious background music with the idea not of being heard but of creating an atmosphere to sink us into our subconscious and make us forget the rustling paper, the shuffling feet, etc. in the auditorium. . . . The role of music

is therefore subsidiary, helping to put us in a trance with a vague background hum. Music helps to *create silence*. And it is this trance-inducing quality which is for us the real purpose of music in the cinema."³⁶

Yet it would appear that the need for music in film may be explained in a way that is both logical and psychological. The "unrealistic" nature of silent film makes it incapable of allowing the audience to experience a real feeling of *duration*, of *time passing*. The time experienced by the characters in the drama, the relationship in time between shots or sequences, may be perfectly well recognized—but it is *understood*, not *experienced*. Film needed a kind of rhythmic beat to enable the audience to measure internally the psychological time of the drama, relating it to the basic sensation of real time. In other words, it needed a measure capable of accounting for rhythm and cadence. And it was music which contributed this measure, this time content. Far more than a sound background echoing the sentiments of the film or freeing us from that terrible silence by creating its unity, music provided the audience with the sensation of duration actually experienced. Related to the time of the drama, this duration allowed the audience to feel its signifying value.

As we have indicated, the sound film was to bring an even greater feeling of "reality" to the film content. Even so, the music of these films was to prove no different from the ideas developed during the silent era. The only difference was that it came from behind the screen instead of from the orchestra pit.

We shall ignore the fashion for musicals which marked the beginning of the talkies, but we must not pass on without drawing attention to some of the more successful of these, notably *Congress Dances* (Werner Heyman) and *Showboat* (Jerome Kern). *Hallelujah!*, *Le Million*, and *Threepenny Opera* were masterpieces in their way but since

their structure was actually based on music, it did not present a problem, any more than in musical comedies where it is the most important element. Vincent Youmans, Irving Berlin, Harry Warren, Victor Schertzinger, George Gershwin, etc. are all partly responsible for the success of *42nd Street*, *Top Hat*, *Gold-Diggers of Broadway*, and *The Gay Divorcée* and other films with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, as they are for more recent films by Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen, Robert Wise, and Vincente Minnelli (*Singing in the Rain*, *An American in Paris*, *Band Wagon*, *West Side Story*, etc.).

Music took on a more "realistic" meaning when films describing the lives of famous musicians came along. Even though it fulfilled a logical requirement, the music was still used to rather pointless ends. In *The Unfinished Symphony* (by Willy Frost), when Schubert plays the opening chords of his symphony on the piano, he is joined by a complete symphony orchestra; but there is no orchestra—nor could there be, since the composer has only begun the first few bars of his score. You might say that it is Schubert's imagination conjuring up the orchestra; but then a whole orchestral score played on a piano would stretch even a musician of Schubert's undoubted skill. When Schubert receives his inspiration for *Ave Maria* standing in front of a chapel and we hear it being sung, that is perfectly acceptable, since no musical reality exists to contradict the fiction which is immediately recognized as such. The same is true when, in Abel Gance's *Beethoven*, we hear the opening chords of a symphony at the same time as the composer, having lost his hearing, receives the visual impressions suggesting the chords to him. (Though it must be said that the composer does not hear his symphony any more than a poet does his poem until it is written down!)

Apart from these one or two exceptions (which at least depend for their themes on

music), film music following the role established for it in the silent era is silly and useless. The tiresome orchestrations supposed to bring out the highlights in the drama and create an apparently essential atmosphere are more of a hindrance than a help. A film can quite easily dispense with their acoustic adornments, particularly when its action deals with psychological or social realities which create their own duration. Only dreams, fairy tales, or fantasy films—being in a sense more in line with silent films in any case—can benefit from a continuous acoustic background.

It is not that music itself has no use—it just has another part to play. Its place is not to comment on the imagery, to paraphrase the visual expression, to sustain its rhythm—except in one or two exceptional cases—or to have value or significance of its own. What was true for the text also holds good for music: good dialogue need not have any meaning, any logical dialectic—especially when it is divorced from the images which might give it meaning. Good film music can do without musical structure provided that its intrusion *into the film* at a specific moment should have a precise signification. Film music is not explanation; nor is it accompaniment; it is an *element of signification* (no more nor less) but from which it gains all its power once associated with the other elements: images, words, and sounds. As Roland Manuel points out, "music must deny its own structure if it is to be an ally of the image." Placed in a visual context, it must establish signifying reactions through contrast or unusual association.

We must be careful to avoid an expression which has become something of a cliché over the years, which is that music must create a kind of "counterpoint" with the image. Counterpoint is precisely the sort of impressive word which looks very good in magazine articles; however, that does not mean that it is any the less irritating, since

it is generally misused. To stretch the point, any piece of music used in conjunction with any image acts in counterpoint: sound against vision. More specifically, counterpoint is a form deriving entirely from specifically musical structures. It describes two melodies developing side by side in such a way that their dissimilarity catches the attention of the listener, through the simultaneous progression of the different "voices" rather than through harmonies or "harmonics" (though the "vertical" relationship between the two melodies does conform with the laws of harmony). In a way, it is the development in time of a harmony or, to put it another way, a new melody created from two others. (Something like montage—that is, parallel rather than successive montage, as in split screen.) Naturally there can be contrast, antithesis, inversion, etc. between the point and its counterpoint. Yet, apart from these potential relationships, it is generally a question of relationships of rhythm and pitch—not relationships of meaning. Thus to refer to counterpoint with reference to the opposition of feelings expressed by music and film is utter nonsense. Would it be an oversimplification to use the only really appropriate word to describe the effect, namely *contrast*?

Having said that, it is to Maurice Jaubert that we must refer in talking about film music. He was the first to appreciate its potential, and in a study which serves as a model for anyone interested in film music, he laid down the foundations for the practical use of music in the cinema. The following extracts form the basis of his thesis:

What do most of our directors require of music?

First, to plug up any acoustic "gaps," either because there is not enough sound in a particular passage or because the director cannot find a real sound which is acceptable—even one suggested by the image. (No need to look further into this crude notion of music.)

Most generally, music is used to "comment on the action." If the scene is tragic, a few notes on an oboe or trombone help bring out the blackness of the imagery. If the scene is sentimental, a solo violin makes the sweet-nothings even sweeter (so it is believed).

One wonders whether those who hold to this aesthetic realize that all they are doing is transposing into the cinema a very old musical tradition associated with melodrama. They are certainly unaware that from a purely acoustic point of view, to superimpose music over a voice or sound runs the risk of destroying the emotional value of one and the authenticity of the other. . . . These current notions about film music have led specialized composers to the natural conclusion that music is dramatic and expressive in its essence. A kind of musical-cinematic language has developed, uniting the worst kind of Wagnerian orchestration and pseudo-Debussy slickness—and even putting in touches of more modern music. A monstrous absurdity which leads some musicians to think that, if they are capable of writing a pop tune, they are equally able to express in eight bars and with a full orchestra the whole range of human emotion.

We should bring these people back from cloud cuckoo land. We do not go to the cinema to listen to music. Indeed, all we need it to do is reinforce the visual expression for us. We do not need it to "explain" the images to us but to add a completely different resonance to them. We do not need it to be "expressive" and add its own feeling to that of the characters or the director but to be "decorative" and to add its theme to the one on the screen; and, lastly, to rid itself of all its subjective elements and give us physical evidence of the internal rhythm of the image without limiting itself to a translation of the emotional, dramatic, or poetic content.

That is why I believe that it is vitally important for film music to create its own

style. If its only concern is the traditional one of composition or expression, instead of entering as an ally the world of the images, it will create a world apart, that of sound, obeying its own laws, answerable only to itself. . . .

Film music must be free of all these subjective elements; it must be as realistic as the image. Using purely musical, not dramatic, resources, it must support the plastic content of the image with "impersonal" sounds, by means of the strange alchemy of correspondences which is at the very heart of the film composer's art. Lastly, it must bring out the rhythm of the image, without striving after a slavish translation of its content—be it emotional, dramatic, or poetic.

Once it is released from its academic commitments (symphonic composition, orchestration, etc.), music will reveal, through the agency of film, an aspect of itself hitherto unimaginable. It has yet to explore the no-man's land between its self-imposed frontiers and those of its natural self. Through the images on the screen, it will restore tired old clichés to their rightful place, presenting them in a new light: a couple of notes on a harmonica (if they correspond to what a particular image needs) will always have more impact in the context than the Ride of the Valkyrie.

It must never be forgotten that in the cinema music makes its greatest contribution as an element of sound rather than as a means of intellectual or even metaphysical expression. The more it lets the imagery take the upper hand, the greater its chances of exploring uncharted territory. (*La Musique de film*)

If only dialogue writers would show a similar humility, a similar understanding of the part their work should play, instead of trying to make the images fit round their words. It is true that a large percentage of composers, instead of writing film music, write music for films; but it is mostly the

fault of the directors, who in large part are not really interested in the quality of sound produced for their films or at least regard it as a minor consideration—particularly since, though they are perfectly prepared to cut the dialogue where necessary, they are unable to do so when it comes to the score. Most often it is only when the film has been edited that the composer is brought in, to provide "mood music to fill in a background for the images." The composer does what he is asked and sometimes one or two adventurous souls manage to create significations where and when they can (though it should be at the shooting script stage, when the overall structure of the film is decided, that the music should be discussed—along with all the other contributory effects: dialogue, sets, lighting, camera movement, etc.). If the shooting script is the director's responsibility, then he should consult the whole crew (including the composer), each of whom should add his specialist's opinion in the execution of the whole. This is the only way that a film can achieve any sort of perfection and also the only way a composer can decide where and how the music should be used. Whenever music is seen to be aesthetically *integrated* into a film, it has always been prepared in this way.

Even after twenty years, Maurice Jaurier's adaptations are still outstanding as models of how film music should be used. The song in *Quatorze Juillet*, the waltz in *Carnet de bal* stand as pretty tunes by themselves, but take the music of *Le Jour se lève* away from the images and it means nothing. Indeed, what value is there in the rhythmic beat which shows Jean Gabin's fear trapped in his room except relative to the images which resonate in an amazing way as a consequence? What value is there in the trumpet solo played by the busker with Gabin and Jules Berry sitting in the cafe, except as an interruption to Berry's

lying tittle-tattle bringing Gabin back to reality? Music does not accompany this film: it is integrated into it.

The same is true of the theme tune in *Stagecoach*, a simple folk song revamped and arranged by Richard Hageman. At the beginning of the film, we follow a stagecoach in a series of tracking shots, with the folk song playing behind; then we see the stagecoach only at the start of each successive part of the journey, this time in much shorter shots. Now, while our attention is drawn to the action inside the stagecoach, the theme tune (which we are still hearing) translates the movement of the coach, giving the film the dynamic lift it needs. By overlapping the storytelling, the music first of all signifies through its relation with the images, and then, through a kind of symbolic transference, it assumes the descriptive role originally assigned to them.

Apart from these classic examples, we might also mention the subtle tunes linking sequences in *Pickpocket* or, by contrast, underlining sudden changes in tone. Bresson is one of that rare breed of filmmakers who recognize the importance of using sound as a signification. The expressivity of the sound effects in *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* is as great—at any rate, almost as great—as the expressivity of the imagery.

We must not forget that the difference between actual sound and music (setting aside for the moment its specifically musical qualities) is the same as that between arrangements of organic and inorganic sounds: the signifying qualities are the same. (By which we mean that sound may have a power equal to the dramatic and psychological suggestion—though this has nothing to do with the rhythmic structures, i.e., the very qualities which make music what it is. And the question does not arise at the level of realism: real sounds will always be preferable to music—particularly imitative music.) And, once again, it is a

musician who confirms this fact, i.e., that "realistic" films are (ideally) self-sufficient and that, all too often, music is used to "wrap up" the mediocrity of others.

Yves Baudrier writes in his very pertinent treatise on film music:

Is it believable that films are less successful, less effective, without music? Well, we would contend that it is all a matter of style and we base our contention on observations which are objective in their generality.

Take a film which is truthful and dramatic, observing all the documentary and psychological qualities generally expected of honest realism. Frankly, such a film does not seem to require a musical accompaniment. Yet if a score is forced on it, how subtly must it be treated to avoid distorting the unbroken visual dialectic centered on a total surrender to reality?

Take a completely different film. Everything in it is set up: think of it as sentimental and unashamedly melodramatic, riddled with every cliché in the book, guaranteed (or so the promoters hope) to fill the cinemas from coast to coast. Now, this film is swamped with music from start to finish. The average audience, endowed, one hopes, with the faintest glimmer of a critical faculty, will see that in fact the screenplay is packed with improbable situations and the psychological truth is distorted to make it conform with the cheap emotional effects. If it has any analytical sense, the audience will realize that all these weaknesses are subtly glossed over by the music; and the film, as shot, could in no way have managed to support the dialogue and real location sound by themselves.

Let us take this to its ultimate extreme. Suppose we put continuous music over the first film where the realism is so marked. There is no doubt that the meaning of the film becomes softened and its deliberate austerity ends up becoming compromised, maybe even strait-jacketed.

Obviously this is all entirely subjec-

tive. Yet there is an entirely objective risk in the interest of the film being reduced, drawn by two contradictory considerations, as if the brightness of the screen were decreased by the sudden illumination of the auditorium, dispersing one's visual attention over too wide an area.

As for the second film, if the music is taken away, there is a risk of losing the necessary minimum emotional warmth which must exist for us to believe (however temporarily) in the sentiments we are supposed to be feeling, attracting, through a sort of magic, the complicity of the audience.

In this perspective, therefore, what becomes of film music? Something which, on the one hand, runs the risk of softening dangerously the value of certain real images and, on the other, through its undeniable strength in the areas of weakness in the visual dialectic, runs the risk of encouraging mediocrity in the easy options it provides. (*Musique et cinéma*)

Baudrier goes on to contrast (perhaps a little too systematically) the realism of film and the lyricism of music, conferring on music the powers of lyricism (or subjectivity), as well as—where appropriate—the realism (or objectivity) of the images. Drawing a more precise antithesis (and aligning himself with our view of film rhythm), he contrasts the fundamental irregularity of the relative durations of shots with the regularity of individual rhythms. "Realistic structures," he says, have no strict *tempo*, whereas music is defined by the tempo which organizes the priority of certain themes and repetitions. There is therefore an obvious irreducibility: relative to two completely separate considerations or two different associative fields. Music becomes "deformed" if it tries to follow the image and the image becomes stiff and "mechanical" when it becomes subordinate to the music. It is therefore vital to ensure that, through the music, the internal reality of time is directed outward to the external

world, providing it with the basic units of rhythm crystallizing either into relative tempi or static spatial dimensions. For an extended domination of space is achievable only where the measures of absolute time have been integrated into it.

In other words, in addition to the emotional or oneiric background which music can help create in "unrealistic" films, its role in "realistic" films is pretty much the same as it was envisaged in the silent era: to provide the audience with a feeling of real duration, an idea of time relative to which the psychological time is defined (with this important difference: that it is imposed only at certain moments).

Without listing every film whose score complies with Maurice Jaubert's and Yves Baudrier's requirements, we should mention in this regard Giovanni Fusco's music for *Hiroshima, mon amour* and for Antonioni's films.

As Marcel Martin points out, "Giovanni Fusco makes a point of not compromising his music for the sake of the drama; he only introduces it at the crucial moments of the film (not always the most crucial in the apparent action but the most important in the psychological development of the characters) as a kind of sound background limited in its duration, attenuated in its volume, refusing the soft option of melody and absolutely neutral from the sentimental point of view: its role apparently is to extend the space-time relationship and add to the image a sensory element deriving more from the intellect than the emotions" (*Le Langage cinématographique*).

In *Hiroshima*, the music translating the overall meaning of the film never lets itself be carried by the tone of the feelings in the drama. The three elements, image-text-music, signify independently of each other and, of course, relative to each other. The magical atmosphere of the film has partly to do with this strange tension.

We should add that though the irreducibility of the time—and therefore the structures—which Baudrier mentions is inevitable as regards film music in the widest sense of the word, there are certain instances where it is not—which we shall come to later on. Roland Manuel's observations provide a fairly comprehensive picture:

Since it is impossible to relate musical rhythm and visual rhythm, all one can do is subordinate one to the other, according to circumstance or the genre of the film in question. This antinomy may be transformed and used to our advantage.

Though the priority of the visual rhythm seems to be a *sine qua non* of the cinema, it is still necessary for the subordination of the music to the image to be as effective as the reverse—for the reasons we have suggested: visible forms change with the speed of light, possessing an almost infinite plasticity, in which they differ from musical forms which are constantly on the point of overflowing the narrow framework given to them and are slow to move. Just as in a busy traffic-laden street the overall speed is governed by the speed of the slowest vehicle, so it is easier to make the rhythm of the image fit that of the music than the other way round.

The success of animation and the excellent effects produced by *playback* are due, on a very elementary but significant level, to a healthy understanding of this fact. In both instances, the script is written to the music before being translated into images. The composer is obviously still required to illustrate all the various changes in the subject of the film; but since he is working directly with the subject and not the plastic expression of the storyline, he is free to proceed using the proper resources of his art. It is therefore within the framework of preestablished and coherent music that the poetic and amusing antics of the cartoon and also the graceful movements of *42nd Street* are placed.

The music is coherent in these cases

because it imposes its rhythm and form, because it is in control of its *tempo—tempo*, "the most necessary and most difficult, the most important thing in music," to quote Mozart's axiom.

This independence of music with a strict tempo explains why we remember a symphony accompanying or rather accompanied by playback or a sequence of animation much more clearly than music tacked onto the action of a film with little effect of the audience's consciousness. (*Rythme cinématographique et musical*)

Audiovisual Structures

It is not the purpose of this chapter to associate music with film (nor to examine musical comedy, where the movements, dictated by the choreography, are registered in the rhythmic cadences of the score) but to compare film with the structures based on the principles outlined by Robert Manuel: viz, "though it is impossible to make musical rhythm conform to visual rhythm, all that is required is to make one subordinate to the other." And yet, though "a split second is all we need to perceive all the details of an object, we need a considerably longer time for our ears to assimilate the sound elements accompanying our vision of the object." On the other hand, though only a couple of bars of music are sufficient to produce a marked effect on us, visual rhythm acts much more slowly. The fact that music is subject to laws of composition not affecting the image means that film gains in letting the score determine the tempo, whereas, if it is the other way around, neither benefits. Thus "music becomes integrated because it imposes its rhythm and form, because it controls the tempo."

Animation, because it is composed to the rhythm of a score, is opening up promising areas of exploration. Of course, when natural movement is subjected to a predetermined rhythm, it becomes to some ex-

tent "mechanized." And the effect of this is comedy, adding to the overall burlesque atmosphere of cartoons.

In fact, unless the film has choreographed movements, the effect of making gesture conform to a given tempo is to make real characters look ridiculous. Chaplin used this mechanization of gesture to create some wonderful gags, particularly in *Modern Times* (Charlie's spanner dance) and *The Great Dictator* (Charlie staggering around when he is hit over the head with a frying pan). However, in the famous barber shop sequence, his movements, guided by one of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*, assumes an obvious poetic quality. The reason is very simple: movements controlled by a "mechanized" rhythm make a character look ridiculous only insofar as the rhythm appears to come "from outside," when it is imposed unexpectedly. Then the man becomes a puppet. He loses his essential qualities (free will, freedom, self-control, etc.), and this degradation—which is the effect [Bergson called] "le mécanique plaqué sur le vivant" [the mechanical stuck onto the living]—immediately makes him ludicrous and comical.

On the other hand, if this control appears to be the effect of free choice, then the man is able to transform our attitude to him, registering the movements of his body in a predetermined rhythm, proving that he is a man of free will, a sort of winged god: a dancer. The choice may be of an action (as in the barbershop sequence) as easily as of a choreographic interpretation (the balloon dance). The rhythms of gesture become the expression of an "internal" movement.

That is why dance is never ridiculous, whereas an involuntarily "mechanized" gesture is always grotesque.³⁷

But dance, the "pure act of metamorphosis," the power of signifying through the performance of a rhythm controlling the body, can be replicated in the mobility of

pure forms. Then it is no longer a matter of free will but of blind submission—for which inanimate objects are better suited for the fact that their very inertia means that they are liable to all and any movement without inviting humiliation or ridicule.

From the very beginnings of the talkie, perfect association of rhythm was obtainable through animation. The little cartoon characters acted rhythmically. However, visual imagination and musical presentation (though working round the same subject) remained independent of each other. Image and music, both with the same tempo, performed different patterns in different worlds.

In some of the *Silly Symphonies* series, however, the visual patterns described variations of form and movement around the musical theme: a method of plastic transposition which occasionally proved quite successful. These short films, the products of a rigid construction coupled with an extremely poetic imagination, formed comic ballets which still represent the art of the cinema at its most accomplished. Yet, though animated films are in fact made up of nothing more than movements of lines and colors (however little Mickey Mouse seems based on pure graphic abstraction), these movements can turn into movements of "pure forms." The researches of the avant-garde were along these lines.

We saw how Richter's and Ruttman's experimentation came to a dead end. It drew attention to the *duration* value of the image and contributed to a definition of a basic film metric structure, but the predicted rhythm did not materialize. Rhythm is always rhythm of *something*; it can never be gratuitous. Though music is rhythm in its essence, this is not the case with either the cinema or literature.

Whereas notes or chords by themselves signify nothing, words or images have very definite meanings. And these meanings, varying according to their place in the sen-

tence or sequence, may be augmented by an emotional quality produced by various metric relationships. However, rhythm exists only when these relationships provide the words or images with a new sense relative to their original meanings. Now, whereas a musical sequence creates its own signification through its actual development, when visual forms have no meaning in themselves, they cannot be expected to have any as part of a sequence. They cannot therefore be employed in the same way as sounds. To attempt to create a cinematic rhythm similar to musical rhythm is to struggle against an obvious impossibility. In Ruttmann's experimental films, the moving geometrical shapes do not determine any particular feeling or emotion. They merely contribute to the perception of a cadence with no actual foundation.

Yet, though nonrepresentational forms were incapable of creating rhythm, they could be used as accompaniment for musical compositions. Relationships of line, color, and sound were therefore able to produce, through their harmonized or contrasting movements, some rather novel effects.

The first to achieve anything like perfection in this association of images and music was the German Oskar Fischinger with his *cinérythmes* produced between 1932 and 1935. Taking over Ruttmann's ideas and at times adding color (*Komposition im Blaue*, 1934), he used music to give meaning to these patterns, variations of lines, circles, squares, and ovals. What in Ruttmann was merely empty form and gratuitous cadence became rhythm through the musical content with which the forms were associated.

Yet whatever their formal perfection, these constructions at the same time revealed a weakness: when the movements of geometric shapes are associated with the rhythm, cadence, even tones of a musical sequence, this is limited to *punctuating*—however skillfully—the latter rather than

associating visual rhythm with musical rhythm. Rhythm is provided entirely by the music, which "fills" with its substance and time signature an empty form visually underscoring its movement and tempo. In other words, if a *cinérythme* is projected mute, the misconceptions behind Eggeling's, Richter's and Ruttmann's work become immediately apparent.

The same is true of the experiments of the English filmmaker Len Lye and the Canadian Norman McLaren, who followed the path pioneered by Fischinger but added a greater flexibility and brilliance (MacLaren in particular) to the arrangement and dazzling intoxication of colored forms. (We know that MacLaren paints directly onto celluloid, whereas Fischinger uses the methods of animation, photographing his images frame by frame).³⁸

From another point of view, because of the speed not of the musical rhythm but of the sounds which the ear can perceive in a cadence beyond the capacities of our eyes, if one tries to translate each beat of sound with a visual beat (as MacLaren tries to do), the speed of the movement becomes such that in spite of the schematic or linear appearance of the graphics, the sequence of images creates a series of shocks which the eye finds difficulty in tolerating for longer than a few minutes.

We shall pass over the various experiments which have tried to photograph sound vibrations produced by the optical recording of music, making it the graphic element accompanying the music. One cannot help thinking of the goldsmith described by Jean d'Udine in *L'Art et le geste* who, "when he fashions a brooch by chiseling the particular curve produced by two tuning forks each vibrating at an interval of a ninth, firmly believes he is producing, in plastic form, an emotion corresponding to the harmonies which M. Debussy introduced into music."

In a different way but along the same lines, other researchers have been led to associate real images with music, basing their work on the well-established ideas of various theorists. The first of these was Canudo, who, as far back as 1922, suggested that any film with an obvious lyrical intention could be supported by a preestablished musical rhythm.

The first filmmaker to be attracted to this type of exercise was Germaine Dulac, who, from the earliest days of the talkies, attempted to create images using the music of famous composers. Her mistake (shared by those who followed her pioneering work) lay in trying to illustrate music, giving a visual interpretation of the *theme* rather than the music (in the compositional sense of the word). A whole sequence in *Disque 957* consists of images of the record turning on the turntable. In *Arabesque*, we see water spraying onto a lawn, raindrops and various movements forming patterns without any tonal or rhythmic correlation between the two expressive forms. At best, the images are, *photographically*, in fleeting harmony with the impressionistic tone of the music. And only occasionally is there an arbitrary juxtaposition between the theme *expressed* by the music and the images *representing* the actions described or suggested, images whose sequence remains unaltered by the movements of the score.

Eisenstein, however, who right up to his death remained one of the pioneers of audiovisual structure, succeeded in *Romance sentimentale* (produced in France in 1930 with his assistant Alexandrov) in giving some pretty clear evidence of what was possible. Apart from one or two clichés and a rather dubious story line (not what we had come to expect of him), he composed a series of visual impressions coming right in the middle of a long sequence (autumn landscapes) which presented exact—though not always rhythmic—correspon-

dences with a score specially written to demonstrate the relative qualities of a singer past her prime.

In 1933, a first adaptation of Arthur Hongger's *Pacific 231* was produced in Soviet Russia by Tzekhanovsky. Though it had nothing to do with audiovisual rhythms, it was a very clever experiment. Filming the orchestra, the director was able to isolate at suitable moments and following the changes in the music the call of the French horns, the beat of the tympani, the wailing of the strings, the braying of the trombones, while in a sequence of fleeting images, by intercutting and superimposing, he showed a locomotive under full steam with parts of the engine related to the various sections of the orchestra. He was thus able to associate the movement of a connecting rod with that of a bow, the in-and-out of a trombone valve with that of a piston, etc. But at best this was nothing more than a clever way of filming an orchestra.

The same criticism may be made of a more recent and more original experimental film made by Djon Milie with a jazz band (*Jammin the Blues*, 1947), a splendid film photographically but with no direct connection with the experiments in question—particularly since in these, where the music is accepted as an independent entity, the first consideration is to ignore that it is the output of an orchestra and cut out the musicians.

It is obvious that if one wants to associate visual and musical rhythm and not limit oneself to illustrating the latter with a form devoid of signification, then one must refer to reality, taking something which already has meaning to be altered and transformed at will through a rhythm—a specific rhythm.

The only possible danger is in lapsing into mere illustration, something neither Germaine Dulac nor Eisenstein was able to avoid but which the Russian painter Sergei

Alexeyev managed to steer around in his film *A Night on Bare Mountain*, which is perhaps the masterpiece of the genre as well as a masterpiece in its own right.

It is neither graphic (in the abstract sense) nor a photographic reproduction of reality but a sequence of fantasy images, apocalyptic visions, a strange nightmare, and it was produced using the "pinboard" technique. Thousands and thousands of pins are stuck side by side into a backing board covered with rubber. According to the amount the pins protrude from the board, the light projected over the pinboard picks out areas of light and shade which the artist models as he wishes by pulling the pins out or driving them in (frame by frame) to form points of either light or shade.

No more lines, then, but a perpetual play of light and shade, of shadowy, ghostly, magical forms which Mussorgsky's music seems to draw from the depths of hell, breathing life into them with its enormous vitality. Not gratuitous imagery any more but a plastic emotion drawing out the musical emotion, both moulded into the same rhythm and consisting of its actual development: a work of genius if ever there was one, far outstripping MacLaren's charming graphics and Fischinger's clever geometrical designs. And this time the film can be projected without its music. Obviously it loses an enormous amount: its internal resonance, its oppressive feeling of time, everything which it gains from the music — that goes without saying. However, the vision remains and its fantasies find sufficient justification in their own movement and form.

It has been often said that musicians are vehemently opposed to this idea of "tacking images onto a score." Though it is true that they have been provoked by certain clumsy efforts, it is totally wrong to say that they have always been opposed to the idea — at least to any general degree — of looking for

plastic correspondences. Quite the contrary. A poll conducted around 1932 by *L'Intransigeant* produced the following results:

Albert Roussel: I would be happy if a director who knew what he was doing took my *Festin d'araignée*, for instance; it would provide the basis for a great many cruel and comical effects.

Alfred Cortot: I believe that for composers in the future there is a whole area ripe for exploitation, every bit as large and fertile in suggestions of all kind as was the form of the symphonic poem for the generation which is passing. . . . The danger would be in being led, when interpreting a purely musical subject, into contriving nonsense or irritating overstatements. Moreover, when filmmakers and musicians collaborate, they should not concern themselves with using imagery to restore the great works of our musical past but with composing new works in which there is equal respect for the characteristics of both arts.

Albert Wolff: The "symphonic poem" formula is the most adaptable to the screen because it includes a linking mechanism but no grandiose effects. What a fund of opportunities for filmmakers! This was what was in my mind when I conducted *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Peter and the Wolf*, and *In the Steppes of Central Asia*. Don't misunderstand me! There is a wholly acceptable fusion between music and images; except that, for this to exist, the composer and director must constantly compare notes.

Jacques Ibert: In principle, I am completely convinced of the value of these adaptations. There is no earthly reason why certain symphonic works should not be brought to the screen, as is done in the theater every day of the week. Even more than the stage, the cinema, through the many marvelous resources of its technique, is able to offer music the possibilities and fulfillment which the theater is mostly inadequate at providing. Obviously, "visual transcriptions" of this kind must be treated with great caution; first,

in the selection of the pieces and then in the way they are handled. . . . The cinema can give music a privileged place without interfering with the interest of the rhythm or the image.

André Coeuroy: The screen adaptation must be careful to retain the same rhythm, the same spirit, and the same character as the music. It requires a delicate touch. The *system* or, to put it another way, the *style* of the director must correspond exactly with the music.

Emile Vuillermoz: It is quite clear that most descriptive symphonic poems and, even more obviously, evocative tunes provide marvelous themes for the cinema. The laws of cinematic technique are exactly the same as for musical composition. A synthesis of the two is not only possible but also quite feasible. . . . Laws of this kind will be flexible, since they will include anecdotal interpretation as well as purely plastic or rhythmic transcriptions. And the formula will have no other limitations than the breadth of imagination of the directors.

Moreover, Arthur Honegger published in 1931 in the review *Plans* a rather remarkable article, "Du cinéma sonore à la musique réelle," from which we have chosen the following passages:

The sound cinema will come into its own only when it creates a union at the narrow junction between visual and musical expression, on the basis that they will explain and complement each other in equal measure. This synthesis will prove to be the birth of a strange art setting itself in two directions at the same time and in equal quality of which we have up to now seen only tiny glimpses in *Hallelujah!* and more particularly Ruttmann's films and Mickey Mouse cartoons. . . .

We can take this even further. *The sound film is admirably suited to completing and complementing music by giving it an actual meaning.* . . . Music has no real, concrete and perceptible representation iden-

tical for all listeners. It is possible that sound films will be able to provide it with one.

Maybe it will be possible one day to define, with some degree of accuracy, the constant and unknown relationships between the acoustic and visual rhythms so that a visual representation of every musical expression will be available corresponding exactly in every detail. From that moment on, the musician will be able to make his listener understand what he is trying to convey, for whom everything will be immediately translatable into images, not those of the fantasy world conjured up by the listener but the concrete images of the composer's work, fixed with precision and unity.

The same artistic sentiment is capable of being expressed in many different ways, according to the nature of the artist's talent: be it music or speech, graphic art or choreography, it is always the same *reality* in one of its aspects. *There exist (inevitably—between these various different expressions of a something always the same) perfect, reversible relationships which, if we are aware of them, enable us to translate each one through its equivalents.*

Once it has stopped being misunderstood or butchered, music can become itself, penetrate reality, and be, like the cinema and with it, a real unanimous force, no longer subject to the anarchic revisions of individual temperament but applying all its strength to a rapturous audience.

We could discuss endlessly the interest—or lack of it—there might be in giving music a concrete signification. In our view, it would not gain very much and we do not share Honegger's views. In any case, what he is talking about is applicable to only a limited type of music—certainly not "descriptive" music, to which any "addition" whatever is superfluous, since the music contains its own suggestive elements (*The Pastoral*, for instance). "Impressionistic"

music at least avoids this kind of redundancy. Since it is not concerned with evoking impressions but with translating them—even creating them—harmony becomes possible to the extent that the images strive to determine *equivalent* impressions avoiding precise representations. Alexeyev's film demonstrates this perfectly. In any case, the interest does not lie in the image "in-itself" but, in Honegger's words, "in the definition of the various relationships between acoustic and visual rhythm."

Since for some time this had been my opinion, having discussed the question at length with Eisenstein during the shooting of *Romance sentimentale* and believing both he and Germaine Dulac to be on the wrong track, I set out in 1932 to make my own version of *Pacific 231*. Unfortunately, the rights for the film had already been sold, so the project did not see the light of day until some twenty years later. In the interim, the experiments of Fischinger, Alexeyev, and Len Lye all tended to back up Germaine Dulac's findings . . . and my own, apart from minor differences in detail.

Meanwhile, Eisenstein had shot *Alexander Nevsky* in collaboration with Prokofiev and had published, in *The Film Sense*, a theoretical exposé which can be considered as the very basis of audiovisual art. What follows is the essence of his argument:

Obviously, musical and visual "imagery" are not actually commensurable through "representational" elements. If one speaks of genuine and profound correspondences and proportions between music and the image, it can only be with reference to the relationships between the *fundamental movements* of the music and the image, i.e., between the compositional and structural elements. . . . We can only speak of what is actually "commensurable," i.e., the *movement* lying at the base of both the structure of the given piece of music and the structure of the given vi-

sual material. An understanding of the structural laws of the method and rhythm underlying the stabilization and development of both provides us with the only firm foundation for establishing a unity between them.

However, describing the associative potential of musical rhythm and static shots, Eisenstein goes on:

We cannot deny the fact that the most striking and most direct impression will be gained, obviously, from a *congruence of the movement of the music with the movement of the visual contour*, i.e., with the graphic composition of the frame; for this contour, this outline, or this line is the strongest "emphatic" element in the actual idea of the movement.

And this is where we part company with Eisenstein.

Analyzing the "waiting" sequence which precedes the attack of the German knights, with the Russian armies standing in *static* ranks at the foot of Raven Rock where Nevsky and his lieutenants are waiting, Eisenstein goes on:

The first chord can be visualized as a "starting platform," a springboard. The following five quarter-notes, proceeding in an upward scale, would find natural visual expression in a *tensely rising line*. . . . In such a way we find a complete correspondence between the *movement of the music and the movement of the eye over the line of the plastic composition*. In other words, exactly the same movement lies at the base of both the musical structure and the plastic structure.

We cannot agree: first, because what we are seeing here is nothing more than an intelligent and "graphic" transcription of an absurd notion which consists (for instance) in associating a descending scale with the movement of a character walking down a

flight of stairs; second, because instead of associating a visual movement with a musical movement, Eisenstein is associating the movement with the delineation of a static shape. He is associating a progression, a rhythm developing in time, with a body of data instantaneously perceived, which produces a collision between the dynamic expression of the music and the plastic expression of the image crystallizing the movement into an absence of movement. And since this image lasts as long as the subsequent musical phrase, the result is that (1) the audience is forced to *read* the image rather than merely look at it, reading from left to right, as with a book and thereby following, with the music, the particular outline of the plastic composition; (2) since the eye is attracted in an image to the focal point of the plastic or dramatic lines of force, Eisenstein is always obliged to put this point on the left (foreground character or special theme) and, generally speaking, to open the corresponding musical phrase with a major chord to conform with this plastic dominant.

Clearly music does not develop in a particular *direction*. Eisenstein might just as easily have put the focal point on the right of the screen or in the middle and the major chord at the center of the time given to the image (as he sometimes did), but then it would be more difficult to "read" the image, since, through a sort of psychological automatic response, the majority of cinemagoers throughout the world read from left to right.

Eisenstein defends himself by saying that "the static whole of an image and its parts do not enter the perception simultaneously." But manifestly they do! Every experiment concerned with the psychology of perception (gestalt, etc.) proves it. Though a certain lapse of time (short indeed) is necessary for an image to be fully perceived, this penetration takes place *si-*

multaneously over all the parts and not from one part to another. Selectivity occurs only at the point of impact around which the image groups itself within a fraction of a second. To be more exact, this perception can be divided into three stages: (1) *simultaneous* perception of all the parts; (2) discovery of a special point which attracts the eye; (3) development of the forms which group themselves around this point. But it could never have anything to do with "reading", i.e., an intellectual, analytical process. It is an automatic response activated within the space of less than a second, which can vary only according to the luminous intensity of the object under consideration.

Eisenstein adds that "the art of plastic composition consists in leading the spectator's attention through the exact path and with the exact sequence prescribed by the author of the composition. This applies to the eye's movement over the surface of a canvas if the composition is expressed in painting or over the surface of the screen if we are dealing with a film image."

This is self-evident, but it brings us back to what we have already said concerning left-to-right reading. As for the analytic examination of a painting (or an image)—requiring more or less time—this is an intellectual operation which can only take place *using perceived material*. And this has nothing to do with perception (though it is, in fact, concerned with an analysis of perception). The eye allows itself to be led by the line generating the shapes or the representation, but this brings us right back to what we said about *The Voyage to Cythera*.³⁹

In any case, there could never be a correspondence between musical movement and the movement of the eye over an object—only with the movement of the object or the images representing it. In other words, *considered as a series of perceptions, music can be associated only with another series*

of perceptions—and certainly not with the analytic examination of an object. (It being understood that we are referring to rhythmic harmonies and not affective relationships which apparently present no problems of structure.)

Plastic association begins to take on a meaning only when the sequence is considered in its totality, i.e., the movement of intensity growing from shot to shot. In the "waiting" sequence, the shots pass through various successive phases—tonal, linear, spatiolinear, dramatic—in an ascending progression, followed by "light effects" which are vague, scarcely alarming, insubstantial (fading in), to the point where the characters waiting for the enemy begin to move off. The unification of the plastic and musical elements forms a movement, a single impetus across all the shots, but it is only an "idea of movement," a successive gradation, an increase in intensity corresponding to a similar increase at the musical level—without the represented material following the musical score.

One obvious effect is that apart from these associations, the use of sound as counterpoint here achieves an extraordinary power of suggestion. The twelve shots preceding the knights' attack are followed by three "empty" shots representing the bare and empty surface of the lake. Eisenstein says:

In the middle of the second of these three shots, the enemy is announced by a qualitatively new element: the sound of its battle horns. This sound bursts from the time center of the shot of the empty lake so that our attention, guided by analogy and the sensation of space, places the sound in the spatial center of the shot, as though it were coming from inside the frame. It is heard a second time in the second of the next shots (representing Nevsky surrounded by his lieutenants)—to give the feeling that the sound "came

from a long way off" (the series of shots of the empty lake) and finally reaches Alexander, suddenly breaking through into the frame of the Russian soldiers who hear it directly. The following shot discloses the distant line of German cavalry advancing head on, appearing to flow from the horizon with which it at first seemed to be merged.

Even so, it is easy to see that in *Alexander Nevsky*—as in *Ivan the Terrible*—the association of music and plastic structures adds nothing more than a sensation of completeness which, in any case, ought to have been provided by the appropriate musical accompaniment. From this point of view, Prokofiev's scores are the model par excellence and Eisenstein's films the equivalent in film terms of opera, but the rhythmic associations he prescribed were implemented in only one short section of one film—but with what effect!—in the famous Battle on the Ice and, in particular, the attack of the German knights. The association of the cavalry charge and the related musical movement excites us as we sit *physically* transported in the cinema: movement matches movement in a complex structure formed by the rhythmic, plastic, and dynamic totality of an indivisible audiovisual unity.

We have seen to what extent "Eisensteinian" montage tried to identify the rhythm of the images with the psychophysiological rhythms of emotion. The example we have just described is a perfect illustration of this. The attack of the knights is modeled on the rhythms of a quickening heartbeat. The progressive increase in the movement, in its intensity and its acoustic expression, through a musical beat becoming faster and faster and more and more complicated translates, at the same time, the heartbeats, the clatter of armor and horses' hoofbeats of the German knights as they charge toward the Russian armies. Everything combines to create a dynamic

unity which determines an emotion similar to that suggested by the represented action—but an emotion considerably increased by the resources used.

Thus Eisenstein's films offer two aspects from which the association of music and the image may be regarded: rhythmic association—the most effective, in our view, at least the most percussive; and lyrical or thematic association, several degrees higher on our scale of effectiveness than the "emotional" association generally given to music in films.

It would seem that in the latter the image-music relationship is comparable to the relationship of music and text in *Pelléas*, whose music is "so naturally incorporated into the action, so naturally developed from the situation, setting and language, so closely associated with the music under the words that in the total impression produced by this kind of sound transfusion it becomes impossible to disassociate it from the text which it permeates."⁴⁰

And Vincent d'Indy wrote the day after the first night:

What is the reason for the emotion which the audience in good faith found impossible to resist? Is it contained in the drama itself? . . . yes, clearly it is, but the drama *by itself* could never produce an impression of such a special kind. Is it contained in the music? . . . there again, it clearly is, but music *on its own* could never be expected to create the complex emotion I mean. . . . Music per se in *Pelléas* fulfills a secondary role. The text is the main feature, marvelously adapted in its acoustic conception to the inflexions of language and washed by differently colored waves of music which serve to pick out the design, reveal the hidden meaning, extend the expression while, at the same time, allowing the dialogue to appear through the fluid element around it.⁴¹

This is not the moment to discuss these

opinions; suffice it to say that all that is needed to turn this article by Vincent d'Indy into a perfect précis of Eisenstein's work is to substitute the words *film* and *image* for *drama* and *text*.

The thematic association of image and music was to tempt quite a number of filmmakers, most of them musicians. One of these was Gian-Carlo Menotti, whose *The Medium*, however interesting and original it might be, was not particularly convincing.

It is worthy of note that a former actor from the cinema, Friedrich Feher, produced in 1936 (two years before *Nevsky*) a fascinating and original film, *The Robber's Symphony*, for which he composed the screenplay, music, and images.⁴² The score was the actual basis of the film, the images serving merely to carry through the dramatic development of the action, whose lyricism derived entirely from the music: an exact application of the principles of lyric drama. Unfortunately, the faults in the script, the looseness of the theme, the unsuitability of the images vis-à-vis the music, and especially the mixture of styles—with the film passing from fantasy and expressionism to comic surrealism, from biting irony to sordid realism, from lyric documentary to caricature, without rhyme or reason or internal linking—were the reasons for its failure, which does not mean that one or two sequences do not deserve to go down as landmarks in the history books. The film in fact resembles a succession of brilliant improvisations on an unusual theme whose conventions draw attention to themselves but with the saving grace that they are sometimes treated carelessly and lightheartedly.

In 1940, Walt Disney, overambitiously taking famous pieces of music as his inspiration, reexamined in the form of animated cartoons the principles of rhythmic association. A travesty! In place of Alexeyev's poetic fantasies, we had miserable Mickey Mouse effects illustrating a story for which

the music was supposed to be the expression! In fact, *Fantasia* was not only misguided but had the effect of discrediting the whole area of experimentation in audiovisual association, letting the public (even those who should have known better) believe that the purpose of these experiments was "to put pictures to music." We owe it to ourselves to point out what must be scrupulously avoided.

Obviously there are some things of value in this disjointed and incoherent film. There is the quasi-geometrical visual counterpoint accompanying the *Toccata and Fugue*, whose graphic style is directly inspired by Fischinger's work. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, which is nothing more than a series of musical variations around a story line, is perfectly suited to the Disney style; transformed into "Mickey, the Sorcerer's Apprentice" (not without humor) it makes a charming cartoon. But bad taste already runs away with *The Dance of the Hours*. As Georges Sadoul puts it,

He pokes fun at Ponchielli's old Italian ballet, trampling over the music with the clumsy, bumptious movements of hippopotamuses dressed as ballerinas. The extreme bad taste of *The Nutcracker Suite*, copied from Tchaikovsky, is at times justified by its ingenuousness. But how can we excuse the awful duel between the waxworks Devil and the Angel with gossamer wings against the fairyland backdrop to the alternating sounds of Mussorgsky's *A Night on Bare Mountain* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*? Or the cosmic pretensions of *The Rite of Spring*, in which Stravinsky creates a ballet of volcanoes and dinosaurs? Or, more especially, Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, transformed into a pretty ballet of dancing horses and capering satyrs in an Olympus decked out like a 1910 gambling saloon. . . . (*Histoire du cinéma mondial*)

In view of the fact that we are concerned

here only with rhythmic associations, we can admit that there are certain sequences in *The Nutcracker Suite* which show a perfect synchronization of acoustic and visual movement. The mushroom dance and the ballet of the exotic fish are successful in this respect. The drawings are as supple and precise as anything of MacLaren's and could have a genuine emotional value were it not for their irritating pictorial quality evoking soft mushy colors.

Thus the problems of audiovisual composition suggest various solutions. Either one accompanies the music with abstract drawings which, in being capable only of punctuating the music, necessarily use it as a rhythmic support and an expressive form (Fischinger, MacLaren). Or else one follows the score with concrete images which carry their own meanings but thereby run the risk of being merely "illustrations" of the universe suggested by the music (Germaine Dulac). Or the representational forms remain sufficiently vague to be evocative in their own right, extending the musical impressions without ever "illustrating" them (Alexeyev). Whatever the case, all these methods of putting pictures to music take music as their starting point.

Association in the true sense is achievable only at the level of a symphonic movement formalizing some dramatic action (Eisenstein). But (in general terms) these are the conditions of lyric drama: the images show people in action, a movement whose rhythms are extended by the musical rhythm but whose primary rhythm is provided by the development of the represented action.

We are led to wonder whether it would be possible to *associate* images and music by developing throughout the *same rhythmic structure*—without the images being forced to "illustrate" something but evoke and suggest it like a poem; without being endowed with a dramatic power and (how-

ever concrete) without being subjected to ridiculous musical illustration.

It is a problem which has interested us for quite some time, and it was along this line of inquiry that we began to think about remaking *Pacific 231*.⁴³ The reader will indulge us if we refer to our own films. They were experiments and only partially successful; in no way would I claim that they exhaust the question or solve the problem. They are, however, the only attempts made in this area, which means that we cannot avoid bringing them into the discussion. Yet, more than the films themselves, it is the *intentions* behind them to which we shall be referring.

Before anything else, we discounted all "pure" forms, since these lay outside the scope of the problem. We discovered in fact that there is no more rhythm or definable expression in a sequence of quasi-geometrical designs than in a sequence of phonemes unaffected by linguistic semiology (lettrism). Which is why this development requires a musical signification to serve as an "emotional content." And yet it is clear that in their "pure" state these designs are by far the most effective, insofar as they are required merely to *accompany* the music. No concrete form taken from the real world, from real objects, could have the flexibility of these curves modeled on the movement of the music, following it note by note, beat by beat. It is easier to use a paint brush than Mother Nature.

Now, we are not dealing here with musical accompaniment or musical illustration but with an *association* of two expressive forms using the *same basic rhythmic structure*, the music serving less as a "support" than as a parallel content providing the film images with the notion of time sense which they lack.

Though rhythm in a film is defined by the dramatic development of an action "as it happens," when the images are not say-

ing anything, they prove incapable of ensuring that the visual poem has a "future," since they have no perceptible relationships which might relate to a clearly defined unit of measurement. Since visual progression obeys no laws of logic, a film may be edited in almost *any* order: whatever the chosen structure, it will always lack a rhythm capable of being *effectively experienced*, i.e., recognized as *necessary*.

Thus we run into the same dead end as with abstract designs, except that images—as images "of something"—at least possess the emotional qualities of the objects they represent, qualities capable of assuming *meaning* as the film develops. It is therefore a question of providing this development with a certain organic need, supporting it with a "future" through which the images can find the meaning intended for them. Now, it is in music that this impression of "real time" is to be found. *It provides the visual impressions with the missing time content by giving them the powers of perceptible rhythm.*

In other words, it is not so much a matter of *imposing* images *onto* music as of introducing music *into* the visual continuity—not just any piece of music, however! For if the intention is to associate the two forms of expression using the *same spinal column*, then it is vitally important for the two forms to produce similar sensations in their own way so that the emotions stimulated complement or correspond with each other within a single "entity."

Of course, the ideal would be an original composition, created from sounds and images conceived specially for one another, each of them developing simultaneously toward the establishment of complementary feelings or sensations. However, without being both composer and filmmaker there is nothing to say that one would succeed in handling images and sounds with equal ease.

Though the way the images of *Pacific 231* develop is dictated by the score, they are independent of the music as far as the objects represented are concerned; that is, they are essentially nonillustrative. Paraphrasing a passage from Souriau, we do not merely say that the forms of these two worlds, music and film, are mutually imitative or that the filmmaker is inspired by the composer but that his express intention is to offer visual effects sufficient in themselves for creating a world similar to that suggested by the music (though clearly more precise). Then the images and sounds start corresponding with each other rather than imitate each other—yet, as it were, echoing the same world which they both offer.⁴⁴

Thus it is a matter of signifying *in space* a rhythm already developing and being signified *in time*, finding a *plastic equivalent* for it by letting the formal movements become associated with the musical rhythms, like shots in the editing with phrases in the score, the quality of the images remaining “in keeping” with the quality of the parallel sounds.

Obviously, since images are always *of something*, reality must be placed “in the abstract” in order to eliminate any overrepresentational elements, while at the same time maintaining the emotional qualities produced by their tangible reality. The elements to be retained are movement, rhythm, tonality, rather than what they represent, the important thing about their quality “as objects” being their substance rather than the fact that they are objects. Indeed, as Gaston Bachelard so cleverly reminds us, “only matter can become charged with multiple impressions and feelings; only sensory qualities can provide correspondences. Perceptual qualities merely provide translations.” That is why it is necessary to add to the *perception* of movement the *sensation* of the thing moving, but without it being introduced for any other purpose than the

overwhelming sensory value it gives us. And that is why we choose to look for plastic correspondences in material reality rather than in abstract designs, in the hope of making poetry from the movement of *objects* which alone is capable of having *meaning*.

The objects must appear as the extension of sound into a concrete reality subject to its laws, a reality which then becomes, as it were, a “spatialization” of the music which lends its durations relative to the represented movements. In this way, the locomotive traveling at high speed must “construct” the symphony as it goes along, as though the score were being produced by a clever organization of the shots. The audience must forget that the music is the work of a composer being played by an orchestra; it must perceive it as though it were the expression in sound of the moving objects.

The concrete reality, the source of the film images, becomes thereby affected by a coefficient of unreality, helping it “sublimate itself” through a transcendent rhythm. The stage is reached therefore when a piece of abstract architecture may be composed from concrete reality without it ever ceasing to be what it is: the combined movement of rails and points shot in extreme closeup producing a ballet of interlocking and interchanging lines which come together and part again according to the music, without the rails ever being anything but rails, contributing their emotional value “as objects” transformed by the all-embracing rhythm.

The problem consists therefore in associating in the audience’s mind, using the *same* rhythmic development, emotional shocks produced by the images and the music, in such a way that their identical or complementary qualities are generated simultaneously. To achieve this, it is necessary to find a quality common to both perceptions, common to two elements affecting two different senses; to define the relationships—

arbitrary but perceptible—between objects developing, some at the visual level, others at the acoustic level thereby creating an emotion incapable of being produced either by the music on its own or by the images on their own but by their constant association, their superimposition in the audience's consciousness. The art consists in associating these impressions, unifying them into a single unity so that they become indissociable in the audience's mind as it perceives them simultaneously: to create a context whereby one is not sure whether one is hearing the images or seeing the music.

When the association is successful, it "produces the truly artistic satisfaction which lies in seeing diversity in unity, divergence in simultaneity, the extension of a moment in time" (Pierre Schaeffer).

It is understood that if the piece of music is self-sufficient, the film must also be able to stand on its own, maintaining the structure which it borrows from the music. In which case, all it lacks is the rhythmic requirement to which we referred (not to mention the emotional powers which the music induces).

In *Pacific 231*, we avoided the problem. In fact, though the film does not actually tell a story, it does *describe* a movement formed by the music. The locomotive with its carriages is traveling toward a specific destination. The film has an *a priori* direction provided by the movement of the train: there is a definable starting point, a middle section, and an arrival. The film could quite easily stand without the music—though it would not be the same—particularly since this movement maintains the rhythm imposed on it being inevitably included in it.

Moreover, though there are one or two sequences (traveling over the points, the countryside rushing past and the locomotive under full steam) work well in terms of audiovisual associations, the film as a whole is not successful. Because I did not

have the necessary resources, I was unable to shoot a number of the shots I had planned and I had to fill in with other shots which are not entirely suitable. But the basic reason is that Honegger's music is in *symphonic form*. It is therefore composed of several elements combining simultaneously with each other in the score. Not only are the various themes interconnected, but they are at times juxtaposed (producing the *counterpoint* we described in the previous chapter) and it is impossible to produce a visual equivalent for this, since the image has only one frame. We had therefore to choose: either to follow the main theme and ignore the others or else show the locomotive in long shot so that the audience could pick out the details through the progression of the music. But in the latter the represented objects assume a completely incongruous anecdotal quality. We should have avoided—or cut out—all images of this kind, which tend to destroy the aesthetic unity of the film. We therefore come to the same conclusion as we reached in a previous chapter: "you cannot play a symphony on a piano." For this type of exercise, only split screen or multiscreen provides an acceptable version: the various themes in the sound track can be reproduced simultaneously in three different frames on a triple screen.

And so this imperfect, incomplete first effort laid the foundations for another experiment more in line with the "monadic" conditions of the ordinary academy screen.

However, before we come on to Debussy, we must deal with the criticism generally leveled at this type of experimentation showing a complete lack of understanding as to its purpose—the sort of criticism which condemns us for investigating the synchronism of image and sound instead of "composing in counterpoint"—which I assume is supposed to mean effects of contrast.

Let us bear in mind that these effects,

often desirable when the music is used merely as accompaniment, are created out of relationships of *meaning* rather than *structure*: a bouncy tune may be used as a contrast for a scene of pathos, revealing an attitude of irony on the part of the filmmaker to the situation. But the contrast is between a certain emotional quality determined by the music and a certain emotional quality determined by what is *shown* or *described*. The music is made to contrast with the *meaning of the drama* and not with the *structure* of the images. Obviously a catchy, ironic tune has a completely different rhythm from that, say, of a lovers' goodbye. But then both film and music are developing according to *different* structures. And if they have different structures, they clearly cannot have the same rhythmic progression.

Now, the problem here is not to play on the relationships of *two* parallel rhythms (which is elementary) but to develop *similar* expressions around the *same* spinal column using *different* resources. That means that the movements, rhythmic or "phrased," must be in constant synch, even though they may not be required to be in harmony. The slightest deviation from synch produces neither contrast nor emotional counterpoint but merely the irritating effect of a film out of synch. And when a *deliberate* nonsynch effect does not appear as an editing mistake—which seldom happens—it is as though the picture track and the sound track were running with *two* parallel rhythms, neatly avoiding the problem or relating it back to the problem of film music in general.

Obviously, temporary nonsynch may be used to great effect—indeed we have used it ourselves—provided that it occurs within a synchronous context. At the risk of sounding repetitive, we might add that *even in the case of purely illustrative imagery*, even when the images show what the

music tends to suggest, it is always a case of matching the musical content with a visual, detail by detail, that is to say (like it or not), an effect of counterpoint *in the true sense of the word*.

Since *Pacific 231* was essentially dynamic, maintaining in visual terms a certain rhythm, I had to develop a series of impressions capable of deep symbolism but whose self-involved movement required the support of the music to become ordered in perceptible time. A poem about water seemed to fit these requirements quite naturally. Thus it was not the pieces of music by Debussy which we used as starting points, finding correspondences naïvely suggested by the titles of the pieces, but the theme of water itself, Debussy's crystal-clear sounds, the shimmering of his harmonies—in contrast with classical harmonies sculpted, as it were, from marble—reminiscent of the eddies, reflections and transparency of running water.

The purpose of the poem, its "essence," was to make the audience doubt the "phenomenal" reality of the world and its objects through the objects themselves, to create fantasy from reality and, in Nietzsche's words "extend the phenomenal world to its furthest limits where it denies its own existence and tries to become part of the only true reality" [*The Birth of Tragedy*]. So the title *Images pour Debussy* is deceptive.⁴⁵ It suggests images specially composed for the music whereas (even more than for *Pacific 231*) we were *using* a musical framework as the dynamic foundation of a visual progression, integrating the themes, rhythms, and sounds of Debussy in a metapoetic of water.

In fact, there is nothing aquatic about *Arabesques*, except perhaps the continuous fluidity and color of the sound structure. Now, there was nothing arbitrary—and there was no musical reason—in grouping into the same film *En bateau, Arabesque en mi, Reflets dans l'eau* and *Arabesque en sol*, for

us to begin with images which were concrete and yet at the same time descriptive and almost "illustrative" and make our way progressively, through a continual contraction of shots, toward an abstract representation, finally ending up with details shot in extreme closeup. And there was nothing arbitrary in our beginning with the representation of *material* objects—the river, trees overhanging the water—and then go back to the same elements reflected and then the reflections themselves which, turned upside down, replaced reality and offered a similar yet different universe. The film image then becomes the "image of the object's image" and makes us refer back to it when we project it into our imagination.

Returned to its phenomenal mobility, reality discovers again, beyond its ephemeral aspects, the vibrations composing it and recognizes itself as the effect of a moment in the universe. But if subjective time sense replaces real time in the same way as the reflection replaces the object, these object-images appear to identify their movement with a universal movement: a fluid and continuous rhythm softening and dissolving all rhythms and which, seeming to emanate "from inside," become as it were a sort of representation *within the representation*. Objects are projected through the movement which they express and which signifies them; mobility disturbs their appearance and translates the dynamic aspiration of a self-seeking perfection, aspires toward a reposessed tranquillity, collects itself and seeks a resting place in the eternity of movement.

Water becomes a mirror of Nature contemplating herself and the world is like a "huge Narcissus thinking itself into existence",⁴⁶ for the idea of the mirror image originates in springwater—perhaps also the idea of the soul, which is no more than its spiritual form. But in this insubstantial material, the imagination of form remains

dependent on the imagination of matter: the soul is merely a reflection.

Thus above all it is a kind of contemplative dream state: a search for movement beneath the surface of objects, for the essence of objects beneath the appearance of movement; a movement which transforms direct reality, delving into matter in the search for the "unconsciousness of form," to use Gaston Bachelard's expression.⁴⁷

My intention was to create a sort of swirling, progressive magic using a dematerialized form of nature perceived through a rhythm appearing to emanate from it. Just as reflected reality seems to dissolve into the liquid substance which supports it, so the images fuse into the rhythm which becomes apparent behind them. Thus music becomes the source of life: at the start of each "piece," the images, static to begin with (stills), start to move with the first few notes which thereby appear to be waking Nature from her hibernation.

Obviously these are very short films; but a "drop of water contains a universe, a moment in a dream contains a complete soul and the water-fairy, guardian of the mirage, holds all the birds of heaven in her hand" (Gaston Bachelard).

Thus to look at these films from a realist point of view or see them as "musical accompaniments" is to make them seem absurd, seeing nothing more than a sequence of reflections, movements of water describing their patterns in a preestablished rhythm. Taking into account the "liquid qualities" of Debussy's music, one might well wonder why movements of water and not movements of some other element, why movements of "objects" and not movements of abstract shapes since, in the final analysis, from a strictly "linear" point of view, *Arabesque en sol* eventually becomes pure abstraction using concrete elements. Though this might allow the film to have an emotional value of its own and, if need

be, stand on its own without the music, it is better to consider it from the other angle: as a kind of symbolic interpretation of the universe in which the filmmaker chases the "real shadow of his imaginary nature" and where a musical rhythm is registered contributing its order and its time sense.

From the purely film point of view—audiovisual harmony—we should really be talking only about *Reflets dans l'eau* and *Arabesque en sol*, which are the only films to have achieved a degree of success (or at any rate what I originally set out to achieve), though I am disappointed they had to be shot in black and white where color would have provided a whole range of nuances denied to us. The other experiments are either only partially successful or else, quite simply, failures.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, whatever the merits or demerits of the films themselves (and though this type of film is bound to be a departure from the norm), it is our firm belief that the union of music and images will provide an opportunity to discover the "delights of frenzied abandon, the savage joy of sacred madness, and the beatitude of Dionysian pleasure," to use Mario Meunier's expression with reference to Orphism and the rites of ancient Greece.

We are dealing here with what is obviously an obsessional, hypnotic art, an almost apocalyptic method of forcing Nature to reveal herself, from behind her appearances, discovering her sublime meaning in an emotion not received and reflected but imposed and experienced. At the same time, if our intention is to exploit the simultaneity of perception and, in a sense, "force" the spectator's consciousness, this can happen only if relationships are created in his mind capable of provoking thoughts based on emotions and not imprisoning his imagination in a fixed representation but, on the contrary, stimulating it by letting it wander beyond the charted paths.

I should like to quote a couple of passages which I find rather gratifying. Whereas most critics saw (or wanted to see) in these experiments nothing more than an attempt to create harmonies, André Bazin and Henri Agel—the proponents of "spiritualism"—were the only ones to perceive in these images a desire to understand the essence of things.

It is precisely this rhythmic accessibility of matter which contributes most in divesting it of its realism, in drawing out of it a kind of abstract first principle compared to which material reality is of only secondary importance. A reflection shows itself first and foremost as rhythm. Compared with this essence, water is nothing more than an accident. Just like the image of the sky in water, the relationship of idea to object is inverted. The perceptible world is merely the reflection and, as it were, the epiphenomenon of an essential musicality. (André Bazin)

The second piece leads us toward an understanding of this notion of fluidity and, in *Arabesque en sol*, we see the confirmation of our intuition, a revelation of a Platonic Idea of movement, a first principle whose visible reality is merely the external appearance. . . . By divesting the substance of all its incidentals, of everything which does not belong to its essence, Mitry brings us into to the world of Plato and Pythagoras. (Henri Agel)

They both understood perfectly that I was not trying to make a commentary to "explain" the music—as critics who knew no better thought—but a malleable universe which, *possessed by the music*, i.e., rhythm, might thereby assume a *meaning*, a cosmic signification.

It is true that our two critics interpreted essence in its Platonic sense and were therefore able to see it (as was their right) only in terms of a manifestation of the "universal soul," the principle on which they based

their whole aesthetic structure, whereas, to my eyes, the "essence of objects" has more to do with the fragility of appearances and demonstrates the way our consciousness works when applied to the relativity of phenomena. However, in view of the fact that the Platonic Idea is a pretty widespread notion, it is odd to think how the proponents of Materialism and Positivism kept their distance from it, for fear of recognizing in it an idealistic signification contrary to their deepest convictions: we see only what we believe, and we admire something only if it flatters us.

Conclusions about Rhythm

As Gisèle Brelet wrote, "rhythm is never self-generative; it is always the effect of an activity which uses rhythm as a reflection of itself, a duration both intelligible and real." And yet, though rhythm is obviously the product of a perceptual activity, grouping durations into separate or interconnected forms, this activity can occur only in certain circumstances. In other words, rhythm is *correlative* with an organization of objects—and with a *motor* activity which uses rhythm to reflect its true self.

Rhythmic structures are *pregnant* forms, as the work of Paul Fraisse has demonstrated. They imply a necessary formalization divided into weak and strong stresses and involve an effective *distinction* between contrasting times in the same way as *assimilation* tends to suppress or reduce the tiny differences between times of the same kind. This *a priori* form explains how rhythms come to be created spontaneously from isochronous times (such as the sounds of a train running over a railway track).

Fraisse is even more precise:

The laws governing the organization of rhythm are not specific to rhythm. They are not associated with the time nature of

rhythm but with our perception of stimuli independently of the nature of the stimuli. These laws are those of assimilation and distinction and may be interpreted as the dynamic forms of the perceptual field. (*Les structures rythmiques*)

The rhythm of successive movements therefore depends on our perceptual capacities. In defining potential distinctions and assimilations, these capacities organize successive stimuli into convenient groups which respond, at the level of time, to the direct forms of the spatial structures. The processes of perceptual schematization in fact tend to organize forms in space and time, into clearly differentiated groups.

Periodicity is the most obvious characteristic of rhythm, but it is not what rhythm is. There can be rhythm without recurring patterns and without strictly proportioned relationships. But in this case, rhythm must be taken in its most general sense: of time evolving in a succession of alternating and interrelated durations. It is "order in movement," to use the simplest Platonic definition, a form which allows the "continuity" to develop and become organized in time.

In this sense, film may be considered as a rhythmic development: a continuity alternated by the time of the sequences, itself alternated by the time of the shots. But, as Fraisse points out, "the less constrictive the sensory data, the greater the influence of the perceptual processes and even attitudes or personality of the perceiver." Now, the film image, with the signification and objective value of its content, is about as constricting as anything can be. There is, therefore, no similarity between film rhythm and musical rhythm involving relationships of proportion and recurring patterns. Though it is an organization of pure associations, a specific rhythm can only involve elements with no precise signification (or at least no clearly defined objective qual-

ties) in the formation of these associations. Sound—and sound alone—responds perfectly to these requirements.

When rhythm involves concrete elements with meaning of their own, it becomes incapable of signifying "by itself" and ends up *organizing significations*.

Fraisse's experiments prove that in all cases—and whatever the tempo—the musical relationship between short beats and long beats is almost exactly half (as in Greek and Latin poetry, where it was a rule of thumb, there being no clear distinction between music and poetry, since their fundamental structures were similar). As a consequence of which these relationships are always clearly perceived, since they clearly differentiated by the perceptual activity itself.

To digress for a moment. Comparing visual and musical rhythm, we described the minute relationships of time perceptible to the trained ear but imperceptible to the eye. The relationships we are referring to here relate to "rhythmic cells" formed from two or three beats (a strong beat and one or two weak beats) like a foot in Greek or Latin poetry. Now, the rhythm of a line of poetry and, by extension, the poem itself is not contained in the iambus or trochee by itself but in the organization of iambus or trochee within the phrase. It is the same thing in music. What we were contrasting was the rhythm of a musical *phrase* whose global time, associated with that of another phrase, reveals a difference which may be minute but is perceptible to the ear, whereas a similar difference would not be perceptible to the eye. However, to continue the argument.

It would seem that the "short" beat is the basis of rhythmic composition by reason of its brevity, a spontaneously perceived duration. And yet, though this may be true for music, it is not for the cinema. In point of fact, a shot cannot be compared (particularly as a unit of time) with a note

or a syllable. The note or syllable is almost instantaneous (between 1/5th and 1/10th of a second), whereas even the shortest shot must last long enough for its content to be perceived. Except when the film employs an effect of visual percussion using shots whose formal content is, for that reason, extremely simple, the shortest shots are seldom less than 1/2 second (twelve frames). The duration of short shots varies from 1/2 second to 3 seconds. Long shots—which generally last between 10 and 40 seconds—can easily be longer than a minute if they are establishing shots (the duration of tracking shots does not come into this discussion, since a track is merely an uninterrupted succession of different shots). Now, however obvious it may be, the difference between a shot of 30 seconds and another of a minute is *intelligible* rather than *perceptible*—at least in the rhythmic sense of the word, i.e., in a related duration which is *precisely perceived*—especially since the content of these shots, as we have seen, has an effect on the impression of the duration which they produce.

Moreover, though, like the other rhythmic arts, the cinema contains only two beats—long and short—the metric relationships are not commensurate with relationships of intensity. In poetry, the strong (or stressed) beat is identified by a long, the weak by a short: in music also. In the cinema, on the other hand, the shot lasting longest is quite often the least intense and the percussive power of the short shot (especially a closeup) is almost always capable of increasing intensity. Moreover, it does not always follow that the short shot is exactly half the length of the long shot—or that it is in any way proportionate. The relative length of shots becomes perceptible only through an action to which the time values are able to *add a quality*—which, as often as not, merely serves to extend the given signification. Since these cannot become

part of a relationship independent of their meaning, it follows that relationships of time are what are determined by the expressive requirements of the concrete data—even though, in return, they may alter the primary meaning. Rhythm here is a function of these data and of the significations it is expected to assume through this perceptible organization. The constricting nature of the image means that rhythm is necessarily subordinated to the object contained in it and the attitude of the perceiver has no—or very little—bearing on the way he perceives its time frame, which means that in the cinema it is not so much a question of *rhythmic* structure as a structure of *rhythm*. That is why there is an infinite diversity and metric freedom in a series of *nonsignifying* relationships. Film rhythm, as we have said, is the consequence of a necessary order rather than an organizing structure with priority over whatever it organizes.

Rhythm in its true sense is the effect of the discontinuity of beats ordered according to various relationships, which means that, when there is no discontinuity, there is no possibility of rhythm. Now, with film becoming closer and closer to the continuous progression of the novel form (as well as its psychological development), it is becoming more and more usual for relationships of time to be experienced only in terms of changes of frame and space. And there are many different ways of organizing film continuity.

As a rule, the constant cutting from one shot to another establishes a kind of regular beat, like the pendulum of a clock. The diversity of the relationships of time and the intensity of successive shots modulate in various ways this basic feeling of a ticking clock, inevitable as the shots cut from one to the other. Film in itself causes a feeling of rhythm—one which is vague and imprecise. Consequently, film rhythm is the effect of a fundamental lack of rhythm. Con-

stantly modulated by the changes of shot, the visual progression takes on the appearance of the "free" cadences of blank verse (poetic prose). And the effect becomes much clearer in the case of moving shots where the continual modification of the field of view (and therefore the shapes) creates a fluid and continuous "flow." In this case, rhythm dissolves into a progression of time whose rhythms are entirely controlled by transformations of space.⁴⁹ In the cinema, based on concrete data, assimilation and distinction are assured by the represented objects even more—as must be obvious—than by the length of their representation. Nevertheless, even in the case of tracking shots, there is a relative discontinuity in the continuity of the images, ensuring a certain notion of rhythm.

We have seen how the present is referred back to whatever is capable of being directly structured, i.e., to the "perceptual field." The duration of this present time is the duration of our perception, itself implying—and involving—our immediate memory: whatever is directly perceived supports whatever is in the process of being perceived and ensures a continuity in the perception. Yet there is a certain discontinuity in the perception of sequences, since the "perception time" involves a series of "moments" fusing into the duration in the same way as the "perceptual field" dissolves into space, each of them ensuring that a homogeneous continuum is maintained.⁵⁰

Now, in the case of moving shots where the camera is slipping continually from one field to another, the permanence of the frame emphasizes the changes in the spatial content. This method of *continuous* description therefore presents in itself a succession of *discontinuous* forms (and therefore perceptions). Consequently, the variety of internal structures determines within a shot sequence, if not rhythm exactly, then at least an obvious rhythmic modulation, which is

what we meant when we said that a tracking shot is a succession in which each frame is, as it were, a different shot—in the same way as a circle is a succession of straight lines.

Be that as it may, the film effect consists in limiting space and duration in a totally arbitrary fashion, in choosing (or, to be more exact, in "building") a special space-time framework, then establishing (orienting) a continuity by means of the organization of a series of dissimilar frames (or shots), i.e., by means of a certain discontinuity revealed by the rhythm.

Nevertheless, this rhythm may sometimes assume the appearance of musical rhythm by following similar structures—fugue, andante, crescendo. Yet these compositions require shots which are very short, i.e., no longer than three or four seconds, even the longest of them. Relating to short durations, the relationships of time are very clearly perceived, and it is amazing how often the short shots are exactly half, or even a third, of the length of the longer ones—just as in the basic structures. In this context, one may speak of "visual rhythm" in its true sense, particularly since the rhythmic, purely emotional significations almost always take precedence over the signification of the content created, for the most part, from pure movement or recurrent fleeting impressions.

"When a piece of music contains recurring isochronous patterns of strong, i.e., stressed, beats, it gives rise to a *motor* activity which develops in synchronization with the strong beats of a musical performance," Paul Fraisse writes. "Education and an artistic sense make it possible for real motor melodies to develop around the framework of these synchronous movements, as in rhythmic dances or ballet" (*Les structures rythmiques*). Now, in these forms of editing, the visual stresses act on our motor systems in the same way as they act on our organic sensitivity and the strength of these motor

effects is increased when they are recurring patterns, such that the film may provide us with a complete rhythmic sensation produced by the synchronization of our activity with the stimuli of the represented data.

A perfect example (though associated with a musical progression which increases still further the strength of these effects) is apparent in the famous sequence of the German cavalry charge in *Alexander Nevsky*. It is also what we tried to achieve in the films we have just been discussing. And from the very first applications of this strict form (*Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, *La Roue*) the assumption was made, as we have seen, that film progression could be modeled on musical progression. Yet this type of exercise requires a quick-cutting technique, specifically relevant to the expression of rapid movement or climactic moments.

All of which may be summarized by stating, once more, that rhythm is determined by changes of shot, long or short, and *without any a priori reason relative to either being given*, the transition from one shot to the next must be justified by the emotion it expresses or the dramatic movement it highlights. It must rouse the audience's attention, contribute something new to its awareness of the facts or actions being represented and be perceived as the opposition or association of these facts or actions. It must help to "take the action forward" while modulating its representation and, consequently, its signification.

There is a marvelous example of what not to do in this regard in the "forest tracking shot" in *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Thérèse and Jean are walking through the forest talking as they go. The camera tracks back, picking them up from the front and framing them from left to right. After a while, *for no apparent reason* (descriptive, dramatic, or psychological), the camera crosses the line and picks up the movement from right to left. Then again, after a while (the length of time is unimportant), the camera cuts back

to the original position. These changes of axis are really disconcerting, but it is the fact that there is no reason for them which makes them intolerable. One might say that they are put there to relieve the monotony of a uniform tracking shot, which is absurd for two reasons: either the length of the shot is made *necessary* by the requirements of the expression (the significance or lack of significance of the characters' conversation or behavior) in which case the length of the shot will *not be apparent*, or else the content does not justify the shot being held too long, for then it will *appear too long*; in these circumstances, it is advisable to cut as quickly as possible to another shot. There is no other law in the cinema, but it is obligatory.

From everything we have said in these examinations of rhythmic forms, we should be better placed to see that apart from various passing fashions and styles or tendencies variable according to the director in question, the school of thought, the social climate, or even the opportunity of the moment, the cinema—like literature—has two ways of translating or expressing ideas or emotions: prose and verse.

The minute organization of movements within a frame, plastic composition, rearrangement of space and time through the resources of editing, perceptual rhythm, alternation and recurring patterns are the equivalent of writing in verse form. Eisenstein and Flaherty (among others) write in verse. On the other hand, tracking shots which reduce the formalization of the frame, the total field of view whose duration belongs to the event rather than to a preconceived organization of time, are the equivalents of prose, however lyrical. And it is absurd to speculate as to which of the two forms is the best or more desirable, since they are each appropriate to their content and become valid only through the use made of them.

Be that as it may, film—because it is an art—is always a *lie*. It presents us with a “reconstructed” world and, though it tends to capture essential truths, it does so via a series of artifices which the image, like the word, is incapable of avoiding (though clearly the artifices are different in either case).

“Truth” in the cinema consists in departing from the prefabricated structures of tragedy and constructing a “postfabricated” world *from* reality. The cinema does not aim to set against literature’s discourse *on* the world its own discourse *with* the world, as some critics claim, as though reality surrendered its mysteries to the indifferent passive eye of the camera lens. Rather it presents a discourse *on* the world but established with the perceptible data of an immanence which immediately becomes transcended, mediated by the personal vision of the director and by the forms which create different illusions and different mysteries. Any expectation of capturing reality “objectively,” in our view, demonstrates either ignorance or stupidity.

More than anything else, the cinema contains a constant interchange between form and content. That is why (as we shall see further on) it is wrong to say that a film is the visual expression of something which exists independently of it—like putting an idea or a fact into images. It is rather the *creation* (or determination) of an idea, emotion, or fact through a form and *by virtue of* that form alone.

When a film is merely the image of something else whose value and meaning are independent of the film form, i.e., independent of the *specific* way they are expressed through the images and sounds, then the film becomes nothing more than a *vehicle*, however interesting the subject matter may be. It is a means of communication, no longer an art form—for art is *creation* and *production* rather than *reproduction*.



Time and Space of the Drama

In Search of a Dramatic Structure

From Filmed Theater to Visual Expression

When Méliès first started to use the cinema for the purpose of expression (around 1898), all he could do was record a spectacle completely independent of the recording instrument. Everything we now know to be cinema was unknown. No one dreamed of the techniques to be developed later on, since they had nothing to do with the means of expression known at the time.

In 1898, the cinematograph was nothing more than an instrument for recording and then reproducing movement by means of moving pictures. The difference between Lumière and Méliès is merely that the former recorded life "captured from its very heart" whereas Méliès recorded spectacles composed for popular pleasure.

Now, from that time *spectacle* inevitably meant theater or theatrical representation – in the same way that *vehicle* meant coach or hansom cab. So, just as the first cars were hansom cabs without the shafts for the horse (following the utilitarian aesthetic of the horse-drawn carriage – despite the addition of an engine), the first films were simply "filmed" representations – but not of the theater, as is generally thought. Méliès was a magician, not a filmmaker – and even less a dramatist. Theater for him (the Robert Houdin theater in his case) was merely a platform for presenting his incredible conjuring tricks, exploiting every device his equipment allowed him. The first "perfor-

mance" films were therefore scenes of prestidigitation, using the stock-in-trade of the conjurer – nothing more. Yet, by trial and error, Méliès began to discover and apply all the latent techniques of the camera: substitution by stop-framing, double printing, lap dissolves, etc. added to those already developed in still photography: superimposition, masking, multiple exposure, etc. in such a way that, after a couple of months or so, film "magic" became added to his stage illusions and eventually took over from them completely.

The first hurdle had been crossed: no longer were films merely recordings of independent spectacles; the spectacles were composed and organized with a view to their recording. However, "narratives" (short burlesque dramas) soon came to take the place of the little sketches. The films became longer: from being only 250 feet, they developed to 500 feet, 750 feet and eventually 1,000 feet, i.e., fifteen minutes' projection time.¹ Although adventure is closely connected with fantasy, the events which it involves require a certain shape, a *mise-en-scène*, a sequence of events occurring in a variety of settings. They then become short successive tableaux whose succession, similar to actions on the stage, is discontinuous; the transition from action to action is heavy-handed and the set designs are very crude, limited to painted stage cloths and flats, with the actors performing in front of the camera as though it were the footlights.

From this period on, what was recorded on film were very simplistic, theatrical

mises-en-scène, to which were added all the available tricks. Film created illusion and composed a genuine fairyland, using painted stage cloths. This second hurdle (which Méliès was never to cross) was the reference point for all (or almost all) the films produced between 1901 and 1906, whatever their style.

During this period more and more films came to be produced. Méliès, Pathé, Gaumont in France, Vitagraph, Biograph, Edison in the U.S.A. produced between two and ten films a week. The Cinematograph set up in markets and fairs and the traveling "showmen" projected their shows in cafés in village squares, drumming up the local populace. Every show comprised ten or so short films (fairy tales, dramas, comedies, and burlesques) and the public queued up to see them. However, this popular entertainment was frowned on by righteous people in the middle classes who set very little store by the flickering images and simulated actions, which they dismissed as nothing more than childish hocus-pocus.

One minute admired for its capacity to reproduce living, ephemeral reality, heralded as a new scientific toy or as an important instrument of investigation, the cinema suddenly found itself relegated to becoming a "utilitarian vehicle" devoid of any aesthetic aspiration. Its attempt to develop into spectacle was greeted with universal scorn. Yet, though we cannot help but smile nowadays at these first stumbling attempts, the characteristic contempt with which they were treated is disproportionate to their lack of sophistication. It has more to do with various complicated social facts which we can only describe very crudely here.

First and foremost, the contempt was associated with the fact that the Cinematograph was and remained a *fairground* spectacle—not the sort of place a well-brought-up young girl ought to frequent.

The first permanent projection was established by Dufayel on the sixth floor of his stores in order to "amuse the kids while their parents were shopping." It was a spectacle for children. You sent your children to the Cinematograph as a reward for being good, but you did not go yourself—any more than you would go to the music hall. The only spectacle worthy of interest and respect was and remained the theater. The circus and the music hall were places where you would be ashamed to be seen: a pleasure for the great unwashed—ignoring the fact that, only four or five hundred years previously, Harlequin would have trodden the boards in public places.

Coming as an intrusion into an organized world, the cinema was also placed out of bounds by the self-righteous guardians of public morality. Imitating the stage, trying to become spectacle, it merely presented a caricature, an empty illustration—yet at the same time it proved to be a formidable adversary. A large section of the vaudeville audience switched their allegiance to the cinema. Without being exactly obvious, the future technical developments of the cinema began to reveal themselves. The theater seemed under threat. Now, the theater was an eminently middle-class spectacle, the artistic symbol of the middle-class and bourgeois mentality. People went to the theater in the same way as they went to Mass, to show themselves off as much as to witness a ceremony; there was as much spectacle in the auditorium as on the stage. The fact that films have to be projected in darkness meant that all this parading up and down could not take place, which explains the strong reaction against it. From the intellectual point of view, the theater offered a choice of spectacles: philosophical plays, witty plays, literary plays; it was an art. The cinema was nothing more than a peep show. What would become of the theater

if the cinema took over? Literature and dramatic art had everything to lose.

In fact, it was not literature or art which the cinema was threatening but a certain conception of art as an established ritual; in other words, the middle classes themselves whose basic beliefs, in the form of their aesthetic notions, were being undermined by it—which explains their resistance. The rejection, ostracism, and contempt leveled at the cinema was in direct proportion to a fear of it, an instinctive fear, rising from the unconscious, beyond any clear explanation—which made it even stronger and more disturbing.

Apart from anything else, the very fact that it presents a duplicate of living reality gives the cinema a disturbing, mysterious, diabolical character: it attracts, it dazzles, but at the same time it frightens. Also, it happens in the dark and the dark is the symbol of all evil thoughts; it rouses a vague feeling of guilt, anxiety, even eroticism in the bourgeois mind—which must be suppressed. And the fire in the Bazar de la Charité did absolutely nothing to allay fears; quite the contrary. Had it happened only a couple of hundred years earlier, Lumière might have been burned at the stake as a witch: after all, the fire itself might have been interpreted as a sign from heaven!

It was a similar feeling which caused the first motorcars to be treated with disapproval and scorn. They threatened to put an end to the reign of the horse—a potent symbol of wealth and bourgeois aristocracy if ever there was one; the ugly, mechanical nature of the car also had something disturbing about it. And yet, transformed into huge limousines, horseless carriages very quickly became luxury items. With one symbol replacing another, the horse was forgotten and the motorcar emerged triumphant. The cinema undermined a whole structure of intellectual values arbitrarily graded in order

of importance. It threatened not merely a form of art but a whole way of living and thinking, of which the theater was the most important manifestation; almost a culture, even perhaps a civilization. The whole idea of the cinema was intolerable, and thus it is small wonder the reactions against it were so strong.

Yet, after Méliès, the cinema found more flexible forms, a method of producing narrative and a visual means of telling stories. But even so, since it appealed to the populace at large, its subjects were confined to paltry melodramas and knockabout burlesques shot against painted backdrops copied from provincial vaudevilles. Though embellished with a clever variety of viewpoints, film narrative followed in the footsteps of the theater in the worst sense of the word. As for subject matter, though it was expressed visually, its construction for the most part defied the most elementary rules of dramatic structure.

The best way of disabling an enemy is to make him into an ally. Since the Cinematograph (that marvelous recording instrument) could do no more than make a poor imitation of the theater, why not do the job properly and imitate it totally? As long as it could be limited to recording a real performance with real actors acting a drama suited to its resources, i.e., where gesture and attitude would compensate for the absence of words, any drama constructed like a play might then become art. Well, at least it would be recording a work of art and art, i.e., "sovereign theater," would have everything to gain. This notion excited various intellectuals for a while and the outcome turned out to be "film d'art."

The presentation of *l'Assassinat de Duc de Guise* in November 1908 (script by Henri Lavedan, directed by Calmette and Le Bargy with Le Bargy, Albert Lambert, Berthe Bovy, etc.) was a remarkable success. The fairground show, returned to the

straight and narrow, received its letters patent on that day, as well as its first consecration. Having become theater-in-motion-pictures, it had the right from then on to consider itself an art—a minor art, granted, but an art nonetheless. And what else could it be with so much art in the directing, the set designs, and the acting? Going to the cinema—on which so many famous people had set the seal of approval—was no longer beneath one's dignity. The bourgeoisie flocked to the cinema in such numbers that ultimately, feeling that they had been elbowed out of the business and seeing potted theater as the only possible commercial outlet for a "cultivated" audience, Charles Pathé formed the Société Cinématographique des Auteurs et Gens de Lettres (SCAGL) and Charles Jourjon (Eclair) the Association Cinématographique des Auteurs Dramatiques (ACAD). Not to be left behind, Gaumont produced two series called *Séries d'Art* and *Films Esthétiques*. From then on, art ruled the screens. Pathé opened the first comfortable cinemas (*Omnia Pathé* and *Royal Pathé*, etc.) in fashionable areas, pompously described as Cinematographic theaters, and the studios themselves became motion picture theaters.

Art was safe. Thereafter one could go and see films without being ashamed. And the sole purpose of the cinema then became the recording of masterpieces of the national heritage, following the example of the film d'art.

It was not long before rot set in. The middle-class public very quickly tired of these plays where actors waved their arms about but did not speak, the leading lights of the stage (chief among whom was Mounet-Sully) declaiming in front of a camera which remained resolutely silent. An unfortunate bankruptcy finally put it out of its misery. With Paul Gavault taking over the business, the boulevard comedy replaced the classical theater in films, still imitated from the theater but in a new method of staging them.

Though the middle class did not completely desert the cinema, it became merely a tiny part of the audience. Nevertheless, the initial impetus had been provided. Aiming now at the public, filmmakers continued to delve into literature, and the public followed.

Despite its failure, its absurd ideas, its obvious regression as regards narrative form reintegrated into relatively discontinuous tableaux, the film d'art must be credited with being the only form up to that point to have seen the possibility of art in the cinema—even though its conception of art was the very antithesis of what the cinema could offer. However theatrical they may have been, Le Bargy's ideas taught the majority of the directors of the time how actors should be directed, how they should be placed in a set,² how space should be utilized, in short, how to "stage" their films according to principles valid for all films (remembering that cinematic language had still to make its appearance). In particular they taught directors how to construct a script according to a solid dramatic structure, dramatic concentration being the only suitable form for such short spectacles. The film d'art also got rid of the painted backdrops and instead used "built" sets, built as if they were to be used on stage, granted, a simple assembly of portable flats and rostra, but, used in the right way, forming an appropriate dramatic space. These advances should not be forgotten (for they were momentous) because they were based on a false conception—bearing in mind that at that time the art of the spectacle was conceivable only with reference to the stage and under the auspices of the theater.

Indeed, ever since, the cinema has remembered its debt to the theater, even in films which go to the opposite extreme from theatrical notions, using them as reference points to contradict or distort them.

As we said, genuine cinema was born in

chase films. Their frantic movements required changes of shot and therefore editing and very soon a particular rhythm. Yet their form was devoid of content. Drama and movement needed to be united and, for this to happen, drama had to emerge from the narrow confines of the stage, from its suffocating static "interiors."

The Italian cinema was the first to try its hand. From *The Last Days of Pompeii* to *Quo Vadis* (1908-12), huge sets and countless crowd movements shattered the limits of the stage. The emphasis was placed on spectacle, chariot races, gladiator fights, etc. And yet, even here, escaping from the stage merely involved extending its dimensions and avoiding dramatic structure, expanding it to the dimensions of a narrative. Instead of actions restricted in time, there was a series of tableaux covering quite an extensive period of time, but each tableau was "staged" as in the theater. The depth and dimensions of the set obviously allowed for a much greater freedom of movement; the actors no longer performed "before" the camera and indeed they acted without paying much attention to it at all. However, these huge scenes had to be organized somehow, and for this the Italian directors took their inspiration from painting. Every setpiece was composed like a picture. The shapes of the set, the balance of the volumes, the patterns of movement, everything contributed to an overall pictorial harmony, imitated not always from the best of paintings; even so, the results were usually spectacular from a pictorial point of view. Since it was a stage show that was being filmed, the quality of the image was of prime importance. And the image took priority over the story, over the dramatic action—going so far as to replace it when it was incapable of "signifying" it—which, it must be said, was the case as often as not (this kind of experimentation not really achieving any signifi-

cance until much later on, with German Expressionism).

Thus the fact that it was not protected from the contrivances of the stage and the rules of classical dramaturgy did not mean that film was any the less dependent upon the stage; it simply meant that the stage had become a circus. The public would go and see the burning of Rome as it would a high-wire act or a lion tamer. Maybe it was no great art, but it was genuine spectacle. Also it was inspired by Bulwer Lytton and Sienkiewicz; and the Italian films lasted, some of them, as long as an hour. They really gave the public its money's worth. Small wonder that the short films which formed the bulk of films produced at that period, attempting to construct a drama within the space of a quarter of an hour, became less and less popular.

Without ever attempting large-scale spectaculairs, the French cinema also tried to become an independent art, maintaining a certain cultural level. Capellani, Perret, and Pouctal adapted novels—Dumas and Hugo in particular. But adapting a novel meant selecting the most significant or most visual episodes, staging them as though in the theater, and linking them together with explanatory titles. In other words, filming a novel meant making a play of it. And since the actors could not speak, the motives of the characters had to be explained by title cards, which throughout broke up the continuity of the sequences. The images did nothing more than illustrate.

It is true that a great deal of care was taken with the set designs (which still remained theatrical); attempts were made to create "effects"; experiments with lighting techniques were tried (by Léonce Perret in particular). But, though the actors were given an opportunity to give the impression of a "nonperformed" reality (despite

the fundamentally theatrical acting style), the best these directors could offer was pretty moving pictures based on stage principles. However, it should be noted that the plastic quality of their images owes less to the characteristics of painting than to those of photography. This was one point in the French cinema's favor—indeed, the only one at that stage. In Great Britain and in Russia, Dickens and Walter Scott, Pushkin and Tolstoy, took the place of Hugo and Dumas.

In the United States, where the film d'art and the Italian cinema were the objects of close study, a *Life of Moses* was produced, shot on the beaches of Florida against rather grandiose cardboard sets and a no less grandiose representational style. Napoleon, Washington, and Mark Antony all had the same treatment. Many of these films are derived from stage techniques, to the same extent as in other countries. But the way the American cinema differed from other national cinemas was in the wide diversity and huge number of films produced. This is an important consideration, especially in view of the fact that the development of film in the States was entirely different.

As in Europe, the cultivated classes avoided the cinema. However, the American cinema was just as concerned to win over the privileged minority as it was to imitate the theater and create "art." Since—proportionately—the public was much larger in the States than in other countries, there would not have been the same stigma attached to working for it; particularly since, in the States, it was the *people* who represented the nation, whereas, for instance, in France it was the bourgeoisie, the ruling class.³ There was no ruling class in the U.S.A., unless one counts the couple or so hundred millionaires—for the most part self-made men anyway—less of a class and more of a business group controlling and

influencing the government through its business interests. And then, for the average American, the theater, played in New York or in Boston, did not represent the centuries of culture which it would for the Frenchman. An art, yes—but one like any other. Coming from the theater, the directors and writers did not feel themselves called to a sacred mission. Instead of turning to the theater for advice, they turned their back on it and in the direction of life.

As a sequence of moving but silent images, the cinema could never hope to compete with the theater or be confused with it. Incapable of presenting dialogue, it could only describe. Consequently, what audiences saw were things capable of being described, expressed in film images—action and movement. Dispensing with psychology and complicated plots (anything requiring dialogue), the drama confined itself to simple clear-cut conflicts, adventures and chases. It was concise, cutting out any tedious exposition, subtle characterization, or irrelevant detail. This was how the cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, became the first heroes of American film.

The Attack on Grand Rapids (1903), the first film of the genre which, as we said, contributed the first notions of editing and narrative, lasted for a quarter of an hour. This was the length of the average film right up to 1909. During this period, the cinema refined its techniques; its language became more flexible. Actions and events were contrasted; places and times were juxtaposed; time sequences were inverted; memories were evoked; points of view became more and more diversified. From 1909 onward, it became possible to signify characterization and suggest feelings. But to do this, films had to contain more information—which meant they had to be longer.

Griffith told simple stories, and the fact that they were comprehensible was a vali-

dation of the techniques used to tell them. It was a little early to talk in terms of psychological drama, but these narrative techniques are perfectly obvious. Filmmakers began to tell simple stories embellished with nuances and details taken from real life. Applying these methods but soon overtaking Biograph with more interesting subjects, Vitagraph launched a new series called *Scenes of True Life*. The length of these films was extended from 1,000 to 2,000 feet, and crude episodes were replaced by little melodramas taking their inspiration from scenes of everyday life. They were shot on sets faithfully imitated from reality, theatrical flattage being replaced by a crude architecture. The actors stopped performing; they acted as their parts and the situation required, apparently ignoring the camera, which filmed them from different points of view using successive changes of shot, thereby associating movements and unifying the dynamism of the action. The impression is given of witnessing a scene from real life, captured directly by a vision, endowed with ubiquity.

With Griffith, with the *Scenes of True Life*, film *mise-en-scène* once and for all replaced theatrical *mise-en-scène* and remained theatrical only to the extent that actors have to be directed. Challenging the theater in its biblical and historical reconstructions, American *mise-en-scène* became an "imitation of life" from the moment it started to deal with contemporary stories, where there was no need to imagine, compose, or "contrive" but merely to observe. There was less concern to make works of art than to make films true to life. The revolution was such that, two years later, Victorin Jasset, one of the more popular French directors, showed his admiration:

The American school differs from our own in three main areas: the use of the camera, the acting style, and the construc-

tion of the script. It is a totally novel approach, completely distinct from the European school.

The Americans noticed the potential interest of facial expressions shot in closeup, and they exploited this to great effect, sacrificing the set and the rest of the background when they felt it necessary to show the public their actors' faces—even when they were relatively static.

Jerky acting put them off, and they chose instead a style that was absolutely calm, almost to the point of exaggeration. With regard to the script—which included dramatic situations, pathetic ones, theatrical ones—they made scenes as simple and uncomplicated as possible, trying as far as possible to get close to real life, frequently building their stories out of nothing and contriving a happy ending. Such as it was, their method had a great deal to offer—more than anything previously seen, and the popularity with the public of the films was the ultimate proof. . . . Projected onto the screen, the harmony and calm, well-thought-out acting gave everyone the impression that they were watching real life.⁴

With such rapid progress, it should have been possible to do more than tell idiotic stories. Yet this would have required over sixty minutes of screen time and the films would have had to be aimed at a more educated audience. To do this would have been completely disproportionate with the commercial return and, in any case, it would have been silly to risk losing the general public, which comprised the vast majority of the audience.

Making long films would have been much more expensive; failure would have been catastrophic. On the other hand, the shorter the films the more that could be made, simple stories which could be used to affect the morals of the public (since the situations and characters were always stereotyped). This purely social factor (gener-

ally overlooked by historians of the cinema) was without a doubt the most important factor, since it maintained—right up to 1912—the two-reeler as the norm in American films, whereas in Europe by 1910 there were films as long as 3,000 feet.

Things did not change until the independent companies managed to break the monopoly of the Edison Trust. The majority of American film companies were part of the Edison Trust (Motion Picture Patent Company). Though it was a private concern, the finance for its operation came from the big banks. Vitagraph and Biograph were controlled by the Empire Trust, a powerful investment company, in turn controlled by the Rockefeller and Pierpoint Morgan groups. Edison belonged to General Electric—that is, to the same groups. Vitagraph and Biograph had powerful connections with the government. Koopman, one of the founders of Biograph, was related to the McKinley family. Albert Smith, boss of Vitagraph, was related to Hudson Maxim, the armaments king, who had vested interests in the company. And so on.

Confronted by the growing success of films, these sleeping partners became aware of the social importance of the cinema and began to become concerned—and, with them, the elders of the churches and organizations responsible for the maintenance of public morality. It soon became obvious that film was an instrument of propaganda whose considerable power was on a par with the press, at least in respect of the social group which they most feared: the proletariat. It needed careful handling.

It is naïve to think that Lenin, proclaiming in 1917 the cinema to be the "art of the people," was the first to understand the potential that film offered for acting on the masses or to think that the first films of social propaganda were Soviet films. The Americans were very well aware of the fact long before the Russians. But they used it

in a completely different direction. It is no coincidence that Stuart Blackton began his career in the cinema by directing *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* in 1897, just as the war in Cuba was being fought.

In 1901, McKinley had just brought about the economic organization of the country, basing it on the power of the trusts, when public demonstrations against it started to threaten law and order. The trusts could no longer afford to consign this powerful tool to a few artists and liberal thinkers who might use it as a platform against the principles which ensured the capitalist system, as Porter had done (admittedly in a very timid way) when he showed the poor continually oppressed by social injustice. The businessmen therefore decided to use the cinema in order to retard, as long as possible, a development which they considered dangerous—using McKinley's assassination as one of the premonitory symptoms.

For this to happen, life had to be represented as conforming to the traditional morality; the people had to be convinced of the merits of the principles which oppressed them. Its powers of reason had to be stifled, removed from immediate reality, or else the reality had to be disguised with illusory qualities designed to sugar the pill for the masses and show them that any attempt to change the system was a waste of time.

Gilmore, in appointing Edwin Porter as the director general of the new Edison studios, had no trouble at all in convincing Porter to change the social orientation of his films. Porter was only too ready to oblige, particularly since it was not his ideas which needed changing but his method. It was not a matter of showing the rich in a favorable light, nor of sanctifying those in power. It was more a case of showing riches as evil or immoral and "crowning the workers' noble brows with roses," illustrating little homilies such as "riches are not everything"

(*The Need for Gold*); "a thatched roof and a heart are more precious than a cold and lonely palace" (*More Precious than Gold*); "better to be poor and good than rich and wicked" (*Plain Jane*); "an ill-gotten fortune can only lead to shame and misery" (*The Livingstone Case*), etc.

Yet it was not long before Porter, assisted by Searle Dawley, moved the Edison production company more in the direction of adventure films, tales from history and legend. It was the *Scenes of True Life* which did most to create this propaganda; indeed, the series was created for the very purpose. Pretty soon every film became a kind of detailed sermon.

Not only is wealth a mirage (*All That Glitters Is Not Gold*), but all rich people are selfish, money-grabbing, and immoral (*The Miser's Fate*, *The Money-Lender*), and sometimes even the avenging sword of Justice descends on them (*The Money King*). Only simple folk have a clear conscience; rich people are haunted by their gold (*The Dream of Dan McGuire*). The hope was that certain "dangerous and immoral" aspirations in the minds of the people would be diverted.

The political animal with advanced ideas was bound to be an unscrupulous corrupt profiteer. Union leaders were shown to be suspect. The public had to be convinced that the workers who followed the leaders of the proletariat were following scoundrels working in their own interest. In *Pete Wants a Job*, Pete, fired from various jobs, tries his hand at politics. He organizes strikes. As he becomes more successful, he becomes increasingly more powerful until he becomes a union boss, moving in the highest circles. But when he finally becomes a minister, he leaves in the lurch the workers who brought him to power.

The idea that workers had no other rights than those granted them by their employers had to be instilled in the minds of the peo-

ple. Strikes, inspired by agitators in the pay of the "Bolsheviks," inevitably brought misery (*An Anarchist*, *The Grafters*, *The Loafers*).

In *Capital versus Labor*, a factory boss's daughter receives the attention of a young officer and a young clergyman at the same time. She cannot make up her mind which of the two she loves most. A strike is declared in the factory. The strikers, fired up by agitators, storm the boss's house. The officer, who is in the house at the time, rushes off to fetch his regiment. But the mob starts to smash windows and doors, break furniture, and threaten the boss and his daughter. Just as the angry mob seems ready to do violence, the clergyman arrives and restores peace, mediating between the boss and the workers, getting the workers a better deal. Thereby he earns the boss's respect and the young girl's heart. In other words, gentleness achieves more than violence; capital will accept the demands of the workers if they are made peaceably and respectfully; and conflicts between management and workers are resolvable through the impartial mediation of the church and the generosity of the bosses.

Strike breakers are treated with sympathy without the films' ever taking an overt stand against working-class solidarity. In *The Fox Is Not a Coward*, we are in the midst of a strike: the brethren decide to lay down their tools. One solitary worker, after much soul searching, decides to go back to work. His ideas of solidarity with his mates have not changed; it is just that he cannot bear the fact that his wife in desperation has had to pawn her wedding ring, the only thing left of value in the house. To feed his starving children, he decides to go back to work. But he is blacklegged by the shop stewards as scab labor hired by the bosses. Abused, insulted, even beaten up, he remains the object of contempt even when the strike is over. One day the factory catches fire and the fox becomes a hero. He saves from cer-

tain death one of his workmates—the one, in fact, who had been so extreme in his condemnation—and he dies in the act. His children are adopted by the union, which honors his memory from that moment on: the fox was not a coward.

Nevertheless, the Scenes of True Life deal more particularly with the defense of middle-class morality and with the illustration of the domestic virtues. Marriage was to be venerated as a "union instituted by God." Divorce was unacceptable and poverty could not by any manner or means be held responsible for domestic conflict. The wife was shown to be docile and submissive. Her place was in the home, and her role in life consisted exclusively in bringing up the children and providing hot meals for her man. A hot supper was the symbol of conjugal bliss. If her husband was sent to jail, the wife had to wait patiently for him to come back to her—which always happened, through divine intervention. Jealousy on the wife's part would only lead to unhappiness (*Jealousy and the Man*); and the eternal triangle was always brought about by "another woman"—a gold-digger or lady of loose morals (*Madonna of the Streets*, *Toys of Fate*); or sometimes a jealous girlfriend, always repentant at the end of the film, is pardoned, as is right and proper (*His Wife's Devotion*, *Love and the Law*). Temptations and causes of conflict were always externally induced.

Love was never shown as sexual but exclusively as a sort of spiritual communion. It was on the same level as filial love, brotherly love, or love of one's country. This type of love led to fulfillment and happiness, whereas a taste for adventure and risk led only to misery.

In any case, love was not seen as indispensable for ensuring the happiness of the married couple. What was indispensable was social equality, the husband's courage, the wife's chastity and docility, and their

mutual respect. Virtue and work were the two essential conditions of marital bliss: the dowry on the one hand and a steady job on the other. All marriages between people of different classes were bound to end in domestic misery.

Her Romance tells the sad tale of a young girl who marries, against her parents' wishes, a much older music teacher. Their difficult and miserable life together (the girl's family refuses to give her a dowry) soon ends in the couple's separation. *In the Firelight* shows a young country girl leaving her family to follow a handsome stranger who promises her marriage and the bright lights of the city. It is not long before he leaves her stranded, though. Her brother is sent to bring her back home before she gets into any deeper trouble.

Parents' responsibility for their children, the dangers of an undisciplined education, and, more especially, the consequences of filial disobedience remained basic themes of these films. Divorce and separation were only presented in order to point out to children the disastrous consequences of misbehavior (*Driven from Home*); extramarital relationships in order to describe the misery of unmarried mothers (*Leah Kleshna*); or the difficulties facing illegitimate children handicapped by their lack of a father (*The Foundling*, *The Evil That Men Do*, *The Love of Chrysanthemum*). Marriages between members of the same family or with alcoholics were regarded in the same light (*The Drunkard's Child*, *Stage-Struck Daughter*).

Yet, however heinous his sin, the unfortunate individual could always find his way back to redemption and start a new life (*The Way of a Transgressor*, *The Lost Sheep*, *From Out of the Shadow*). Most usually a bad man found his way back to the straight and narrow through the love of a good woman (*Salvation Sal*, *Honor of the Family*) or of a child (*Child as Benefactor*, *The Convict's Child*).

Sometimes the humble working girl's

plight was treated (*Nellie, The Bountiful House-Maid, Nellie The Model, Bertha The Sewing-Machine Girl*). But it was only to show the woman incapable of taking on work not made for her. *The Road to Happiness* tells of the fortunes of a waitress who falls ill because she has been working too hard. She finds happiness by marrying the son of the farmer in whose house she has been recuperating. At the same time, acts of female heroism were not ignored. Sometimes they contributed to films describing sensational events, such as shipwrecks, fires, or train derailments (*The Land Beyond the Sunset, The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter*). The two latter films were produced by Edison.

All American films of this period (1908-11) followed the same kinds of themes. The Scenes of True Life are only examples of the type of films being produced. Certainly, this is exactly the sort of film Griffith was producing—dressed up in a more tragic form, it must be admitted.

The Rocky Road tells the story of Ben Cook, an intelligent and energetic man who one fine day decides to leave home. He arrives in a distant town and finds a job in a mill. His wife and child set out to look for him. After a series of adventures, the wife finds herself unable to cope with the needs of her child and has her adopted by another family. The years go by and the father becomes a rich businessman and by chance hires his own daughter as his secretary. He falls in love with her and they plan to marry. The mother meanwhile discovers what has happened, hurries to the church, arriving just in time, and reveals the awful truth, falling dead in the arms of her husband.

In *The Face at the Window*, a young man marries an artist's model against his father's wishes. But life becomes impossible because husband and wife have had different upbringings and therefore have different ideas and thoughts. In spite of the birth of a daughter, the man leaves home and takes

up with another woman. The child grows up. On the day of her marriage, a tramp's face appears at the window. He is allowed to come in. And we recognize the father, who looks for a moment at the family scene, holds out his hand for money, and then leaves.⁵

When Taft took over the presidency from Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, the new policy toward isolationism had numerous repercussions on the cinema. Propaganda continued to play its role on the screen as it had always done. For the Edison Company, Edwin Porter and George A. Lessey reproduced various episodes from the nation's glorious past: *Stars and Stripes, The Star-Spangled Banner, The Battle of Lexington*, etc., while, at Biograph, Griffith, taking as his subject an episode from the War of Secession, produced his first masterpiece in *The Battle*. But then Vitagraph also made a point of demonstrating its enthusiasm for serving the interests of the nation. Parallel to Van Dyke Brooke and George D. Baker's Scenes of True Life, Stuart Blackton and Larry Trimble were glorifying America, land of liberty, working round a well-tried theme: "Pick up pins and you'll end up a millionaire": *The Best Man Wins, From Cabin Boy to King, A Self-Made Hero*, etc.; and especially extolling bravery and patriotism in an act of heroism: *George Washington under the British Flag, Old Glory, Red Cross Martyrs, The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, etc.

Since the American army was a volunteer force and the country needed a strong, well-trained army to defend it, life in boot camp was shown as a bundle of fun or a never-ending round of sports: *A Day with the Soldier Boys, The Girls in the Barracks, The Sailor's Sweetheart, Hero from West Point*. "Join the Navy and see the world at the government's expense" and "Join the Army and enjoy the outdoor life" were the slogans of these films in which the courage and loyalty of the American soldier were glorified.

The political trends of the day were

reflected in many films of the time: in 1913, Universal produced *The Money King*, criticizing the armaments kings: a munitions boss engineers the breakdown of a peace conference during a fictitious war in the Balkans in order to protect his contracts and safeguard his interests and business.

In 1915, partly financed by Hudson Maxim, Vitagraph produced *The Battle Cry of Peace*, from a script by Hiram Maxim. Wilson's isolationism—which was close to altering the outcome of the war in Europe—relied on a strong and powerful nation: munitions had to be manufactured in order to arm the United States and prepare it for eventual attack, etc.

We shall come back to this propagandist feature of the American cinema still apparent even in contemporary films; also to the ways in which films reveal the social conditions under which they are made—which more or less determine their content.

The important thing to understand from this rather revealing conspectus is that if these short films were realistic (at least superficially) in order that they could be more persuasive, the fact that they were realistic through the use of new techniques produced an enormous step forward in the development of the cinema. Granted, what these short films were reproducing is not so much realism as "verism" (the semblance of truth), as though reporting reality in the raw—but they were ringing a definite change and could quite easily pass for actual scenes *from real life*. Their contrived psychology, benefiting from the apparent realism of the scenes, seemed much more authentic for the fact that the impression of truth had been reinforced by the totally new art of editing and by the performances of the actors doing their best to behave as they would in real life.

Even nowadays, one or two of these films amaze us with their sense of detail and accurate observation (giving us, moreover, a

precise idea of what it was like to live at that time). The truth of the framing made the crude artificiality of the melodramas seem true to life because everything appeared to happen naturally and because the audiences, used to the artificial, stony world of other films, were able through them to come into contact with real life.

We would not go so far as to agree with Georges Sadoul's observation⁶ that Vitagraph preceded Griffith in the use of editing, exploiting the variety and multiplicity of shots, for the simple reason that though the first of the Scenes of True Life films were shot in December 1907 (and therefore before Griffith's first films), it was not until November 1909 that the first worthwhile film of the series was released, that is, *The Broken Violin*. Griffith had already introduced the techniques Sadoul mentions in his very short films. But the efforts of Griffith, Blackton, Van Dyke Brooke, and George D. Baker took place at much the same time; from the evidence we have, it seems as though each influenced the other. It would be wrong to say that Griffith was entirely responsible for the discovery of editing. It would be equally wrong to say that he was not responsible for it at all.

Whatever the case, no one will deny that a huge distance separated Vitagraph and Biograph from their European counterparts. Even at his best, Louis Feuillade in France could do no better than imitate the Americans three years later in his 1911 series *La Vie telle qu'elle est* (*Life as it is*).

With these short films, directing, designing, and acting became released from the stranglehold of the stage. The apparent construction of film had nothing more in common with that of plays: shots and sequences replaced the tableaux and the acts. Yet in its conception the drama remained fundamentally tied to the theater. Good or bad, true or false, it was still "constructed," i.e., pre-meditated, drama. It was all directed and

developed toward a preconceived idea, and the conventional ethic governing this conception was not ready to change. The form might be flexible, the action might be true to life, but the concept essentially still belonged to the concept of *theatricality*—one which, moreover, was to remain the basis for all drama right up to the end of the silent era and even beyond.

Nevertheless, even though the dramatic structure of the films was made to serve a conventional situation (even a dull story), at least it had a freedom of movement previously denied it; and however much it owed to the theater, *constructed* drama was infinitely more desirable than the total lack of construction in previous subjects.

However, the brevity of these films prevented the filmmakers from developing a situation in such a way as to give it its own pace. Thus freedom at this stage was only freedom of form.

The first concern of the independent producers (having to struggle against the hegemony of the Edison Trust, in order to win over the public and therefore the market) was to extend as far as possible the length of the show, to tell stories which moralized as little as possible, and to impart to events the ebb and flow of life itself.

Unfortunately, the cinema was not sufficiently mature to be able to develop character psychology in any depth or trace subtle patterns around complex situations. Once again, action took priority over drama. The first full-length (2,700-foot) film was *The Life of Buffalo Bill*, produced by Pierce Kingsley and William Kraft from Powers Pictures in June 1910. Pearl White made her débüt in this film, playing opposite Paul Panzer. The spectacle—a Western, naturally—had its interesting moments, but the film was really nothing more than a series of adventures tracing one or two more or less authentic episodes in the life of Colonel Cody, alias Buffalo Bill. The film could easily have been

two or three times longer; all it needed was to increase the number of adventures. And yet its success showed the way for films over 3,000 feet.

It is true that some few weeks earlier, Vitagraph had released *The Life of Moses*, a five-reeler (4,500 feet). But the film was marketed in four parts, each of them 1,125 feet. The following year *The Lady of the Lake*, produced by the same company, proved to be the first film lasting over an hour and a half.⁷ However, since the public was not yet used to films of this length; since, in any case, not many were being produced; and since they were shown only in theaters converted into cinemas,⁸ one or two filmmakers (following the example of Victorin Jasset, who had established the genre in 1909 with *Les Aventures de Nick Carter*) had the idea of telling a story following the adventures of a hero through a series of short films, each of which would describe a different episode. This was the beginning of the serial.

Selig delivered the opening broadside in the form of *The Adventures of Captain Kate* in 1911, and Edison returned the fire with interest: *What Happened to Mary* (July 1912), *Who Will Marry Mary?* (July 1913), and *Dolly of the Dailies* (January 1914), all three directed by Walter Edwin with Mary Fuller as the star. Every month or every two weeks a new film would describe new adventures, keeping the audience in suspense for months on end.

The success of these films was beyond the producing companies' wildest dreams. So much so that a journalist, Max Annenberg, a former head-of-sales for the *Chicago Herald* (a W. R. Hearst paper), then in the service of the *Chicago Tribune* (a McCormick paper), suggested to his bosses the idea of a magazine to be published conjointly with the exhibition of a film coming out every two weeks. A very clever idea, it was worked on by Walter Howey, editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Tribune*, together with Terry Ram-

say, the paper's publicist and film reviewer.⁹ Once again it was Selig who launched the genre with *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, directed by F. J. Grandon with Kathlyn Williams as the star (December 1913), soon to be followed by *Kim-Kip-Kop*, directed by Ralph Ince with Florence Turner (Vitagraph, February 1914), and *Million-Dollar Mystery*, directed by Harold Hansel with Florence La Badie (Thanhouser, May 1914).

Hearst, rather surprised by this success, very quickly came back with a serial produced by Eclectic-Pathé, *The Perils of Pauline*, directed by Donald MacKenzie with Pearl White (February 1914). The success was overwhelming. The overall takings jumped by between 20 percent and 30 percent. The public lined up outside the ticket offices and every company in the business started producing episodic films. With rivalry boosting production, Hearst and McCormick soon had their own personal production companies: Eclectic-Warton and Balboa, both distributed by Pathé, which in the meantime had become the Pathé-Exchange Company thanks to the addition of American capital. The twenty or thirty dailies of the Hearst group and those of the McCormick group each brought out a magazine. It was a kind of gold rush of episodic films. In 1914, thirty. By 1915, as many as fifty, among which were *The Mysteries of New York*, *The Red Circle*, *The Mask with White Teeth*, *Ravengar*, and *The Mystery of the Double Cross*, directed by Louis Gasnier, Joseph Golden, Desmond Taylor, Hayes Hunter, George B. Seitz or FitzMaurice, with Pearl White, Ruth Rolland, Grace Darmond, Mollie King, Paul Panzer, Creighton Hale, etc., from magazines by Charles W. Godard, Arthur B. Reeves, Ray Stringer, Marie Corelli, Payson Terhune, etc.¹⁰

Clearly, these films did very little to advance the art of film, but they did play quite an important role. As well as the fact that they stimulated the public to make a habit

of going to the cinema every week, thereby helping to make the cinema part of the culture, they extended the conditions of film drama by forcing the dimension of time into the structure of the narrative, a dimension which gave it a meaning associated more with the novel form than with plays. Indeed, this fact was so obvious that the public of the time was able to distinguish between "cinematic plays," i.e., the normal run-of-the-mill films, and "cinematic novels," i.e., the magazines.

It is true that the directing of these films was somewhat behind the times. Most of them were inferior to the worst of the Vitagraph films around 1910, particularly since they were rush jobs, but the complete lack of verisimilitude in their situations had a kind of poetry about it, which the Surrealists caught on to, as in the poetry of Pierre Souvestre's and Marcel Allain's *Fantomas*:

. . . The traitor has stolen the diamond for the hundredth time. Pearl snatches the jewel holding a gun on him. She gets into a cab. The cab has been deliberately planted. Pearl is thrown into a cellar. Meanwhile, the thief is trying to get into Pearl's house. Surprised by the newspaper reporter, he makes off across the roofs. The reporter follows him, loses him and in the Chinese quarter accidentally bumps into the Man with One Eye who, thus far in the story, has been a shadowy figure.

Eventually, he finds the cellar where Pearl is imprisoned. He is about to set her free but . . . The thief who has given him the slip has followed him down to the cellar, unknown to the journalist. When he finds our heroine out cold — having blown up the building with an explosive which has only recently been invented — she is tied up and relieved of the diamond by her quick-fingered adversary.

It is action-packed. And, whether we like it or not, we are gripped by it. No time for argument or thought. This is the

kind of spectacle the twentieth century deserves.¹¹

A psychoanalysis of these films would reveal the mythology of which they were the ephemeral reflection, a popular social mythology to which they owe most of their success. We have only to compare the French magazines: association of criminals and bankers, vindication of society, sense of justice and the law (*Fantomas*, *Les Vampires*, *Judex*); the German magazines: lust for power, spirit of domination, doctrine of might is right (*Homunculus*, *Herein der Welt*); the Danish magazines: hypnosis and hallucination, vague evil powers (*Gar-el-hama*, *The Mysterious Mr. X*); the American magazines: struggle to gain control of diamonds or an incredible inheritance, rags-to-riches, trials where loyalty triumphs through energy, the spirit of initiative, the boldness and courage of the hero or heroine (*The Mysteries of New York*, *The Queen's Necklace*, etc.). They contain a kind of typology which merits a deeper study, especially in view of the fact that their expression seems to lie at the very heart of popular mythology. However, we shall leave this to future sociologists of the cinema.

For the first time, then, these films introduce the *notion of time* (not psychological duration, of course). But with them the "time of the drama" is turned into the "time of the narrative," a linear development which replaces the relative concentration of the theater. However, this method of narration took a long time to catch on. It was really used only in episodic films to guarantee the succession in time of a series of adventures, always seen and described "from the outside." Since the psychological inner world had yet to be included within the capacities of the cinema, the drama still had much to gain from being compact, concise, and precise. It was only by following this direction that the film art could hope to attain any

sort of refinement—all other aspirations being outside the compass of its techniques. The narrative development of the magazine marks a move toward freedom which proved fruitless because it was based on thin air.

Between 1910 and 1914, the continued development of independent production companies meant that films became progressively longer, from 1,800 feet to 3,600 feet, or almost one hour's running time. With Zukor focusing attention, with his Famous Players, on stars of the stage and then on genuine film actors after the failure of the stage actors, the fashion came back full circle to adaptations, particularly since these longer films required a sustained dramatic action, and what better material for this than plays in the repertory?

Now, in order to avoid stagy structure and make films more true to life, the writers began to develop the "in-between bits," giving as much importance to the subplots as to the main plot, which produced a much woollier, vague construction, a total absence of dramatic relief, and interminably boring exposition to explain what did not need explaining. The dramatic events, the whole purpose and basis of the film, became submerged in a lumpy porridgelike construction.

Then came the first great films directed by Thomas Ince.¹² Working for an independent company, New York Pictures, Ince had formed in October 1912 a production group called Kay-Bee (the phonetic transcription of the initials of the financial backers, Kessel and Bauman). He set up the group in the West, in the San Fernando Valley just outside Hollywood, and his ambition was to make Westerns, dramas, and comedies using the natural setting of the region.

Reworking the principles of the Scenes of True Life but on a much larger scale and with subjects less conventionally melodramatic, he attempted to establish a kind of

balance between form and content, between the means of expression and the dramatic requirements of the story, imposing on the latter values and conditions similar to those of classical dramatic structure. Like the directors of Vitagraph, Ince tried to move away from *theatrical directing*. Yet he had recourse to the structure of the drama as the source of his own structure, which at the same time had nothing whatever to do with any aspect or form of *stage representation*. His work, which may be seen as complementary to Griffith's, seems now to be a kind of dramatization of reality, using reality itself.

Griffith was led, almost forced, to create a language which would allow him to express himself to the limits of his genius. His themes were rather crude and simplistic at the start of his career, since he was able to convey what he wanted only through forms which themselves were crude and simplistic. As they began to develop, so he was able to elevate his tone and express—at least at the high point of his career in 1919—ideas which became increasingly more ambitious, his faults being confined to his rather antiquated notions and the excessive schematizations brought about as much by the formal restrictions of a technique still being developed as by the receptive capacities of his audience. Notwithstanding, the very fact that he did create his own language meant that because the language was breaking new ground, it was continually towing behind it ideas for which it had been conceived. With the exception perhaps of *Broken Blossoms* and *True Heart Susie*, which are his most successful films, the effect of this was that his richest and most complex films, such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, are flawed in the lack of any constant balance between form and content. However remarkable it may be in a historical context, the form, still wet from the mould, showed

itself in most cases incapable of handling the vast subjects demanded of it.

Ince followed in Griffith's footsteps, profited from his discoveries, and, confining himself to the careful application of what he had learned, took off, so to speak, in the opposite direction. Accepting the form established by Griffith and making no attempt to refine it, he considered the means at his disposal only inasmuch as they provided him with a crystal-clear form of expression entirely through motion pictures.

In spite of an already extensive vocabulary and an advanced syntax, it was still impossible to signify characters in any depth or suggest any kind of subtlety. The slightest hint of character motivation required the use of long-winded explanatory titles. Now, using images to illustrate titles, which was the only way the action of the film could progress, obviously had very little to do with cinema. In bad films there were so many titles that it would be meaningless to refer to them in terms of continuity; but in the better ones it was often the case that titles were necessary to translate the dialogue. Thus to be able to include the title, the *continuity of the shot* had to be interrupted. Since the film was shot to allow for the titles, the shot following a title did not necessarily have to match the shot immediately preceding it; and this was so because the title took the place of events supposedly happening at the same time. It was therefore impossible to cut the title out, because it would create a "jump cut."

Ince and his collaborators always cut the title *in between* shots in such a way that if ever the titles were cut out of the film, normal changes of shot would be left. Even so, in order to limit the number of titles, Ince was careful to choose situations and general ideas which needed very little development, at the risk of appearing occasionally rather too succinct. He limited the title to the role of *indicator*, using it merely to link

sequences and place events. Without underestimating the importance of character psychology, he attempted to place his characters in situations where subtleties of characterization were superfluous to an understanding of their drama. He suggested their development as much by condensing time, implying the causes of the development but confining himself to its effects; but as a general rule he preferred to describe characters who defined themselves through their actions in a clearly defined, concise conflict.

The narrative had to be developed with a certain flexibility to give the audience the impression of watching a document taken from life—or at very least an "image" of life—instead of a plot contrived for obvious ends. Though it meant giving back to film an unavoidable structure, Ince had to be sure he was not losing any of the benefits of the cinema, its capacities for capturing life "from within life itself."

Psychological developments are interesting only insofar as they help to reveal the motives behind the characters' actions. Since this kind of analysis was beyond the scope of his resources, Ince concentrated entirely on reducing facts to their bare minimum. He centered the drama on a few very precise motivations, keeping the subplots or unstressed elements in the background, evoked or suggested by various carefully chosen allusions, deliberately removing anything which did not propel the action forward. He achieved thereby an extreme conciseness but also, inevitably, an excessive schematization of his social dramas.

Of these, *A Gamble in Souls* (directed by Scott Sidney)¹³ was one of the first films to develop a thesis in a valid cinematic form. The realistic lighting, the authenticity of the sets, and, more especially, the living quality of the acting gave the impression of true life drama. The plot concerns a young painter in love with a saloon girl who poses for him and who, tired of her cheap existence, is

trying to redeem her past. However, the young man's strait-laced parents oppose the match and the girl goes back on the streets. A marriage without parental approval was unthinkable in view of the orthodox morality of the time, which would have seen a match like this as an offense against virtue. Thus, though the subjects may appear nowadays stilted and melodramatic, it was this hypocritical morality and the bigoted notions of bourgeois mentality that Ince and his main scriptwriter, Gardner Sullivan, were criticizing through their films. When we think of the *Scenes of True Life*, we realize how remarkable was the progress which Ince made.

The Regenerates (R. B. West, 1916) develops the argument that those who reach positions of power by flouting laws and ethical principles are the very same people who defend them most readily once they feel themselves protected and supported by them.

The Outrage (R. B. West, 1916) attempts to proclaim women's rights in a "man's world" where, all too frequently, they are victims of their own trust and credulity.

Illusion (Charles Miller, 1916) develops the idea that the apostles of this new morality, which supposedly frees mankind from mundane social conventions, practice what they preach only when this serves their own interests or feelings. As soon as they have to suffer from the emancipation they have been extolling, they are quick to complain but disguise their selfishness behind the respect due to the customs of modern civilization and established principles.

The Sorrows of Love (R. B. West, 1917) defends the social rights of the deserted mother and her illegitimate child.

The influence of the "message play," which had such success in the theater between 1900 and 1915, is quite obvious—so much so that in 1918 French critics, impressed by the breakthroughs of Cecil B. de Mille's 1915 film *Forfaiture* (which was

merely an application of Ince's methods) proclaimed it as being "almost as good as Bernstein."

In fact, Bernstein, Bataille, Brieux, Portoriche, and even Pierre Frondaie, Charles Mérè, and Kistemaekers and their American imitators David Belasco, Cyrus T. Brady, Hector Turnbull, and Paul Armstrong, provided a source of considerable inspiration for the cinema of the time.

Every one of these films would affect us even nowadays, if only the characterization were a little more subtle. Yet, all too often, the characters are forced, the situations exaggerated, and the consequences distorted out of all proportion. It is not so much the facts as the way they are organized which lacks verisimilitude. Everything verges on the melodramatic in order to extract more mileage out of the message, but the net result is that the message loses its effect. The filmmaker, anxious to prove the point, does not follow his characters; he "directs" them. He makes them behave in a well-defined manner, in such a way that however true they may be, they appear as "character ideas," acting out their place in the thesis instead of working freely toward the resolution of their drama.

We should point out that in 1915 the general cinema-going public was not really used to this kind of film—particularly since what was being used was *images*, not words. Consequently, the expression of the ideas had necessarily to be supported, bolstered up. "Reducing things to their essence" applied not only to the dramatic structure but also—and unavoidably—to the very substance of the drama.

It must be said moreover that the naïve symbolism sometimes used was not a characteristic of Ince's films or Griffith's—or indeed the cinema as a whole. It was merely the application, lock, stock, and barrel, of an out-of-date pictorial art considered even then in mediocre cultural circles as the su-

preme manifestation of art, nothing more than a transcription of currently popular concepts typical of that particular period in history. One has only to reread articles in the contemporary press or the occasional poems of Jean Aicard or Edmond Rostand or look at the paintings and sculptures supported by the artistic establishment of 1914!

However, the Westerns, the films inspired by the War of Secession, and one or two dramas (whose documentary quality, in hindsight, is remarkable) were in another league altogether—*The Italian*, for instance (directed by Scott Sidney in 1914). The film shows an Italian immigrant just off the boat in New York, trying to look after his family. In spite of the double dealings of an American who wants to swallow up his business, he manages to stand up for himself and open up a stall in a Brooklyn street market. The prologue, which takes place in Venice among the gondoliers, has the feeling of pasteboard about it, the artifice of the old type of cinema (but with the odd humorous touch). Yet as soon as we get to New York, down in the streets of Brooklyn, the whole thing changes. We have truth, the manifest authenticity of "life in the raw." Certain sequences pave the way for Von Stroheim's *Greed* and others. In particular, those where the immigrant is wandering through the Brooklyn streets looking for the man who double-crossed him are reminiscent of *The Bicycle Thief*, thirty years ahead of its time.

In the Westerns, it is no longer a question of contrasting different social conditions or criticizing oppressive laws (themes which require a certain amount of subtlety) but of bringing individuals into conflict in short, violent, brutal dramas, exploiting the relationship of the characters with their backgrounds, of glorifying basic but powerful feelings by means of an exemplary action.

Whereas the social dramas were based on elements similar to the "message play," the Westerns and episodes from the War of

Secession had a great deal in common with the short story—maybe even with poetry. It is true that poetry, i.e., narrative poetry, in contrast with novels, must limit itself to precise facts, to a linear action, to archetypal heroes (Masferer, Roland, Siegfried, etc.), the value of the poem transcending the story itself in the transposition of the facts, in the qualities of the words themselves and in the rhythms of the verse. *Formal* qualities, all of them, with their equivalents in film in the dramatic movement and rhythm of the images.

The drama serves as a pretext for the evocation of an atmosphere. It attempts to describe characters on which the brevity of the action and conciseness of the narrative confer a vividness where, otherwise, they might be totally uninteresting (unless, of course, they are developed in much greater psychological depth). The film develops only tragic situations. The characters are less interesting than their drama, and they are aware of who they are only by virtue of the drama.

Thus by emphasizing the importance of the background as a conditioning influence and making it the most important character in the drama, Ince was able to pare down his narrative to the level where it confers a tragic grandeur on some of his Westerns. A poetry hitherto unknown in the cinema (at this point it was not even certain that the cinema was capable of it) emerges onto the screen: a lyrical force created most usually by the chosen means of expression or suggestion, by the constant attention to telling detail, by a technique which, in these films, proves to be the basis of a cinematic code.

The superiority of these films, successfully combining myth and reality, fiction and truth, and the fact that some of them have not, so to speak, aged, is essentially due to details which assume a resonance, like words in a poem. The tiny, incidental miscellanea, the subsidiary actions influ-

encing the main action and the drama itself, seem occasionally to have no other purpose than to produce images of this kind through which the drama is transfigured. As Louis Delluc wrote at the time, "Not so much visual details together with psychological details, but the two together sublimated by another element—poetry."

One may say that in place of the premeditated, contrived moral intentions of the message films, there is something which is not *intended* but which is revealed as the film develops, something which the filmmaker is aware of and *with which he composes* but which has not been *artificially composed*. This is how the living qualities, the direct, tangible truth of the films, becomes *added* to their intention, and what was denied in other films appears here in all its power and newfound splendor.

It is, for instance, a stream sparkling in the sun down in a peaceful valley while, further upstream, we know there are two men battling to the death on the riverbank. After the fight (we do not actually see the outcome), only one of the horses returns. A water bottle and a revolver hang out of a half-open holster and the bag of gold (the cause of the fight) dangles from the ripped saddle.

Some of these films—the finest of them—are characterized by a kind of somber, desperate Idealism. Since all feelings are presented in their raw state, it is drama in its grim nakedness, misery without reason, life turned upside down to find the richest fruit and finding at the end of it all only futility, or nothing at all.

The most interesting of William Hart's first Westerns are *The Bad Luck of Santa Inez* and *The Fugitive*, both produced in 1914, from short stories by Bret Harte,¹⁴ directed by Reginald Barker and Cecil Smith.

The first tells the story of the leader of a gang who comes down from the mountains with his band of desperadoes. They attack

a stagecoach, wreak havoc on a small Western town, demolish the local saloon, rape the girls, and leave as they came, stopping to raid a number of ranches on their way. Rio Jim, however, takes with him the memory of a woman—a dancer in the saloon—who gave herself to him willingly in order to save herself from more violence and, at least partially, to help protect the property of the community.

The second has some of the virtues of the short story form about it, being short and poetic. Rio Jim, a gambler and badman, falls in love with a dancer in a saloon. He protects her against the advances of a group of drunken Mexicans. Surprised and moved by this sudden act of bravery, she gives him the rose she has been wearing. Meanwhile, Jim discovers someone cheating in a poker game. He pulls a gun and kills the man. Helped by the dancer, he makes his escape, but, convinced he is not guilty, he returns and waits for the sheriff in his office. The sheriff arrives and arrests him. The two men ride to the next town, where the sheriff intends to hand him over to be tried. Crossing the desert, they are attacked by a band of Indians. They defend themselves to the death. The following day, the bodies of the men are found, Rio Jim smiling with the rose in his hand.

These first efforts were to lead eventually to *The Aryan*, (directed by Reginald Barker and Cecil Smith in 1916), which is the first masterpiece of the genre. Rio Jim, a plainsman, is returning with his money belt full of gold dust. He walks into the saloon of the first town he comes to. The card sharps think they see easy pickings in the simple giant. He is persuaded by a saloon girl to take a drink; he gets drunk and is forced to gamble. He wakes up the following morning with a hangover and realizes that he is ruined. At the same moment, he hears that his mother has died, news that had been kept from him the previous evening so that

he would continue gambling. White with anger, he rushes round to the girl who got him drunk, shoots her lover dead, beats her up, and then, throwing her across his saddle, digs his spurs into his horse and makes a getaway into the desert.

The years go by. Rio Jim, who has made a slave of the former barroom queen, is at heart still a simple soul, ready to extend his hatred to all women and indeed to the white race in general. He becomes the leader of a gang of bandits of all colors, and he robs wagon trains, living off his spoils and spreading terror wherever he goes. One day the leader of a wagon train of immigrants and prospectors which has lost its way comes to him to ask for his help and protection. Rio Jim, his desire for vengeance still unsatisfied, refuses to help his blood brothers; he will not even give water to their children; even worse, he abducts the women and gives them to his men. However, a young girl dares to go into the bandits' camp by herself to beg for mercy. At first the chief shouts her down, laughs in her face and refuses to be disarmed by her perseverance. Then she begs the badman in the name of his race and simple humanity. Rio Jim, surrounded by his half-breed renegades, suddenly sees where his duty lies. Risking his life, he saves the white women, finds food for the wagon train, and acts as their guide. Then, without accepting their thanks, after a last farewell, the man of the open range rides off into the desert, alone.

The attitude of the filmmakers in this drama is obvious; leaving aside details which suddenly assume a tragic meaning, such as the bucket from which Rio Jim drinks a ladle of water when he refuses water to the thirsty wagon train. Bessie's look, the sparkling water, and Rio Jim's indifference, the whole tragedy is there contained in a single frame with water in the foreground. Similar elements come up throughout the film, enriching the im-

pressionistic synthesis of an *essentially descriptive* action.

For it is worth remarking that, with Ince, the significant detail is never "transposed," as it is with Griffith. The closeup which isolates the detail, removing from it everything but its quality as an ephemeral *sign*, can really be applicable only to epic films or subjective analyses, to anything more or less directed toward transforming reality into symbols. Now, Ince remains objective throughout his films. Where he concentrates on the *immanent* rather than the transcendent, he uses *what things say rather than what they are made to say*. The significant detail is captured together with the universe of which it is part. Its value depends exclusively on the particular position given to it in the frame.

That is not to say that the signifier in these films is coextensive with the signified but that the meaning is immanent within the objects themselves, that it evolves from them quite spontaneously. To put it more simply, Ince *does not signify; he expresses*.

In fact, the "signification" derives from the concept rather than the objects: *ideas are what is signified; objects are what is expressed*. Now, with Ince, the object assuming value as a sign always becomes the sign of an immediately tangible concrete reality *contained within the limits of the drama*. The symbol never extends beyond the facts. It achieves (and then only occasionally) the level of a concept only to the extent that the facts themselves reflect it.

We have seen that film signification—in contrast with what it is in verbal expression—does not depend on a convention. It is evanescent, constantly differentiated, but always and necessarily *associative*. It relates to a (generally isolated) detail, associated with a whole, and operates through the process of distinction and assimilation (example: the pince-nez in *Potemkin*).

Thus, dependent on a concrete fact, it de-

velops into an *idea* which strangely transcends the act or object behind it. It is therefore quite normal that "signification" should be the basic element in a form of code which tends to extend or increase the importance of events: the epic code, the very code used by Griffith and by Eisenstein.

"Expression," on the other hand, is for the most part global and continuous. It derives from the objects themselves, relates to the objects, and only transcends their immediate meaning in order to influence the drama of which they are part. Association is therefore always concrete: of objects with objects, actions with actions, facts with facts, of every conceivable relationship between objects, actions, and facts but not objects, actions, or facts with ideas.

When William S. Hart drinks from the ladle in front of the young girl he refuses to help, the underlying signification does not extend beyond the event to which this action is related. It is the only possible idea which could be motivated by such a situation (summarizing and *expressing* it). Instead of shifting constantly from the particular to the general, as in the epic, Ince stays within the specifics of a single complete drama. He does not transcend concrete facts. His concepts are immanent in the objects themselves; he characterizes them but does not transcend them.¹⁵

This is therefore quite clearly the code of the short-story writer—if not altogether that of the novelist. Any lyricism there may be comes from these facts or their direct association and not from some ethical or metaphysical extrapolation.

Ince's films, then, are a definitive departure, not only from "theatrical staging" but also from the *theatrical structure* of drama. Ince rejected the dramatic construction appropriate to stage representation and used instead a construction suitable for film expression. He can thus be said to be the real creator of cinematic dramatic structure.

In fact, apart from one or two rare exceptions, all silent films of any value were constructed and developed according to principles generated by the *short story* . . . and, come to that, a great many talkies, too—at least up to the present day (the notion of *fiction time* since then giving a new meaning to film, that of the psychological *narrative*, which is where the future of audio-visual expression appears to lie). Yet this was made possible only through the extension of representation time—which nowadays may last anywhere from ninety minutes to two, three, or even four hours. For exactly the same reason that it is impossible to do justice to a complex novel in thirty pages, so fiction time in the cinema cannot be developed in an hour and a half. As long as the duration of the spectacle was confined within these arbitrary limits, it was the structure of the short story alone which was capable of refining film to any degree.

What is more, so that the *mise-en-scène* could conform with the required conditions, it became imperative to prepare it beforehand. From 1909, scripts began to be written. The overall structure of the film was established in a couple of pages, serving as a "guide" to the director; but the film was composed spontaneously according to the inspiration of the moment. The "shape" of the film, its rhythm or its tone (if indeed we can speak of such qualities in films before 1912) had to do with the way it was edited. This was the way Griffith worked. When one considers that *Intolerance*, an extremely complicated film, was shot without any other reference than thirty or so scraps of paper which were an aide-mémoire for him, it is amazing just how much actual creation was done on the studio floor.

Assisted by Gardner Sullivan, Ince was the first to construct a film "on paper," to anticipate the way the film was to be shot, to prepare what nowadays is called a shooting script. There is no doubt that his pur-

pose in doing this was influenced by the fact that he did not actually direct most of the films for which he was responsible. These notes on paper were his only guarantee that the film would be shot to his specifications. And, generally speaking, one may say that if Griffith was the first to give the cinema the notion of *montage*, i.e., *symbolic signification* created by editing, Ince was the first to contribute the precision of a *shooting script*.

Even so, it was not until talkies that the use of the shooting script became widespread, although one or two directors, such as Fritz Lang and Murnau, from 1912 onward, developed the script to the stage where each shot in their films was plotted out beforehand. The expressionist aesthetic, based on the plastic qualities of the image, played an enormous part in forcing them to make this kind of preparation.

Though the structure of the short story is completely different from that of tragedy, it must be admitted that they both develop a *preconceived action*. The short story contains its situation within very tightly controlled limits and imposes on it a development produced by these limits and by the dramatic meaning it is made to assume. Characters are no longer "directed" as in the message play, but events are orientated (or selected) toward a particular *ultimate purpose*. Everything develops in a single direction. Reduced to those elements which advance the action and help the drama along, the story can only move forward, toward its proper conclusion.

At times these limits are irksome—but only when the *duration* is what explains the characters and situations. The drama, sustained by the psychological motivations which control it, then tends to burst through—the short story becomes a novel (unless, hemmed in on all sides, the action remains confined and becomes dislocated).

On the other hand, insofar as events contained in space and time are what deter-

mine a short drama and, particularly insofar as duration plays no part in explaining the characters, which are presented rather than analyzed, these limitations serve as a support guaranteeing the control and refinement of the film. Since psychological duration was out of the question for silent films (by reason of their projection time), it is obvious that these limits, even this pre-meditation, were absolutely vital, which meant that, though expressed visually, the drama remained in the grip of theatricality.

By drama limited in space and time, we do not mean drama necessarily obeying the three unities. However varied its locations and however extended its time scale, the film drama for the most part remains brief and compact, for its duration is nothing more than a period of time, a container rather than a determining factor.

If we take the example of *The Birth of a Nation*, whose action develops over a period of several months,¹⁶ we can see that the narrative comprises a series of sequences, which are merely slices of time. They are "moments," each influencing the others—but time itself is and remains merely a *concept*. Presented like this, duration is merely *signified*. We see its effect but we never follow its development. "Fiction time" and psychological duration do not appear until much later in the history of the cinema. Thus, regardless of whether or not it is extended in time or space, the drama is always compact. It is a moment or a succession of moments, a place, a simultaneity or a succession of places, but everything contributes to the expression of a drama seen as the revelation of characters brought together in a given situation or series of situations.

It is through this rigid framework, requiring the chosen events to work themselves out, associating and corresponding with each other according to a cleverly conceived organization and requiring the more or less predetermined characters to follow

their preordained course, through an "enclosed" structure, through this "constructed" dramatic structure, that the film (both silent and talkie), in spite of the external trappings of the short story form, takes its derivation from theatricality, i.e., from the concept of tragedy interpreted as an aesthetic principle.

Classical tragedy enfolds the drama and cuts out everything but the facts which more or less determine it. Instead of following events by developing alongside them, the facts are considered from a single particular moment in time. Thus what may be seen as the consequence of choice appears, through this distorted view (or limited in time), as the inevitable consequence of a sequence of causes of which this is the pre-ordained conclusion.

In fact, every human action appears to be inevitable once it is removed from the passing of actual time and placed in a "moment" which crystallizes all its consequences. To return again to the throw of the dice which we mentioned in connection with Determinism, we see that it appears that once the dice stop spinning, *everything* must necessarily and inevitably turn out the way it does, for the simple reason that this is the way it has turned out. On the other hand, if we consider the simple place kick in football, *nothing* allows us to know what the consequences will be; the result is unpredictable.

Thus the transcendence which characterizes tragedy is the product not so much of the content as such (whatever tragic meaning it may have) as of the effect of that kind of structure. Both of them are mutually inter-dependent. Tragedy *requires* a structure to bring out its tragic qualities, as well as to reveal perspectives stretching back into the past. The tighter the space and time surrounding the crucial moment, the more the drama gains in its fundamental inexorability, which means that the most banal event,

treated in this way, may achieve the stature of tragedy. Conversely, the wider and more diversified the space-time framework, the less inevitable destiny will seem, since freedom of choice opens up new possibilities into the future.

This is how most films appear. Though only very rarely do they have the tautness of tragedy, their deliberate construction encloses the drama within a similar structure. Though freer in space and time, this structure nevertheless remains conditional; its very freedom is predetermined. However excellent the film—and most often because of its excellence—it reveals a fundamental artificiality, a convention which may be in harmony with the visual content of the scene but is in contradiction with the feeling of freedom and objectivity necessary for truth and the concrete existence of the film.

The doctrine of the three unities is justifiable only in terms of tragedy, but its origin is connected with the origins of theater itself. Moreover, since spectacle is spectacle and not reading, the audience's attention must always be kept at the alert through the use of a single focus of interest. A return to the rules was therefore not merely a whim of playwrights but an internal structural imperative. Having lost their usefulness to the actual drama, to its metaphysical meaning, the rules nevertheless offered the most suitable structure for precise and concise expression in the theater: a unique architecture subject to the laws of theatricality and shutting them inside a very strict framework.

It was therefore quite understandable that they should be applied to the cinema, where the notion of drama gained some value from them and where it was clear that the relative brevity of the "representation time" benefited from such a structure. Yet it is no less true that by turning time into a mere span of time, filmmakers were forgetting that the cinema is the only art

capable of basing its expression on a relative domination of *duration*. Obviously, the researches into rhythm were bound, by the end of the silent era, to have produced a certain knowledge of the values of time but tempo and rhythm, though dominating time, do so on a strictly formal basis. They allow for a structuring of the *expression* but not for the conception of the substance of the *objects expressed*.

Now, this domination of time, seen as the fundamental element of the drama, controlling the way the characters develop within the narrative and as the source of substructure of any potential psychological analysis, was the most difficult thing to achieve at the content level—in the same way as dynamic unity was the most difficult thing to achieve at the formal level—which is why the cinema, the *art of time* or rather the art of the relationships of space and time, was, first and foremost (we have said it before and we shall say it again), an art of space.

It was principally the characteristics of space—setting, location, and set dressings—which were the essential significant elements in the drama. And if it can be said that, after theater, the art which most influenced the cinema was painting, it is only because painting is the art of composing a picture or organizing space within a frame so that the picture is expressive through its structures and harmonies. Nonetheless, without ever being subject to the rules of painting, it was through the interpretation of space, through the organization of movement and objects within a fixed frame that silent films gained the greater part of their expressive power.

Leaving to one side for a moment the elements introduced by editing, i.e., objects turned into signs or symbols which, though part of a more or less theatrical dramatic structure, gave the cinema its independence, one may say that it was through natural settings, through the use of *locations*,

that film turned its back on verbal signification and stage expression.

Beyond the simple fact that space was real and not represented—a “field of view” whose limits were simply those of the human eye—the location shooting of *L'Arrivée d'un train* or *La Sortie du port* shattered, from the outset, the fetters of stage representation. With no other signification to impart, the image conveyed the direct signification of reality: it “presented” the world, with all its tangible qualities, its true nature.

Liberated from the painted canvas in which Méliès had imprisoned it, the camera at first required nothing of the location but its frame—occasionally a frame for emotions, it is true, but which was nothing more than a setting. Indeed, the only rhythm in Westerns was the rhythm of galloping hooves and the only poetry was the marvelous scenery. Scenes set in the Far West might just as easily have taken place in any other place (wherever attacks on stagecoaches and outlaws might be imagined).

On the other hand, with Ince, the action became inseparable from the positive geography of the drama. In his best films, the valleys of Wyoming or Colorado, the plains of Arizona, the deserts of New Mexico, including of course the jobs characteristic of each area, fur trapper, prospector, lumberjack, or cowboy, do not merely provide local color for the adventure; they actually create it.

The drama belongs to the Far West which, though supplying the story with all its movement, color and scenery, does so in a totally natural way. The characters’ behavior, the characters themselves, are unimaginable in any other setting. They exist only in terms of their environment and the time they live in; they are perfectly in harmony with the atmosphere and the area, as well as with the morality produced by the conditions of life of that particular area at that particular time in history. A similar dramatic structure transposed to another loca-

tion would show nothing more than an artificial development of a theoretical action built around imaginary characters. However cleverly assembled, the result would still be uninteresting.

This apparent realism (“social” realism, if you like—since it is entirely associated with how the West was won at the end of the last century)¹⁷ keeps the thematic structure of its films safe from the artificiality of the theater. And it is through a similar kind of realism—very much a superficial kind—that silent films present the illusion of living reality, despite their stilted plot lines. Though “contrived,” the drama appears to be perpetually open-ended. Essentially theatrical, it is able to transcend the theater through its *mise-en-scène*, its setting and its storytelling, whose conciseness and compactness depend on a structure similar to that of the short story.

This was the structure which Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller were to develop (from a lyrical rather than a dramatic theme), injecting into it a finesse characteristic of the best silent films. From being a “character in the drama” in Ince’s films, the background was to become, with Sjöström and Stiller, the reflection and symbolic expression of the feelings of the characters.

We have seen how the symbolism of the set was the distinguishing feature of Expressionism (which followed soon after). Yet, though their intentions were similar, their techniques were utterly different; doubtless because the things they expressed were also different in their meaning.

Expressionist symbolism derives essentially from the *forms* and *structures* of the image, from its plastic organization, far more than from its pictorial composition. Reality is reorganized and recreated through a studio set which composes the universe of the drama, which—be it imaginary world, fantasy world, or nightmare world—is always the world of a tortured, guilty

conscience. It is a tragedy of despair in a bottomless pit. The destiny of the *Weltanschauung* hangs over men's consciences while the *Unwelt* crushes and oppresses them.

The setting then is, as it were, the disproportionately extended projection of the drama symbolically "expressed" by its architecture. Yet this architecture acts on the drama like a parabolic mirror: the set reflects back onto the characters their hidden consciences of which it is the expression, in such a way that, dominated by their reflected consciences, multiplied to infinity, the characters seem to be at the mercy of a world enfolding them in its spider's web. The drama appears as the manifestation of a Destiny written in the Universe, the concretization of an essence, an unconscious act accomplishing what the in-itself of a guilty conscience dictates.

Take an apparently realistic film such as *The Informer*, a film entirely conceived and composed according to this aesthetic principle. One can see that though the action takes place in dark narrow alleyways, in dirty hovels and cellars, it is obviously because these Sinn Fein members on the run are hiding, because it is easier for them to make their escape by night under cover of darkness and fog. But this setting also reflects the state of mind of the informer. The dark alleys, dingy walls, and glistening streets prefigure, in a symbolic way, his crime, before he has even committed it. They prepare the ground for it with a kind of blind, inevitable determinism. The thickness of the fog, with the streetlights diffracted through it, reflects the impenetrability of his mind, his mental confusion, his delusion. The cellars and rooms with their low ceilings are oppressive with the weight of his remorse and the narrow alleys or culs-de-sac close round him with the inexorability of the punishment which awaits him. The overall impression is sticky, viscous, dense.

We mentioned in a previous chapter that in expressionist films—and more especially those whose "realistic" subjects derive from obsessional fantasies—everything seems to happen in a world where the air is thicker and the sky seems to hang with an awful weight, in a world both real and unreal, where the unreality remains at ground level, part of matter itself, a world both dark and light, where the light itself helps to suffocate the characters.

There is nothing of this in these Scandinavian films, where everything is clear and bright and sun-drenched. Far from feeling guilty, the character's conscience is continually trying to find itself, to reveal itself in the dignity of an act of free will, in actions which, while they may triumph over bigoted moral principles, still retain the absolute consciousness of their rectitude. Though guilty in the eyes of the law or in respect of this kind of obligation, Man never stops proclaiming his innocence and sincerity, the purity of his intention, giving proof of his arrogance. On the contrary, far from being imprisoned or dominated, Man dominates the situation which frustrates him, and this same frustration which speaks volumes about him is merely an additional statement of his freedom and rights.

The overall impression one gains from these films, therefore, is of open spaces, the invigorating freshness of the open air, carrying frankness with it with all the force of a wind, driving dross and vainglory before it. The location is no longer merely a setting to serve as a framework for an adventure, an atmosphere consistent with the thoughts of a character, a place to influence certain vague and disordered moral attitudes; it is the instrument of a theme, a vitality, a passion reflected in its still waters and leading, as it echoes endlessly back and forth, toward a knowledge of the universe. The awe-inspiring splendor of Nature does not exist exclusively to provide splendid images but

also to create a drama whose stark untamed wildness proclaims feelings which it glorifies to the heavens.

For, in truth, it is not just the location which is important; it is Nature herself: the elements, wind, snow, fire, and cold which communicate friendship or anger to Man, which become the symbols of his vitality, his desires, and his fears.

Indeed, intuition lends objects a power — of the same order as the feelings which it experiences. The art then consists in creating a unity between Nature and an elementary state of mind, to the point where Nature is able to suggest that state of mind directly. Nature "expresses" the tragedy without confining it. Instead of an enclosed universe which stifles the heroes, sharp edges which wound them, the open horizon extends their actions, expressing optimism within the drama which grips them. The very antithesis of the tortured set designs of Expressionism and the contrived symbolism of lines and volumes and the meaning of objects, the natural location is the expression of elementary forces, the meaning of objects and of their form. The impressionism which it reveals is free from all constraint.

The Outlaw and His Wife (1917) was the first masterpiece of the genre. Fleeing from a disapproving community, a farmer's daughter, previously wealthy and respected, and her lover reach the high mountains of Iceland. The years go by. Discovering their hiding place, the mayor of the village, formerly in love with the young woman, relentlessly tracks them down, with all the greater zeal that the man is wanted by the law. As they make their escape, their daughter falls down a ravine and is drowned. However, they manage to evade their pursuer. Taking refuge in a little hut, they eke out their days and, little by little, their love turns to a mutual hatred, each condemning the other for being the

cause of their misfortune. But love proves stronger. When the woman is caught out in a storm, the man combs the mountainside endlessly looking for her. When finally he finds her, near death, buried under a snow-drift, exhausted, he too stretches out to die beside her. And the snow gently covers them with a pure white winding-sheet.

The three parts of the film — the farm, the mountain, and the loneliness in the snow — which might seem to be of a theatrical construction, in fact look more like the stanzas of a poem rather than the acts of a play. In any case, it is only through the changes of location, justified by the drama, that the divisions become noticeable; however, what is missing (as always) is a sense of time passing. As always, it consists of "moments" linked together by successive editing mechanisms. Yet, since the film is not so much psychological as lyrical, this has about as much importance as it would in a poem. Other considerations apart, *The Iliad* is equally discontinuous; as are *The Aeneid* and Victor Hugo's *La Légende des siècles*. The essence lies in the radiance of the characters, in the natural locations transfigured by the warmth of their love, in the "poetry" of the rushing stream, the mountain, and the snow (whose symbolism is so obvious that there is no need for us to discuss it here).

Snow also forms the symbolic background and setting for *The Treasure of Arne* (1919), with the long funeral procession through the icy wastes which ends the film. Not to mention the consuming flames of *Trial by Fire* (1921), in which a young woman suspected of adultery unintentionally causes her husband's death. A trial by fire will prove before God whether or not she is guilty. This story, which takes place in Florence in the fifteenth century, provided a marvelous opportunity for this film, together with *The Treasure of Arne*, to be the most pictorial of all Scandinavian films: contrasts of light and shade, deep

chiaroscuro, the continual harshness of the contrast translates the moral austerity of the subject matter. Like the sea in *Terje Vigen* and the snow in *The Outlaw and His Wife*, fire dominates the film, the instrument of redemption and purification; but its setting and plastic composition also play an important part. The influence of Expressionism, itself influenced to begin with by the Swedish cinema, is obvious.

It was not until *The Wind*, directed in the United States in 1927, that Sjöström—and indeed the whole of the Swedish cinema—found, in this magnificent film, the ultimate expression of their achievement. After an exhausting journey across the Arizona desert and an unhappy stay with distant relatives, a young orphan girl arrives at a ranch owned by a western farmer she has agreed to marry. There, in a log cabin, isolated in the middle of a dry, arid plain, where the wind blows ceaselessly, and alone when the husband she does not love is away with his cattle, she is terrorized, frightened out of her wits by the wind buffeting the cabin and raising violent sandstorms. One day a gentleman of fortune tries to rape her; she kills him. Having overcome her fears and her own weakness through a sudden energetic burst of action, she goes out into the wind—which henceforward she is able to brave thanks to her liberation and the love of her husband.

There is no drama in the true sense of the word (except perhaps for the brief tragedy of the rape); rather there is a sort of domination of the character by the world around her, a dramatization of the natural location rising from a crisis caused by the initial conflict between the young woman and the world, a panic symbolizing both the fear which her husband instills in her and her own frigidity. And Nature in this film is able to indicate passing time by measuring the development of the character, which it forms in its own image, having

terrified her with its violence. Never was fear more natural or more obvious than in this terrifying relationship between the woman and the wind, and never has tragic greatness been produced with such moving simplicity.

This film is a long way from the theatrical notion of tragedy. It is organized in the form of a narrative (in this respect, we shall see further on how important Von Stroheim's and King Vidor's influences were), but there was another trend, developing in parallel with Swedish cinema, an important trend, which was to lead the cinema back into the clutches of theatricality.

Strongly influenced by the *Kammerspiele* and the theories of George Fuchs, who wanted to see a return to pure theatricality, to a rigid framework bound the three classical unities, Carl Mayer attempted to apply these ideas to the cinema. Also around this period (1921-24), any film intending to develop a psychological drama or an idea of "something existing in time" inevitably came up against the problem of having to use titles. The sciences of ellipsis and abbreviation were still at an elementary stage, and since the running time of a film imposed a limited dramatic framework, any remotely complicated drama found itself reduced to a skeleton. From this point of view, the cinema had not progressed much beyond what it had been in 1914.

To make a refined film using the available means of expression, that is, a completely silent film, without titles, in which the image stood by itself, capable of signifying everything which needed signifying, meant producing once again a short drama, circumscribed in time and space, requiring no dialogue. Carl Mayer was therefore exhuming principles formalized by Thomas Ince ten years earlier. But instead of using simple dramas, he wanted to include Expressionist-type symbolism in his films.

The tragedies of the Far West, where the

action was sufficient to explain the characters, gave way to a type of psychological tragedy signified by the setting, by material objects, by the *Umwelt*. However, since this kind of signification needed to be applied to dramas without words, the motivations were inevitably those of newspaper headlines, headlines which immediately assumed the realistic appearance of "slices of life," whose extreme realism bordered on a kind of theoretical naturalism, a cliché deriving from pure theatricality.

In this "realism" the (completely contrived) "reality" is captured in its most "significant" details, and the facts, reduced to their essence, are organized in view of the expression; objects appear as signs, which means that the great majority of these films are fabricated in order to express through images abstract moral or social ideas; and nothing, as we have said, appears more artificial and false than this warped reality, conceived solely for the purpose of fulfilling a preconceived intention.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that though the *Kammerspiele* film is the ultimate expression of screen theatricality, it is so only in the visual sense. In fact, though the conception, construction, and thematic organization of the subject matter—the actual dramatic structure—are entirely derived from the theater, the way the concept is treated, the signification of the drama—however arbitrary and theoretical—are entirely derived from the cinema. It is the height of artifice presented under the guise of objective concrete reality.

In this respect, Mayer was without a doubt the greatest European scriptwriter at the end of the silent era, the greatest perhaps since Ince, for, though in conception essentially theatrical, he steered the dramatic structure of his films toward a genuinely cinematic expression. His association with Murnau led to *The Last Laugh*, a masterpiece for the reason that Murnau, in-

stead of signifying ideas by putting them into pictures, worked out a way of letting the images suggest the ideas through a narrative whose control and artificiality have more in common with the imaginative realism of poetry than the arbitrary psychology of a falsely realistic "slice of life." By making the film artificial, he saved it from artifice, in the same way as Griffith saved *Broken Blossoms* from being melodramatic by basing his poem on a melodrama.

Along with Eisenstein, Murnau was in effect the only filmmaker in the silent era capable of elevating the art of motion pictures to its ultimate expression. Apart from *The Last Laugh*—a masterpiece of film theatricality—his art derives both from Expressionism and Impressionism, two apparently contradictory methods which he was able to combine into a superb synthesis. Far from shutting his characters inside a set, it is the natural location in his films which provides the overall tone and delivers the dimensions of space to the feelings it expresses.

Against the Scandinavian directors' sun-drenched lyricism and white magic, he sets his own dark gloomy world where the purpose of nature is to express the inexpressible, the supernatural. Though his symbolism, like that of the Scandinavians, is a symbolism of objects, these objects always border on the transcendental. In *The Outlaw and His Wife*, for instance, the mountain where the man and woman take refuge is the symbol of grandeur and isolation and their tragic effort to overcome their fate and the snow is the symbol of purity and redemption. However, the general nature of these symbols is brought down to specifics. On the other hand, in *Dawn*, though the swamps symbolize the hero's state of mind, the power of a destructive and shameful love, by the same token they become the symbol of his spiritual decline, his weakness and his downfall. As in the Swedish films, Nature is the image of the internal

drama; it reflects a state of mind. But, as in the German films, it becomes an idea, a concept, an "essence." Let us refresh our memories as to the theme of *Dawn*:

A lad from a village, seduced by a stranger on vacation, decides to kill his wife: he conceives the idea of taking her to the town on the other side of the lake and faking an accident. However, he hesitates during the crossing; the wife has time to realize what is happening and starts to scream. The terror of the man's wife is enough to bring him round and make him realize the enormity of his crime. Stricken with remorse, he tries to convince his wife whom he had planned to murder that he had fallen prey to a sudden inexplicable urge. The wife is convinced that she must have been mistaken and her trust in him is slowly restored. Reunited, they discover together the delights and marvels of the city, like a honeymoon couple. But when they are ready to return, night has already fallen; a storm breaks out as they are crossing the lake. The boat capsizes. The young man manages to swim to safety. He runs to the village for help. Sadly, all that is left floating on the surface of the lake is a bunch of reeds. Later on, fishermen pull out the body of the young woman.

This film, which is the story of a man's "dawn of awareness," is divided into three parts. The first takes place in the mist and murk of the swamps: a "real" exterior to which the studio realism, with its dim diffuse lighting, lends a symbolic and lyrical transfiguration in the purest Expressionist style. The stranger attracts the peasant. Her role is not just that of a seductress but that of an aggressive will, an evil power which dominates and bewitches the man. Though he reacts violently when she suggests that he kill his wife, he lets himself be swayed and, inspite of himself, becomes guilty in intention. The part ends with the boat crossing when the man becomes aware of

his crime—a crossing which takes place in an exterior which, this time, is entirely real: a lake skirted by dark forests, pines and firs, an exterior which appears both wild and magnificent, huge yet suffocating. The second part begins with the tram ride during which the young man tries to win back his wife. The film suddenly becomes a kaleidoscope of tiny impressionistic touches which translate the happiness of the young couple as well as the man's simplemindedness (at heart still a simple country boy) and their delight in the dazzling lights of the big city: a studio city, stylized, but only enough to bring out its magical appearance, its wealth and its hustle-and-bustle. Then there is the return and the Expressionist style is resumed with the storm breaking as night begins to fall. The film has been criticized for this sudden break in tone, but it is quite deliberate and is contained in every frame of the film: two dark almost symmetrical episodes (the boat crossings) and, in between, a change into a major key: the brief spark of happiness of the two young peasants.

To describe the exegesis of this film, one of the finest in the history of the cinema, would require a minimum of twenty pages. Though the young woman's body is found at daybreak, the dawn belongs symbolically to the awakening of the young man's conscience. The progression of the film, its slow and gradual stylistic transformation, the transition from early morning mist to midday sun, from the swamps to the town, with the sun returning the following morning, breaking over the mist-covered rushes, is a taste of what the film has to offer.

It is all symbolic but without the significance being contrived; it emerges quite naturally, along with the objects themselves: the awareness of the criminal act is accompanied by a flock of wild ducks taking off, apparently carrying away with them the effects of a spell cast in thick and sticky mud.

In the passage from forest to town, the tram ride achieves the journey of an awakening consciousness, a conscience finally revealed. The man, surprised in his doubts and weakness, suddenly comes to realize his power; he wins back his young wife. The day in town begins with their witnessing a marriage—*their own* by proxy—while, later on, nature completes what the husband had for a moment wanted to do—which brings him face to face with the horror of his actions, also by proxy.

Whether this is Expressionism in the true sense or Impressionism, one can say with clear conviction that this film is one of the models of the art of signifying through aspects of the external world. As in Murnau's other films, the course of events seems to be the fulfillment of an obscure destiny or metaphysical fatalism. Yet, far from being a manifestation of naïve spiritualism, this is associated with the fact that the locations symbolize a concept at the same time as they reflect a state of mind. The expressionist method is revealed in the way the states of mind "expressed" by the setting reflect on the characters—with the reservation that having genuinely become the *Weltanschauung*, the setting assumes the appearance of a universe. Thus objects which seem to be subject to both the universality of the natural location and the universality of the concept appear as the concrete expression of a universal destiny. This is apparent in films such as *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Faust* (1926).

It is also present in Murnau's other masterpiece, *Taboo* (1931). Among the islands of the Pacific Ocean, the island of Bora-Bora shelters the simple life of the native people. The notions of good and evil are meaningless to them, and life takes its course as if in the Garden of Eden. Matahi and Reri love one another. There is dancing to celebrate their forthcoming union. But the arrival of the witch doctor from a neighboring island, instead of bringing expected happiness, is a

cause of sorrow: the latest virgin consecrated to the gods of the tribe has died and fate has ordained that Reri should take her place. Sacred from that moment on, the young woman is declared "taboo."

However, Matahi carries Reri away—human love is stronger than her love of the gods. On Tahiti, where they take refuge, the process of civilization has already begun; they need money to survive and, to that end, Matahi becomes a pearl diver. His only joy is to return every evening to Reri in their hut. But one day the witch doctor comes to the island and finds the young woman. She has remained a virgin in the eyes of the gods and must follow her destiny. On his return, Matahi finds her gone and rushes after her. He tries to swim after the canoe taking his wife away from him; but, exhausted, he drowns as the boat gets farther and farther away and eventually disappears over the horizon.

It is not a film to be regarded as some kind of ethnic documentary: if it were, the film would seem rather romanticized. Instead, it is the expression of a social theme in the guise of a fictional story. The lovers escape to find happiness outside the duties imposed on them by the religious beliefs and superstitions of a primitive tribe. Destiny, however—in the form of the laws of the tribe—proves stronger and forces them to submission or death. Reduced to its simplest expression, the narrative is that of classical tragedy: man's struggle to protect his freedom from restriction and oppression; but it is difficult to refer to tragedy since there is no conflict in the true sense of the word. It is a love story with an unhappy end, that is all. The tragedy lies in the starkness of the expression, in the simple grandeur of this lyric poem.

The refusal to surrender, the expression of revolt (intuitive consciousness), replaces the "dawn of awareness." Their love and their freedom are the young couple's only

reasons for living. Their free will is in conflict with the ceremonies and superstitions of the tribe—which, in embryo, are the caste and class systems of more organized societies. Yet Murnau's tragic realism finds expression, in this film also, in a story whose development takes on the appearance of fate, which, “as flies to wanton boys,” kills them for its sport. The metaphysical meaning which critics like to see in Murnau's films has no other basis.

When the witch doctor finds Reri in the hut, no one has seen him coming. All we see is a shadow passing over Reri's face as she sleeps. She wakes up and sees him. Then we see him, standing over her, the image of her inexorable destiny. Later on—toward the end of the film—when Matahi reaches the boat carrying Reri away from him and makes a grab for the mooring rope, the witch doctor simply takes a knife and cuts the line: destiny has spoken. Matahi, exhausted, swims a few more despairing strokes and then sinks as the canoe gets farther and farther away from him. Bazin points out in one of his essays: “The fact that the boat enters frame on the left of screen identifies it absolutely with destiny and Murnau in no way distorts the strict realism of the film's natural setting.” In fact, Murnau does not distort the realism because *the way things are presented* is the only reason they possess their disturbing and supernatural appearance. Destiny in *Taboo* is no more than the expression of a social order, a tangible reality, not the representation of a superior essence sitting all-powerful in a heaven somewhere controlling human life. His film displays a symbolic structure in which “essence” expresses an “existence” which it merely reflects but in such an unusual yet *natural* way that our imaginations open onto vistas of the supernatural which are sheer poetry.

Thus in spite of a certain fiction-type narrative apparent in films such as *The Wind, Dawn, and Taboo*, there is absolutely no ev-

idence of psychological duration in the silent cinema—except for one or two films which we shall examine further on, which show the intrusion of the time factor on the screen.

The development of the silent cinema—which was very rapid—was marked by the formation of a code rather than an art. Though many superb films, well worthy of the name of art, emerged from this period, the average production derived from a code whose hard-won facility of expression had no other purpose than to tell facile stories. The cinema, which skillfully described situations and actions and was capable of signifying ideas and suggesting feelings, was still incapable of developing a story, handling events, blending different times and places, following characters, losing them, finding them again—with the style of the novelist. It was already better equipped than literature (which copied its example in this respect) to move easily through time and space—but in order to place events and *describe* them, not to analyze them or draw psychological conclusions with a similar freedom. Its art, a very real one, was as yet confined to the method of expression rather than the value of what must be expressed to signify beyond mere facts, to achieve a deeper resonance, with the exception, naturally, of the few masterpieces which were able to reveal the extent of the cinema's capabilities in this respect.

In any case, the cinema describes and exposes far more than it “recounts.” Though the restrictions of the theater had been removed, the cinema continued to find suitable structures from within the theater, which guaranteed its productions their stability and strength. It could achieve its epic qualities only in frescos, however, and its lyricism in the short story. It required a simple action, a linear development, a compact framework: *the silent cinema may have been able to control space, but it had no control over time.*

Without making a complete list, we should mention that the most significant "dramas" derive from pure theatricality: *Forfaiture, Mater Dolorosa, La Fête espagnole, The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari, The Golem, El Dorado, The Phantom Coach, Way Down East, Fièvre, Le Rail, Torgus, Vanina, The Shadow Puppeteer, The Street, The Treasure, New Year's Eve, The Last Laugh, Variety, Lulu, Master of the House, The Passion of Joan of Arc*, etc.

Lyrical films were able to avoid theatricality only insofar as they based their aesthetic on the signification of natural scenery or objects included within the spatialization of the drama. The action evolves smoothly in space, but time, unless it is of short duration, is always condensed into a notional outline. Such is the case with *The Italian, The Coward, Terje Vigen, The Aryan, Thirst for Gold, The Outlaw and His Wife, Carmen of the Klondike, Song of the Scarlet Flower, The Treasure of Arne, Broken Blossoms, True Heart Susie, Covered Wagon, Trial by Fire, Witchcraft through the Ages, The Three Lights, Nosferatu, The Old House, Crainqueville, The Girl I Loved, Visage d'enfants, The Chronicles of the Grey House, Faust, Mother, Scarlet Letter, Dawn, The Wind, River, Lonesome, Docks of New York, White Shadows of the South Sea, Earth*, etc.

And it is still the control of space which ensures the magnificence and epic force of films such as *The Battle of Gettysburg, The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance, J'Accuse, The Covered Wagon, The Nibelungen, Strike, The Battleship Potemkin, October, The End of St. Petersberg, Napoleon, The General Line, Turksib*, etc.

With talkies, the storytelling became more flexible, more homogeneous, speech providing the linkage between sequences and thus allowing the mobility of time to be more easily manipulated, involving both time and space. But instead of moving closer to narrative, the cinema took the opportunity to make a positive move back to the theater. There is very little point in

dwelling on what were no more than plays and musicals filmed at a time when the camera seemed merely an instrument for recording songs and dialogue, but it is worthy of note that the first masterpieces belonging completely to the cinema in their means of expression and signification also belonged completely to the theater in their construction—in spite of a certain mobility in time and space impossible to reproduce on stage—films like: *The Blue Angel, The Threepenny Opera, Street Scene, Le Million, M*, and many others beside. Though wonderful, *Hallelujah the Hills*, the first lyrical masterpiece of talking pictures, is still a throwback to the discontinuous construction of cinema's early days, with each sequence (outstanding in terms of its internal rhythm) remaining isolated from the rest and with titles used to make the link ("And Zeke became a preacher," "Six months later," "The years rolled by").

The union between theater and cinema—which seemed desirable at the time—was only (apparently) achieved in American comedies starting to appear around 1930 whose wit seemed perfectly suited to the freedom offered by the cinema. Yet, though they ignored the theatrical rules which might have paralyzed the freedom of movement of the comedies, these films did retain theatrical dialogue, leaving the cinema responsible for telling the story. The effect was that instead of being encumbered by a rigid construction expressed visually, they were films constructed with a freedom which was at times breathtaking but where the most important elements, i.e., the characters' feelings, thoughts, and states of mind, were expressed verbally: cinema at the level of dramatic structure, but theater at the level of expression.

Many of these comedies were delightful. A smooth and superficial character development (but character development nonetheless) is discernible through the quickness

of the verbal exchanges. The best of them, presenting real characters in contrived situations, disguised with their wit and repartee the filmed theater which was the essence of their production. Standing as modern fairy tales, they showed the way to a new cinematic essence—especially since the images, when they were employed to signify, did so with a genuine subtlety.

Does any of this hold up nowadays? Precious little, in truth. *New York Miami*, perhaps—undeniably a delightful film. The others are intolerable because of their incessant chatter and situations whose artificiality is such that the irony presented as social criticism either strikes the wrong note or falls completely flat. There is very little kick left in this heady brew, which very quickly lost its sparkle, whereas films like *The Blue Angel* and *M* seem ageless—allowing for the fact that their structures seem a little dated compared with modern films, but their ideas are still remarkably fresh.

Only genuinely knockabout comedies have kept their youth, comedies in which the absurd characters, implausible situations, and breathless rhythm have priority over the dialogue, which is reduced to verbal nonsense—films like *Madame et son clochard*. Also, satirical comedies whose satire comes not just from the dialogue or images but from their constant association. Whereas in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, for instance, the verbal expression is constantly alternated with the visual expression, in Lubitsch's films the visual and the verbal react with one another, thereby determining a perpetual deviation from their original meanings.

Even so, American comedy caused filmmakers to construct their films with much greater freedom, to give them the “appearance of narrative,” without knowing (or being able to know) how to provide them with the meaning and functions of the novel. In this respect, its influence proved

rewarding. However, comedy did not suddenly make its débüt with the invention of talkies. There were innumerable films of this type during the twenties, and their origins were not (as was generally assumed at the time) in the theater of Maurice Donnay, Alfred Capus, or Robert de Flers.

In point of fact, light comedy is based on witticisms deriving from word play. At the time of the silent screen (though titles were used—or rather abused), it was not possible to base a comedy on dialogue. Only character situations of a visual nature could be exploited. Now, American music-hall comedy, like Hungarian comedy, is based, as in vaudeville, on *facts* rather than *words*. It was from this type of theater that all these “silent” or “speaking” comedies were derived. It is easy to follow the progression.

Before he arrived in the U.S.A. in 1924, Lubitsch had been strongly influenced by many different factors. He had been a director during the period of the great historical reconstructions, setting great store by the Italian productions of the time (1919), and had then directed a number of rather stilted comedies, before he came into contact with Mauritz Stiller's comedies. These were as light as his were heavy. The Swedish director was the initiator of the genre (or so it appeared), and Lubitsch was to remember this.

While directing dramas glorifying man and nature, such as *Song of the Scarlet Flower*, *Shooting the Rapids*, and *The Vengeance of Jacob Vindas*, Stiller was making comedies in a tongue-in-cheek, satirical vein—notably *Karlek och journalistik* (1916), *Thomas Graal's basta film* (1917), *Their Firstborn* (1918), *In the Hope of Happiness* (1920). Now, *In the Hope of Happiness* was an adaptation of Ferenc Herczeg's *Silver Fox*, and his other comedies were similarly inspired by plays.

If there was a European influence, it was that of Stiller and the Hungarians distilled through Lubitsch. It is also an extraordi-

nary fact that the vast majority of playwrights and screenwriters of American comedies toward the end of the silent era were Hungarians; in particular, Lajos Biro, Hans Kraely, and Melchior Lengyel. Doubtless because of their ability to create humor through situation rather than words, they were more or less destined to express themselves through a visual medium. However, satirical or not, American comedy was not born until Lubitsch, and its origins are to be found nowhere but in the United States. Its cradle was the same as the short "realistic" dramas: Vitagraph.

Whereas slapstick saw the light of day at Biograph with Wallace MacCutcheon's chase films, developing through the Christy Comedies to its perfect form in Mack Sennett's films, comedy itself took the place of Van Dyke Brooke's *Scenes of True Life* in the shape of George D. Baker and James Young's *Scenes of Comic Life*. Naturally, since these films depend on the comic rather than comedy, they are as naive as they are crude, yet situation comedy already shows itself developing in short films such as *Love and the Suffragette* (1919), leading onto the drawing-room comedies—short playlets, poking fun at social habits and customs—directed by Sidney Drew and his wife from about 1915 onward.

Certainly the objects of their satire were clichés beyond the reach of irony. There was no risk of offending anybody and only a fool could think that a criticism of such insignificant taboos could in any way be risqué. Yet, though these films attacked principles which no one in his right mind could have taken seriously, their authors were working genuinely in the direction of satire. They learned to use ellipsis and innuendo, and when it became possible to find more interesting topics to lampoon, the form had already been prepared; it only needed filling.

After the First World War, the resulting social and moral revolution made things a

great deal easier. Sex, flirting, and adultery, previously forbidden on the screen, could now be tackled, if not openly at least in an oblique way which lent itself perfectly to irony. Comedy of manners suddenly started to take off, and we must pass over the American comedies of the twenties to give the credit for originality to the comedies produced in the thirties. Of course, from the point of view of directing skill, they cannot be compared, but the "method" is there, proving merely how clumsy were the beginners.

With the comedies acted by May Allison, Harold Lockwood, Ethel Clayton, Bryant Washburn, etc., the American cinema took on a totally different appearance. The sentimental spark so beloved of Mary Pickford, Miles Minter, and June Caprice gradually gave way to a tart, tongue-in-cheek type of humor, still inoffensive but far from innocent. With Madge Kennedy, Constance Talmadge, Vivian Martin, Viola Dana, and Shirley Mason, the with-it college girls eclipsed the simple village girls in their Sunday best; and the chrysalis opened, revealing the "flapper," the semi-virgin of 1925 illustrated by Joan Crawford, Phyllis Haver, and Clara Bow.

However, it is to Cecil B. de Mille's first comedies that we should look for their style, looseness of tone, and pace rare in the cinema up that point. It is fashionable these days to look down on Cecil B. de Mille. Yet, besides the fact that he was superb at handling crowd scenes, there was a period when he had more than mere talent: an innate gift for visual expression, an acute sense of observation of tiny details which made him one of the most original filmmakers of his day.

Critics generally ignore the social comedies which he directed between 1918 and 1922, from scripts by his brother. They also ignore the fact that he treated these subjects, considered obscene at the time, with

an incisiveness and subtlety well ahead of his time. However, the picture is a little clouded: though the comedy is smooth and subtle when it concerns the characters' behavior, when it comes to their thinking or dreaming, the "visions" he conjured up are, in a word, pedestrian and provide a foretaste of the worst that de Mille was to produce. Fortunately, they can be isolated as superfluous trimming; but it is odd to think that a filmmaker is capable of including in the same film such bad taste and such finesse. De Mille is unique in the history of the cinema.

We are concerned here only with the part of his work (a considerable part) which shows him in a good light, in order to see where the famous "Lubitsch touch" (and even the subtleties of *Public Opinion*) originated. It is quite probable that the influence of William de Mille, a writer of talent, responsible for the scripts of most of these films, was decisive, for his own films have a value perceptibly equal to that of his brother's, at least in their bad taste. Their tone is slightly more dramatic. Be that as it may, we should remember *Old Wives for New* (1918), *Male and Female* (from the play by J. M. Barrie, 1919), *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919), *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), and *Something to Think About* (1920), starring Gloria Swanson, with Elliott Dexter or Thomas Meighan.

These films have not faded half as much as the majority of 1930s talking comedies. *Don't Change Your Husband* is the humorous story of a woman of the world who suddenly finds that she cannot stand any longer her husband's carelessness, annoying habits, and scruffiness. She leaves him for a man who treats her like a lady—she finds him irresistible. But, when they get to know each other, the same thing happens all over again. The handsome hunk proves just as scruffy and annoying as her first husband—not only that, he is a boor. Nothing else for

it but to return to her husband, who at least can assure her of his constant affection.

Obviously the film does not probe very deeply. Yet, for the first time, we have a comedy made out of the thousand niggling everyday things, intimate details some of which are rather near the bone. Objects (signs or symbols with Ince and Griffith) become sketches to indicate a passing thought, a state of mind, a way of life, and to describe the characters in fine detail whose psychology, though simple, has the ring of truth about it—though the tone is of a sophisticated comedy. The action, which might just as easily be that of a play, reveals—even translates the *tone* of stage comedy, but it disguises any "theatrical construction" through its expression, which remains visual almost throughout, and its freedom of movement, which already points the way forward to the future styles of comedy.

To realize how far the cinema had developed up to 1920, all one would need to see is *The Birth of a Nation* or *Intolerance*, which, at the level of editing and rhythm, represent the highest achievement of motion pictures; or *Broken Blossoms* or *True Heart Susie*, short melodramas transformed by the lyricism and sensitivity of the director; or else *The Outlaw and His Wife*, the first study of man against Nature; then Thomas Ince's *A Coward* to see the first trends developing toward a narrative and *Don't Change Your Husband* to follow the progress of a technique where the expression, becoming elliptical and allusive, tried to describe character psychology.

In this order of ideas, the masterpiece of the whole of the silent cinema must be, without a doubt, *Public Opinion*. For, though Griffith, Ince, and later on Eisenstein established the basic structures of film signification, it must not be forgotten that films are made not out of shots and relationships of shots but above all else out of scenes which

interlock with each other and form the continuity of the narrative, at the same time as they guarantee it. All film signification depends on this architecture whose conception, theatrical as it was at the start, evolved as we have seen in the direction of the short story, developing the drama into psychological analysis.

From this point of view, *Public Opinion* marks one of the most important dates in the history of the cinema: the first study of manners where the characters' ambiguity was expressed in a specifically filmic way and where the characters, deserting their close cousins in the theater, are taken from real life.

In previous psychological films (with the exception of the comedies of Mauritz Stiller and Cecil B. de Mille and other exceptional directors such as James Young, Harry Beaumont, and Clarence Badger) the exposition of the drama was engineered most usually through the use of long explanatory titles. Now, *Public Opinion*, in developing the sketches we have just been describing, signified doubts, second thoughts, and other similar self-examinations with an art never previously achieved. Compression, ellipsis, metonymy, allusion made their conspicuous appearance on the screen to serve the purpose of the narrative psychology, not for some theatrical fancy. Putting to one side the humanity, subtlety, and authenticity of the characters, *Public Opinion* was, in the words of Theodore Huff, a kind of "advanced manual for directors and producers in cinematic technique."¹⁸

The story of the film is quite simple: two young people, Marie and Jean, whose parents disapprove of their relationship, decide to elope. Through a misunderstanding, Marie thinks that Jean has jilted her and she leaves by herself. We find her some years later. The kept woman of a man-of-the-world, she leads a life of luxury and pleasure. One day she happens to meet,

purely by chance, her old boyfriend, who is scraping a living selling his paintings. She asks him to do a portrait of her and, eventually, decides to start her life with him all over again. Through another misunderstanding, Jean kills himself in despair coming out of a nightclub where Marie is dining with her lover. Weary of her life of luxury, Marie retires to the country with the mother of her eternal love.

In keeping with the attitudes of the time, there is still a considerable element of melodrama in this story—if not in the facts, then at least in the way they are assembled (happy coincidences, misunderstandings, etc.) but we receive the impression that the director was not trying to tell a story for its own sake. He uses it as an argument to link together a series of circumstances through which the truth of the characters can be displayed.

Here are a few examples:

—At the very beginning, when Marie (Edna Purviance) is at the station waiting for Jean to arrive, it is nighttime. We see her on the platform, in the shadows waiting for the train. When finally it comes, all we see are the reflections of the carriage windows on the ground and on her face. The reflections slide by, then come to a stop. Marie walks away, out of shot. The reflections start to move again. She has gone.¹⁹

—When Pierre Revel (Adolphe Menjou) visits Marie in her apartment, their relationship is made very clear from the moment he fetches one of his handkerchiefs from a chest of drawers.

—When Marie invites her former betrothed to the apartment, she is unable to conceal the fact that she is a kept woman when, as she looks for a dress which he wants her to wear, a man's collar and cuffs fall out of the closet.

—When Pierre comes to the apartment and realizes that Jean is there, he sucks with feigned sensuality a chocolate which he

takes from a box he had given her the previous morning; he offers the box to Marie, archly suggesting: "perhaps the gentleman next door would like one, too."

— When Marie visits Jean in his studio and he offers her a cup of tea, the crumpled and stained napkin gives his situation away immediately.

— When Marie, in her evening clothes preparing to go out with Pierre, quarrels with him, complaining that she is not happy, he playfully fondles the pearl necklace round her neck which he has given her some few days earlier. Furious, she tears it off and throws it out of the window. Pierre sits down smiling to himself and starts to play the saxophone (which he has been playing while she has been getting ready), ignoring this temper tantrum. However, down in the street, a passing tramp picks up the necklace. Marie, on edge, tells Pierre, who calmly carries on playing his saxophone. Marie rushes down into the street after the tramp, from whom she snatches the necklace and then, on reflection, gives him a small reward, returning as fast as she can to the apartment and, in her haste, breaking one of her heels. She hobble into the apartment and Pierre bursts out laughing. She throws the shoe at him.

— After an explanation where she tells Pierre that it is Jean she really loves, Pierre's expression shows that he does not believe her. Sitting on her bed, she tells him again: "I love him." He leans over and kisses her on the forehead: "Very good, I'll see you for dinner tomorrow night."

— The following morning, Marie is being massaged, stretched out on a table covered with a towel. A friend arrives. The masseuse impassively continues with her work without appearing to take any notice of what the women are saying. However, by her attitude, her reflexes, we know that she has not missed a single word. She pulls the towel away and Marie is naked (out of

sight just below the bottom frameline). We deduce the shape of her body through the movement of the masseuse's hands—and also through the movement of her eyes, when another friend arrives. From then on, all the action and chatter offscreen is registered on the masseuse's face, whose mime is worthy of Chaplin himself.

— When Jean meets Pierre and Marie at the nightclub (having sent her a message), the two men shake hands. Pierre invites him to take a seat beside her, offers him a cigarette and lights it, as friendly as can be, but at the same time slips into his pocket the message addressed to his lover.

— Finally, in the last sequence of the film, a fully laden haycart is making its way slowly up a country road. On top of the hay, a young villager is playing the accordion. Sitting beside him is Marie, surrounded by the children she looks after on the farm. On the same road but driving in the opposite direction some distance away is a big Marmont (the Cadillac of its day) with Pierre Revel and a friend inside. The friend says: "Whatever became of Marie?" Pierre shrugs his shoulders. He does not know and does not care. The car passes the hay wagon and continues on its way, while on the other side of the road the cart moves slowly away into the distance.

It is true that there are too many titles, but the image is no longer dependent on the text. In fact, it is the reverse: the text calls up the image which evokes the visual expression.

Chaplin was already using these stylistic devices in his short films, but at that stage no dramatic film had been able to exploit them. *Public Opinion* proved that the cinema was not merely editing and rhythm but, more particularly, writing, scripting, conceiving. Chaplin realized that directing a film was not, as in the theater, merely the "staging" of a work whose value preexisted its representation but the formalization of

a subject gaining its action, value, and meaning only from its formalization.

Theater and Cinema

We were present at that moment in history when talking pictures threw everything back into the melting pot. The fact that it brought with it verbal significations tried and perfected over many years (and thereby a facility of expression) meant that for many filmmakers there was no point in trying to signify with images when it was so much easier to do the same thing with words. That explains the spate of literal recordings of spectacles whose intrinsic value preceded the film process. However, it was not long before the screenplay replaced the *filmed* play and relied on the cinema only for its movement and its ability to be everywhere at once.

Just as in the era of the silent film (but in an even more obvious way), the cinema based itself on the theater. Though it allowed a freedom contrary to the rules of the theater, it expressed itself through dialogue; and though it managed to use the image as a signifier, it relied on the theater to provide the backbone of its dramatic structure. What happened was that instead of the audience having to *read* the text, they could *hear* it. In one sense, it was all quite predictable: the fact that dialogue could be heard meant that the images could develop according to a homogeneous continuity. On the other hand, the verbal content, because of the facility of expression, took priority over the visual content.

It might be appropriate therefore to begin this section by agreeing wholeheartedly with Bazin (something we are not always inclined to do) when he writes, in one of his better essays:

It is clear that the association of theater and cinema is older and closer than is

generally thought, especially since it extends beyond what is normally described pejoratively as "filmed theater."²⁰ . . .

If we take the view that the theater is the art specific to drama, we must acknowledge that its influence has been considerable and that the cinema is the last of the arts capable of escaping that influence. But if this were so, half of literature and three-quarters of films produced would be merely extensions of the theater. So perhaps the problem should be approached in this way: that it arises only in connection with an actual theatrical production, not with the actor but *with the text*.²⁰

This is the essential point. For, though the effect of the theater's influence was apparent in the majority of films before 1940, this influence was limited to the dramatic structure. We have seen how silent films showing signs of "theatricality" were no less visual in their technique and their style. The same is true of the major films of the thirties, which showed the way ahead for those who aspired to a filmic rather than a verbal expression.

On the other hand, most of those who thought they had managed to avoid the theater found themselves even more deeply entrenched in the text, which they turned into their basic means of expression. For, though theatricality remains the foundation of dramatic art (regarding a "tragic moment" preferably directed backward in time toward a past of which it is the *present consequence*), it is still possible to avoid theatrical expression, even when using it as reference—the perfect example is Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lève*. However, when the verbal expression becomes necessary (especially when it becomes *dialogue*) it is not possible to avoid the theater, since this is precisely how the theater creates signification. True, it is not just the dialogue which gives a play its quality; there are many

other factors. Yet no play can exist in which speech does not provide the expression and purpose—since the very medium of the theater is words. That is the way it was seen by playwrights who, from the outset, thought of talking pictures as just *another form of theater*, i.e., another method of expressing and signifying *through the text*, a method unfettered by the demands and duties imposed by the stage.

Marcel Pagnol was apparently misinterpreted (perhaps deliberately, who knows) when he was quoted as saying that the cinema "should confine itself to photographing theater." However misguided he may have been, he could never have been so foolish as to make a remark like that. On the other hand: "The art of the theater is being revived in another form and will begin to enjoy an unprecedented success. . . . A new field is opening up for the playwright and we shall start to see productions which not even Sophocles, Racine, or Molière could have dared to attempt." And when he adds, "the talking film is the art of distributing, recording, and broadcasting theater," he is not referring to "theatrical staging" or spectacle but dramatic art—the substance not the representation. For him, dramatic structure finds, in the shape of the cinema, another possible *formalization*. And though the "talking film, bringing new resources to the cinema, must *reinvent* the theater," it is because it can (and must) create a dramatic art proportionate with its resources. Moreover, Pagnol goes on to point out that "The playwright must eliminate from his scripts all theatrical conventions which, on the stage, are unavoidable but from which the new means of expression frees us."²¹

We are bound to agree with these observations. Where we beg to differ is where Pagnol sees cinema merely as the filming of a drama whose significations are (and remain) essentially *verbal*: "this means that

the scope of dramatic art will be extended, its rhythms altered by this new minor art which has placed itself at its service." For Pagnol, though film replaces theatrical *mise-en-scène*, it must be made to serve the drama, i.e., the speeches. We shall see later on to what extent this is possible, since, in the cinema, "the art of representation," everything is possible. Film can represent anything and everything and, as Pagnol sees it, can quite easily be nothing more than an original way of bringing out the qualities of a play conceived (or not) for that purpose. In which case *mise-en-scène* becomes *mise-en-film*. Yet it is not cinema in the aesthetic and semiological sense of the word. The cinema—must we come out and say it?—is not just an art of representation: it is also an art of creation. *Mise-en-scène*, in this respect, is not representation but narration and signification through a certain form of representation. This is what makes it *écriture*, a formation of relationships and associations rather than *mise-en-scène*.

To say that a film is not cinema is merely to observe that the main significations contained in it—concerned with character, character psychology, or intelligibility of the drama—do not depend so much on visual or audiovisual structures as on another technique deriving directly from the theater, literature or painting for which film merely serves as a recording device. That is not to say that cinema cannot and must not be used for the purposes of bringing out the values of verbal expression but that film, in that case, is being used for purposes which are not its own, aesthetically speaking. We do not deny the resulting spectacle the right to be interesting or valid, merely the right to take film expression for granted. Everything which is printed is not necessarily derived from literature. It is also true that everything projected onto a screen and part of the cinema in the sense of a means

of reproduction or communication is not as a definitive rule derived from visual expression, i.e., from the art of expressing and signifying through motion pictures.

Now, Marcel Pagnol believes that the cinema can only "produce films conceived and thought out before the production process begins, works existing outside itself." This gross error, understandable in 1915, forgivable in 1930, is totally inexcusable nowadays, in view of the fact that the sole purpose of this recording instrument is to construct films with no meaning or existence outside the creative act—the filmmaker's intention having even less connection with the finished film than the design of a novel with the completed work.

It is true that this definition applies only to a small handful of films among the total output. Since the greater part of the cinema comprises adaptations, it is clear that, in these cases—long before the filming process starts—there is the presence of a work with its own existence and also a value completely independent of the finished film. It is a matter of knowing whether the significations deriving from the literary forms are transposable into the cinema, whether it is possible to go back to basics, recreating them through certain visual forms, or whether, on the other hand, the cinema in that case is (or should be) nothing more than the presentation of a drama whose intelligibility is wholly contained in its verbal expression.

The question is an important one, particularly since it throws light not merely on the problem of adaptation but also on how one considers film in the first place, since ultimately we may well wonder in what ways a work conceived specifically for the screen, such as *Lady Panama*, is more cinematic (or less theatrical) than a play put onto film such as *Les Parents terribles*. Indeed, taking a closer look, the latter appears a great deal more visual than the former.

The fact is that Jeanson's film (apart from the story which gives it a cinematic appearance) is based entirely on its text. The dialogue is what leads the action forward, causes the characters to behave as they do, and explains their motivations—and in short holds the whole film together, even the randomness of the plot through the randomness of the words. The images are there merely to place the drama within a visual context. Thus there is nothing to distinguish this original script from an adaptation, since, though it is *developed* as a film, it is *conceived* as a play. On the other hand, Cocteau's film, which remains predominantly theatrical because words are the most important element in it and retains a theatrical aspect from the fact that Cocteau deliberately did not alter the structure of his play, at least takes imagery and visual signification into account—something *Lady Panama* fails to do. It could never be said that being *constructed* as a play it is *conceived* as a film, but at least the imagery in this film does more than merely present characters in a context, illustrating the dialogue: it does give the film a meaning.

To establish the precise difference (and here we might seem to be jumping ahead), we may say that the two films have one feature in common, in that they both introduce us to speaking characters living a drama whose expression and comprehension are *verbal*. In Jeanson's film, however, the action is determined by the dialogue. In Cocteau's film, on the other hand, the words are the consequence of an action to which the imagery provides a genuine authenticity. In the former, visual developments are introduced around the words without adding to their signification or their meaning; in the latter, film is used to bring out the qualities of a dramatic work incapable of being reproduced on the stage. This is Marcel Pagnol's theories (or ideas) taken to their ultimate conclusion. And we can see that they are of

value when we consider that films such as Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* and Orson Welles's *Macbeth*, though they do not share the same aesthetic principle, at least derive from similar conceptions.

Before we begin to examine the extent to which it is possible to adapt a work of theater to the screen, that is, the extent to which theatrical significations are transformable into film significations (assuming that it is possible in the first place), it would seem necessary to identify (or try to do so) the specific qualities of the theater.

From what we have seen thus far, it is clear that the principle of theatricality by itself is not sufficient to define the essence of theater. As a condition of tragedy (though perhaps not of the tragic) it is one of the bases of dramatic structure, but it extends beyond the scope of the actual art of the theater because it is just as easily applicable to a literary or cinematic work whose form and expression have absolutely nothing in common with it. Quoting Bazin, we pointed out that the essential point does not lie in the text, in the dialogue. This is true, but it does not explain the exact nature of the theater, since the novel also uses similar verbal forms without deferring in the least to these stage rules. What we mean, therefore, is a specific quality in dialogue, conceived and organized with a view to certain conditions.

These conditions are those of the "representation." Indeed, though a play is expressed and signified in terms of words, this expression can only achieve its full meaning through a representation for which it has been conceived.

A work written for the stage potentially contains, in its writing, qualities eventually *produced* on stage, but these qualities remain implicit and do not become living realities until they are acted and produced on a stage. The reader's imagination is able to conjure up the spectacle, but when he is reading his judgment is brought to bear

only on the *literary* qualities of a text whose theatrical qualities are perceptible only to those who are specifically looking for them. When we study Racine we analyze his poetry not the plays as plays (though it is helpful to know something about the dramatic requirements influencing the way the plays were written). However, only a very sketchy knowledge of these requirements is necessary to be able to appreciate the quality of the poetry—and all serious studies of drama concentrate on this aspect exclusively. We have already mentioned the fact that Racine and Corneille (and even Molière) were dramatic poets rather than playwrights—or, to be more accurate, they were greater poets than playwrights, in contrast with Shakespeare. Which is why they, rather than Shakespeare, are studied in our secondary schools. It is their *language* which is analyzed and not the reason for that language—the drama. There are plenty of translations of Shakespeare, the reader will be thinking; why should Shakespeare be reserved for English classes? Well, the fact is that even in England Shakespeare appears very little on school curricula—a great deal less, at any rate, than Shelley or Byron.²² And the reason is simple: the language of Shakespeare's plays is archaic. There is another reason, however—perhaps an even more convincing one: studying Shakespeare means studying the theater, and the best way of doing this is to act out the plays and produce them, actually coming to terms with Shakespeare the dramatist. In other words, Shakespeare's poetry is contained in his drama, whereas Racine's is predominantly in his verse.

Bazin points out in his essay: "If we are allowed to prune *Phèdre* down to its action and rewrite it according to narrative needs or cinematic dialogue, in theory we would find ourselves in the hypothetical situation . . . of the theatrical reduced to the dramatic." But things are not that simple. Ob-

viously a tragedy like *Phèdre* is capable of being expressed in forms that are purely narrative or filmic. But then the drama would be completely different. It would assume a totally different meaning, revealing new perspectives because, in being different, the means of expression would be expressing different things, not the same things in a different way.

We shall see that this very point—which critics still find difficulty in accepting but which is of fundamental importance—is a source of error and confusion in bringing a work of fiction or theater to the screen. Adapters believe it is a matter of translating, transferring as it were from one code to another (both codes being the same expression—the verbal code), whereas it is in fact a matter of transferring from one form to another, i.e., transposing or reconstructing.

To reduce *Phèdre* or any other tragedy to its dramatic foundation does not mean merely stripping it of its theatricality (as Bazin believes) but reducing it to its motivations, its basic argument, cutting out (or removing) all its expressive qualities, i.e., denying everything which makes it what it is, everything which gives it its value and meaning: *its very form*. Now, this form which is theatrical is wholly contained in the text, less in the literary or poetic qualities of the text (contributed by the poet) than in a much more subtle quality contained in these other qualities (contributed by the dramatist).

Classical tragedies can be played against a background no more elaborate than a curtain. Créon can be costumed in a tuxedo and it will pass unnoticed, since the words he speaks provide the evidence of his class, his personality, and his clothes—as much as his thoughts or his actions. And if Mithridate wears armor, if Néron wears a toga, if Bérénice and Titus are shown speaking in front of buildings made of plaster of Paris, it is not to appeal to some sense of realism

but to help the audience construct around them the imaginary world they suggest. For Mithridate's armor, Néron's toga, and the world around them *exist in the text*, contained by the words they utter, by which they are defined—which could never be the case with the dialogue of a novel or film.

That leads us to say of Marcel Pagnol's plays (even those of Jean Giraudoux) that they are not theater—as films with too much dialogue are described as not being cinema—because Marcel Pagnol's dialogue, meaty and pungent, is living spontaneous dialogue which does not in any sense signify in the theatrical sense of the word. It is dialogue brought to the stage rather than dialogue of the stage. It is too direct to be theatrical, too verbose to be cinematic, and thereby reveals a double incompatibility with these two contradictory forms for having tried to assimilate them both. Giraudoux's texts are also preeminently *literary*. They are verbal artifices of the most extreme brilliance and subtlety, but they describe patterns around the characters instead of defining and signifying them. They never succeed in becoming identified with the actor; though he may speak the lines, he can never embody them. That brings us to the “presence of the actor”—which is what gives the verbal signification its whole meaning.

For Henri Gouhier, “what defines theatricality in its essence is the impossibility of separating the action from the actor. The stage produces every kind of illusion except the illusion of presence” (*L'Essence du théâtre*). These ideas are debatable. Bazin took issue with them and there seems little point to add to his remarks, especially since this “presence” seems as obvious on the screen as it is on the stage. Yet, in the cinema—as we have said over and over again the actor, instead of moving within a space serving merely as a framework, is actually part of a space “composed” with him as

one of its elements; he is included within it. The essence of the cinema, apart from the mobility of its points of view, is without a doubt contained in this intimate union between the human beings and the world they live in. All the elements contained in the field of the camera—scenery, setting, objects, characters—constitute a unity of form in which and through which they are indissolubly linked together. It is this image of space which ensures “presence” in the cinema which, every time the film is projected, revives a reality whose very unreality seems more “real” than the reality of which it is the image.

In the theater, the presence of the actor is a physical presence. The actor lives in the same space as the audience—but not in the same world. Now, contrary to what happens in film, this world is an *artificial world*. Thus the actor is able to isolate himself from it, since there is no link (other than purely imaginary) between his own physical reality and the unreality of the set representing his world. Consequently he is able to focus the audience’s attention exclusively on himself; particularly since his “presence” is not just a physical presence; it is also the *presence of the drama* in the form of the *presence of the speeches*. So if presence in the cinema is the formal unity of *character* and *world*, in the theater it is the formal unity of *actor* and *speech*, speech in physical form. The actor in the theater is not *acting* a part; he is *assuming a set of speeches*, i.e., his character defined by the text.

This means that just as with film time, time in the theater has no connection with real time. It is generally assumed that a scene lasts as long as it would “in reality” because the time it takes to say the words or make the gesture is the same on the stage as in life. That is as may be. However, this is to ignore the “thinking time” preceding the speech or action which is not represented on the stage. Thinking time would

be indicated with a pause—“dead time.” It must be admitted that such pauses do exist in the theater, but they are very short, since any period of silence quickly becomes boring. The actor does not *think* his speeches; he *says* them. At least the impression given is that the thought is suddenly turned into speech at the very instant it occurs. The thought process, which normally precedes speech, is therefore present *during the process of speaking*, in such a way that the words become a reality through the actor speaking them. The feeling is not expressed or translated by the words; it is *created* by them. “The hero,” Roland Caillois writes, “is constantly being revealed to himself and to the audience in a continual transfiguration of his inner being. . . . When Macbeth conjures up a world full of sound and fury, he is actually conjuring it up, like a wizard, surrendering to his visions as if he were hallucinating: the imagery does not so much describe the world of his environment as the state of mind which conjures it up. . . . Eloquence of this kind is *incantatory*, creating a world which, so to speak, takes shape on the surface of the words and gives them their reality. The world of tragedy is revealed in the speeches and is sublimated by them.”²³

In this perspective, there is only a difference of level between tragedy and drama. Incantation changes places with exposition, but the drama is still contained in the words in such a way that the essence of theater does not really reside in the “presence of the actor” so much as the presence of the speeches turned into action by and through the actor, i.e., through whom this specific quality potentially contained in the words finds expression. And it does so only on a stage, in a production which “realizes” the playwright’s intentions.

Theatrical dialogue is all the more incompatible with the cinema for being obliged to express everything, whereas film

dialogue must on the contrary tend toward nonsignificance, i.e., toward an expression involved with what is happening on the screen but not involved with any transcendence. When transcendence exists, it must be confined to the images exclusively.

This necessity is related less to the fact that speech in the cinema must necessarily and definitively be subordinate to the images for the reason that the cinema is based on visual content than to the fact there is a constant de-synchronization of time. As we have said, several pages of description are necessary to describe the content of a single shot. The hero telling us he is tired is merely repeating what is plainly visible in his face, in the way he is standing or moving—with a couple of seconds added on for us to realize the significance of what is being signified. That explains why there is a constant dissociation between the time of the visual expression with its comparatively rapid rhythms and the more gradual rhythm of speech. Words, when they are not being used to support images, when they are *expressive in their own terms*, cripple the film, weigh down its rhythm. If a length of time without speech is intolerable in the theater because it is "empty," a length of time containing only speech is intolerable in the cinema for the reason that this length of time "stuffed with words" becomes excessively long.

In normal life this kind of dissociation is imperceptible, not merely because we act and speak freely but also because events occur *with us*. In the cinema or the theater, they occur *in front* of us and are directed into a series of significations. The solution therefore is to give the text and the image entirely different roles to perform, making their significations *complement* each other, react with each other—and not to alternate them or make them coincide.

Directors in the cinema must start with a principle which we believe to be basic:

once an idea is given precedence over an image, the image becomes redundant, for the reason that the image, as a means of expression, is created for the purpose of suggesting ideas—or at least developing the narrative with a view to what is being expressed and which must assume meaning only through the expression. The film image performs in the cinema exactly the same function words do in the theater. A film may be considered as a play; its "content" may be based on a concentration of different times and spaces—provided the forms and methods of signifying are those of film. On the other hand, though the *role* of the image in film is similar to the role of words in a play, because its power is completely different, the visual "development" of a piece of theater cannot help but distort it. It is not possible to signify with images what can be signified with words and vice versa.

Moreover, though time in the theater is the "time of the speeches," time in the cinema is not (as some people seem to think) "the time of the action"; it is a time related more to perception. Theatrical reality is an *understood* reality; cinematic reality is a *perceived* reality—which means that the process of intellection is different in each.

In the theater, the audience member is one of a group of people brought together by common consent, and the representation, presupposing a certain complicity between actor and audience, unfolds as a kind of ritual. Individual participation is as it were a reflection of the collective reaction. Communication exists at the level of reason, understanding, especially in view of the fact that a play presents thoughts complete in themselves. The audience is always considering previously organized thoughts. The playwright has already done the thinking.

The cinema, on the other hand, denies all complicity. There is no more "common cause" between actor and audience than between the man in the street and an ob-

server. Thus everything appears genuine because there is no pretense. The audience is witness to a drama which in no way seems to have been made for it. It is there by chance; it observes and becomes involved to the extent that it allows itself to become involved.

Each individual audience member, moreover, is alone, by himself, looking at the world presented to him. Yet this isolation does not separate the individual from the group. He does not communicate with his fellows, but he sees and feels *with* them, if not like them. A kind of underlying connection is established between audience members shut up within their own contemplation. A kind of intersubjectivism replaces the objective unanimity of the theater—which is less conscious but without a doubt more profound. Communication exists at the level of feelings and fascination.

Whereas a play is understood, a film is perceived, according to a continuity in which thought, no longer circumscribed and *defined* by words, is able to develop exploring many different *potential* avenues. The circle is not closed, as in the theater; it becomes extended in an ever-widening spiral. Film does not require its audience to think specific thoughts but to refine thoughts which remain deliberately vague. It requires the help of the audience, asking it to contribute something of itself, something to be digested—a series of relationships and mysteries to be unraveled. However, like Nature, always there to be seen, film does not oblige us to think. It is immediately changed, transformed by movement. It allows us to think what we like, which is why many of us stop thinking when we go to the cinema, believing that neither film nor film art can stimulate thought, that the cinema is a passive art; whereas, in fact, it is quite the reverse. However, in order to think around these images,

we must learn to *see*, to know how to interpret their meaning through what they show—just as we must learn to read in order to think around words. The same is true of Nature in which the untutored mind sees only commonplaces, what everyone has seen or heard before—whereas even a little application will reveal a wealth of continually renewed meanings and marvels.

In brief, we are *present* at the performance of a play, whereas we go to *see* a film which, as we have seen, is a *presentation* more than a representation.

In the theater, we watch ("listen to") living characters objectively and physically present whereas, in the cinema, we "project ourselves" onto a living shadow which absorbs our capacities for dreaming. The audience becomes the subject of what it is seeing: it duplicates itself and watches itself living an imaginary existence. It is observer and observed both at the same time, a consciousness becoming conscious of its own subconscious but remaining free to remove itself and break the spell.

With very little exaggeration (a matter of personal taste), one may say that, in the cinema, the audience is alone before the world in the same way as the mystic is alone before God. The cinema thus may be regarded (potentially at any rate) as a mystery, in the absence of religion. It is cosmic in the deepest sense of the word, for if the theater is an incantation whose purely verbal magic represents Man's dialogue with God, the cinema provides a platform to observe the magic of *reality*. It lets us into its secret not through an arbitrary and conventional representation but through an *image of the world* where reality wavers at the margins of its likenesses. Dialogue is no longer heard; it is *experienced*.

It is clear now that the problem of adaptation is not a problem at all. It is insoluble in the way it has been interpreted so far, since it is impossible to translate verbal into

visual magic, since their meanings, perspectives, and general outlook are radically different.

Obviously there is no difficulty in expressing visually the tragic meaning of a tragedy—*Phèdre*, *Electra*, *Cinna*—but the very fact of expressing it visually gives it another *signification*. It is no longer Racine's, Euripides' or Corneille's tragedy but *another* tragedy on the same theme—a *creation* not an adaptation. To be faithful to Racine is to be forced to illustrate him; and therefore falsify him, since to replace his verses with images is to destroy the meaning of his work, reducing it to an argument with no greater or lesser value than a newspaper headline. Once again the only solution is to keep the original play intact and "stage" it using the resources of the cinema; but that is to plunder film techniques for the benefit of the theatrical expression. As Bazin points out, "the specific contribution of the cinema can only be defined in this context as an excess of theatricality."

It could be argued that classical theater (which we brought into the argument deliberately so as to prove the point) achieves its ultimate goal in its words. Shakespeare, on the other hand, uses words not as an end in themselves but as a means to an end. In his plays, the signification derives from a fiction which is not confined merely to its verbal quality. In other words, though Racine and Corneille express an inferiority defined and limited by words, Shakespeare creates with words a universe containing the feelings he expresses. He is dynamic (a quality he shares with the Spanish playwrights), whereas the others are static, and it has often been said that had he lived in the twentieth century, he would have been a filmmaker rather than a dramatist. We are willing to accept this—with the proviso that we should remember that his masterpieces are plays and not films.

Henri Lemaître, in his study *Le Cinéma*

et la tentation Shakespearienne,²⁴ quite rightly points out:

though the representational resources at his disposal were limited, Shakespeare could be relied on to extend to the limit the visual qualities of his speeches whose dramatic power so often depends on the function of the words, their rhythm and arrangement, to produce in the mind's eye of the audience, a rich progression of imaginary film images. . . . In the eternal struggle between *showing* and *telling* which has plagued the history of the theater almost from the beginning, it would seem that both Shakespeare and the cinema, following each of these contradictory terms, have resolutely ignored the fact that a contradiction exists and have increased the dramatic *essence* by bringing together both *showing* and *telling* into a single integrated unity.

Unfortunately, though a parallel may be drawn between a "linguistic art which, like Shakespeare's, succeeds in giving the words the magical power of the image and an imagistic art which, like the cinema, succeeds in giving the image the suggestive power of words," it is a parallel between two contradictory processes—a comparison serving merely to emphasize their built-in antagonism. In fact, Shakespeare does not create an "integrated unity" between *showing* and *telling* but between two forms which invite association in order to produce a complementary signification—as happens in the talking cinema. In Shakespeare, the visual is a *function of telling*; it exists *within* the words (though continually released, like scent from a flower): the image *depends on* the verbal expression. On the other hand, in a good film it is the *telling* which is *within* the image or which depends on a visual expression, in which, contrary to appearances, Shakespeare is just as antycinematic as Racine or Aeschylus. One might even say that it is the most

apparently visual forms (this is true of the American novel) which have least in common with the cinema, since the visual is contingent on a *nonvisual* expression and is not a *fact* but a *concept*.

This is obvious, particularly in films which might be expected through their subject-matter to be more cinematic: fairy tales. Could anything be better suited than the cinema for creating an imaginary world—for translating *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example? Well, in fact, the opposite is true. Produced by Max Reinhardt at the Deutsche Theater, the work was pure fairy tale because it was based on the resources of the theater and realized in the perspective of the stage. Directed on film, also by Max Reinhardt, with a breadth unrealizable on the stage and with the aid of various film techniques supposed to provide a visualization of Shakespeare's fantasy world, the whole illusion collapsed. A choice has to be made: either a genuinely filmic fantasy world is established, an unreality which only the cinema can produce—in which case Shakespeare is traduced, in that the fantasy world thus created is no longer associated with its verbal expression, with terms involving a forest painted on stage flats and donkey heads made out of cardboard—or else the play is respected (which is what Reinhardt did, gambling on the spectacular capacities of film) and it is automatically destroyed by an absurd cardboard fairyland totally out of place in the cinema.

Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles, the only valid adapters to date, understood this only too well. They turned their backs on adaptation and used the cinema merely as a new method of staging.

The main interest lies in the extension of time, not possible on the stage. The play is enhanced by a number of moments where the characters do not speak but act and think in such a way that what they say is explained by their behavior. This happens

only very occasionally, however, for, though the film staging provides a framework of authenticity to the tragedy, it tends to strip the words of their transcendental signification. The very fact that it gives the play's hero a concrete existence means that the notion of time overturns verbal transcendence within the potential of experienced reality. And without ever ceasing to be tragic, the tragedy becomes a drama; from being metaphysical, the motivations of the characters become psychological.

Whereas time in the theater is essentially the time of the word, i.e., the speeches, in the cinema, any time not supported by a concrete action is a dead weight. Thinking in the cinema is a function of reality, the transcendence a function of immanence—the exact opposite of what happens in the theater. That explains why it is impossible to make a transposition of form from one to the other. Not only are the values of another order but they act in diametrically opposite directions.

The only avenue left, therefore, is an art of representation which consists in staging a play using the techniques of the cinema, accepting meanwhile that this will automatically mean a loss to the original play in transcendence but a gain in immanence and that, though the result may be a film, the work will always remain essentially theatrical.

Film reality, in constant conflict with a metaphysical transcendence expressible only in words, opens onto social-type values, represented by *objective and concrete* rules governing the behavior of the characters. The tragic then assumes a new appearance, realistic rather than conceptual. It belongs to a collective imperative which oppresses or limits individual freedom of action, to the struggle between these two basic requirements and to their resolution in a satisfactory stability.

There is therefore no purpose in looking

for inspiration in plays whose subject matter and motivations are outmoded and which, being theatrical, can find their meaning and ultimate objective only in words.

Literature and Cinema

All the same, we should not forget that, though the cinema is a code, an *écriture*, expression in the cinema consists in signifying with a reality already endowed with meaning of its own. A certain reality is presented as existing within a certain space and for a certain time. In one way or another, it is a spectacle which is being composed.

To direct a film is to organize a series of elements staged for the purpose of certain anticipated significations; which means that the cinema can be *écriture* only to the extent that it is first a spectacle.

This definition places the cinema exactly midway between theater and literature, insofar as it has features of both incorporated within it; but it also clearly indicates those areas where it is different from them.

Because its expression depends on the staging of an action to be developed, the cinema was monopolized, at the beginning, by directors from the theater, or else was placed under the protection of the all-powerful theater. We saw how filmed theater was abandoned only to be replaced by stories told in images dominated by the same cause-and-effect structure of drama and by its inevitable progression toward a happy or unhappy ending.

Tragedy not only benefits from being cast in such a mold: it is its precondition. Yet the cinema had absolutely no need of this kind of structure—especially since it removes the event from the flow of time which, since it is potentially capable of doing so, it sets itself the task of exploring or translating. This capacity, contained within its very nature, remained at the hypothetical level, however. To implement it, it required the assis-

tance of a fluid *écriture* which up to then it had not been able to develop and, more especially, a representation time capable of integrating a relatively consistent duration. Just as a novel could never be written in thirty pages, so the expression of that same novel could not be expected to be encompassed within the space of sixty minutes' running time. This limitation, imposed on film for many years, was the reason it stuck to the norms of the short-story form. The better filmmakers succeeded in creating an aesthetic principle from this limitation instead of using absurd devices to try to overcome it (we saw how episodic films were able to fill in time only by using action for action's sake). The model provided by the theater of a relatively concentrated structure was perfect for keeping the dramatic progression within the limits necessary for its best expression: imparting the maximum amount of information in the minimum period of time.

The refinement of methods and techniques of visual expression, the arrival of the talkies, the extension of projection time (from 60 to 90 and then to 120 or more minutes of running time) gave the cinema the opportunity to free itself from the structures of the theater and move progressively further toward an exploration of time itself.

We know that the first film to follow character development—induced by social and environmental influences (an analysis made possible only through the representation of a homogeneous duration)—was Eric Von Stroheim's *Greed*, shot in 1924 from Frank Norris's novel. The original version was to have run for eight hours, in two parts—but it was never edited. With a number of scenes hacked out of it—against the director's wishes—the version that we know today, cut down to four hours, includes a number of title cards, there to explain the missing scenes.²⁵ But this does not alter the fact that the film is a masterpiece—

the first screen masterpiece in novel form. The fact that the film was a turning point in the history of the cinema is reason for us to devote a few words to it.

McTeague, a rough diamond with a heart of gold, works in a gold mine and lives in penury with his mother. One day he leaves the area in order to learn a real profession with a traveling dentist. He sets up practice in San Francisco and prospers. Wealthy, he marries Trina Sieppe, a German immigrant's daughter, having won five thousand dollars in a sweepstake, making Trina's previous boyfriend (Marcus Schoulder) mad with jealousy. Now, McTeague is not professionally qualified; he is reported to the authorities by Schoulder and he has to shut down his practice. He is out of work and Trina, always thrifty, becomes penny-pinching. He gets drunk and beats her regularly until one day he goes too far and kills her. He escapes with the savings that Trina had been keeping hidden from him. Marcus sets off after him. They have a showdown in the middle of a desert with the sun beating down on them remorselessly. McTeague kills Marcus but not before Marcus has managed to slip a pair of handcuffs on him. The key to the handcuffs is lost in the struggle and McTeague is fastened to the corpse of his enemy. He drags it behind him for several miles until he falls down exhausted to die.

The fact that a great many sequences and secondary characters were cut makes certain passages completely incomprehensible, especially since the Kerkow-Maria and Miss Baker-Old Grannie pairings were supposed to have a bearing on the development of the McTeague-Trina pairing and give the film the solidity of the novel's construction lacking in the projected version. It is the story of a couple becoming estranged, human beings degraded by poverty, and love that has turned to dust: Trina's lust for gold, an obsession which little by little robs her of all

her humanity. The drama transcends mere naturalism, but this is not the reason it was an important film. *Greed* was above all the first film with a genuine duration: a feeling of time passing. Even compared to modern productions, it is one of those rare films where the characters are in a perpetual state of evolution.

Stroheim's realistic intentions are evident right from the start in the fact that the film was shot in the actual locations where the action is supposed to take place. Moreover, the characters and their obsessions are not pathological oddities. They are human beings identified with the environment which makes them what they are and is the basic cause of their moral defects. It is a perfect representation of the poverty afflicting the proletariat and lower middle classes in a large urban agglomeration (San Francisco) around the turn of the century. The misery McTeague feels in being out of work anticipates that of *The Bicycle Thief*. However, the film's realism is in fact a subjective realism intensified by Stroheim's very strong temperament, occasionally going so far as to caricature his characters' behavior. For instance, Trina's thrift becomes a monstrous obsession; she starves and freezes herself to death, finally sleeping naked on gold coins which she lays on her pallet. Lust, greed, violence, and passion throughout the film cut through illusion and prejudice. Social taboos, incapable of containing the violence of a man pulled this way and that by the contradictions of society, are continually broken by scandal, murder, blasphemy, dreams and madness, passion and death.

One can say that before *Greed*, psychology in the cinema was rather crude (psychology presupposing a development in time). In *Greed*, the characters start to get on each other's nerves, irritate and provoke each other, become jealous, reveal each other's secrets, escape into isolation—and,

eventually, when brought face to face again, kill each other. Each character sinks deeper and deeper into his own isolation, despair, obsession, or hatred. Time shows itself in the destruction it wreaks. And by details undergoing minute changes: objects play an enormous part, and there are no two shots in which the characters and objects are the same. There is nothing remotely similar between the young girl at the start of the film and the old hag at the end, ugly and full of wicked little ways, between the handsome confident McTeague at the beginning and the paunchy old soak at the end, out of breath and vomiting. The indications of atmospheric conditions are also quite remarkable. Stroheim succeeds in making the different hours of the day perceptible according to the season or month of the year.

Instead of a theatrical (in the dramatic sense) cinema, Stroheim created an art of narrative and a realism of duration and overturned all the popular tenets of the time. The film has some obvious faults. There is evidence, in some parts, of a rather naïve use of symbolism, following the contemporary cinematic clichés; but they are unimportant details. The work overall was twenty years ahead of its time in terms of exposition and development of plot, if not its methods of signifying (though its significations are inherently contained in the authenticity of the facts). The mediation achieved through these facts is a consequence of their direct meaning and not an editing technique or pictorial composition — as was the case in the majority of pictures at the time. In the whole of the silent cinema, it is the only example of realistic expression and expression of time (though King Vidor's *The Crowd* is comparable to it in several respects—but then only at a relatively minor level).

We saw how talkies established their credentials at the start by returning to com-

edy, to verbalism—if not always to theatricality. We had to wait several years before an effort to de-dramatize the cinema was made, a definite move toward the meaning of the narrative and to structures borrowed from the novel. However, to conceive a film “as a novel” is one thing, to adapt a piece of literature is quite another; so much so that the result is generally contrary to what is expected.

The apparent similarity between film and the novel in their respective progressions (development of time, narration of a series of more or less chronological events, etc.) provided the stimulus for filmmakers to bring works of fiction to the screen, in the same way as the apparent similarity between their dramatic structures had prompted them to put plays onto film.

The direction we have just described (the extension of the representation time) should have provided—or so it seemed—an opportunity for making more perfect and more precise adaptations of the great works of fiction. Leaving aside for the moment the difficulties of organizing the content in a genuinely filmic way, we shall see that this never in fact happened, for the simple reason that it is just not possible.

Adaptation to begin with (whether of plays or novels) was no more than a guarantee of quality which the reputation of the work adapted was supposed to lend the film. The cinema's claim to be art depended on the amount of art injected into it. Though distorted by the translation, the original work retained its potential power even when it was being caricatured, impressing the stamp of its quality on the film it inspired, giving it the necessary aesthetic warranty but inevitably pointing up the congenital inferiority of an art totally dependent on it.

At first, because they were very short, adaptations were no more than recordings on film (generally mediocre in all respects:

directing, acting, set design, etc.) of various famous historical events—a kind of crude illustration similar to the newspaper comic strip. However, if we pass over these first faltering steps and move onto the films of the twenties (and, moreover, the majority of talking films), we notice that the adaptation of a novel almost always consisted in reducing it to the dimensions of a short story, or to its basic plot line, stripping it of its quality as a novel, its density, its sense of time.

In the best of them, it was a digest of the events organized into a dramatic sequence, just like a play in the theater. The flow of time was therefore congealed into a succession of "moments" and the character psychology was translated by an overabundance of words which deprived the images of the little they had left to say. Everything was reduced to its essence and only the skeleton remained. The images, which did no more than describe and locate the action, reflected a content organized in view of a series of *literary* significations; but, being dependent on the form which gave them their meaning, they could make themselves felt only through their absence. Trimmed down, pruned, and bowdlerized in this way, all that remained of the novel was a sketchy movement directed toward a preconceived purpose. In short, from a rich and complex work, a mediocre play was drawn, and from the play an even more mediocre film.

These are the faults, one might say, of a method based on theatrical thinking. It is not inconceivable that there should be an adaptation method of the same standard as an art able to signify not just the passage of time but also the attendant changes in character motivation. And it is true that certain adaptations have produced films which, while maintaining a high level of cinematic technique, have succeeded in translating at least one or two of the main ideas of the

novel adapted. These, however, are rare exceptions. Moreover, if they are outstanding, it is only because of their use of parallel sequences, i.e., sequences expressing something entirely different from the specific content which was their starting point.

Indeed, whether of plays or novels, adaptations start from the absurd principle that the values signified exist independently of the expression which presents them to the audience's eyes or ears. In the context of a single system of signs (the same language or code) this may well hold true. But when cutting from one system to another, the values are bound to change. Since the significations are dependent upon the particular system adopted, the same elements take on totally different meanings and the nature of the things signified becomes totally altered.

It is practically speaking impossible to express in words what Leonardo da Vinci expresses with form and color in *The Virgin of the Rocks*. Obviously the painting can be described, its content summarized, its significations listed, and its aesthetic or metaphysical consequences analyzed. At a stretch, it is even possible to capture in words the significations which it constructs—but not to signify *the same thing*, to create identical significations, achieve with a verbal expression the latent content making it what it is. Dependent on a mediation, i.e., a way of interpreting and structuring the world, this value can exist only in terms of the form which creates it and gives it its *meaning*: the information specifically conveyed by painting—that particular painting. Any other means of expression describing or saying *the same thing* is bound to give that same thing a *different meaning*, a different signification. Baudelaire (in *Les Phares*) was only able to translate an emotional equivalence, relating more to a style than to a painting—and that was Baudelaire.

To transpose a work from one mode of

expression into another, to adapt it, is to assume that there is an equivalence between the signifieds, overlooking the difference between the significations—squaring the circle. Not only do signs or symbols used in different expressions have different powers of expression or signification but they also have different ways of appealing to the consciousness. They are not perceived in the same way; the mental processes which they conjure up do not operate in the same way; their conceptual perspectives are not the same.

Thus to try to transpose literary methods of expression into cinematic ones is nonsensical. Whichever way he turns, the adapter confronts the same dilemma. Either he remains true to the letter: he follows step by step the progression of the novel, the chain of events, in such a way that it remains completely intact; even so, the fact that these events are being expressed visually means that there is a difference in what is being signified from the novel, a distortion of its meaning determined by a literary expression which alone conforms with the author's original intention. Either way, he is continually forced to betray the novelist with the very elements he uses to tell the story, believing all the while that he is serving them. Or else he remains faithful to the "spirit" of the novel, i.e., he tries to express similar ideas or feelings using different means. Inevitably, however, he finds that he has to upset the continuity of the novel, change the information, the circumstances, the characters; and here too he ends up betraying the author's intentions. To mention adaptation in this context would be a breach of confidence, for the film, whatever its other merits, has nothing whatsoever to do with the original work which it claims to reflect.

It would need some rather strange reasoning to believe that it is possible to remain true to the spirit of a novel and at the same

time change its development, transform its data, alter its structures, as though the spirit and the letter were two completely separate entities able to be superimposed or dissociated, when it is quite obvious that both of them constitute a body of facts, expressions and significations whose interdependence is always apparent. To betray the letter is to betray the spirit, for where else does the spirit exist but in the letter?

The only possible solutions are these: Either you follow the story step by step, putting it into images while taking care not to build significations through some purely literary device, in order not to express anything alien to it; attempting to translate not significations (since they exist in the words) but whatever is signified by the words. Film then stops being creation and expression and becomes representation and illustration. Or else you forget your duty to the author and start from scratch, giving a totally different progression and meaning to his original subject matter. You create your own personal work from the author's using the original merely as inspiration. But then you forfeit your right to refer to the original.

In the first case, the film may be more than a simple collection of images—but it is never more than a vehicle. With the film significations removed, the adapter is free to compose with meaningful images, i.e., images which at the level of the set, lighting, plastic structures, characters' behavior and action, create a general impression conforming with the impression the words set out to evoke. In other words, at the level of the mise-en-scène—i.e., the composition of the dramatic space—the adapter creates the world suggested by the novel, its atmosphere, its context, and then this is recorded by the camera. It is a signified, interpreted reality that is recorded: the quotient, as it were, of the verbal significations insofar as they are limited to description.

This is an art not to be underestimated:

an art of effacement, renunciation, scrupulous fidelity to the original work and, though incapable of translating the deeper meanings and providing aesthetic equivalences (for the reasons we have just enumerated), at least capable of producing a worthy reflection.

The most notable successes in this genre have been David Lean's films adapted from *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. The images seem to jump right out of the pages of the novel and, here and there, it is possible to recognize little flashes of Dickens's style and manner.

At a higher level we find *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*. And yet, apart from certain equivalences of tone and spirit belonging to the images (though Bresson occasionally comes close to signifying what Bernanos had in mind), it is the text which shines through. The images, continually recessed from the thoughts they support, create the atmosphere, the context, describe the facts, do not suggest a great deal (appropriately enough) and rely on the commentary to look into the soul of the priest—who, moreover, exploits it to *tell his story*. The novel's meaning contained in the words is found in the verbal apparatus of the film; small wonder. One might say that the images add to the text, extend it, illuminate it; but that is the most one could expect while they remain faithful to the verbal significations. The images include but do not translate the verbal significations. To have created visual significations would have been to create a different film, to use a different structure, different situations. Maybe it would have been possible to present similarities, but it would never be the novel and certainly never Bernanos. The perspectives would have been completely different.

Just as the adaptation of a play (if the intention is to respect it) is inevitably reduced to filming the original play, so the adaptation of a book is reduced to putting

the world of the novel into images. In either case, the cinema can only record a world which is already signified, act as a vehicle for it. When it attempts (almost always unsuccessfully) to signify the same things, it cannot help but clash with the methods of the playwright or the novelist.

This said, there is nothing to stop the filmmaker from using a play or novel as inspiration. But if he totally transforms the original work, the most basic honesty requires that he should not hide behind its title and use its reputation to enhance his own. He must take responsibility for his work. La Fontaine often had recourse to Aesop's fables. He did not translate them. He borrowed the odd theme, homily, or anecdote but only in order to create his own personal work. When writing *Le Cid*, Corneille did not stoop to adapt Guilhen de Castro or even the *Romancero*, even though he was obviously inspired by them. Racine's *Phèdre* is as distinct from Euripides' *Hippolytus* as his *Électre* is from Sophocles. Literature abounds with examples of this kind, but never has a writer worthy of the name claimed to adapt the work of a predecessor, and since a number of filmmakers with their customary modesty compare themselves to Racine or Shakespeare, there is nothing to stop them doing likewise. When that happens, though they might be digging over the same ground as Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, Flaubert or Zola, or some other lesser writer, we might be able to think of them as genuinely creative. Provided, of course, they have the common modesty and humility to indicate their sources.

Adaptation nowadays is no more than a commercial venture. The cinema no longer needs to hide behind the respectability of literature, as it did previously; yet a large majority of the cinema-going public still thinks that if a masterpiece is brought to the screen, the film is at least assured of a basic quality—as though the qualities of a

masterpiece could be transferred by a simple mechanical process!

Film producers bank on the public's credulity and could not care less about whether or not their adaptations are true to the novel. All they need is the title. As long as the publicity posters read "Henry Fonda and Audrey Hepburn in *War and Peace*," they can go ahead and shoot whatever they like, since it is certain that it is not *War and Peace* that the public will want to see but Henry Fonda in his latest rôle.

However, this type of film has very little to do with what we are discussing here. So let us leave it for what it is worth, pausing meanwhile over the other method of adaptation, which consists in *transposing in time* a work of fiction, retaining the original structure and following its development. This type of adaptation borders on lunacy or imbecility. In either case, it shows a profound contempt for the original work which it exploits, or else a complete lack of understanding of its characteristic qualities.

When a director adapts *Thérèse Raquin* for the screen, for instance, he is not content merely to transform its deepest meanings using his adaptation, he must also bring the action up to date. Obviously he retains the situations, the motives—which the new context does not alter particularly—and he reintroduces the characters as they are with their personalities and mentalities intact. And on this basis contemporaries of Jules Grévy are supposed to be living in 1960. However, from that moment, all credibility is lost, since the heroes' state of mind is characteristic of the manners and preoccupations of the provincial middle class around 1880.

In fact, outside this context, *Thérèse Raquin* stops being *Thérèse Raquin* and becomes merely a drama with two lovers getting rid of an unwanted husband and being tormented with remorse, a situation which could happen anywhere at any time to any-

one—except in the way which Zola describes and with the characters he presents, whose very existence depends on the time in which they live and on their background.

This type of adaptation is evidence once again of a stupid misconception which consists in thinking that the dramatic action, the substance of the novel and the characters, are permanent values incapable of being distorted, easily transposable from one infrastructure to another. Yet the structures which give the novel its human significance, its psychological authenticity, depend on the infrastructure on which it is based. When this is removed, it becomes a mere abstraction, a hypothetical drama which has no real value.

There is nothing to say that a similar drama could not conceivably take place in modern times. But it would presuppose other circumstances, an altogether different state of mind, and the associations of a society different in every way from the society on which Zola's novel is based. Consequently a drama of this kind would bear no relation to Zola's novel. If the intention is to change the whole infrastructure, there is no purpose in searching for it.

The same could be said of any novel. A novel breathes life into something more than mere abstractions: overlapping in time and space, the characters which it presents, their customs and their drama, cannot be removed from their context except by losing their authenticity, their value and their meaning.

"Every subject," Goethe wrote, "dictates to its author its ideal corresponding form." A predetermined content can find its perfect expression only in a form which has also been predetermined, in other words, in an art appropriate to that content and that form.

Naturally a single content is capable of generating many different meanings. But these are deliberately contrived meanings

which control the form in proportion to the extent they depend on it. A single content may be treated in a hundred different ways and each one will give it a different meaning.

We are in complete agreement with Jean Domarchi when he writes:

We are bound to admit that one can only be true to the *deepest* inspiration of an established work of art by creating a new work, a new genre which, by the mere fact that it uses a different technique, explains the authentic meaning which that work had for us and which, far from betraying the original meaning, only makes it deeper. When, for instance, Murnau made his cinematic translation of Molière's *Tartuffe* or Goethe's *Faust*, the expressionist code he used might seem superficially to be a misinterpretation of the theatrical background of these two plays. But, in fact, he reveals the hidden content of the plays which demand plastic equivalents in their own way as effective and compelling as those seen in theater.²⁶

It is quite obvious that if the intention is to signify something different, to discover the same "hidden content" in different perspectives and in a different context, then the adaptation problem does not arise. We would merely point out that in that case it is not adaptation, since adapting a work is a matter of transposing it while preserving its meaning and significations; otherwise it is a different thing altogether. It is always possible, it is even desirable, but it is not by avoiding problems that they are resolved.

Béla Balász had said (in *Der Geist des Films*) that the adapter "must use the existing work merely as source material, regarding it from the specific angle of its form as a work of art, as though it were raw reality; he gains nothing by considering the form already conferred on that reality." Yet it is clear that though this may be true in dealing with a total recreation,

with a film totally unconnected with the work which inspires it, it is patently not the case with an adaptation. A work of art — be it a play or a novel — can never be regarded as raw reality for the simple reason that it is not raw reality but an interpreted, mediated reality. It is impossible to ignore the form, since it is the form of the work which gives it its power and its meaning. Nothing exists outside the context of the form — except perhaps an *intention*, or rather a theme allowing the intention to show itself. To reduce a work of art to its theme is to deny its existence as a work of art, since, at that level, it exists only potentially, as a collection of possibilities which the author can select or discard in constructing his work.

If he chooses to express the same thing as the novelist, the adapter is bound to betray the form of the novel; and if his intention is to respect the form, then he is forced merely to put into pictures a world which is already signified, instead of creating his own significations. Direct transposition is an impossibility. As René Micha so rightly points out,

the code of an art is inseparable from the signs which reveal it. To alter the forms or colors of a painting is to destroy it or create another painting; to put a poem into different words is to distort it or make a new poem. It would seem that a work of art is as perfect (or "finished," as Baudelaire described it more simply) as it needs to be: because, once it is "finished" there is nothing more that can be done to it without its being damaged. Valéry draws an antithesis between the life of the spirit, "which is a power of transformation constantly in action," and "the composition of a work of the mind, which is something which is finished." The rough draft of *The Idiot* which Dostoyevsky scribbled down, the revisions he kept making even after the first edition of the book had appeared,

all these contradictory pieces of text are the very image of the creative mind before the work has been completed. They show that the novelist was exploring every conceivable direction his hero could follow, that he was actually living the life of his hero through all these little anecdotes and finally using language alone to create him. Limitless freedom hand in glove with a rigid discipline: psychological invention eventually yielding to the universe of words and syntax. (*Cinéma et littérature*)

Yet it would seem that adaptation—transposition word for word, quality for quality—is possible for a certain type of novel, with no other purpose than to describe events whose existence, though imaginary, tends to be limiting.

The problem of transposing the action novel into film images is considerably reduced for the simple reason that the words are not used for the purpose of expressing or recreating, as in literature, but of evoking and then disappearing behind the images which they elicit. Words can never be said to exhaust their role in communication because it is not a matter of communicating by any means available but of presenting the situations as precisely and completely as possible in order to make it appear to the reader that he is seeing the situations directly. This kind of writing requires a great deal of art, but art which would be better described as being "outside literature," even though it finds its purpose and expression in words. The style of these novels can sometimes be outstanding; it certainly endows what it describes with a definite color and presence, but the facts, events, and actions it describes are independent of the form, which merely serves to suggest them to the reader's mind. Such are the novels of Walter Scott, Dumas, Jules Verne, Jack London, James Oliver Curwood, Stewart Edward White, Owen Wister, etc. In these

works, words become images of something which is not "controlled" by them. The descriptions do not try to recreate but to provide an accurate photographic record of the event.

Nevertheless, even when this descriptive literature is being transposed into film images, there is an inevitable contradiction based on the very nature of the two modes of expression. In the novel a description is built up gradually; objects appear little by little through consecutive sentences. In the cinema they are presented all at once, in such a way that the rhythm is different—the development as well. Results—maybe even intentions—in literature prove to be no more than starting points in the cinema, which is what is behind Godard's remark: "The nuisance in writing is not knowing whether to say 'as I went out it was raining' or 'it was raining when I went out.' In the cinema, it is very simple: the two things are shown together at the same time."

As for saying that film can visualize the images of the novel which reading generates in the reader's mind, what could be sillier! Besides the fact that mental images depend on the individual reader, they exist at the level of concepts, whereas film images are concrete data. What in the cinema corresponds to the mental image is the *idea* generated by an association of images, not the images themselves.

As we have said, the film image prevents us from imagining the reality which it presents to us. What it does is force us to imagine *with* the reality, to discover relationships and significations in it. In the cinema, the object does not reveal the concept directly, yet it constantly refers back to us. The concept is accessible only through the density of reality, in other words, through a certain *representation* of that reality, an individualized, particularized reality, considered from a specific point of view and presented in a context which gives it *meaning*.

Just as there is no formal—or indeed structural—similarity between the verbal code and the film code, so there is no similarity between the conceptual image and the image projected on the screen, and no similarity either between reality “presented as an image” and reality suggesting and forming that image.

“If I were asked to illustrate the cinematic code as I imagine it,” René Micha goes on,

fiction reflecting a form which reflects it in its turn, a human truth incarnate, I would quote a scene from *The Magnificent Ambersons*: Joseph Cotten arrives at the Ambersons’ mansion where Dolores Costello is waiting for him. Between them, a beautiful glass door, a huge hallway with a grand staircase leading down into it; and then, all of a sudden, Tim Holt, who does not want his mother to follow Joseph Cotten, pushing his mother aside. Someone walks up to Dolores Costello and speaks to her. Tim Holt runs up the staircase to his aunt who scolds him for his behavior. In a single moment, the camera, like a whip, brings the protagonists of the drama together, stays on them and then leaves them. The narrative knot is tied, at the same time as the code. The Ambersons’ home is also captured—or rather the staircase: the gigantic hand carrying them to rebirth or death. (*Cinéma et littérature*)

On that note we end our examination of adaptation and its hypothetical problems, adding that film is beginning to approximate the structures of the novel, in that it is now capable not only of signifying the passing of time but also of making the audience experience it.

As in the novel, film presents us with characters involved in a series of events whose associations are not cut and dried but variable, generating significations which cannot stand by themselves and whose duration extends beyond the mere

organization or arrangement of situations to reveal the characters, their psychological makeup, their ambiguity. Thus an *open* world takes the place of the closed world of older films and, as with the narrative, the problem consists in introducing an unlimited duration into a limited structure. Whereas the short-story writer can go directly to the heart of the matter, the novelist must “take a stroll down life’s highway.” The development of a novel is slow and sinuous—like a river. A precise, compact novel such as *La Princess de Clèves* is more like a long short story than a novel, since creative freedom must be allowed to flow at its own pace in order that it should have time to stop and offer a perspective, a different point of view.

Before we come on to consider to what extent a film may be constructed like a novel, we should point out a few irreconcilable differences.

Whereas space in the literary work remains conceptual, duration is experienced intensely, since the texture of the novel, the chain of circumstances, the character development all depend on it and construct it as the same time as they depend on it.

Time plays (potentially at any rate) an equally important role in the cinema, but it is always the duration of *something*, of a reality with an objective and geographical location. This spatial reality must necessarily preexist the duration of which it is the subject. Now, the inertia of this space, which at the same time confirms the validity of the time relating to it, makes it difficult to exercise any real control over it. In other words, time in a novel is constructed *with words*. In the cinema it is constructed *with facts*. The novel conjures up a world, whereas film puts us directly in contact with a world which it organizes according to a certain story line. *The novel is a narrative organized into a world; the cinema is a world organized into a narrative.*

Moreover, space and time in the cinema form a continuum comparable with the real space-time continuum (comparable but not similar), a *whole* unalterable by any unilateral act of consciousness (affecting space or time). It is perceived as a continuous flux, as a world both changing and perpetually present. In this global flux, there is no past because it no longer exists (though it might be present as an immediate memory) and no future because it does not yet exist. As we have observed, in the cinema, as in real life, only the *present* exists: a present, however, which is forever looking forward to the *future*. What we are *actually* perceiving in this recording of the future as it *develops*, of the present as it occurs, is nothing more than space, space in motion. And we are unable to perceive its duration because it is the same as our perception, developing and changing with it—with us.

In the cinema, as in real life, we are unable to *perceive* duration actually “taking place,” experience it as such (unless we are bored by the spectacle). The action carries us along with it: we perceive it as action, as movement, and not as time passing (though we do retain a notion or an awareness of the time—of something taking place over a period of time—when we relate the mobility of changing circumstances to the immobility of the spatial referents). Objective duration exists only within the permanence of my relationship with the world, which can only be revealed in an action *actually* happening in the *present tense*. The impression I receive is of a substance remaining unchanged in a form which changes.

We can perceive duration—or feel its effects—only when it has been *experienced*, i.e., when we consider a past reality from the mobility of an action in which we are involved. I am able to measure myself through my actions only by relating my present self to a self which no longer exists, considering myself from the standpoint of

an external impression of time. The perception of time, even subjective time, presupposes a certain objectification relating specifically to the past. Thus only by an act of memory are we able to perceive time passing, any direct perception necessarily being of a state which we must relate to a previous state if we wish to measure its effect or to a spatial or chronometric reference if we wish to know its duration.

The psychology of duration is a psychology of memory. No art is better suited than the cinema to handle the effects of memory, since actualization and presentification are the most tangible evidence of its very essence. However, as we have said, subjective duration is not so much real as a feeling of duration and objects recollected in a memory are only ever interpretations, mental images; they are certainly nothing like the objective image which the cinema always presents (however much the represented reality is transformed). The cinema cannot capture this feeling of “interiority”; nor, for that matter, can the novel; but at least literature is able to disguise the fact, since the fiction created by words remains a fiction and the mental images conjured up by the reader coincide—for him—with the mental images of the hero in such a way that he can imagine himself in the hero’s place, thinking, remembering, and feeling as he does. He imagines himself projected into the hero’s existence as he compares himself with him, composing him according to his own mental composition. At least his mind is in a position always to fulfill him.

The novel, in contrast to film, makes allowance for a unilateral act of consciousness. Everything is constructed for and in terms of the duration. The characters, setting, and scenery imagined by the reader are constantly subjected to the needs of this sense of time. Reduced to the necessary authenticity of a specific location and context, space remains conceptual; in other words,

the novel conjures up a world which appears and constructs itself around a duration recognized as true. Moreover, the action of the novel is always registered in the past tense, even when the style sets it in the present. It is always a reality which *has happened*, not *in the process of happening*: it must necessarily *already* exist for the novelist to be able to describe it. At least, though it is always constructed with the novelist's words, from the reader's point of view it is *already complete*. So that the reader (constantly representing himself as a character into whose inner life he projects himself) feels as though his present self (the reader is aware of being a reader) is recalling a past self (the hero acting—or having acted—during the course of the sentences) and this objectification, which establishes a distance in time, involves a feeling of *experienced duration*, supported by the reader's own self-judgment (or judgment of his double). In the cinema, on the other hand, the audience member, in associating himself with the hero, is always "in the process" or "on the point" of acting with him; his mental projection is in the present tense—which explains why the cinema captures the attention more readily, why it presents a more lifelike reality, but also why differentiation in time is impossible—or, at any rate, difficult.

On the other hand, the audience member watching a film being projected is unable to refer back to what has gone before as a reader might flip back a couple of pages to reread a chapter.²⁷ Granted, one can see a film more than once (and, when it is a good film, this is even essential for, just as it is impossible to assimilate the whole expressivity of a poem or symphony reading or hearing it only once, so it is impossible to assimilate the whole of a film at one viewing), but the progression of the film remains the same however many times one may see it. Film narrative must therefore be intelli-

gible (if not revealing all its significations) as this progression develops. Whatever the narrative style, it must always express the maximum amount of information in the minimum period of time (though the time may be made to stretch to the length of a novel). That is the very obvious reason why in the beginning the cinema was considered from the standpoint of theatricality and cultivated according to its laws.

As we have said, the cinema is an *écriture* whose terms are the elements of spectacle. Which means that if it intends to satisfy the rules of the novel form as well as the requirements of its own form, to achieve any kind of success it must first of all satisfy the rules and requirements of spectacle.

Though it is allowed to extend itself, to encompass actions evolving through various different levels, in time as well as space, though it is capable of avoiding the strictures of dramatic concentration, it is incapable of avoiding the process of *centration*. However many times it goes off on a tangent, a film must constitute a well-defined *global unity*, i.e., with its axis and orientation not necessarily centered on a final end or purpose but on a final *meaning*. It denies this obligation only at the risk of dividing the audience's attention, thereby destroying the interest it claims to present.

That said, there is nothing to stop a film from developing like a novel, assuming its structures and progression, diverging from the main plot line, telling a story which describes the characters' feelings as they react to time and circumstance, rather than encompassing a brief drama, a temporary crisis, willy-nilly weaving the themes of a tragedy. We would merely point out that since the methods of signifying are not the same, the processes could not be expected to be the same. It is not a question of *imitating* the novel but of capturing (like it but in a different way) a certain density of time, a duration which ensures, deepens, and de-

fines in its many different perspectives the psychological authenticity of the characters in the film, a duration which safeguards their free will or endows them with a certain illusion of freedom. It is a question of following the characters' logical development through situations which are always *variable*, subject to the vagaries of chance, to the unexpected, instead of directing them, imprisoning them in the straitjacket of a drama which always seems contrived, since the hand of the writer is all too plainly visible. Not the hand of style, which is the evidence of creation, but that other hand which manipulates the development and creates such a rigid balance that instead of expressing life it stifles it—and this is the core of the problem.

Content and Form

The Importance and Value of the Subject Matter

There is no formal technique which will ever make a film complete and effective if the form does not bring out the qualities of the content which justify it and for the expression of which it is made. This is a self-evident truth. Yet many popular misconceptions and confusions have been built up; and, to eradicate these, we must once again return to our basic definitions.

In the first place, we should distinguish between *plot line* and *subject matter*, indicating the essential difference between two elements generally thought to be one and the same. Most people—and many critics—believe that the subject of a film is its plot. Not because the plot is considered as the essential purpose of the film but because they see it exclusively as the substratum on which the significations are based. Thus the story line becomes *material to be signified* and the form is seen merely as a means of commu-

nication, a particular way of bringing to the knowledge of everyone information with an independent existence. We would maintain, on the other hand, that form is what provides the support, that the plot line is merely a pretext for bringing closer together elements capable of having meaning.

Take, for instance, the example of a well-made film like *La Strada*. We can say that the plot consists of the events which bring us into contact with the characters Fellini has chosen, the series of experiences which Fellini makes them live through and which reveal them to us as much as to themselves. The subject is what *arises* from these events. In this instance, it is the realization which strikes Zampano when, indifferent to Gelsomina's feelings, to Gelsomina herself, he suddenly becomes conscious of what he is missing when she is no longer there, of the importance of an apparently insignificant human being, of the wealth of her humanity which he has lost. This subject may be summarized in a single phrase: "when you miss someone, the world is an empty place." Zampano's tragedy is that he is too late and that the universe, devoid of meaning, closes in on him inexorably.

The subject, then, is what some people call the "moral of the story," a phrase really applicable only to didactic films, films with a message, films whose obvious intentions predetermine the development and outcome of the plot. Meaning in this type of film has no genuine basis, since the arbitrary nature of the situations almost always points up the artificiality of the preconception. That is why we would prefer to say that the subject of a film is its *hidden content*: whatever is signified throughout the film without ever being explained in so many words and which gradually takes shape in the consciousness of the audience.

"Content" in the broadest sense is, therefore, both plot line and subject matter. It is the combination of facts which have become

significant and not the story reduced to its bare bones or to its nonformalized intentions.

Form is the structure given to the arrangement of these facts with a view to expressing what they would not be able to express without it; it is what would give the facts a totally different meaning were they to be formalized in a different way. Style is merely the way this formal arrangement is constituted in respect of what it has to signify.

Though there is no common denominator, no similarity whatever between words and what they describe, images can exist only in terms of the things of which they are the image. Thus we can say (as we have already) that the film image is *reality presented as an image*, the "ghost" of a content which survives in it as a form, the content being in a certain sense "everything which is represented" to which the representation gives a *meaning*. So there is no distinction—and less in the cinema than anywhere else—between content and form: the one can only exist through the other.

Nothing is more absurd than this distinction, which is the jumping-off point for all the formalist squabbles in art, i.e., that the values under consideration can refer only to themselves or to some purely hypothetical "in-itself" for a criterion of absolute judgment. Bourgeois realism and Marxism are at the root of this distinction (though for very different reasons) and, oddly enough, find common ground in this naive idealism.

The concept of art for art's sake or form for form's sake is merely the logical conclusion of various misinterpretations of aesthetic principles. In this perspective, beauty and harmony are held to stand on their own. It is true, the plastic arts justify this conception to a certain extent, but in literature or the cinema it is quite meaningless. A perfect form applied to a threadbare story will never give it the substance it

lacks, and one is led to wonder therefore what is meant by perfection. Presumably it means the pictorial or plastic beauty of the imagery, the freedom of an independent rhythm, the perfect application of a technique which, not being governed by an inner necessity, merely demonstrates its own futility—except in a case where beauty and perfection, detached from the mediocre story, serve as vehicles for a few ideas. In which case, though expressing a content alien to them, they still necessarily signify *something*. The danger lies in the fact that the story, though no more than a pretext, inevitably refers, through its very existence, to significations within its immediate context. The pretext must therefore be valid and capable of integrating these incidentals into its structure, since the inconsistency between the inconsequential story and the ambitiousness of the themes embroidered around it always damages both of them. The absurdity of the story becomes all the more obvious; also the futility of a message based on nothing. The French cinema of the twenties (the so-called avant-garde) had to contend with contradictions of this type. It is not hard to imagine how Paul Valéry's *La Porteuse de pain* might have looked.

Thus the content is conditional on the work through which it is revealed. Yet, acknowledging once and for all that no genuine art can exist which is not the expression of an idea or feeling (or anything valid from one point of view), it is obvious that this content must and can only be communicated through a form. It is only through the agency of a form that the audience can be led to discover the thoughts of the filmmaker, to share his feelings and emotions. For the filmmaker, the idea must always invite the form, since, as long as it is not formulated, the idea remains only a vague intention or plan. For the audience (or reader), it is the form which invites the idea, being its only perceptible manifestation.

Though the form is constantly subordinate to the intentions of the message, it is obvious that the intelligibility, value, and meaning of the message depend entirely on the formal qualities which present it to be seen or heard. The idea is therefore, in its turn, dependent on a form without which it could not exist—not even for the filmmaker who measures his intentions by the forms he gives them, through which and by which they appear. That is why, if it is foolish to judge a film solely on the merits of its forms, it is just as ridiculous to judge its content independently of the particular value the content assumes through its form, on which the meaning of the film as a whole depends.

To the philistine, form is technique, the use of material capable of translating a predetermined content existing previous to the particular means of expression. Content and form are associated as content and container (the word content in this context meaning what it says) solely as a requirement of communication, the particular method being merely one vehicle for the message among many others. Independent and heterogeneous, they can thus be studied by themselves, on their own terms.

It would seem that this notion of separation is due in large part to a misinterpretation of the expressive qualities of a work of art, the symbol being seen as the same thing as a sign. In fact, the relationship between sign and signified is purely arbitrary; the object exists independently of the sign which represents it. Thus right from the start there is a distinction, a heterogeneity, between the sign and the signified. Now, this distinction, a characteristic of communication codes based on the extensive nature of the sign, is unfortunately applied to aesthetic systems based on the intensive nature of the symbol. Though, like communication codes, it may signify, the aesthetic effect is first and foremost ex-

pression, creation. In the cinema, the symbol can behave only like a sign in virtue of its relationship with another symbol. Since the direct meaning of the image is inherent in what it represents, it is inseparable from this represented datum and this datum is inseparable from the meaning it assumes through the representation.

Be this as it may, depth in the content is what derives from the work, what *appears* (which must be obvious and therefore not contentious—except at the level of the ideas expressed). To say that something is expressed is to say that it is made perceptible through a form. Real depth lies in knowing how and why, by what devious means the idea is presented as such, and therefore in knowing what the appropriate form is for the needs of such a meaning.

Any discussion about content is prompted by the film when it prompts a discussion *about itself*, i.e., about the signified considered entirely from the viewpoint of its associations with a predetermined method of signification.

Marxist theory holds that it is possible to capture the content directly in its "concrete and positive" reality, transcending the form, which is seen merely as a vehicle. Now, since a content is only presented through a form, to consider it outside the context of that form, *in abstract*, inevitably leads to pure formalism. It is to see the content as an "in-itself," to interpret its meaning as an ideal free from the material forms, which enable it to be understood. Formalism exists here in spirit if not in the forms—which makes it even more insidious.

If the idea as such is disregarded in favor of the work, the consequence is a series of generalizations which have nothing to do with the artistic aspect. One could argue until the cows come home as to whether a girl has the right to marry her father's murderer without feeling the need to refer to *Le Cid*. Indeed, if that had been the sole pur-

pose of that particular play, there would have been no need to write it, since it is not the responsibility of art to prove, merely to *show*. Obviously the author has the right to be partisan, to reveal his point of view, but this must be presented as testimony not as a sermon.

Indeed, though the work of art may take it upon itself to express valid truths, *the problem exists in creating a form both necessary and suitable for giving the chosen idea its completed meaning, enabling it to become fulfilled in an original signification, and, at the same time, turning a potential reality into an actual reality.*

For the artist obliged to provide the message with every opportunity to achieve its fullest expression, it boils down (eventually) to the only viable and solvable aesthetic problem in the area of expression: *the problem of form*. This is really what is meant when critics sometimes say that in art the form is more important than the content. "More" does not refer to a qualitative value associated with a formal "in-itself" but to a specific quality connected both with the content and the form, since the content exists, insofar as it has an *evident meaning*, only through the form which expresses it. And the form must necessarily dominate the content, if only to contain it; if it extends beyond the form, it loses itself, since there is nothing there to make it perceptible and therefore imaginable.

It is more obvious than ever that for both the audience and the critic (whose job is merely to receive and to judge) the question as to which is more important, content or form, should no longer arise. The work of art is a whole whose value can be estimated only in terms of the balance and harmony of its elements, in terms of the *close integration of a content and a perceptible form*. However mediated—or dependent on a mediation (ideas, author's viewpoint, method of describing or signifying)—the perfect work of art must appear to be di-

rect. Presenting itself as the natural expression of a world and its objects, it must appear as though a veil were being lifted, resigning itself to a spontaneity devoid of artifice (simplicity always being the ultimate in contrivance).

As a rule, any separation of content and form is the consequence of a lack of artistic knowledge or (which is almost the same thing) a deliberate desire to make art into a vehicle for values completely alien to it. Such is the case with the firmly established notion that form should tend toward the minute and perfect reproduction of reality. Admittedly, it does not apply either in the theater or in literature (based on abstract significations), but it has a tremendous effect on painting, which, for several hundred years, represented Art with a capital A for the ruling classes. Subsumed into the category of the "portrait" (wealthy people had their likenesses made—which had to be exact—to enhance their image of themselves), the whole of art became considered in this light. The decadent academism of the end of the last century, which was founded on this conception and continued to hold sway in official circles of art right up to the end of the First World War, did little to help. Now, a work of art is not judged by how faithfully it represents reality. As Pierre Francastel (among others) points out, "the point of art is not to create a manageable likeness of the universe; it is to explore it, to investigate it in a new way: it is a means to knowledge and expression mixed in with action." There can be no other reason to explain why modern painting remained misunderstood for so long (though it has now developed an even more universal snobbery).

As we know, art for art's sake is the consequence of a friction between the artist and the world he lives in. Starting with painting (painters having been forced, as a reaction, to cultivate form for form's sake),

this friction gradually spread to the realm of ideas. Prevented from giving free expression to unorthodox ideas, authors took refuge in their imagination or in any pretext which allowed them to translate their anxieties into structures and formal harmonies symbolically signifying "eternal" values. As well as being a refuge for the artist, formalism is the ultimate expression of conventional thinking (bourgeois or otherwise), searching for absolutes as hypothetical as they are illusory, a process of thinking which achieves its fulfillment only in the idealization of a reality in harmony with its needs, in the glorification of a reality faithfully reproduced, "more beautiful" than true reality—something which can be (indeed is) one of the fundamental features of the cinema, of the photographic image, but which could never be the purpose or basis of painting. In this sense, bourgeois formalism is directly associated with Marxist formalism, for which the objective content, the symbol of socialist realism, is the only one accepted as true and valid, the iron foundry or blast furnace merely replacing the piano lesson or nude woman.

If indeed formalism consists merely in seeing or cultivating one aspect (content or form) of a work of art, in pulling its elements apart when clearly they have no value except taken as a *whole*, there is as much formalism in a content without art as in an art without content.

The "subject" of a painting is not the scene it represents but what it offers to our eyes, our emotions, our intellect, through its interpretation of the world. It is obvious that abstract painting derives from formalism, in that its forms display nothing more than an overpowering subjectivity. Indeed, in abstract art the subject and object merge into one another rather than being identical to one another, for even though for the painter the subject is presented "as an ob-

ject," this kind of distinction is impossible for the spectator, since both are essentially alien to him.

If it is to be understood, the subject must necessarily be isolated from the object, for which reason the object must be established as a concrete fact; and this is achievable in no better way than by using concrete reality as a starting point from which and relative to which the spectator is able to gain a perspective. It is relative to a real field of corn that I know Van Gogh's mind, style, thoughts, and feelings, viewing the interpretation which is the *subject* of his painting and remains so in respect of the concrete object. Associations between fiction and reality, between representation and represented, are what allow us to make judgments and enable us to understand. Now, since there is no such distance in abstract painting, the subject presenting itself as object can no longer be judged except by reference to itself. The painter alone is capable of evaluating the meaning of his work (assuming there is one). As we have already said (and whatever the claims to the contrary), abstract painting is nothing more than a pretty but *purposeless* pattern of shape and color because, in being a "subject," the object finds its own justification within itself. It raises itself as much to the position of an imaginary absolute as to one of absolute imagination.

To dot the i's and cross the t's (perhaps unnecessarily) and to dismiss, once and for all, this absurd distinction between content and form, we have only to consider the example of an object reduced to a photographic image. The photographer is faced with three possibilities: (1) The object is beautiful in its own right. The photograph records it, attempting to bring out as much as possible its intrinsic beauty. It is a means of reproduction communicating something which preexists the photograph whose qualities are completely alien to it—a func-

tional art which does not reflect any artistic creation. As a photographed object, the content is inseparable from the image but, as a real object, it may be perceived independently of the photograph; aesthetics plays no part in its representation. (2) The object (interesting or not) is used merely as a theme for a pictorial composition, allowing for the distribution of different planes, lines, volumes and the play of light and shade. Using shapes for effect, the photographer is apparently able to express a quality; but whatever that quality, it is bound to be alien to the meaning of the object, which is eclipsed by the expression for which it is merely a pretext. These features are not entirely devoid of content since they do express something but, subject to the individual interpretation of the photographer, the object expressed remains in the sphere of potentiality. All contact with reality is lost—which is formalism in its truest sense. (3) Instead of reproducing the object as it is or completely discarding it, the photographer endeavors, through effects of light and shade, emphasizing or understating certain forms and shapes, to bring out the object's essential qualities, to *translate* them. He shows us the object in an unusual light; he reveals for us its secrets or its hidden mystery. In so doing, he discovers a new signification, a new beauty—but in the direction of the object's own reality. In other words, the plastic qualities obtained *with* it do not seem independent of it, acting as it were by themselves. Far from eclipsing the object, they become fused with the qualities it had originally, so that, augmented by these new qualities, it appears through them as though they were emanating from it. It is true that henceforward the "content" will always be inseparable from its form, since it is from the form that it gains the qualities it lacks inherently or when it is separate from its form. However, it does not gain these qualities from its form alone

but *from its presence within a form—a specific form.*

That is the whole secret of the work of art. The aesthetic quality, that *extra* quality, is measured by the distance separating the represented from its representation, that is (to use an example from painting), the distance separating the original object—its elementary meaning, its specific emotional qualities—from the meaning and values it acquires from its representation.

This is what we mean when we speak of *creative form*. Obviously the form does not create the represented object or the story being told; it does not create the content. The value of the subject, i.e., the *value of what is expressed or signified by an object or story within a form*, therefore relies on it completely, provided, once again, that the object or story is naturally predisposed to *warrant* or suggest these significations. On the other hand, though the form does no more than communicate significations or emotions already included within the represented objects, it itself cancels out the aesthetic factor as expressing nothing which was not there in the first place.

Here again, an example from the sphere of painting will give us a clearer idea of what this question really involves. Take two paintings dissimilar in all respects, such as David's *The Oath of the Horatii* and a Cézanne still life.

In the former, David is illustrating a scene from legend. He presents us with a personal vision and composes it with a pictorial theme which holds our interest. The meticulous organization of line and shape gives the event a classical, one might say Roman, rigidity, thereby developing the deeper meaning of the represented action. On the other hand, it may be said that, in so doing, the painter is merely developing a body of established significations, based on literary semantics, which have already acquainted us with the subject and ex-

hausted all the possible perspectives. In other words, the meaning established through the form of the painting is insignificant compared with the meaning it already possessed at the start. There is an aesthetic factor at work in the painting, but it carries very little weight, notwithstanding the qualities of the painting as a painting, i.e., its technique. It is a literary concept, a wholly verbal idea "put into pictures," more than an idea produced by the image.

Cézanne, on the other hand, takes three apples, places them in a fruit bowl, and puts the whole thing on a white tablecloth. Admittedly, the signifying and emotional value of the apples is relatively small just mundane objects—*to begin with*. But then, through the effect of form and color, the painting assumes a *meaning*—and one which is not merely formal, for the apples are indeed taken at their face value, i.e., as objects formalized in a certain way to *become* affective and meaningful. The art in this case is complete because the form becomes *creative*—creating a whole system of *values*, if not the represented object itself. At the opposite extreme from abstract art, it is not the subject presenting itself as an object but the object becoming a subject. Or, to be more precise, having become a subject, the object is built up with all the subjective values relating to it through a representation which *is* the work of art.

The painter who moves me with a box of matches, a fruit bowl, or a mandolin is a much greater artist than one who moves me with a naked woman, since, for all the obvious reasons, through the appeal that such a representation makes anyway, he would have to be a pretty poor painter not to move me with such a content!

It is a criticism to be leveled at a great many films (good ones at that): that they move the audience with a story or facts moving in themselves and do so, for the

most part, entirely through that initial emotion. Accepting its documentary value (which is undeniable), *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) can be criticized on these grounds: it is too easy to move an audience with concentration camps and gas chambers, with all the horrors of war. Certainly the film does not dwell on this exclusively; its qualities lie in the subtle way we remember these horrors. Even so, it relies a little too much on an *a priori* emotional response; the game has already been won. On the other hand (and to give Alain Resnais his due), it is a much greater *artistic* achievement to have been able to move an audience merely by wandering through the bookshelves of the Bibliothèque Nationale, as he did in *Toute la mémoire du monde*.

We are back to the fault of formalism as expressed in Eisenstein's more extremist views, particularly his pretensions to a cinedialectic based essentially on montage. Ideas determined in this way become alienated from the content, exploited merely to build abstract signs whose meaning has no direct link with what the images represent. Now, in the cinema, form is not an abstract design using film merely as a picture puzzle. It is thought incarnate; thought which informs us of its presence, which *appears*, tells us what it is, what its purpose is, using real (in the dramatic sense) events as reference points. It can manifest itself in a concrete way only through concrete facts and its primary function is to ensure the narration of these facts.

In a general way, as we have seen, Eisenstein based the meaning of montage upon an emotional shock produced by the collision of two images; and upon *fragmentary representations* whose sum and juxtaposition awakened in the audience's intelligence and emotions a final synthetic image, a symbolic idea, the very idea which obsessed the filmmaker himself.

It is certain that the accidental juxtapo-

sition of objects with no apparent association, the intensive nature of significations, and the condensation of ideas produced by emphasizing certain specific details exert a tremendous emotional influence. Nonetheless, though these poetic images become in a sense the "emotional incarnation of the theme," the idea must not mask the reality which generates and supports it; it must not be imposed by the arbitrary association of two images, by contrived relationships, but must prove itself to be the consequence of objectively reported facts.

Now, in Eisenstein's view, this idea, this emotional shock, is contrasted with a description of actual reality following a dramatically organized narrative line. However, one can see in *The Battleship Potemkin* (his most genuine masterpiece) that the symbols are *always* the consequence of the facts described and in direct association with them.

The image being essentially the sign of what it reveals (*gestalt sign* or *analogon*), we saw that in the cinema—to the extent that the signified is limited to the represented actions or facts—"signification and signified are one and the same." We also saw that, through an ephemeral relationship, film images become charged with a new meaning, provisional but no less apparent. Signifying something other than what they reveal (albeit through what they reveal), they act in the same way as *linguistic signs*, which is how we came to say that in the cinema, reality becomes the element in its own narration. Yet, at the same time, we pointed out that the images possess this *sign* value only as an accessory. By themselves they signify nothing. What determines the descriptive value of an image is the general meaning of the story, and this is always by means of the relationships of facts which it reveals. Thus a film entirely composed of a series of metaphors or symbols is totally inconceivable. Without the

support of a narrative, visual symbols are meaningless or else become lifeless conventional signs.

The narrative developing events according to the interplay of connections and associations both logical and chronological is what constitutes the *literal* message of the film. The "signifying cells" being constructed (through montage or some other form of structure) with the actual elements of this narration, it is *these same images* which in any film are both descriptive and symbolic.

Employing the terminology of Hjelmslev and the semiologists (very illuminating in this context), we would say, with Roland Barthes:

We know that a system which annexes signs from another system in order to turn them into signifiers is a system of connotation; we might say, therefore, that the literal image is *denoted* whereas the symbolic image is *connote*.

The signifiers of connotation, which we shall call *connotators*, are formed by the *signs* (signifiers and signifieds together) of the denoted system: of course, more than one denoted sign may be assembled to form a single connotator—provided that it has a single signified of connotation; in other words, the units of the connote system are not necessarily on the same scale as the units of the denoted system; large sections of denoted discourse may comprise a single unit of the connote system. . . . However it "dresses up" the denoted message, the connotation never contains it completely: there still remains "part of the denotation" (indeed, there would be no discourse if this were not so) and, in the final analysis, the connotators are always discontinuous "erratic" signs, naturalized by the denoted message which conveys them. As for the signified of the connotation, it is characteristically general, global, and diffuse: it is, if you like, a fragment of ideol-

ogy.... These signifieds are in close communication with culture, knowledge, and history; it is through them, so to speak, that the world penetrates the system; in short, *ideology* is the *form* (in the Hjelmslev sense) of the signifieds of connotation, whereas rhetoric is the form of the connotators themselves.²⁸

Briefly, then, a connotated system is one whose level of expression is itself formed by a system of signification. In this sense, all art is a connotated system and all artistic expression is the effect of a connotation. Which of course does not mean that all connotation is an aesthetic effect, for, as Barthes goes on to indicate, "society is constantly developing secondary systems from the basic system which supplies it with human language, and this development, sometimes obvious, sometimes disguised and rationalized, comes very near to forming a genuine historical anthropology."

Be that as it may, since in the cinema symbols (connote symbols) assume their meaning only in respect of the events which serve as anchor points allowing them to be interpreted, it is clear that the literal message is *necessary* support and that no intelligible symbolic message could exist without it.

However, though the intelligibility of the story dictates the expressive forms which signify it, one could never deduce from this that this intelligibility has *already been formed* before being expressed by the forms. The structures are organized according to a logic and chronology whose pure potentiality forms the ideal or intentional infrastructure of the narrative—its purpose—but it is by becoming formalized that they give it a pretext for existing, making it appear as it is and can only be through their agency. Oriented by the development of the story, by the articulations of the narrative, the meaning of the connotations influences the literal message and gives it its full signifi-

cation, its deeper meaning—indeed, becomes the meaning of the narrative by revealing its perspectives.

Consequently, though it is true that the signifying cells (or units of meaning), like the narrative techniques, must mold themselves to a controlling structure of time, it would be wrong to assume, as does Claude Brémond in the conclusion of his study of the "narrative message,"²⁹ that the "semiology of the narrative must be developed before, not after, the semiology of the narrative techniques." He clearly has a point (a debatable one) with regard to literature, which works with signs which are *formed and fixed*, but not with regard to film, which must create its signs as it goes along, each time differently from before. Brémond goes on: "if narrative is turned into vision by becoming film, turned into words by becoming a novel, turned into gesture by becoming mime, etc., these transformations do not affect the structure of the narrative, whose signifiers remain the same in each case." But of course they do! They do affect the structure of the narrative (perhaps not its infrastructure)—which is what we have spent the last few chapters trying to prove.

In the cinema, the signifiers are always visual or audiovisual, that is obvious; but though their *material* is the same, their *forms* are not. They do not exist *a priori* but are *contingent*. Formed in terms of a specific content, existing themselves in terms of specific associations and, what is more, a specific style, they are always *different*, i.e., "formed in a different way." Added to that, the units of meaning are almost always composed of heterogeneous elements (images, words, sounds) whose internal articulations are infinitely variable. One cannot help but see that though reality controlled by the film code is independent of the code insofar as it is reality, this is not so *insofar as it is represented reality* (dependent on a

representation). Since it is possible to formalize significations in myriad ways (though the style of the individual film requires that only *one* be used), it would seem that there can be as many different signifieds as potential signifiers (or ways of signifying). It has already been said: the same story told by two different directors is bound to turn out differently. The meaning of the narrative, its perspectives, necessarily become altered. In other words, the connoted significations of the subject depend on the way they are produced.

It is obvious that narrative and expressive techniques are subordinate to the narrative, since the whole effect depends on the associations which its development in time creates. However, the units of meaning are formalized by these techniques. And since the narrative derives its deeper meaning exclusively from the connotated significations, it follows that the semiology of the narrative depends on techniques which, paradoxically, are subordinate to it: *a specific code is formed for the expression and comprehension of a story, but the intelligibility of that story depends on the formal qualities of that code.*

The rules concerning the order of shots within the narrative are those governing dramatic structure (either narrative or discourse) applied to the cinema, since it is also a matter of ensuring the intelligibility of the story with respect to the dramatic or psychological motivations which it involves. Yet the order of shots is also conditioned by the meaning the filmmaker intends to give to the associated connotations. The only rule which applies in this case is to ensure that the significations appear as the natural expression of things. It is imperative that the events and their direct meaning should not be forced into analogies, comparisons, or metaphors, whatever need there may be to emphasize ideas more or less hidden behind the drama it-

self. This would be the same as forcing concrete facts into a *preestablished* structure when the structure ought to be established by the apparently unmotivated development of the facts. Subjective interpretation in the cinema is given a more secure foundation when it is based on the objective (or quasi-objective) development of the content. Which, of course, can be entirely subjective in itself. It is possible to present a conceptualized world (script, set, situations, etc.), but the *way* in which it is presented must appear as a relationship which has not been contrived or prepared beforehand. A couple of concrete examples will illustrate this more clearly.

One example is a sequence from *Variety* (a famous film from the end of the silent period), and for convenience we shall refer to the characters by the actors' names. Emil Jannings, a fairground acrobat, has taken in and married Lya de Putti, teaching her the tricks of his trade. With Warwick Ward, a famous trapeze artist, as their partner, they perfect a sensational trick. The trio becomes a star attraction. Meanwhile, Warwick Ward is not insensitive to the charms of his pretty partner. The feeling is mutual, and when the occasion presents itself, she becomes his mistress.

The sequence in question takes place as they give a performance in a large Berlin music hall. The previous scenes have led us to believe that adultery is in the air. After their turn (on stage), all three come forward to take their bow, then step back as the curtain is lowered. The audience's enthusiastic reception calls them back for an encore and they bow to the applause. Meanwhile, the stage manager, obviously in a hurry, lowers the curtain. Warwick Ward and Lya de Putti step back, but Jennings does not see their action and remains on stage receiving the applause until the curtain comes down, leaving him standing there by himself.

It is a trivial incident, a purely anecdotal

fact. And yet this accidental lowering of the curtain is seen from the side with the camera tilted up, so that the lowering is shown as a knife cutting an imaginary thread and placing Lya de Putti and Ward Warwick on one side and Emil Jannings on the other. That same evening, Lya de Putti and Warwick Ward will be in each other's arms.

Through the meaning it assumes, the image becomes a symbol, even though its purpose is merely to denote, quite specifically, a concrete fact. Yet, though it *may* be interpreted as a symbol, this is not obligatory, and the spectator who fails to catch the allusion will still be able to understand what follows. The connotation is implicit, not explicit (which it must never be),³⁰ yet it gives the situation a resonance and depth which endow the film with its quality and style. Obviously the symbol does not transcend the signification of the content; all it does is give the signification an accent; it is less a symbol than a metaphor. It has been said that there can be no such thing in the cinema as metaphor in the strict sense; a metaphorical image can only be the effect of a comparative association or allusion. We would say, using the jargon of semiology, that it is an *index*, in the sense that though the filmmaker may or may not intend the signification, the fact that it is identified with an action, a concrete object, means that it must be interpreted by the audience. Far from being applied or tacked on, the connotation is the product of a specific *form* of the denotation. It therefore depends on it, as long as the meaning of the denotation depends on it. Their correlation is obvious.

We may recall that Dovshenko used this stylistic device in *Earth*, giving it a much wider meaning, i.e., a genuinely symbolic meaning. And there is a similar example in *Paisan* (directed by Rossellini), when, at the end of the film, after the gun battle in the swamp, there is a shot showing, without being obviously contrived, a drowned man

floating downstream. In relation to its context, this final shot assumes an extraordinary significance. It is no longer an isolated victim we are seeing; it is the actual consequences of the war assembled into a single vision, an image of desolation, silence, and death, an absurd death carried by the indifferent and all-powerful current.

Within these image relationships which organize the description into symbols, we should distinguish between *comparative* (or analogical) relationships and *associative* relationships. To do this, we must once again refer to two examples which, in their objective content, are quite similar: the breakup of the ice in Griffith's *Way Down East* and the breakup of the ice in *Mother*.

In the first film, Lilian Gish (banished from her father's farm for returning one day with a child, abandoned by the father whom she refuses to name) makes her way across country in the middle of a snowstorm. Blinded by the blizzard, she falls fainting on the frozen surface of a river which at the same time is beginning to break up and carry her downstream. Setting out after her, a village lad in love with her saves her from certain death by jumping from ice floe to ice floe.

There are no symbols here—even less than in *Variety*—merely a simple metaphorical allusion, an *index*. The parallel editing which alternates between the body of the young girl being swept downstream and the hero setting off after her creates a dramatic "suspense" at the same time as the association of a *natural crisis* (the ice breaking up) and a *dramatic crisis* (Lilian Gish's flight and the danger facing her) suggest a comparison with a progression edited in counterpoint. The two events are *associated*. Neither of them involves the other or the other's signification. And yet this association calls up mental images which are symbolic. Rejected by a self-righteous society and her own relatives for having given free

expression to her love, Lilian Gish, in the depths of despair, is literally an "orphan of the storm." And here we have the social victim becoming a real victim; the disintegration of her morale is identified with the disintegration of the natural phenomenon. Nature herself seems to be siding against her, thereby reinforcing the cruelty of her destiny.

It is not our purpose to judge whether or not such a melodramatic reinforcing device is successful (though, it must be admitted, it is a well-realized sequence, achieving a genuine grandeur even in its excess) but to consider an effect of language, a form of expression.

As in *Variety*, the subject becomes apparent through the concrete facts but is not limited to the actual story; a whole series of significations radiate round it, which it does not exhaust, even though—as in *Variety*—the sole purpose of the significations is contained in the final purpose of the drama. And it is clear that in contrast with what certain psychologists have all too easily concluded, the film image is not an obstacle to the imagination but in fact stimulates it. Obviously we are not able to imagine what is presented to our eyes, since we are in the process of perceiving it, but we can exercise our imagination if we use these relationships in their immediate context as *starting points*; and indeed that is precisely what *we must do* if we wish to understand the meaning of the connotations when these depend on one *feature* of the represented objects. The film provides material for thinking as well as for seeing and not only *about* what is being seen but also *with* it.

If we now turn our attention to *Mother*, we have already seen how Pudovkin intercut the images of the strikers marching down the Mail alongside the Neva with images of the Neva carrying packice breaking up against the arches of the bridge. This

parallel editing is based on various comparative associations: the river breaks the stranglehold of the ice just as, in their own way, the striking workers are, for the time being, breaking through the resistance of the tsarist forces. Yet these images very quickly take on a symbolic signification, through a kind of allusive association, passing from the particular to the general. They become, as it were, the "image" of the revolution in progress: the revolutionaries have failed for the time being but the revolution continues despite the setback. This is a genuine metaphorical substitution—like the last image in *Paisan*—whereas in *Way Down East* there is merely a syntagmatic confrontation: metonymy rather than metaphor.

Oppositional relationships involved in a causal progression are potentially comic, often through the enormity of their relationships. Such is the case in *Modern Times* (the naval yard episode) when Charlie is ordered by the petty officer to fetch a wedge and he brings the nearest one to hand—which happens to be supporting a prop, which in turn happens to be supporting a ship under construction. The effect is that Charlie is the cause for the premature launching of the unfinished vessel, which sinks to the bottom of the ocean. Here again, the symbol is not contained in the concrete image but in the mental image suggested by their relationship: the facts imply the hero's ineptitude and absent-mindedness, but their relationship implies the enormity of the effects compared with the triviality of the causes. It is not in the signifier that the symbol exists but in the signified.

Once again—and we cannot over-emphasize this point: if the attitude of the reader is to interpret a suggested reality and suggested ideas through a series of conventional signs, the attitude of the spectator in the cinema is to interpret, through

a perceived reality, ideas which are suggested rather than signified, film significations being necessarily vague and imprecise. The events described by the narrative merely form the basic substance of the film, its elementary level of intelligibility. The associations deriving from the arrangement of these effects must be understood—and understood *instantaneously*. Whereas reading requires time for thinking, the cinema depends on immediate understanding, without which we cannot hope to estimate the importance of the message. We confine ourselves to the represented objects without understanding the meaning of the representation; we believe we have understood, whereas we have merely been following the progress of a succession of events making up a story.

Before we examine what this story should be (or rather could be in its relationship with the subject), we must draw attention to *false significations*, or rather falsely cinematic significations.

There has been considerable comment, mostly adverse, about *literary* cinema. Now, a literary film is not necessarily a film adapted from a play or a novel, any more than it is a film in which there is a lot of talking. In the latter, the film is simply verbal, whatever the literary merits of the text. A film is said to be "literary" when its significations are preestablished, i.e., when they rely on concepts, not on facts. We have the example of Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence*, which, as the perfect film of its type, embodies everything which should be avoided. It is not that it is a bad film; from the point of view of the production, the directing, it is a very skillful film, but from the perspective of creation and expression, it is the perfect example of anticinema.

At the start of the film we are in a train compartment; at least this is the *impression* we have, since the setting is established in a very vague way. The action, on the other

hand, is quite definite: everything is real. After a while, the child accompanying the two heroines goes into the corridor and looks out of the window. What does he see? An interminable line of goods trains loaded with tanks. The country is at war, we are led to assume—or else the army is on maneuvers. But the sisters get off the train at the next station and we quickly realize that it was nothing to do with war or military maneuvers. The images are there merely to create, in an arbitrary and premeditated way, the impression of uneasiness and neurosis characteristic of the rest of the film, which the film continues to contrive in exactly the same way.

Now we are in a large cosmopolitan hotel, a place where you would expect to see a lot of people; but the corridors are empty, as though the sisters are the only visitors there, in a hotel whose dimensions suggest at least a hundred bedrooms. The more indulgent among us might deduce that it is presumably in order to create a feeling of solitude and desolation. Fair enough; but what is the basis for it? The child playing in these corridors, where he never meets a soul, nevertheless keeps running into a troupe of deformed dwarfs who are giving a performance in the town. It is quite logical that they should come and go in the hotel where they are staying but completely illogical that they are the only people we see. They are there merely to symbolize, through their deformity, the depressing, neurotic nature of the world and *for no other reason*. There are no maids in the hotel, no porters, merely a decrepit doddering old waiter who, as might be expected by now, symbolizes death and who naturally enough shows the child images of catastrophes and burials. Then we have one of the sisters masturbating while down in the street a tank which has been rolling through the town completely on its own comes to a halt, coincidentally, right under-

neath the windows of her bedroom. No need to mention the sexual symbolism of the tank's gun pointed in the direction of the bedroom, but why on earth should that particular tank be rolling through the streets on its own, except to create its petty effect and to symbolize symbolically a symbolic menace? Etc.

One can see how frequently these significations are applied. They are concepts *put into pictures* and introduced into a story developed in respect of these concepts; whereas signification should be the consequence of the events and appear in a way both logical and natural.

Lastly, we would point out that the whole symbolic structure of this film is of an *oneiric* nature. Everything which appears arbitrary and false in the film would be perfectly acceptable if it were a dream or, as Bergman himself has described it, a legendary story. Yet, however theoretical it may be, reality is presented in *The Silence* for what it is. The intention is to give us the impression that we are living in a nightmare—which is all well and good; but then it is not possible, even with that pretext, to introduce the logic of dreams into the development of concrete facts without losing contact with actual reality, the two structures being unconformable. Which puts us well and truly into the realm of literature.³¹

And the problem is not so much one of realism or lack of realism as of a way of using signification contrary to the techniques of motion pictures, which (as we have said repeatedly) do not consist in illustrating concepts, introducing preestablished symbols or ready-made ideas into a drama, but in moving an audience with concrete facts through which ideas are expressed, with or without metaphors, symbols, or metonymies.

Thus, when we say that denotation always precedes connotation or, more simply, that narration is necessarily previous

to expression, since the latter relies entirely on the former, we are not breaking new ground. Anyone who has gone to the trouble of pondering the subject will know this. The purpose of this study is not to contribute new ideas or personal opinions on each succeeding page. As well as the personal opinions (which we recognize are present in abundance), our aim is to define as clearly and accurately as possible the implications of various problems in order to be able to suggest ways of solving them. To be aware of a problem is already an advance, but to give a clear and precise justification or explanation is an even bigger step forward—at least that is our opinion. We believe we have demonstrated exactly how expression is governed by the narrative, how the subject is controlled by the dramatic action. All we need to know now is how the cinema can avoid being filmed theater or a novel in pictures and be film in all senses of the word.

The Dramaturgy of Film

During the twenties, Jean Epstein wrote, "I dream of films where nothing much happens," and a number of critics followed him by saying, "We must put an end to anecdote. The ideal film is one without a subject." And yet, despite their misleading rhetoric, these theoreticians were not advocating doing away with the subject, merely the *plot line*, at the time considered to be the only possible subject matter. It was not so much a matter of abandoning stories as of elevating a theory into a be-all and end-all of film. In Jean Epstein's films, something was always going on, except of course whatever it was which brought the people flocking to the cinemas of the time; and the fact that the idea was taken up again by Zavattini in 1945 proves that the aim of the theoreticians of 1925 was not far removed from those achieved by Italian

Neorealism—the difference being that a similar capacity for capturing reality was not possible at the time. Stripped of the complications of a story line which was no doubt restrictive but at least rang the changes, the “slices of life” (as they were called) produced by the avant-garde never went further than a well-directed naturalism, interesting enough when it did not degenerate into banal triviality.

Whereas commercial producers were presenting subjects reduced to a clichéd anecdote, the avant-gardists were working with structures intended to be significant but having nothing or very little to signify. It seemed that if one had something to express, it had to be via a story.

We believe we have reached the point where we can quite clearly identify the basic conditions of the film code. It is not montage (in the narrow sense of the word) or indeed any specific form but *a very general principle governing relationships and associations considered in their expressive manifestations*, however they are produced.

Associations, then; but associations of *what*? It is this we shall endeavor to define by studying the signified as opposed to the significations, the forms of the narrative as opposed to those of the expression. From now on, we shall try to establish an aesthetic of the content in its relationship with the aesthetic of the form, leaving the film code to one side in order to concentrate on the motivations which support it.

Film narrative is a discourse organized with perceptible objects but with a view to a drama involving a beginning, middle, and end—a duration. We have seen that the two art forms capable of conveying a fact as well as its moral or social consequences are tragedy (which presupposes a dramatic situation pivoted round a central point) and the novel (which allows the development of one or more actions toward a common conclusion). Given that the “time of

the narrative” is limited, these actions “could be continued.”

It is obvious that the criteria and aesthetic canons used to judge the perfection of the work could never be the same in both cases. *In the classical meaning of the word*, the perfection of a work is contained not only in the harmony of a content and a perceptible form—using Hegel’s formula applicable to all genres—but also in the constant balance of its parts, taking into account the human interest of the things signified. This notion of perfection goes back to the Greeks. It is the translation, the perceptible expression, of a particular conception of the Universe, a static, closed Cosmos at the center of which was Man. Confronted by such a universe, where the future was merely an eternally recurring pattern, the only qualities capable of expression were the transcendent and immutable qualities of the essences governing and controlling the world of appearances.

Whereas previous generations were preoccupied with the problem of space, our own is dominated by the problem of time, i.e., speed and movement, change. Instead of time being crystallized in a representation of space, it is the spatial representation which has become just one link among many in the chain of Time. The static equilibrium of *proportion* has thus been replaced, as a basic element, by the dynamic equilibrium of *rhythm*, no longer related to a geometric space but to a continuity, a development, a continuum. No longer does equilibrium lie in repose but in movement.

Now, the cinema, which is the art of time par excellence (space being a mere *compositional frame* for time), is always judged according to the principles of the stage. Critics generally latch on to the internal balance of the film, i.e., a static balance, for, though the apparent dynamism of the film may be obvious, the dynamism of the subject may remain inaccessible—at any rate

incomprehensible in its creative action, in the power it receives from the modalities of an action "in progress."

Because it was spectacle, the cinema was placed, as we have seen, right from the very beginning under the aegis of the theater. At that stage, it could only be considered as a vehicle suited for transmitting a preestablished work (if not an actual stage production), since, except for the fact that it was made up of moving images, the specific capabilities of film were unknown. However, as quickly as these were discovered they were put to work in the service of a composed dramatic structure and, in a certain sense, diverted from their proper development.

We have seen that the paths of theatricality, though leading film away from its true *nature*, were in fact essentially worthwhile, providing a steady, reliable, and well-tried structure, a guide as it were for its first few halting steps, particularly since the duration of the spectacle prevented it from straying from the well-trodden paths.

However, arriving late on the scene, full of potential promise, the art of the cinema could do no more than ape its elders and betters. And to do this, even those who held it in high regard instead of querying its methods tried to adorn it with all the glories of its predecessors. Endeavoring to find laws and solid principles, they claimed they were helping the newcomer not to find its way but to find a position at the right hand of Art. Yet these principles had already been abandoned by contemporary painting and theater.

As we know, academic rules always lag behind living art. They obstruct it insofar as they try to submit the *current* forms to principles established from previous forms applicable only to them. In other words, they presuppose the permanence of forms in an unchangeable society, thereby basing their aesthetic criteria on metaphysical concepts which can be traced back to Plato. As

a consequence, the cinema was allowed to breathe its magic only in order to revive tottering old ideas. Ideas and feelings dating back as far as the Second Empire were thus restored to a sort of ghostly existence, to which the dynamism of expression provided a new power, bringing unsupported fiction into the broad daylight of concrete reality. Naturally we do not mean films which deliberately evoke the behavior and manners of a bygone age but those (the vast majority) which attempted to describe a contemporary drama and which, for that reason, found themselves completely out of touch with reality.

At any rate, whatever the content of these cinematic dramas, they were always "constructed" (sometimes well, sometimes badly) with a view to an internal balance. The dynamism of the imagery followed the jerky movements of the action, which in fact became absorbed into the static time of an inexorably closed circle. The fatal knot was tied. At its very worst, the art of film—film dramaturgy—was no more than the art of turning circles.

True, there have been many great films fashioned from the closed structure. It is not a question of rejecting them out of hand or dismissing their undeniable qualities. Besides, far be it from us to deny the considerable aesthetic pleasure to be gained from the notion of balance which came from it. It is like a feeling of rest and fulfillment completing the tragic movement and carrying it through to its final resolution. It remains to be seen whether this aesthetic pleasure takes precedence over the authenticity of the actions, over an awareness of an active duration, over an analysis of characters subject to the vagaries of an action "in the process of taking place." This is not our view. At least it seems to us that these structures derive specifically from the theater, from the perspective of the stage acting as a receptacle

whose limits happen to coincide perfectly with theirs. The cinema must and always will use them as inspiration, particularly for films of a timeless nature or dealing with a more or less conceptual reality. Films such as *Ivan the Terrible* and *Alexander Nevsky* are perfect illustrations of this. It will always be possible to conceive great films starting from a principle not altogether alien to the cinema which the cinema is able to satisfy quite remarkably; but the fact remains that what makes film special belongs to a completely different sphere.

The type of dramatic development best suited to the texture of film is one occurring over time in a world where the uncertain progress of beings and things is constantly governed by duration. The cinema, whose progression is wedded to the process of time itself, whose sequences are capable of arranging any number of ellipses, is the only art able to produce a concrete, living impression of time passing, experienced in its living, active reality. Once again, determinism finds itself overtaken by probability.

From then on it is no longer a case of balance dependent on systematic coordinates. However, a difficulty even greater than that ever-elusive balance is constantly changing. Now, in that it is spectacle, film must control—dynamic or not—the vital balance which it finds in the perfect harmony of its associations and the evidence of the situations.

It is clearly the reason why closed structures offer a certain guarantee, particularly since they are in tune with the relatively static nature of static shots, the means of expression specific to the silent cinema—and also the talkies of the 1930s. Yet no one will deny that however credible, works like *The Informer*—even *Stagecoach*—revealed their artificiality more clearly for being the very basis of their perfection. It fulfilled a genuine need, but the artificiality tended to

destroy the feeling of authenticity—a feeling which the cinema must preserve at all cost, however essentially mediate it may be.

Does this mean that the cinema must divorce itself from tragedy if it is to be authentic? I do not wish to quibble, but Tragedy broadly interpreted as Theatricality is one thing, the *meaning* of tragedy is quite another. It is the structures of the former which the cinema must avoid if its purpose is to capture a living reality rather than the tragic conditions of existence—which it is quite capable of capturing in their *concrete* manifestations without ever having to produce a theoretic, abstract representation. For, in a play written for the theater, not only does Fate more or less determine the actions of the heroes but, at the compositional level, these actions are always predetermined. To fulfill the rules of good theater, the resolution of a drama must be understood from the beginning. That is what produces the feeling of artificiality, perfectly in keeping with the perspectives of the stage—*re-presentation*—but entirely out of place in the cinema, which provides a direct *presentation* of things. Cinematic artificiality, which exists in the way the world is presented, must not distort or pervert the facts it presents or, at least, give us the impression that these facts were artificially prepared and assembled to begin with.

As Roland Caillois observed some years ago, “Tragedy found new expressive powers in the cinema. One is even led to wonder whether the tragic vision of our modern world is not more forcefully and more accurately portrayed in its cinematic rather than its theatrical form.”³² We are convinced of it. Tragedy in our time is no longer defined by *Antigone* or *Prometheus*, and it is to be expected that an uneducated audience, i.e., incapable of placing these dramas in their historical context, is likely to be bored by them. There is far more of

the tragedy of our time in *M* and *You Only Live Once*, even in a Hitchcock thriller, than in Sophocles or Euripides. They are in direct contact with it.

Moreover, *You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1937) rediscovers—and renews—the principles of classical tragedy, that is, the struggle for freedom against an implacable fate and the reversal of action. As the result of circumstantial evidence against him, a man is imprisoned as a dangerous criminal and condemned to death. To escape, he inflicts a wound on himself. He is taken to a hospital and given a blood transfusion, with the purpose of reviving him sufficiently that he may be executed properly the following morning. In the meantime, a telegram arrives: the real culprit has confessed, so the execution is canceled. But the prisoner escapes, in the course of which he kills the priest who tries to stop him. He thus becomes a murderer at the very moment his innocence is proved. He is tracked down and shot with his girlfriend, just as they are about to cross the border.

Granted the coincidences are too good to be true, but the events are played out in such a logical fashion that they do not look contrived. The examination of justice and guilt assumes—in a way more closely related to our contemporary society—the kind of meaning it might have in a Sophoclean tragedy where, let it be said in passing, the coincidences are no less contrived.

Obviously when it is stripped of its metaphysical background, tragedy scarcely transcends melodrama. Apart from what it suggests beyond the actions it presents, *Oedipus Rex* is no more than a good cops-and-robbers story. Yet good cops-and-robbers stories are capable of producing this kind of extended meaning: the best of Fritz Lang's films are evidence of this. At the same time, these are the limits of a genre where the apparent freedom of events is registered within the framework of a premeditated

drama, and if there is less visible artificiality in these films than in (for example) *The Informer*, it is because they are associated with a tragedy convincing in another way.

In any case, melodrama is always a question of form. Life turns it into the length of a day; but in life facts are what they are, without preconceived purpose. The quality of "melodrama" exists only in the tone given to the narrative through various contortions, whose sole purpose is to stimulate as powerful emotions as possible. When it is interpreted aesthetically, when it is used to signify, when its appeal is intellectual rather than emotional, then whatever the meaning of the interpretation, it is no longer melodrama. In the absence of which, as we have just indicated, that is all classical tragedies are—which leads us right back to our conclusion that there is no such thing as a bad subject, merely bad ways of treating it.

Besides, without aspiring to universal tragedy, masterpieces may be created by transcending trite subjects. It happens only very occasionally, since a great deal of talent is required, even more so perhaps than for the tragedy which brings its own a priori values. The most striking example is, without a doubt, Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919).

The structure of the film, throughout which description takes second place behind expressivity, has the concentrated rigidity of tragedy, beneath its external appearance of melodrama turned into incantation or plainsong. The way the world is seen is dictated by the sordid setting, which reflects the miserable, downtrodden creatures roaming the alleyways, through the thick mists shrouding the Limehouse docks. In this respect, *Broken Blossoms* is one of the models of the "closed" aesthetic which later became the hallmark of German Expressionism—without there being any attempt to use the setting interpretatively except in the most basic sense. The

stylization lies in the drama. It is clear, then, that though the subject relies on the anecdote, *the subject is not the anecdote, depending entirely on the form which gives it its value and meaning.*

Several years later Griffith was less successful with *Way Down East*. Apart from the extraordinary ending, which we have discussed, the only purpose of the motivations is the "pathos" which they involve. Instead of being overshadowed by the ever-present poetic atmosphere, they are right in the foreground, subordinating everything exclusively to the purpose of the plot line, whereas in *Broken Blossoms*, they are completely eclipsed by the constantly lyrical transposition.

A month after *Broken Blossoms*, however, Griffith presented *True Heart Susie*, a film not so well known or appreciated in its time, doubtless because of its unusual tonal quality. Indeed, its richness is no longer contained in a well-tried dramatic structure but in the observation of the attitudes of a group of people in circumstances neither wholly dramatic nor wholly trivial, the tiny details of everyday life, its sorrows and its joys. The narrative, not concerned with either logic or facts, meanders hither and thither, much as the lovers in the story wander through the fields. It is simplicity itself: a narrative line following the characters without imprisoning them in their own drama, allowing them complete freedom of action, even the freedom to think or act against their own natures. Quite simply, we watch them living, nothing more.

It is understood that though *Broken Blossoms* shows all the signs of a rigid a priori architecture, *True Heart Susie* paves the way for modern cinema, which abandons story to concentrate exclusively on the characters' behavior. Obviously the plot is still fairly conventional, but then it has no other purpose than to act as a theme around which patterns are woven.

Thus we come back to the story which creates its own significations, whose material is made up of everything which makes the characters what they are, their actions, their behavior within an active span of time. No longer is it an arbitrary action introduced into an equally arbitrary context but a series of accidents, coincidences, chance encounters, whose purpose (or interest) is to show us characters living in their own world, rather than to interest us in the problems of a plot line.

Yet this de-dramatization (which seems to have attracted so much comment these days and which certain critics have accepted unreservedly without considering the implications) does not suggest the complete negation of drama, any more than it does the negation of all structure. Quite the contrary. It is not a matter of replacing a stiff unworkable skeleton with an amorphous invertebrate but of *replacing a development strictly controlled by an inflexible body of rules with a development controlled by facts alone.*

It is certain that it is only through exceptional circumstances that characters reveal their innermost natures, their deepest selves—which is the basis of what we call drama. There is very little to be discovered from an impression of the characters' everyday behavior (taking the train, sitting in a bar, going to the office, returning home, making love), so similar are the most diverse of human beings in that respect. This kind of voyeurism leads nowhere.

However, instead of the rigidity of a restrictive architecture, we may speak of the flexibility of a drama growing and developing like a plant. A plant is not devoid of structure, but however deliberate it may be, it is not preestablished; instead, it *establishes itself*. It does not conform to a priori rules, only to the movement of its sap, to everything which feeds it and forms its concrete being (subject, however, to external factors:

soil composition, position, exposure to the sun and the elements, etc.). It obeys a *life force*, an impulse, the various contradictions which fashion, organize and alter it; not a mold likely to make it as lifeless as a piece of cardboard. And if it occasionally develops into strictly geometrical forms (rhythmic spirals conforming more or less with the Finonacci series), it does so *in the most natural way possible*. In our view, this is how the cinema should compose its dramas.

At the beginning of cinema, pure physical movement—in chase films and the early Westerns—was the essence, the main-spring uniting or dividing the heroes. Nowadays, mobility in time must be the dynamic motivation of the facts, following the forces and impulses of a more or less determinant praxis. The narrative thereby quite naturally creates the norms, which, equally naturally, it imposes on itself, which in their turn create the connotations which give it its meaning—a meaning, however, which does not reduce the facts to supposed intentions.

At this point, we are obviously seeing the issue from the audience's point of view. If we see it from the filmmaker's point of view it becomes clear that the circumstances and implications of the drama are entirely predictable; otherwise the film could never be made. Except in exceptional cases, it could never be a question of making films off-the-cuff without a preconceived plan or ideas but of ensuring that the preproduction work does not paralyze the action or kill off the living qualities and that the impression given is *as if* the filmmaker had accidentally captured the scenes, as though he had taken them, raw and unadulterated, from life itself. It is a question of the narrative being more important than the spectacle, i.e., the narrative style taking precedence over the work method (though some work methods are better than others).

In brief, the interest of a film must lie not in what it tells—its *object*—but in what it *expresses*, which becomes the *subject* in all senses of the word.

No longer is it a matter of “staging” a story but of creating situations, bringing characters into confrontation, opening up new perspectives, briefly fashioning scenes which “become organized into a story” as they unfold: *interpreting reality rather than presenting a reality already interpreted*.

No situations, then, to exhaust the possibilities of a character; only characters to exhaust the possibilities of a situation. Facts, actions which develop, prompt, and contradict each other through choice, impulse, free will according to an ever-present margin of uncertainty, rather than a preplanned blueprint. For if the facts are always in some sense predetermined, it is only insofar as they are mutually *self-determining*, according to constantly changing factors. The present of the action exists in what happens or appears, in what prompts and changes the characters' intentions. The action sways between a past and a future—or tendency—which continually actualizes it in a new action. The past influences the present, whereas the future is directed by the characters' intentions, subject to the changes of the moment. Thus, along these lines, the film no longer puts the world “into images”; it *forms itself into a world* in the image of reality.

As Henri Agel reminds us, recalling an outmoded formalism,

previously, a sequence was connected to the one before and the one after, according to a perfect dramatic progression: shots were linked together to form a construction whose mathematical precision appealed to our sense of balance and love of dialectic. However, it would appear that man is not just a constructive, logical being; he is above all (and perhaps in essence—as the history of the novel, particularly since James Joyce, tends to prove)

an incomplete being, constantly in flux, struggling blindly to find himself in a world which at times eludes him.³³

In this context, Agel quotes the example of Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni* as one of the films which illustrate most clearly the tendency which developed with Italian Neorealism before opening up the vague and often contradictory currents of the French New Wave. He writes:

The whole film is made up of moments whose sole reason for being is their instantaneity: the storm breaking at the beauty contest, the billiard game, walking through the dismal, moonlit streets, the showgirls larking about round Natali, the morning after the ball with Alberto wandering about dead drunk, searching for Sandra and stopping in the woods to listen to the bird song, the car breaking down and inviting other road users' abuse of the careless merrymakers: everything seems linked together as though by accident, with no logic or purpose. A marvelous absence of purpose. The unexpected suspense of logic. A series of facts slipped together with no link other than circumstance.³⁴

Quoting from various interviews he held with Louis Delluc in 1919, Henri Fescourt also proves—as if proof were needed—that these ideas, whose implementation has become possible only recently, are not new and that the researches of the French avant-garde of the 1920s were not confined merely to questions of rhythm and editing as is generally and mistakenly thought. Fescourt relates:

When we came to that particular place in the script³⁵ I asked Delluc: "And what about the action? All I can see are descriptions of atmosphere." He replied: "That's true. There should not be even the merest hint of fact. If I had taken my intention to its logical conclusion, the action (i.e., the story) would not have emerged—at least

not if I had had my way. We would not have dwelled on compositional details if it had meant the exclusion of others. They would have all been jumbled together in the maelstrom of the fiesta. . . . When Germaine Dulac and I left for Spain, we took with us one guiding principle: to capture, without preparation of any kind, without preplanning, the camera reacting spontaneously, every potential event, from the commonplace to the unusual: people dancing, laughing, crying, eating, getting drunk, arguing, praying, mourning, banners flapping, the funeral procession passing by, the breeze raising clouds of dust, men sweating in the heat of the sun, the strains of music, two young men stabbing each other to death for the love of a woman who, in the same moment, is making love with a third. The assembly of these facts, which forms the subject of the film, appears to the cold eye of the camera and is projected on the screen as merely one component in the Spanish fiesta, a series of incidents of equal importance. It is up to the unbiased audience to use its imagination to provide a scale. Thus, grounded in a truth which is almost absolute, we captured a moment in the life of an Andalusian village. This we achieve . . . except for the scenes of the girl and her suitors, which had to be written and staged."

Thus for Delluc in 1919, the exposition of his story would not have been according to the accepted patterns of classical drama; it would not have been articulated, structured, developed, or treated as a drama but included with other pieces of information as one element among others. It would be the *result*; it would have to be pieced together by the audience, not handed to them on a plate. Life does not construct stories. Facts follow one another with no rhyme or reason and it is up to us to link them together.³⁶

Although with *La Femme de nulle part* Delluc introduces the psychology of memory,³⁷ he was never able to fulfill his inten-

tions. The time had not yet come. It was not until some few years later, until Von Stroheim's *Greed*, that real time was integrated for the first time into a film. At the same time, we should realize that Chaplin had made use of this free structure in most of his films after 1917—long before *Public Opinion*, therefore.

Chaplin's films are not constructed as dramas. They do not follow a predetermined structure of which they are merely the expression, the translation into film. In these films, the drama is merely a linking together of situations created as the story progresses, basing its structure entirely on itself, with all the freedom we find in life. Each scene, each sequence, is the logical continuation of the previous, but it is quite obvious that the slightest alarm, the merest flutter, would be sufficient to send the story in a totally different direction. . . . Clearly, this sort of construction, applicable only to chases or the linking of situations, is risky from the aesthetic point of view. It is probable that its only possible application is Chaplin's films, in that they rely totally on his character and actions and that it is he who leads the action forward. It is also true that it is one of the reasons why his films, despite their apparent slapdash production technique, are pure cinema.

Whereas so many other films are no more than the pictorialization of a story already written, the expression of an idea existing in itself independently of the medium which translates it, serving merely as a support for something it has not actually created itself, Chaplin's films create their own signification and emotion for and from themselves. They are self-defining, being their own ultimate purpose and having no responsibility for anything but what they are. They are irreducible to all forms of expression other than the cinema (though Chaplin's own personal art, as an actor, relies on mime and dance). I believe that this notion is in direct conflict

with the concept of art for art's sake, which is always being attributed to the intentions of pure cinema, whereas in fact they are entirely opposed to it. It happens that style in these films, instead of being involved with the semantics or morphology of the cinematic code, is quite simply the effect of a method of expression and composition. It is style in the exact sense of the word, not a contrivance of form. (Jean Mitry, *Charlot et la fabrication Chaplinesque*)³⁸

It will be pointed out by way of correction that if this aesthetic applies only to Chaplin's films, it cannot strictly speaking be considered "risky"—merely apparently more difficult. Whether or not this is so, it does presuppose the importance of the characters over the drama, which, being the consequence of their actions, can never constrict them with rules conceived abstractly (as has been the case up to the present). As Louis Delluc said, "the cinema is leading us toward the suppression of art, which transcends art in being life."

It would seem, moreover, that the "creative form" we spoke of in the preceding chapter becomes fully employed, totally justified, only within the framework of structures of this kind. In closed structures, although the form helps to bring out the qualities of the story, it can only increase, sublimate or magnify something preexisting it (*Broken Blossoms*, *The Last Laugh*, *Alexander Nevsky*). On the other hand, in open structures, it creates significations at the same time as the perceptible features of the narrative, if not the narrative itself. Obviously, form cannot create motivations; what it does do is organize them and give them meaning. Thus it would perhaps be more logical to refer to it as *generative* form, a term apparently close to the attributes and capacities we observe in it.

It remains the case that montage (in the sense of a combination of images or scenes

likely to provoke a psychological reaction and signify an idea through the effect of their juxtaposition) retains all its powers and remains the basis of film expression – though, in our view, this expression is always the product of a series of associations both logical and psychological relating as much to the denotation as to the connotation.

However, whereas Eisensteinian montage is at the level of the shot, modern editing technique attempts to set itself at the level of the sequence (without denying any of the advantages of its predecessor). Without underestimating the potential signifying power of emphasizing particular details (successively or simultaneously), the event itself becomes a signifier through the structure of the image which reveals it. As a concrete fact, it carries with it a certain meaning, but as a fact presented as an image (framing, spatial relationship between characters and between characters and background), it gains a secondary *revelatory signification* – one which reacts with the signification of a different sequence, producing the effective meaning and general current of the film.

Thus montage exists in the story structure of the film, its development, not just within the transitory space and time of a sequence of shots. It becomes genuinely analytical, constructional, a compositional element in the drama: an *écriture*.

Time and space are no longer the time and space of the drama (a framework around the drama); they become a function of it. In other words, the story is a series of facts and events given space and time which constitute, through their reciprocal relationships and associations, their own continuum – which is nothing more than a receptacle for a dramatic movement whose directions, generated by its living forces, follow the same lines as those of a river cutting its own channel.

Sartre writes in *La Nausée*, "One must choose between living life and describing it.

In life, nothing happens." On the contrary, a great deal happens – except that one is not aware of it as such, precisely because one is living it, or rather, one is not aware of it until *afterward*, when it has passed into our memory and is sufficiently detached from us that we are able to observe it from a distance as though seeing it from the outside.

Whether it be a film or a novel, the work of art can only describe: particularly film which can only capture events from the outside. And yet film is able, better and more fully than the novel, to show us what is in the process of being lived.

A filmmaker describes his characters. Yet he does so by showing them continually in the act of doing something – in such a way that film narrative is capable, better than any other narrative, of following the minutiae of life. Instead of describing things in the past tense, it does so in the present. It does not tell us what was but what is.

What has happened always distances the narrator from the action he is describing, and this has the effect of objectifying the world, turning it into an object, crystallizing it into a "good story." On the other hand, "what is happening" involves us in its own course of events, and the only distance between the narrative and the actual event is that between the screen and the audience.

When we watch a film, we are always "face to face" with things, yet we have already seen the difference between the *presentification* of an action which has taken place, belonging to the past, already complete, and the *actualization* of an action in the process of taking place.

Presentification, as we have said, is what can be expected from static shots. It is suitable for telling legendary tales, tragedies enclosed within a certain time span into which they fit perfectly. The moving camera, on the other hand, creates the impression of an active presence, an action "to be continued."

Modern cinema therefore describes more than it narrates though its images *reveal* rather than describe (to describe an object, it must be excluded; if it is there, it only needs to be seen). Description being a literary art, we might prefer to say that modern film is an *observation* of events in the process of happening, a vision which discovers in them an *intentionality* (in the phenomenological sense) without ever apparently submitting them to an aesthetically predetermined intention.

Yet this way of observing and following things presupposes a totally objective form of dialogue from the characters (objective, that is, for the audience); but all too often things happen as though the characters speaking were considering their actions *from the outside*. What they say serves to explain the motivations which cause them to act the way they do. When A talks to B, it is in order to inform the audience rather than show B what he is thinking or feeling. Now, characters in the act of experiencing something cannot at the same time reflect upon it—precisely because they are experiencing it. Reflection can take place only *after* (or before) the event. Only commentary about something *in the past* is capable of distantiating itself in this way, taking up a perspective on the past. Direct dialogue cannot possibly do this, and we should therefore not look to it for an understanding.

In the cinema—more specifically, in the narrative art which records duration in the process of happening—images alone are capable and responsible for explaining events and actions, for the reason that they alone *describe* it, i.e., consider the actions *from the outside*, whereas the hero of the story is *living* the action being described.

However subjective the eye of the narrator, he is always seen as impartial, with no part to play in the hero's actions. Thus to say that film dialogue must be "nonsignifying" does not mean that it should be devoid

of meaning but that, keeping strictly to its purpose of revealing the way the characters act or think, it should not attempt to be explicit as regards the drama which introduces it. Dialogue is nothing more than a verbal behavioral pattern. Now, all too frequently—even in the best films—the dialogue is written by people who see dramatic development only in terms of the theater, i.e., through the text, as in a play, where it is responsible for every signification.

What gives the majority of films their appearance as forced, contrived drama is their dialogue—far more than an overelaborate directing style. Only when filmmakers accept that real life, life in action (even the vaguest impression), cannot be captured by burdening it with a carefully composed text totally divorced from life will the cinema be said to have made an advance along the path it has chosen for itself.

In the theater, things are *summoned* to appear by words. In novels, they are mentioned in passing or *described*. In the cinema, they are shown; no need to explain them. Only what is not shown or cannot be shown—part of the characters' behavior in a given situation—needs explanation. In this respect, Italian Neorealism (in particular Antonioni) and the films of the [French] New Wave (in particular Godard) have pointed the cinema in the right direction (though often they themselves have not always followed it).

It has been said over and over again: signification in the cinema is achieved through the objects themselves; yet this signification never ignores the *meaning* of objects: it provides them with a *supplementary* meaning. It is therefore up to the objects to say what they are, to show themselves in terms of a context acting as a catalyst, and up to the filmmaker to ensure that this is what happens.

The main difficulties lie in the facts that
(1) The story must never be merely the pretext for an exercise in style, though it is

merely the support for significations rather than the ultimate *purpose* of the film. It must never be relegated to the background; it must maintain a certain interest through its development; it must, in the time-honored phrase, have rhyme and reason. (2) The narrative, while attempting to be as objective as possible vis-à-vis the events it is recounting, must not become merely a record, an impersonal statement of fact, any more than a prefabricated drama. Ideally, generalities and universalities should be achieved through specific temporary facts, without the ephemeral reality being imprisoned behind a priori attitudes, without it ever being considered except for its own qualities. It is from the "immediacy" of objects, from their coexistence, that their universality must spring—or rather from the way they are presented. The ethical, social, or metaphysical perspectives transcending the direct meaning must come only from the connotations; and these, registered at—and with—the limits of the denotation, must not, under any circumstances, distort or alter the denoted reality, merely in order to "fabricate" a meaning. The few examples we have mentioned should be sufficient proof of this.

So it must not be a play or a piece of reportage but a narrative organized with successive scenes but sufficiently flexibly that the basis of its structures may be the progression of time—which means that contemporary films pose problems of a totally different order: in particular, the problem of balance in the storytelling.

In fact, not only must the logic of the content, i.e., what is being developed, be ensured; so also must the logic of the development, which, by being placed in the perspective of a progression, is necessarily *genetic*. Duration being a creative force rather than a more or less extendable span of time, the narrative gains a balance whose dynamism must make provision for this

creation and control it as the expression of an internal necessity. It is not balance based on a preestablished point but balance established as events take their course.

In effect, all structures presuppose the problem of their own creation. Though their origin may not be a priori facts, it is from a priori facts that they are established—and this is a gradual process. That leads us back to the image of plant growth.

These "established facts" in film narrative are moments, sequences, or states of balance—not just of content and form but of harmony between the logic of events and the character psychology. Since actions in the process of happening are always subject to the vagaries of chance, to external factors, it follows that the balance achieved through a particular action (necessarily based on the past and on a provisional expectation) is being continually adjusted. Thus a new balancing process takes its place alongside the previous one, setting itself in the direction of probability—and so on.

There can be nothing more difficult to control than this narrative method, this formal construction whose realization produces its own specific content, as well as following—or appearing to follow—the natural development of things, i.e., controlling a logic dependent on circumstance, moment, place, and character according to a balance continually being adjusted. Indeed, very few have managed it at all successfully.

One may observe that those films of the New Wave (Godard's in particular) which have done most to destroy the "closed" structures and de-dramatize the story are incapable of following a logical, coherent development—though *at the level of the individual sequence* they are at times dazzling. They produce moments whose genuine authenticity achieves a truth which, however essential it may be, never stops being direct and contingent; but the linking together of such sequences or circumstances is either

lacking or, in the context of the freedom in which it appears, quite arbitrary—whereas the artificiality of the “constructed” story might have served as its justification. The same might be said of a great many Neorealist films, notably those of Rossellini (the most recent), which degenerate into cliché or melodrama, or those of Visconti, which suffer from being too rigidly constructed.

At the same time, we should give credit where it is due; and it is true that though in these films the genuine feeling of time is short-lived, it is at least captured in its most clear and perceptible manifestation. The giant step forward has been taken. The rest, we hope, is to follow.

That is not to say that this notion of duration, which plays such an essential role in the narrative art, cannot appear in many different guises. It may appear in an achronological fashion, relative to associations between present and past which can be considered in two ways.

One, the associations may be considered objectively, as in *Citizen Kane*, in which case, by constantly going back over the same ground and letting memories overlap (particularly if, as in this film, they are different memories relating to the past experiences of several different characters), the establishment of such associations requires an obvious dramatic construction which, for all its novelty, is not far removed from the structures of Tragedy. In fact, time stands still, is fixed upon a present action (or fact) from which all investigations and recollections relating to it radiate. There is achronological displacement of time, but only from the present to the past and only relative to an action already completed: Kane is dead and this death is the cause of all the researches and testimony relating to his past. The effective “domination” of time brings us right back to the concept of theatricality, but in a totally original way,

fundamentally cinematic in its expression and form. The same is true of *Rashomon*, *Thomas Garner*, and *Le Jour se lève*, whether it be a question of several intermingled associations, memories of a dead friend, or the personal recollections of past events, all these effects of memory being based around—and upon—a moment neatly circumscribed and arrested in time.

Or else these associations are considered subjectively, as in *Hiroshima, mon amour*. In this case, the associations are established around a moment which the heroine is *in the process of experiencing*. As we know, she compares her present actions with a similar past, coming between her and the present and endowing these actions with a particular resonance. Not only is time not arrested but it is transformed by memory. As Robert Pingaud pointed out so brilliantly:

There is as yet no past for the heroine of *Hiroshima*; and no memory, come to that. The situation she has already experienced cannot be used to make her aware of a situation which, quite simply, is a repetition. The film, initially starting off in Hiroshima, gives us the impression of returning to Nevers; in fact, it is the other way around. Nevers pushes Hiroshima out of the picture and we find ourselves witnessing a kind of *return forward* which first produces one episode within another and then dissolves the second in the first, announcing the disappearance of Hiroshima through that of Nevers.³⁹

The film deals with two parallel stories, one in the present and the other in the past, subtly entwined and inserted in the heroine's present and active emotional responses. The association is not just achronological; it is also diachronic; it is a constant overlapping of present and past, past and future, in which reality and imagination (or memory) are fused into a *whole* which is the pure expression of the real experience: a

subjective experience introduced into the objectivity of the narrative.

As regards the chronological narration of events, two methods are possible as well: objective and subjective.

One of the ambitions of a certain modern school of cinema (whose pitfalls seem too numerous to mention) is to try and make the audience experience the weight of time passing as experienced by the characters in the drama. Yet it is as plain as a pikestaff that experienced time cannot be perceived when it is *actually experienced*, i.e., filled with a particular activity. It becomes perceptible only when there is no activity: waiting or boredom. Now, it is quite possible to show people being bored, dragging out an aimless existence; but to try to make us share it and experience their boredom is bound, in the nature of things, to end up boring us to death. It does not seem possible to base an aesthetic system on audience boredom, on the expression of emptiness, the representation of immobility (though it be only moral or mental). It is to Antonioni's great credit that he was to some extent successful, interesting even when he is being boring; but he went as far as it is possible to go in this direction.

It should be noted in passing that the "dead" periods [pauses] frequently used in contemporary films have nothing in common with the "empty" periods of waiting or boredom. This classification, originally associated exclusively with the stage, in fact applies to moments where nothing happens in the *theatrical* sense. Yet it is quite usual in these moments of *dramatic* inaction for something *genuinely* to be taking place. The duration is filled with mental if not physical (or verbal) activity. This is quite obvious in certain films where such moments, used intentionally, become the explicit manifestation of inner mental activity unwilling (or unable) to express itself—notably in the films of Olmi or Rosi.

Lastly, the most widely used narrative method, which follows step by step the chronological development of events, seems to us the most appropriate for this quasi-phenomenological description of duration, this consciousness of reality in action—insofar as the intention is to capture, as literally as possible, the characters changing day by day under the pressures of a more or less determinant social milieu. As well as *Greed*, which remains the model of the genre unsurpassed even by today's standards, we might quote one or two other successes: *The Crowd*, *The Wedding March*, *The Wind, Dawn, Jezebel*, *The Childhood of Maxime Gorki*, *Oharu*, *I Vitelloni*, *Ugetsu Monogatari*, *Sansho Dayu*, *La Dolce Vita*, *America, America* (there are a few others). From the purely formal point of view, one should also mention *Le Voyage en Italie* and even *Europe 51*—though the subject matter of these films is quite inconsequential.

We should make it perfectly clear (as if that were necessary) that it is not a question of the uniform continuity of the objective time of the story (otherwise we would have to include *Rope*, *It Happened One Night*, even *3:10 from Yuma*) but the link—necessarily elliptical when the action extends over a long period of time—between homogeneous, continuous "blocks of events," which give us the impression of a duration experienced by the characters in the drama, who are more or less altered by this experience of time. It is a matter of following them through that experience, of observing them *living* through it, not just concentrating on the *before* and *after* in a series of flashes capturing merely the after-effects. The time of the film and that of the action thus become (more or less) isochronous—but only at such moments. The overall story time may extend over several hours, even years.

In unrealistic films (fairy tales, fantasies, even dream films), duration does not present any obvious problems, being infinitely

flexible. Yet in this type of film we are back in a roundabout way to the structures of the "closed" system. To talk of space-time which is clearly defined or situated outside real space and time is virtually saying the same thing.

All that remains is to point out, yet again, that our purpose is not (nor ever has been) to prescribe *ways* of overcoming specific difficulties or to solve problems raised by the introduction of the notion of time into the dramatic structure of a film. Apart from the fact that this would be outside the scope of our present brief, it would be presupposing rules which, as we have said, cannot possibly exist—except in the sense that there are as many rules as potential subjects. Moreover, it would be presumptuous to suggest an attitude vis-à-vis the organization of the narrative at the same time as arguing that it is the events themselves which elicit their own development and that any norms, created by their own content, are imposed as norms only by reason of the needs of their content.

The "methods" suggested here derive entirely from stylistics, with that area of activity which maintains the boundaries of creation. Our intention is to indicate as clearly as possible the conditions and overall design of film expression, in such a way as to indicate what steps must be taken, what steps cannot be avoided, in order to achieve it.

It is our firm conviction that there is only one imperative and that is *justification*. In other words, any form is valid which is justified by what it expresses—provided that it is *expressive*, i.e., comprehensive in its exploitation of the potential of a given content, more directly and genuinely than any other.

Any content is valid which is justified by the authenticity and truth of the characters and situation, the *meaning*—provided the meaning not only exhausts every capac-

ity in the form and transcends the short-term interest of the story yet, through it and by it, reveals more general human perspectives of a moral, social, psychological, or, when required, metaphysical nature.

Thus two broad avenues are open to the cinema: realism and fantasy. However, realistic or not, it can only operate from the starting point of a certain representation of reality. In the same way that it "injects fantasy" into reality, so it "injects reality" (material reality) into fantasy. The latter can therefore be only a more imaginative form of reality than the former, in other words, a form of reality whose motives depend on fantasy or contradict the immediate impression of verisimilitude. Yet the imaginative freedom it presupposes places it outside the realm of what we know as realism—the subject of the remarks which follow.

Realism and Reality

Thus the cinema tends, in a remarkable way, to break down the impenetrable barriers which have grown up over the years between reality and fantasy.

If research into the supernatural is an attempt to discover what a certain philosophy compares to the "essence" of things or, at any rate, whatever transcends the power of our senses, one could say that in the cinema, reality and fantasy show themselves as different aspects of one and the same thing. As soon as it is seen in an unexpected way, reality becomes fantasy, to the extent that one could argue that reality is no more than a fantasy to which we have grown accustomed.

Water is a common substance. Yet a simple drop of water under the microscope opens up a disturbing new world. The fantastic and the marvelous express themselves within the very heart of reality. As for the "supernatural," it is merely the natural eluding the explanations suggested by

our knowledge of the world and material objects. Thus electricity, part of our everyday reality, was a supernatural force in Thales' time. Nowadays (not counting the field of atomic physics, which we are only just beginning to understand), radio and television are far in advance of the alchemist's art and the most commonplace reality is proving daily more ingenious and surprising even than the most far-fetched fictions conjured up by our science fiction and fantasy writers.

Suffice it to say that the cinema, the "art of reality," is not necessarily "realistic." The term *realistic* might just as easily be applied to any art which not only captures the known world but describes concrete facts and limits itself to a certain immanence by attempting to express it or capture its deeper meaning—even though that meaning must eventually develop into a transcendent meaning.

On the other hand, the term *unrealistic* may be applied to any film which expresses (or tries to express) transcendence through a more or less stereotyped or arbitrary immanence, however convincing its historical basis, to any potentially *true* film (in the deepest sense of the word), concerned only with essential truths, that is, whose associations with a particular time and place are made apparent only through superficial or incidental features, films such as those of Dreyer and Bresson, notwithstanding their "realistic" attention to certain specific details.

Films of the first instance are limited to describing "existence" by observing direct and concrete reality. Films of the second instance aspire to an "essence" through a more or less fictional existence based necessarily on a convention—the more so for the fact that existence, considered *in abstract*, becomes dissociated, intentionally or not, from its historical or social context.

The "known world," as we call it, is not just the world of perceived objects, as op-

posed to a world beyond our perception; it is the world of facts, the world that we see, that we experience, that we suffer, in a word, the social realities of the *real* world.

Before we proceed any further, however, let us attempt to clear up the misconceptions about realism, as many as they are varied, which have muddied the issue up to now.

If one naïvely considers as realistic "anything which is part of reality," then all works of art are realistic. Inversely, since every work of art is a fulfillment of self, the external manifestation of the artist's view of the nature of things, his striving to transform the world according to his own changing character, to act by means of a "message," to alter ideas or concepts (which is what makes all works of art necessarily and fundamentally "revolutionary"), one may say that there is no such thing (nor could there be) as realism in art. An interpretation of the world is not the world. Though it might be a more profound vision of reality, it is only a vision, a point of view. To claim that the work of art captures "true" reality is either to fool the audience or fool oneself as the artist. It is impossible to make art conform with reality. Otherwise the work of art stops being a work of art and becomes a simple vehicle for reality devoid of purpose, theme, or meaning (although it is impossible to act as a vehicle except for a single "aspect" of the world; to act as a vehicle for reality is already in some way to damage it, to exercise the power of choice and limitation over it, since nothing is more suited to conveying reality than reality itself).

"Realism" exists midway between these extreme positions and involves less uncompromising ideas. Since it does not purport to be a copy of reality and does not limit itself to pure and simple observation, it is not inconsistent with aesthetic interpretation as long as it does not subvert the truth but follows and develops the significations

of the objects themselves, as long as it celebrates the objects without idealizing them in such a way as to lose all contact with concrete reality, ultimately creating pure symbolism and abstraction. This was pretty much the conception of realism which developed in France in the nineteenth century: as far removed from naturalism—founded on the identification of art with nature—as abstract idealism.

Since it is always in some sense a re-creation, art sets itself the task of expressing the essence of reality through its forms and concrete appearance (essence being used, as one might imagine, in its empirical sense, not as a *noumenon*). Yet facts, actions, and other concrete manifestations can never be captured as they appear individually (this would be a way of abstracting them like any other), only in their relations with other facts, actions, or concrete manifestations. The purpose of a realistic work of art may be the study of character or psychology—as long as it is not Mankind in general which is being considered but individuals constantly subject to more or less formative obligations—social, moral, and cultural—and not “cut off” from the incidental influences which make them what they are.

Even so, “realism,” interpreted initially as a category of art, degenerated fairly rapidly into a style, a school (except when it was allowed, by way of reaction, to wander down the untrodden paths of Naturalism or Symbolism). Once again, everyman ended up as the notion of the “archetypal hero,” set in no less archetypal surroundings—archetypally “realistic.”

As we know, Marx and Engels were to take up these ideas—passing through Hegel—in formulating their concept of Socialist Realism. Yet, though realism must have as its foundation the relationship of man and the world he lives in within a given historical context, though it must be

social, there is absolutely no reason whatever for it to be “socialist” (assuming agreement as to the meaning of the word).

To the extent that we mean “Socialist Realism” as the expression of political ideology (and therefore a certain prejudice), the expression of a dogma whose purpose is to inculcate, through “archetypal” examples, certain ethical and politically acceptable standards of behavior, we are totally opposed to its concepts. In this sense, it is contrary to the notion of realism itself, as well as to the notion of art which does not set out to preach, teach, or moralize but to express and signify, to provide food for thought, without transmitting already established ideas. If, on the other hand, Socialist Realism is simply social realism integrated into the praxis of our time, if it is merely the continuation of realism in the history of facts, then it is realism “itself” in its most concrete and immediate form.

As far as this goes, we are in agreement with the majority of Marxist (or simply left-wing) critics,⁴⁰ but we would part company with Georg Lukács, for whom all “great art” is necessarily realist and say that realism is not a norm and that a realist work of art is no more valid as such in the hierarchy of art than any nonrealist work.

Stefan Morawski, a Marxist critic, puts the case quite succinctly when he writes

Realism is not a normative category. It does not imply that the only—or most valid—works are those which satisfy the conditions which it lays down. . . . As a category, realism does not prescribe any particular formal characteristics. Its principles are those involving merely the business of representing nature (figuratively) and capturing the essence of the represented phenomenon, . . . which does not mean that symbols and elements of fantasy do not have a part to play in the realist work of art; they have their place as individual components or as a formal and

stylistic disguise for the essence of the represented phenomenon.⁴¹

Yet what may be true of the plastic or literary arts does not apply in the cinema. Being founded on the exact reproduction of things and not on a totally mediated representation, film is unable to capture the essence of concrete reality through an arbitrary representation; or, if it does capture the "essence," that is all it captures, immediately entering the realm of timelessness. Expressionist films (for instance) symbolically signify abstract generalities but not "real" facts, in the objective sense of the word.

Far from being an impersonal method of recording, film realism purports to release the deeper meaning of things. Yet it can be *art* and *realist* at the same time only if it is based on true reality, i.e., on facts such as they appear in a historically determined social context. It is therefore a question of content before it is a question of form (content, obviously, meant as the *element around which everything is constructed* and put on display, rather than the result of the process, totally dependent on the form). However, if realism in the cinema implies a certain way of apprehending the world, this lies in the truth of the signified far more than in a style of signification.

Visual Structures and Film Semiology

The cinema could never be studied or considered—either from the aesthetic point of view or at the level of its content—as an isolated phenomenon. It has to be seen as the evidence and reflection of Man's concrete activities and therefore must be included among those activities, i.e., among those arts which, like the cinema, bear witness to those activities.

The aesthetic reality—like any other—cannot be explained except in terms of ex-

ternal factors. We lose sight of the unifying link between things if we look too closely at the things themselves. Since no knowledge can be defined without referring to previous knowledge, it is less a matter of elaborating doctrines alien to the art of film than of retaining the essential qualities in order to define—through analogy and distinction—the general characteristics and principles of an art which, for all its independence, it still very much associated with the arts which have gone before.

To speak of something is to understand it through everything it is not. Yet the question "what is cinema?" demands a philosophical answer—which means that we must start by defining what we mean by philosophy—the system.

It being that the phenomena of perception are the basis of film expression, to ignore them or gloss over them would be like building castles in the air. We must therefore make a clear exposition (at least in general terms) of the thought process to which our study of contemporary psychology and physics—as much as the cinema—has led us, in order that we may base an aesthetic on something more concrete than mere words and something other than vague technical considerations, which are merely the good or bad applications of principles beyond their scope.

It is our belief that the cinema is not just an art, a culture, but a means to knowledge, i.e., not just a technique for disseminating facts but one capable of opening thought onto new horizons.

The film image is comparable to the organic cell, film editing to distributive organization. Naturally, no editing technique will *transform* objects; but according to the order and rhythm imparted to them, their framing, their position in the "field of view," the objects become "different"—yet, at the same time, remaining what they are: they are "victims" of their own representation.

This is how film expression underlines the importance of *structure*, demonstrating the extent to which any change to the whole involves a change to the elements which make it up.

This is why we decided to conduct our own aesthetic and psychological researches — particularly illuminating for the cinema but no less interesting in their own terms — attempting to describe the general area in which film operates (without claiming to exhaust the whole topic).

Even in linguistics it finds an echo; for when we refer to the language of cinema we do not mean cataloguing techniques, observing the relationship between what is expressed and the form of its expression, but defining the why and wherefore of signifying structures in their relationship with what is signified.

"Structuralism" (which covers the whole of modern linguistics) is no more than the essence of the psychology of form in the guise of the language codes. Or, to put it another way, the quasi-phenomenological investigation of the *effects of language* has enabled us to identify the interrelated structures involving mental activity, the language code being merely the formalization (in its various aspects) of the actual structures of the thought process.

Thus instead of consigning language to an arbitrarily created logical framework, considered from the outset as necessary and sufficient, the structuralists have tried to decide what this framework is by investigating the semantic needs of the language code.

Considered in this light, the study of language becomes the study of signification and methods of signifying, the study of "sign systems," indeed any system with signification as its purpose: *semiology* (in which linguistics is merely a subsection, albeit the most important one).

As Ferdinand de Saussure wrote, "When semiology becomes organized, the question

will arise as to whether it is justified in including modes of expression based on completely natural signs — such as pantomime. . . Language, the most complex and widespread of all the systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense, linguistics can become the master pattern for the whole of semiology"; that is, an "ideal reference" but not a *unique model* (contrary to what some old-fashioned linguists still believe). That is the source of the confusions and contradictions surrounding film language — which we mentioned in the first few lines of this work.

We should certainly return to this aspect of the question, if only to clear up certain points which we were unable to examine at the time. Though it is true that the linguistic sign is the "total result of the association between a signifier and a signified," we should not forget — as Émile Benveniste reminds us — that it is both *arbitrary* and *necessary*: there is an *arbitrary* (or unmotivated) relationship between a sign and the object it denotes (the word-chair and the object-chair)⁴² but a *necessary* relationship between the sign and the signified (the word-chair and the idea-chair). There is a natural association between the word and the idea: both are by nature psychic and conceptual.

Now, in the cinema, much the same situation exists: there is a consubstantiality between the signifier and the signified. This is obvious if one is dealing with direct signification, since the image is analogous with its object. But — as we shall see — it is not so obvious at the level of symbolic or metaphorical significations.

Let us first take a look (another look) at what happens at the level of the denotation. Analogical systems, Roland Barthes tells us, are impoverished systems because they almost never involve a combinatory factor. That is as may be. But the cinema is not an analogical system. Film symbols are not produced by the direct relationship be-

tween signifier and signified—though an obvious symbolism does result from that relationship. The image of a chair is not the symbol of the chair of which it is the image. However, in that it relates back to the concept, it does become, to a certain extent, the symbol of the idea-chair. But there is no linguistic significance to be drawn from this strange fact. At this level, the image shows—that is all. It is, as we have said, the "gestalt-sign," the analogon. The image becomes a sign only at the level of the connotations—which do not constitute a conventional or conventionalized system but are created by associations directed by an intuitive logic and by the meaning of the denoted objects or facts.

The concept is directly accessible through the word; the word is "transparent" with the idea it suggests. Yet, however I may "fill out" the word *chair*, that image is only a construction of my mind. Since it serves merely to fix an idea, to give substance to an abstraction, and since it depends on my knowledge, it teaches me nothing but what I already know.

Since words have direct meanings, to name something is as good as eclipsing it through its evocation, retaining only the sign value which it confers on the verbal structure. At the moment of seizing them, they slip away. And since the world is consequent upon what I am myself, it is not surprising that I constantly project myself into it, that it is *me myself* whom I always find in *it*. The world becomes the storehouse of my aspirations and feelings; it reflects them like a mirror: the mountain is "majestic," the sea is "angry," the landscape is "melancholy," etc. Objects are just a collection of signs for me to discover in them by lending them a meaning. They give me back what I put into them.

The danger is that by dint of thinking about something it very quickly becomes eclipsed by the significations given to it, to

the extent of seeming merely to be its substratum. The world disappears behind a representation which runs the risk of being taken for the "essence" of things, whereas it is merely an image with myriad hues provided by the semantic density of an equally dense literature.

However much one might like to consider the object "as it is," one is forced to *name* it. Thus at best one can only "free" it from the significations which normal word usage confers on it. However, a sustained effort is required, a kind of relative objectivity, in order to strip away the received ideas which encrust it, in order to capture it in its individual "corporeity."

In the cinema, on the other hand, the image *shows* its object. However, it does not stop merely at showing it; it presents it with all its peculiarities, its own individual characteristics. It is not *a* chair which is presented to me but a *particular* chair and, better still, a *certain aspect* of that chair related to a *certain aspect* of the objects next to it. Thus if I attain the concept through it and by it, it is not without retaining from it *first of all* everything which distinguishes and characterizes it, everything which signifies it *at that particular moment*, i.e., in a progression of which it finds itself part. Not only is the object presented to me and imposed on my mind, not only does it stop being the effect of a fiction created from known data, but as part of a complex of unique relationships it imparts a totally new aspect of itself to me. The image *summons up* the objects. It is a summation of reality, a *materialized invocation* which suddenly assumes a new and different meaning. Thus the film image always forces us to think *about* the objects which it shows, at the same time as it forces us to think *with* them in the order of the story and the resulting connotations. At the level of actual representation, denotation is already a message whose code is provided by the reorga-

nization and restructuring which the field of view and the framing of that field of view impose on what they contain.

Yet this involves not just objects. There is also the involvement of characters. The character values released by the narrative merge together with the description of the events. These are descriptive elements, *expressions* rather than significations.

When Merleau-Ponty says that "in our physical attitude we must not say that only the signs of anger and love are presented to the audience and that others are understood indirectly through an interpretation of these signs; we must say that others are presented to me through obvious behavior patterns," he is merely observing that in human attitudes, sign and behavior are one and the same. Signs are no more than abstractions. Far from being *presented* to the audience, they are *inferred* from behavior which is understood from the start. Yet, though human signs are contained within man himself, the signs of objects are projected by man onto the objects.

Objects have no signification in themselves—other than the signification of existing, being what they are. Now, in the cinema, they are actually *present*, with all their density and stillness; they *exist* before they have meaning. And the relative nature of this meaning becomes clearer when we consider that these same objects may have totally different meanings at different moments in the same film (we are referring here to the direct meaning of the objects, not the metaphorical or allusive meaning of their connotations). The filmmaker finds it much easier to signify using these facts if the particular signification does not reduce the facts to the temporary meaning he is ascribing to them.

Having said that, it is clear that *one* film image is not a means of expression, in the same sense as a painting which recomposes and completely reconstructs the world in

order to extract its significant qualities; and we know that the "overly composed" images of Expressionism border on painting.

Even so, as we have seen, *one* image can be *expressive*. It does not merely repeat the world, as Roger Munier would have us believe.⁴³ But two or more images laid end to end *haphazardly* are *already* a means of expression: they establish certain relationships, suggest certain links, and *organize themselves into a narrative*.

The images of a woman sitting in a bar, the images of a man staring into space, tell us nothing but what they show us. But if I splice them together and show a woman sitting, a man staring with a diamond ring on one finger of his hand, I have not merely described the action of staring; I have also suggested a character at the same time. If, using the same images, I show a woman sitting, a man staring, and a split skirt revealing an expanse of thigh, in describing exactly the same action I have signified something totally different.⁴⁴

Thus if verbal signification is composed of a relationship of signs, film signification is composed of a relationship of facts. But whereas words are already significant in their own terms, facts are not signs and, by the same token, neither are the images which present them. In other words, film signification in the linguistic sense is a circumstantial factor. As for direct signification, this is nothing more than the development of a meaning inherent within a certain *form*—the development of a sign which, upon occasion, may be revelatory. But it is never "signification" in the true sense.

Thus in the cinema, as in linguistics, the signified is consubstantial with the signifier, since *the signifier is never one image, one concrete object, but a relationship*. To say that the image is a sign or a symbol is not strictly accurate, if one means that its value must be self-supportive. Film signification

is signless signification, in the sense that *the actual sign is a concept, a logical function*. Yet signification is necessarily related to an object (the diamond or the skirt) which then *acts as a sign* by virtue of the symbolic value it acquires. The image *assumes* the quality of a sign, though "essentially" it is not one "in-itself."

We have made repeated reference to this without being able to go into detail—since this would presuppose a knowledge of this entire study. At this point, however, we can afford to attempt a resolution of this problem, which confuses a great many people.

To do this, we shall be referring to the arguments which Madame Dreyfus put during a symposium on "the cinema and language" at the École Nationale de Sèvres in July 1963. They are substantially the same arguments she made to Claude Lévi-Strauss a year earlier.⁴⁵ Though somewhat subtler than Cohen-Séat's ideas, they nevertheless hinge on the same question, which is, that no systematic transposition of the linguistic model can be found in any other area of signification, that there is no equivalent semiotic function, and therefore that there can be no language code which is not language. We have already pointed out that though there is no formal equivalence between film language and actual language, there is at least the similarity that they both have access to meaning through the use of signs or symbols, forming—each individually—a signifying structure, i.e., a *language* in the sense that most linguists and all contemporary semiologists use the word.

In *L'Être et le Néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), Sartre reminds us that "language is originally being-for-another," that is, it assumes the dual function generally recognized as the communication of signifiers and the expression of the subject. Now, for Mme. Dreyfus, language is not a particular way of signifying; it is signification itself which is a modality of language. "Lan-

guage," she writes, "is a unique function of its type. It may serve as a reference for other functions; but it has no real equivalent. . . . Only language signifies, in the true sense of the word. But, there again, it does not signify the object, merely that aspect of the object which is intelligible—its meaning. . . . Linguistic signs do not exist in their own right, since their essences are identified with their signification. They are nothing except what they refer to—which is not a being but a meaning."

We are in complete agreement in considering the word as "transparent with meaning," referring directly to that meaning. But, as we observed in the note [42] concerning Brice Parain, meaning itself is relative to a being, something without which it would not have the meaning ascribed to it.

Mme. Dreyfus goes on: "Since the sign is a sign only because it carries meaning, sound can only be material for a purely material perceptible sound which, if it were no more than this, would cease to be a sign, since it is a sign only by virtue of its ability to suppress its perceptible and material nature in favor of the meaning to which it relates." To put it another way, the word tends to make us put its own sound structure behind it for the sole purpose of the meaning. It is (or should be) merely a sign devoid of any perceptible quality, the idea being its sole consideration. For Mme. Dreyfus, the word is a *written sign*, nothing more. Now, a written sign is merely the transcription of the word whose original values are essentially oral and, therefore, acoustic. What she says is true as far as utilitarian signification or, for the sake of argument, fictional narrative is concerned (to the extent that it is *written*) but untrue at the level of *spoken* language; and even more so at the level of *poetry*, where the plasticity of the word (its sound material) plays a no less significant role than its direct signification with which it is and remains "transparent."

It is by basing her argument on this necessary transparency, which she considers as the essential characteristic of the linguistic sign, that Mme. Dreyfus proves that the cinema is not a language. "The image," she says, "is presented in all its opacity as an object and reveals nothing through its transparency. . . . If the image were a simple sign, it would disappear at the very moment it appeared, in order to relate to its linguistic signification. However, it cannot do this, because it is not a sound, but an image."⁴⁶

It is obvious that the film image is not a simple sign. Yet in statements such as these there is a hint of Prudhommesque syllogism, already elaborated by M. Cohen-Séat, of the type: All mountains have peaks; this mountain has no peak; therefore it is not a mountain. Mme. Dreyfus, however, recognizes that "the image, because it is an image, duplicates its representational meaning, that is, its own expressivity, with a secondary signification, a secondary expressivity which is that of language proper." Yet this secondary expressivity depends on the exclusive use of a symbol which can never be a sign: "The external nature of meaning puts it back into the subjectivism of symbolism. Symbolism and not sign, since the image can never become completely submerged, suppressed in favor of the meaning toward which it is projected: images are taken for both what they are and what they signify. The cinematic art becomes a symbolic art and can recover its objectivity only through the general application of symbols which it invents or borrows from a preexisting symbolic structure—mythology or psychoanalysis."

Thus, because it can "never be completely submerged, suppressed in favor of the meaning," the film image is not a sign. Now, though in linguistics sign and symbol are two separate entities, in the cinema they are, as we have seen, one and the same. Or, to put it another way, every sign is not nec-

essarily a symbol, but all symbols are employed as signs.

Mme. Dreyfus concludes from her observations that either "the image suggests or evokes because it is *unable* to express accurately—which explains its equivocal nature and its inferiority as compared with language proper" or else "it is not equivocal; it is superdeterminate; it is capable of expressing *anything*." And Bernard Pingaud, who takes these ideas a step further, adds: "With the exception of their real analogies, it is clear what they (the objects) mean, and the more this knowledge is obvious, the more the object loses its value, its specific quality, with the effect that film would appear to be condemned either to the opacity of a well-developed meaning or to the clarity of an underdeveloped meaning. It is either a symbol or a mystery."⁴⁷

It would seem that for these authors the film symbol belongs uniquely to those films where a kiss is love, a broken cup is jealousy, a deserted island is loneliness, etc. And indeed, Bernard Pingaud informs us that "literary cinema is represented by the type of film which tries to avoid symbolism," adding that "the people walking along the beach in *Amiche*, the island sequences in *L'Avventura*, give me the same feeling of completeness and ambiguity as the action of watching another person." However, though his last statement is reasonable enough, Pingaud omits to point out that Antonioni is using a symbolic and allusive code throughout his films. We may well wonder which of our contemporary directors would dare to use, as valid signifiers, the aforementioned clichés, which once were real enough but whose meaning has become devalued by overuse. Even so, we must be careful not to confuse actual symbols and the symbolic code.

In point of fact, images are neither indeterminate nor overdeterminate. They are, quite simply, determinative. Though in lit-

erature the meaning is to be found *behind* the words, in the cinema it does not exist *behind* the images. It may exist *within* the images, i.e., within their compositional structures, within the resultant pictorial symbolism, but for the most part and more particularly, it exists *between* the images.

In the example from *Potemkin*, it is not the pince-nez which is significant but the relationship of the pince-nez with the images showing the sailors throwing Smirnov overboard. The pince-nez becomes a sign only because the concepts implied by this relationship are automatically related to it. In other words, the *image-sign is merely the consequence of the objectification of a concept implied by an association of which it is one of the elements*. It thereby comes to symbolize the concept, serving both as sign and symbol.

Thus the film sign becomes a vehicle of meaning, but not a meaning with which it must be transparent; on the contrary, a meaning which it *reflects* and does so only by reason of its opacity. It is precisely because the image acts as a screen to all meanings other than its own that it is able to sustain a signification *devolving* upon it. It is because the represented object has real presence, a concrete meaning, that it is able to allow itself to be identified temporarily with something it is not.

Once more, images are not signs in the same way as words—signs whose responsibility is to relate to a constantly unvarying meaning. They are signs only insofar as they have the *power to signify*. Because of the concrete nature of the image, the signified idea itself becomes a perceptible quality. Or, to put it another way, meaning is achieved through a perceptible quality which formalizes it. The idea is not merely intelligible; it is effectively perceived as the specific quality of the object.

Because ideas assume a form and a perceptible quality, visual expression—of even the most objective and realistic films—has

poetic values. That is what we were suggesting when we argued that cinema is language only at the level of the work of art.

Yet the most important aspect of language does not lie in the style or means of expression; it lies in the *definitive and indisputable fact that it signifies*, in other words, that it provides access to a *meaning* through the agency of signs or symbols—transparent or otherwise. The whole area of intelligibility is formed from signification, but not all types of linking mechanisms necessarily correspond with the linguistic mechanism. For instance, in the cinema, significations are always motivated. At the analogical level (relative to represented objects or denoted events), the significations are *intrinsic* and *continuous*. The dialogue adds its own *discontinuous* significations, which conflict and contrast with the former. At the symbolic or metaphysical level (relative to the connotations), the significations are *extrinsic* and *discontinuous*.⁴⁸ However arbitrary they may appear, the relationships which they form are always supported by a motivation of some kind.

"Unmotivated" signification occurs only in the case of clichés. The wind blowing the pages of a calendar (for instance) has become a sign in its own right, fixed in its meaning like a linguistic sign, and is therefore arbitrary, unmotivated. That is what makes it unacceptable for the screen nowadays. Thus, though charged with meaning, a film image could never be compared with a *seme*, since the meaning which it reflects is not attached to it. A seme has a definite, limited meaning, despite the modalities which it presupposes: the semantic density of a word is always related to its normal meaning. On the other hand, the meaning of images is indefinable from the outset, since it is relative to infinitely variable combinations by virtue of the extreme variety of their forms and contents.

The effect of this combinatory freedom is

that film expression could never be governed by a lexicology, in the sense that though the image has a definite semantic value, this value is not related to any definition capable of guaranteeing it the universality of the sign whose signification it assumes temporarily. Now, language codes presuppose both lexical semantics and semiology. One may say, therefore, in the final analysis that, though the cinema *is* a code at the semiotic level, *it is not a code* at the level of formal semantics.

It is impossible for there to be a film grammar, for the very good reason that all grammars are based on fixed values, on the unity and conventionality of signs. They can only govern modalities relating to these basic fixed values. Any attempt in this direction has ended in failure, and indeed anyone who claims he can submit the cinema to the laws of grammar has a poor understanding of the expressive and semiotic conditions of motion pictures. Since it does not operate with previously established signs, the cinema does not presuppose any a priori grammatical rules. Even syntactical rules are unreliable. They may be applied to a particular aesthetic or stylistic principle, but never to the language of film as a whole.

That is why when critics, befuddled by these notions of grammatical or syntactical rules, whose enthusiasm for the cinema has crammed their heads with *what has already been done* instead of stimulating them to discover *what can be done* using one or two basic principles—when they praise Antonioni, Godard, and the like for overthrowing the rules of cinema, I feel constrained to ask them: what rules? They may be overthrowing conventions, no better or worse than any other, but only to replace them with other new conventions, again essentially no better or worse in themselves. Since all art is necessarily conventional, all artists have the right—and, I maintain, the duty—to manufacture the

conventions they find necessary, i.e., necessary to the expression of the ideas and feelings they may wish to communicate. Provided, that is, that they do communicate them—which they have every chance of doing, as long as they do not stick to the established conventions; otherwise they risk spoiling their work.

As we come to the end of this study, that is the only rule of technique which it is possible to establish with any certainty, for the simple reason that there are no others. For we must be careful not to confuse rules of aesthetics with these practical rules, relating to the technical conditions of directing and imposed by their very technical nature. The art consists in exploiting to the full these rules and regulations, submitting one's technique to the requirements of the expression—and not the other way round.

To conclude our examination of the formal difference between the linking mechanisms and structures of film language and those of genuine language, a difference which means they cannot be compared either on the syntactical level or the grammatical level, we should single out the essential aspect of an expression as much visual as verbal: the *metaphor*, proving that there is *no common ground*, other than signification, between what might be called metaphor in the cinema and its counterpart in everyday language.

Though we continually make use of this blessed term—with reason, because of what it implies—we have already said that there can be no such thing as metaphor in the cinema, in the sense of an expression similar to what metaphor is in literature. In fact, metaphor implies analogical substitution. For instance, in the metaphorical image a “leaf of paper,” the original term of comparison, the leaf on a tree, has completely disappeared. At a much higher level, when Valéry writes of “focs qui picorent” (pecking jibs), he is substituting the

pointed jibs and white sails with the beak and whiteness of seagulls. Now, on the screen, there is never substitution of this sort, merely a comparative association or comparison.

If we consider the two great forms of verbal expression, metaphor and metonymy, we can say, following Jakobson,⁴⁹ that metaphor is paradigmatic, in other words, it is a system of expression depending on substitution for its effect, whereas metonymy is syntagmatic, in other words, it is a system of expression depending on contiguity for its effect.

The majority of film metaphors use synecdoche, that is, a form in which the part replaces the whole, such as Dr. Smirnov's pince-nez indicating his presence or absence; the drowned corpse in *Paisan*, which represents others like it, victims of a wartime atrocity, symbolizing the atrocity itself by acting as evidence; or the balloon trapped in the telegraph wires suggesting the abduction of the little girl, etc.

Yet, though it substitutes a part for the whole, synecdoche is still a form of metonymy in the sense that the contiguity of the part to the whole remains obvious. As Jakobson reminds us, all forms of synecdoche are part of metonymy, as indeed are all comparative forms, since there is an association between two contiguous terms.

In the famous lion sequence in *Potemkin*, the metaphor (or paradigmatic substitution) is achieved by means of the comparative association of three contiguous lions following each other in sequence in different poses. But here again we are dealing with a syntagmatic structure.

From which we can say, generally speaking, that *film metaphor*—or what we understand as such—is no more than a particular form of metonymy, which is contrary to what happens in verbal expression, where metaphor and metonymy are fundamentally different (though both contain substitutive

significations). This means that anything in the cinema which appears to have a paradigmatic function is in fact merely a particular effect of the syntagmatic function.

In the example from *Variety* (the lowering of the curtain), there is obviously neither comparison nor synecdoche, neither metaphor nor metonymy; the form is allusive, that is all. When Peter Lorre sees the reflected image of the little girl in the shop window, with the display of knives framing him (in *M*), the symbol is purely an effect of metonymy.

In the "comparative association" which generates a metaphorical idea, there is not just comparison but also an actual association of elements, an exchange of significations, where each borrows from the other. Thus in the example from *Mother* we have frequently quoted, the image of the ice breaking up symbolizes less the people's uprising than the idea of the uprising projected into the images by giving them a meaning which it reclaims in return. By providing them with a sign value which is theirs by right, the idea of revolt becomes apparent through these images. The world of "breaking ice" is delivered in its immanence. It becomes a metaphorical sign only because the revolt happens to be taking place at that point and lends its intention to it: the signified becomes apparent in the sign by providing it with the power of signifying, i.e., by endowing it with its own significations.

This is how the "world, in its own terms and in the immanent expression of itself, puts itself at the service of a logos" (Roger Munier). Or, to quote my own words, "reality becomes the element of its own narration."

According to my theories (or, to be less grand about it, my ideas) concerning perception, the act of consciousness which "structures" objects is already a discourse, a logos. It is "for-me" a means of existing

in the world, of communicating to the world, of presenting to myself a discourse *about* the world: a discourse which appears as an expression of the world but one which has a duty to me to be what it is, into which I can completely project myself, the means to suggest the question and answer by creating the spectacle of my own illusions.

In the cinema, whatever the forms or styles employed, reality organizes itself into a logos. What is important is to ensure that reality, subject to the requirements of the logos, does not become a caricature of reality and that the logos does not become a cheap restatement of a meaning which reality expresses in any case. There is a whole gray area between contrived, theatrical reality and impersonal observation, which is where cinematic creation finds its place, a creation which must not be the servant of signification, merely the act of signifying.

Film Logic

Contrary to what happens in other areas, the art of film is not (and cannot be) based on purely aesthetic principles; its foundations are the logical and psychological functions of which these principles are merely the formal application. We believe we have devoted enough time to the psychological conditions; all that remains is for us to discover the nature of film logic.

The logician does not ponder the nature of things, any more than he does the reality of the physical world. Logic sets out to analyze signification and point out where misinterpretations caused by a faulty use of language lead to false premises. Yet it can only do this to the extent that language uses forms whose structures are governed by grammar and syntax and to the extent that the signs which represent objects have only a conventional association with the objects they represent. When the signs are consubstantial with the objects, the nature of the

objects inevitably becomes involved: the appropriate logic is no longer the formal logic of language, the symbolic language of propositions, but the natural logic of concrete facts. Bertrand Russell writes: "Something like preciseness or impreciseness cannot exist outside the context of a cognitive or mechanical means of representation; things are what they are—no more nor less." To which Adam Schaff adds: "Objects in themselves are neither precise nor imprecise; just as they are neither true nor false; they are, quite simply, objects. On the other hand, the knowledge we have of them and the verbal constructions we use to express them can quite easily be imprecise, just as they can be true or false. In the case of impreciseness and in the case of truth, it is a question of the nature of the *relations* which exist between knowledge (reduced to a cognitive-linguistic unit) and reality, not the actual nature of reality."⁵⁰

Thus language gives rise to a number of logical problems among which is the problem of noncontradiction—to the extent that it speaks *about* things using conventional and abstract symbols. And it is essential that these symbols (and their meaning) be integrated into the norms of the world which they claim to represent.

Logistics attempts to eliminate potential non-senses (whose rules of syntax do not preclude linguistic propositions) by reducing them to an abstract, simplified pattern, eliminating everything which is not an attributive proposition. In a sense, it is an impoverishment of language; but this logical language—perfect only in the sense of an ideal construction—is interesting only on a scientific level (which, of course, is the reason it was conceived in the first place).

Looking at it another way, one could just as easily eliminate the problem of impreciseness in expression by introducing a bi-univocal relationship between the expression and the fact. This would eliminate

the possibility of impressions associated with a relationship between an expression and a number of imperfectly determined facts. However, as Adam Schaff writes, "If, by definition, the word is meant to represent an individual object, thereby preempting the possibility of generalization, then two miracles are accomplished at the same time: first the whole system of abstract thinking established during the course of history is consigned to oblivion and then the memory of an infinite number of words (as well as the production of an infinite number of words) corresponding with an unlimited number of objects and phenomena, is established." Ryle calls it the "Fido-fido" theory: the word *fido* corresponding with the dog Fido.

Now, to some extent this is the way the cinema operates, speaking not with words but with objects and, at the same time, maintaining the possibility of generalizing from individual cases and "making abstractions" from concrete facts. In a film, only "factual propositions" can exist, in the sense that all linguistic facts are consequent upon the events described and the situations denoted. The signifying values are dependent on the specific arrangement of such propositions, an arrangement which cannot be anything but logical—otherwise the facts would appear unreal or absurd.

However, as Bertrand Russell reminds us, "the representation of the object is *imprecise* when the relation of the representing system to the represented system is not bi-univocal, but unique and multivalent." Now, though on the screen there is a constant bi-univocality between the object and the image of that object, the symbolic or metaphorical significations are univocal and multivalent. Which leads us to conclude that though of all the codes of communication the cinema is the most precise in what it shows, it is the most imprecise in what it suggests.

At the level of the denoted facts, the logic of film is quite simply the logic of everyday life, experienced reality: that much is obvious. And there can be no errors of category, since category is not being used as a subject in itself, merely as a tool.⁵¹ Any absurd proposition is immediately seen as absurd or is forced to hide its tracks, as in the verbal code. Non-sense, immediately recognized as such, provides an inexhaustible supply of material for slapstick comedy films. But it is an *absurdity of the world*, not a verbal absurdity—a quality which scandalized a great many people when Mack Sennett's films were first shown. The word *dog* does not bite; nor does it fly. But we can talk of a flying dog, just as we can talk of the "Cheshire cat vanishing into its own smile" in *Alice in Wonderland*; it is merely a fanciful or absurd concept. However, when a real dog flies through the air like a bird, when a hunter kills a fish, when a swimmer swims through snow, then people start to become scandalized: *reality is being tampered with*. "That's silly," they say and dismiss the idea.

Yet, though the logic of facts may be obvious, though it demands that events be credible at very least, the logic of association produced by relating facts to objects in a given sequence of time is much less easy to define. The associations have the same logical value as the relationships would have as the consequence of what they suggest in the audience's mind. The connotations must therefore be directed by the meaning of the denoted objects, in such a way that their very imprecision may be utilized with precision—only to a limited extent, however. The same is true of them as of metaphors in poetry. There is no rule governing their creation, apart from the intuition of the poet: they are valid or they are not; the current flows or it does not; it all depends on the talent of the creator—and on the intelligence or cultural awareness of the reader.

That is why I have grave reservations about a syntax for the cinema. The absence of genuine signs cancels out the need for morphology; and if all syntax is syntagmatic (to use Saussure's terminology), it does not seem possible to govern, with any degree of accuracy, structures which are self-governing through their content and motivated solely by the (infinitely variable) meaning they give to the objects they express.

What one can say, however—leading us back to the definition of metaphor—is that, forming part of an *art of reality*, allusion, metaphor, and metonymy must have an *objective basis*. They must derive from the evidence of the objects, the evidence of the facts, since the cinema, even in an "unreal" film, uses concrete reality as its basic material.

Returning to the examples we quoted a while back, we might ask: What could be more normal than that someone's glasses should fall off when he loses his balance? What could be more normal than that a drowned man should be floating in a river into which dozens of partisans have been thrown? What could be more normal than that a child in being hit should let go of the ball and balloon she is holding, that the balloon should drift away and the ball should roll across the floor? What could be more natural than that a river in spate should be carrying melting ice? But what could be more contrived than to associate *arbitrarily three different* stone lions in order to produce a unifying idea and, from that idea, a symbolic signification?

Eisenstein's metaphor is undoubtedly cinematic—*in its form. In its conception*, however, it is literary. The filmmaker is applying a concept established a priori which he creates (with a great deal of skill—too much, in fact) into a visual metaphor; whereas he would have been better off extracting ideas from the simple, normal description of *true facts*, using them to create his metaphorical significations, without distorting them.

It is not a rule of syntax but a principle inherent in the very logic of film.

The transition from denotation to connotation—in which the initial signified becomes the signifier of a new, much larger signified—is related to the processes of transference which we examined a while back, that is, to mental restructurations similar to those which syllogism involves.

Relying on the logic of discourse, connotations therefore depend on a level of comprehension and assimilation requiring a certain sophistication. Yet, when this logic coincides with the logic of the objects themselves, comprehension is immediate and direct. We all immediately grasp the meaning of the balloon, the drowned man, the river in flood. As for the pince-nez, the primary meaning—the absence of Smirnov, the humiliation of his character and class—is perfectly understandable. But the secondary implication—the collapse of the social structure of which he, Smirnov, is a qualified representative—demands some rather dialectical thinking. As for the idea of revolt symbolized by the lion rearing up in the representation of three different lions, though it is relatively comprehensible, it contravenes even Eisenstein's own theory about awakening ideas by stimulating emotion. There is indeed an "emotional shock," but there is no genuine emotion, for the whole effect relies on an overelaborate construction, a justification for which must *first of all* be found. The symbol is not immediately assimilable because it is not *natural*.

Critics often talk of metaphors "becoming old-fashioned." Now, unless it becomes a commonplace cliché—which *must never* happen in the cinema, where the use of fixed signs is strictly taboo—a metaphor becomes old-fashioned only to the extent that it is contrived. Natural metaphors never become old-fashioned. The difficulty therefore is in ensuring that while being original, the metaphor is natural, i.e., in di-

rect relation with the event on which it is based, that it is, as we said with regard to editing, *implied by* it and not *applied to* it.

This is, in fact, the source of the constant confusion leading to the assumption that if they are to be comprehensible, the ideas suggested by a film must be simplistic (whereas they must be merely simple and direct, i.e., *true* to the truths presented to us and, as it were, guaranteeing them beyond themselves) or that in order to be original, they must be confused and overelaborate.

The effect of this is that mediocre films employ a kind of code deriving from a conventionalized way of thinking. They form signs with universal appeal by exploiting the excesses of a code relying on archetypes and accepted myths. On the other hand, films of merit (like poetry) create metaphors based on unexpected associations, and to appreciate the subtleties, one must be equally subtle. At the same time, these metaphors, seemingly obscure by reason of their novelty, must be capable of being interpreted and their interpretation must reveal a form perhaps not previously explored but fortified with positive truth. *The objectivity of observation and the subjectivity of vision* must find common ground in the expression of these metaphors.

It is certain that film associations constantly require restructurations of the perceptual field, the integration of a constantly different meaning into continually changing relationships. The perception of a film —i.e., its comprehension—implies the uninterrupted linking of these processes, the constant reestablishing of perceptual systems extended over the succession in time of a series of shots all interrelated and corresponding with each other—processes which rely on the functions of assimilation and distinction which we mentioned in previous chapters.

Contrary to the popular view, the cinema has proved that it requires intellectual

gymnastics of the highest order. The sophistication of the average viewer is evidence of this subtlety.

A silent film whose rhythm seemed intolerably fast in 1924 now seems interminably slow; the symbols indicated by significant closeups are perceived in a much subtler way and the “technique” of these old films is seen nowadays are irritatingly pedantic. And there is no need to dwell on the fact that *Hiroshima, mon amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *8½*, which were unthinkable forty years ago, have had a considerable success. It is not a question of comparing them commercially with *Gidget Goes to Town* or an Elvis Presley film; but, though they are pitched at a level far beyond the comprehension of the average audience, they nevertheless have an audience—and one which is growing daily.⁵²

There is still the problem of alienation, which critics have blown out of all proportion because of the ethical values it brings into question. Yet this is basically a social problem and has nothing whatsoever to do with art in the true sense. Literature in general has never been regarded as pornographic just because there are pornographic books. The alienation of the individual in our modern society is indeed a major problem, but the press, radio, and advertising, written or broadcast propaganda, are infinitely more corrupting than film.

Yet alienation in the true sense occurs only when this “evidence of the world” is taken to be the real world. Film is a game, all the more fascinating for the fact that what is presented in it *appears* to be real. However, though this is the impression it creates, it is not so in fact. The image captivates me as much as the world which it reproduces—*more so*, perhaps, because it gives me something *extra*. Yet it is only an image. I am enchanted by this presence (which is really an absence), this quasi-presence; and I am frustrated by it only if

I assume it to be real. However concrete it may seem, fiction remains fictional. Its presence eludes me but at the same time overwhelms me. It liberates me from my obsessions and offers me an image which is both me and, at the same time, the world: a magical vision of the universe.

The aesthetic attitude is an aspect of *Einfühlung*, an attitude of play, a participation during which we never lose consciousness of being ourselves and in which the fusion of the Self with the object is never complete but is conceded and limited. Ecstasy is the highest level of this obsessional attitude, whereas it is merely the point of departure for the mystical attitude where the individual becomes sublimated in the object of his contemplation.

As we reach the end of this study, we come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as aesthetics in the cinema if by that we mean a body of rules and regulations governing the conditions of the individual film and the qualities which make it what it is.

Interpreted in this way, aesthetic principles are conceivable only in terms of Art in the classical sense, i.e., in terms of a form and representation whose elements, more or less stylized, are subject to laws and rules by reason of their very stylization or whose methods are limited both by their object and by the processes which they employ.

Film forms owe their existence to whatever is represented and to it alone, to the reality which offers, in its image, the means both of representing and transfiguring it. These forms are therefore as varied as life itself, and just as life can never be regulated, so it is with an art which is both subject and object.

Whereas the aim of the classical arts is to signify movement through an absence of movement, life through an absence of life, the responsibility of the cinema is to express

life through life itself. It begins where the others leave off, and it therefore remains unaffected by all their rules and principles.

The fundamental mistake was in trying to force the cinema into the conventional norms of art, as though life could be turned into stone for the purpose of fixing it for all eternity. Art was forced into films in order to prove that they were art, instead of allowing works of art to be created *with* them. All too frequently, the cinema has been forced to create a lifeless, solidified reality, assumed to be sublime, whereas all that was needed was to use the cinema to sublimate living qualities captured in their immanence and pursued through their development.

If the cinema is an art, it is one which stands foursquare against the constraints imposed on it by art. Art doubtless provides access to transcendence, but its responsibility is to lead us there rather than represent it for us and to lead us there through immanence and liberty. The cinema alone is capable of achieving this goal, since it alone has life as its raw material.

Abandoning those stiff and lifeless gods for the joy of movement, artificiality for freedom, and absolute values for relative values, it is an art ultimately worthy of Mankind, one which celebrates the victory of Dionysus over Apollo.

Weaving together time and space, the present and the past, reality and illusion, with one foot in the camp of reportage and observation and the other in storytelling and dream, integrating duration and following the development of beings and things, the cinema of the future will undoubtedly be to the cinema of today infinitely greater than what Joyce and Faulkner are to Paul Bourget. Having been theatrical, pictorial, musical, romantic, the cinema will finally be able to be itself: quite simply, cinematic.

NOTES

Editor's Introduction

1. A measure of this was the studied silence which greeted Mitry's *Semiology*, which even so reveals a great originality and remarkable intelligence.

2. On this whole question of memory and judgment, see François Lebeau's excellent article "Voir, c'est revoir," *24 Images*, no. 12.

3. After the publication of the fourth volume of his *Histoire du Cinéma*, I told Mitry that I considered King Vidor's *Northwest Passage*, to which he had devoted two long pages in praise, not to have stood the test of time. His immediate retort was: "I've just seen the film on television; it didn't work at all!"

I. Preliminaries

1. E.g., made-up gestures, such assign language.

2. The term *sensory content* used by certain logicians and psychologists seems to me a dangerous expression in the sense that it may tend to lead to confusion by introducing the idea of a "content" of consciousness. I understand that it does imply the perceived "sensory data," but I prefer to use the terms *sensory data* and *structured data* which represent the object independently of the actual act of perception or the product of that act.

II. The Film Image

1. Translator's note: from the Greek *hylo*, meaning "matter."

2. From the German verb *erleben*. *Erlebnis* may be translated as "moment of experience or knowledge experienced intuitively."

3. We will return later to this question — to our mind, of capital importance.

4. This idea is still only relative: there are as many different photographs possible as there are different lighting conditions and different emulsions — and therefore possible interpretations and different *meanings*.

5. The same is true when he says, "the field of view presents *itself* . . . , space presents *itself*." It is the camera which presents *them*. They present nothing; they *are*.

6. The represented data already being inherently a "form" in the psychological sense of the

word, one might say that the image is a form of the second degree.

7. The reader can also put down a boring novel, daydream around it, skip pages, or quite simply close the book.

8. See V. Jasset in *Cinéjournal*, October–November 1912.

9. Editor's note: It goes without saying that some of the problems raised here have been solved for the past several years with the invention of image stabilizers and with the appearance of the Steadicam, a hand-held camera system with automatic correction.

10. On the question of depth-of-field and use of focus, see *La Sémiologie en question*, pp. 86–88.

11. Particularly since a composite word presupposes the association both of the terms and their meaning. A "shot sequence" is neither one thing nor the other. One might just as easily say "no-shot-no-sequence." Take your pick.

12. Editor's note: This interpretation runs counter to the way film is discussed in certain intellectual circles and universities. One may be justified in wondering whether, in taking this position, Mitry was not several years ahead of his time.

13. Which has nothing to do with the projection screen; it refers to any visual obstacle which acts as a screen between our vision and the object of our vision.

14. Since the frame of the screen and the frame of the image are homologous, there is no need to make a distinction between them.

15. It should be noted in passing that these are only conceptual notions. A two-dimensional universe is inconceivable. There is no such thing as an "absolute surface." A surface is always the surface of something. The surface has no depth — only the body of which it is the surface. The one cannot exist without the other.

16. This, of course, is not the fourth dimension of a space-time continuum, the so-called Universe of Minkowski, a quadratic form with differentials of four variables, one of which is time, in which space, as such, has only three dimensions, those of the three other variables; but an imaginary space with four spatial dimensions. However, if we are to accept Henri Poincaré's notion

that "nothing prevents us from presuming that there could be a being with the same mind as ourselves, the same sense-organs as ourselves, in a world in which light reached him only when it has passed through a complicated refracting medium. The two indices which help us appreciate distance would cease to be connected in any constant sense. A being who trained his senses in such a world would no doubt think of total visual space in terms of four dimensions" (*La Science et l'hypothèse*).

17. The best seats (at least for an audience with normal vision) would seem to be between the fifth and fifteenth rows back from the screen — though these considerations depend on the dimensional relationships between the auditorium and the screen and the individual position of each audience member; they are valid only as generalizations.

18. This also happens in front of a tiny television screen. A film seen on television and from the first few rows in the cinema does not produce the same effect. It is not the same film at all.

19. The mechanism of constancy is also related to our experience of space. However, its effect is unconscious—to a certain extent, automatic. I am making comparison here between constancy and a conscious notion produced by reason and judgment alone.

III. Rhythm and Montage

1. Dziga-Vertov's real name was Yuri Kaufman.
2. *La Correspondance entre les arts* (Flammarion).

3. In *La Folie du Docteur Tube*, shot in 1915, Abel Gance, imagining a scientist discovering the light-refracting properties of glass, reveals to us a world through a series of diffractions and reflections from concave or convex mirrors. The camera suddenly becomes used "subjectively" for the first time.

4. *Le Temps*, June 4, 1919.

5. *Les Cahiers du mois*, special issue on the cinema, 1925.

6. Léopold Survage was born in Moscow on August 12, 1879, of Scandinavian parents. He was educated in France and therefore is counted among French painters.

7. In 1914, color was achieved by a trichromatic process (discovered by Gaumont and Kinemacolor) using three lenses equipped with their own selective screens.

8. Vicking Eggeling was a "constructivist" painter. Born in Luen, Sweden, in 1886, he was in Paris before 1914, then in Zurich during the war, and in Berlin from 1919 onward. He died ten days after the first showing of his film in Berlin on May 19, 1925.

9. In *Schémas*, no. 1 (1925).

10. "Musique plastique," *Cinéma-Ciné pour Tous*, 1926.

11. Henri Fescourt and J. L. Bouquet, "Sensations ou sentiments?" *Cinéma-Ciné pour Tous*, 1926.

12. "La Musique des images," *L'Art Cinématographique* (Alcan, 1927).

13. We should disregard for the time being the abstract films of Len Lye, Rischinger, and MacLaren, which, based upon music, take their justification from it and pose rather different problems. We shall come back to them when we come to speak of the relationships of music and film.

14. We mean object here in its psychological sense, i.e., "what is perceived" with, for that reason, the qualities of an "object."

15. Author's italics.

16. We do not intend to consider synchronization or even postsynchronization (which sometimes consists in editing together, for the same shot, the sound of the second "take" with the picture of the fourth) and the vast number of technical details—since technique is not encompassed within our subject. We refer the reader to the various standard works on the subject, notably the publications of the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques and Michel Wynn's *La Technique du cinéma* (Eyrolles, 1956).

17. A film, as we have said, exists only in the finished, projected images. Thus the preexistence we are discussing here has no meaning except for the filmmaker.

18. Indeed, a whole is not just superior to the sum of its parts; it is *something else* entirely.

19. That leads us back to the Dziga-Vertov montage. If it were merely a matter of signifying ideas, this kind of analogy would be perfectly possible. But then concrete reality would not be represented, since the descriptive continuity would have lost all its meaning.

20. In fact, his "cinedialectics" were formulated after *Potemkin* and *October* in 1928. But, as we can see from his writings, they were merely the "intellectualization" of the montage of attraction and an extreme generalization of the

image-sign considered as an independent dialectical form.

21. See *Esprit*, April 1959 and June 1960.
22. *Cinema Nuovo*, March 15, 1954.
23. In *L'Écran Français*, October 3, 1945.
24. In *La Revue du Cinéma*, April 1948.

IV. Rhythm and Moving Shots

1. In *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 51.
 2. In *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 51.
 3. Interview with Orson Welles, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 84.

4. An article on *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* in *Télérama*.

5. The use of the past perfect or historic perfect is justified by the fact that they express a "mythical" past. In another context, this would not be possible. This is true of a great many silent films.

6. By which we mean editing considered as a relationship of static shots.

7. This analysis is more detailed in Mitry's 1978 book on Eisenstein (see *Eisenstein*, pp. 149-71).

8. The quotations from Bazin are taken from his study *Orson Welles* and his work on William Wyler in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*

9. An editing console which allows the film to be stopped, started, and reversed with fast wind forward or backward.

10. Editor's note: The format most widely used nowadays is 1 x 1.65.

11. Which he went on to realize in *Cœur fidèle*, shot some two years later.

12. It is clear that subsequently William Wyler became merely a good commercial director, having been in his time (between 1935 and 1945) one of the greats of Hollywood. It is strange that the critics who pretend to despise him now are the same people who shouted "down with Ford, up with Wyler" ten or so years ago when it was fashionable to denounce John Ford. In the same context, these same idiots would have shouted "down with Corneille" for having written *Agésilas*. Since we are not in the business of making prescriptions or stupid generalizations, we should not forget what Wyler once was, even though we might deplore what he has become. As well as one or two worthy films, he directed three masterpieces: *One-Way Street*, *The Little Foxes*, and *Jezebel*. History makes all other considerations quite irrelevant.

13. Let us not forget that in the previous shot the camera is already *behind* Henry Fonda but at waist level. Fonda is seen in three-quarter profile in the foreground while, through the open door, Bette Davis can be seen completing her toilette. The shot change corresponds with a simple change of axis as if the lens had been changed. It is almost a "reframing."

14. The impression *may* be more marked for the passenger in the plane than for the audience in the cinema, but this is because of feelings of fear and anxiety, which are not shared by the audience *knowing* itself not to be at risk. The passenger is *involved* in the movement, whereas the audience, involved with a "perceived fiction," only participates in intention (taking for granted that the pilot is *used* to this kind of maneuver and does not feel any emotion associated with panic).

15. Wertheimer, *Experimentelle studien über das Sehen von Bewegung*.

16. I.e., the collection of objects, relationships, and perspectives on which the "anchor" point is built.

17. On 16 mm because the stock is so easy to use—screens and projectors of the standard (35-mm) gauge being fixed. The duration of the shots must be at least five minutes.

18. It is in this way that in future interspace travel, where the absence of weight might presuppose all possible directions, the human being will still retain the notion of high and low. Referring to his own body and his immediate field of action, he will create a spatial level—temporary but definite—correlative to the field of action with which he is in contact and to the responses which his motor intentions will receive from such a context. The odd thing is that he will be able to change at will his spatial level by changing his axis relative to the previous field of action, thereby creating, each time, a new series of relations between him and the immediate world—rather in the way that making an about-turn down here changes our right-to-left orientation.

19. A striking example of this is Hitchcock's *Marnie*. The colored hallucinations of the young woman are perceived and understood as genuinely subjective because they are associated with Marnie's imagination and memory. They do not "alter" reality (as in the pink bedroom); they merely interpret it.

20. "La Question des sous-titres," *Ciné Pour Tous*, January 1922.

21. In *Zhizn Iskusstva*, August 5, 1928.

22. "L'Avenir du film parlant," *Pour Vous*, June 6, 1929.

23. In *Cahiers du Film*, December 15, 1933.

24. "Portrait de René Clair," *Le Magazine du Spectacle*, no. 1 (1945).

25. Pierre Henry, "Vers un art du cinéma sonore," in *Cinéma-Ciné pour tous*, May 1929. Pudovkin's film was released commercially only in a silent form, in 1933 with the title *A Simple Case*.

26. In *Pour Vous*, June 1929.

27. Reading over Eisenstein's essays (*Film Form* and *The Film Sense*), one can see that, in his view, it is the other way round. Eisenstein calls horizontal montage what we are calling vertical montage. This is because, in the USSR, editing tables operate on the horizontal rather than the vertical plane: sound and image therefore seem to be (vertically) superimposed with the images running horizontally. In France and the United States (Mauritone and Moviola), they operate vertically (like projectors). We think our description to be more accurate in the sense that it relates to the way we normally think of film traveling—in projection and shooting.

28. The *Titanic* went down during the night of April 12, 1912, during its maiden voyage, after colliding with an iceberg. There were very few survivors.

29. In Jean-Jacques Bernard's "theater of silence," where the playwright expresses himself more through what is not said (but implied through the speeches), the silence derives from silent objects rather than from an absence of dialogue or a pause between words.

30. Indeed, all that is ever said of this area of acting is that the actor is forced to project his voice and amplify his movements "so that they will be able to see it in the gods." This is obviously somewhat simplistic.

31. Author's italics.

32. André Bazin, in *France Observateur*, October 30, 1958.

33. Bernard Pingaud, "Alain Resnais," *Premier Plan*, no. 18.

34. We are obviously not talking about sound counter point used for symbolic purposes: the engine whistle during the hanging sequence in

La Bataille du rail, the lamp gradually going out as Susan's voice gets weaker and weaker in *Citizen Kane*. There are numerous examples of this kind. Yet sound effects have rarely been used for any other purpose.

35. Every history of the cinema and every article on the subject of film music has for the last twenty years made the same mistake: viz., "In 1922, Abel Gance asked Arthur Honegger to make a musical adaptation of *La Roue* to contain pieces of music composed specially to support the images by following their rhythm, in particular during the famous fast cut sequence of the speeding train. This fragment finally became known as *Pacific 231*." The first phrase is correct, but the second could not be further from the truth. Honegger ran out of time and did not compose a single note for *La Roue*. He merely assembled an arrangement with special sound effects (Honegger told me this himself). Gance's film no doubt inspired him, but his symphonic movement was not conceived or composed for Gance. *La Roue* was presented in November 1922, while *Pacific 231*'s premiere was not until April 6, 1924 (at the Opéra). Though I pointed this out some ten years ago, critics have still been churning out the same nonsense. I suppose fiction is more attractive than the truth.

36. "Sur le rôle de la musique au cinéma," *Cinémagazine*, 1926.

37. Animals dancing—bears standing on their hindlegs, performing dogs—are always grotesque in the sense that without knowing why, the animal *conforms* to a behavior pattern imposed on it: its action is *stupid* (in the precise sense of the word).

38. Since MacLaren's films are commercially available (in 16 mm), any enthusiast can obtain a film such as *Begone Dull Care*, project it at his leisure, and perform the experiment we repeated over and over again at IDHEC. Having projected the film (which, complete with its music, is a masterpiece of its kind), it is projected again, this time mute. It completely loses its meaning. Or rather its colored movements lose their justification. Projected backwards or upside down, the colors are just as attractive, just as pleasant to look at, and just as gratuitous. There is nothing obligatory. What was true of Ruttman's *Opus* is also true of MacLaren's and Fischinger's films. This has something in common with Bergson's re-

marks: "we have only to stop up our ears against the sound of the music in a dance hall for the dancers to appear utterly ridiculous" (*Le Rire*). In point of fact, movement is incapable of justifying the rhythm it produces unless it is related to an objectively defined requirement. Then it *accompanies* the music. It is justified by the music. And without the music it is nothing.

39. Rodin's observations about this particular painting are relevant: "Have you noticed the way this *pantomime evolves*? Is it really painting? Or is it theater?" It's hard to tell. You are seeing an artist able, when the mood takes him, to represent not merely momentary gestures but also an *action* (using the term normally employed in the theater). To obtain the right effect, all he needs is to arrange his characters in such a way that the spectator sees first those who *begin the action*, then those who *continue it*, and finally those who *complete it*" (*L'Art*, a series of interviews collected and edited by Paul Gsell, 1911).

40. Paul Dukas, in *Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité*, May 10, 1902.

41. Vincent d'Indy, "Pélléas," *L'Occident*, June 1902.

42. Friedrich Feher was known above all for his interpretation of the part of Francis the student in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1919.

43. Finally produced in 1948.

44. Souriau, *La Correspondance des arts*, p. 133.

45. It was for commercial reasons that the title was used in the first place.

46. To quote Joachim Gasquet's expression (from *Narcisse*).

47. Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves*.

48. In particular, the films under the collective title *Rêverie de Debussy* which I made under contract to the producer. Another experiment, *Symphonie Mécanique*, produced in multiscreen, should in theory have been the most interesting of them all. A first version was conceived in 1950 with Arthur Honegger; the three screens would have allowed us to make the necessary harmonies. But a prolonged illness and the eventual death of the composer put an end to the project. Produced in 1955 starting with the original theme, it seemed that—in the absence of a Honegger or a Stravinsky—concrete music might be capable of producing the necessary rhythms. Consequently, Pierre Boulez wrote the score; but I must confess that it does not really fit. It con-

stantly works against the film, proving that these so-called effects of counterpoint are just not practicable in this sort of exercise, dislocation continually taking the place of the required unity. It is not the composer's work which is at fault but the principle, for which we are as much responsible as he. Moreover, circumstances beyond our control (which we will not go into here) meant that the projection of this triptych in the only cinema equipped for it (Studio 28) was made almost impossible. We were eventually forced to show it in a reduced format on a simple academy screen—which defeated the whole point of the exercise.

49. A striking example of this is to be seen in Alain Resnais's tracking shots (*Toute la mémoire du monde—Hiroshima, mon amour—L'Année dernière à Marienbad*).

50. According to P. Fraisse, the perceptual process lasts between 5/10 and 6/10 of a second *in its entirety*—i.e., about twelve frames. It is our opinion—and certain films prove the point—that a simple shape may be perceived in the space of 1/4 second (six frames). Obviously, the more complex the shape, the longer the time it takes to perceive it. One second may not be long enough to assimilate a wide angle containing a quantity of information (not to mention questions of movement, obviously—the perception of an object in motion takes as long as it takes to complete the movement).

V. Time and Space of the Drama

1. Let us not forget that right up to the end of the silent era, films were projected at fifteen feet per second. Nowadays, at twenty-four feet per second, a reel of 1,000 feet lasts just over ten minutes.

2. "Good actors performed without hurrying, staying in one place, and an effect of growing intensity was achieved. It was wonderful" (V. Jasset, in *Ciné-Journal*, October 1911).

3. This is 1908, let us not forget.

4. Victorin Jasset, "Le Cinéma contemporain," in *Ciné-Journal*, October-November 1911.

5. We find this same theme, somewhat modified, in several silent films and also in several talkies: *Thunder Mountain* (1919), *Stella Dallas* (silent version, 1926; talkie, 1937), *The Way of All Flesh* (1927), etc.

6. Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, vol. 3.

7. It is therefore incorrect to claim, as some critics have, that the first full-length American film was *Judith of Bethulia*, produced by Griffith in 1913 (four reels). This was merely the first full-length film produced by Biograph—though Griffith had earlier directed a trilogy (*The Genesis of Man*, *Prehistoric Times*, and *Primitive Man*), each film being a two-reeler. It is also incorrect to claim that *Quo Vadis* (1912) was the first film longer than an hour. These are clichés supported by myth, not by history.

8. Between 1910 and 1912, a hundred or so theaters belonging to Keith-Proctor or the Vaudeville Company were converted into cinemas. These were the first cinemas with any degree of comfort. And they showed only full-length films—Italian, French, or American.

9. A few years later, Terry Ramsay was to become the first historian of the cinema.

10. A complete list of these films and those responsible, with names, dates, etc., is to be found in the *Filmographie universelle*, published at IDHEC.

11. Louis Aragon, *Anicet ou le panorama, Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1924.

12. Thomas Ince's eldest brother John and younger brother Ralph were also directors. Whereas Ralph directed a number of adventures, mostly set at sea, John had very few good films to his credit.

13. Ince directed very few of the films he produced (more than 600 between 1912 and 1924). Among those he directed were *The Wrath of the Gods*, *Typhoon*, and *The Battle of Gettysburg* (1914) and *The Coward*, *Punishment*, and *Civilization* (1915). Most of them were directed, under his control, by Reginald Barker, Scott Sidney, Walter Edwards, Raymond B. West, etc. The styles therefore are quite different, but the overall aesthetic concept—which was Ince's—was predominant throughout.

14. Along with O. Henry, Bret Harte was one of the most remarkable American writers at the turn of the century. He has been called the Maupassant of the West.

15. That is something Bazin failed to understand, seeing this means of expression as the only "valid" one. It is true that, for him, every image reveals a transcendence of reality when it presents an "in-itself." There is no need to examine further this metaphysical position, which

in any case has been pretty well exhausted in the first half of this book.

16. This kind of development, organized dramatically in a clear continuous way, was possible only because Griffith's film—one of the first full-length films (1915)—lasted over two and a half hours.

17. Cf. *Le Western*, by J.-L. Rieupeyrout (Éditions du Cerf, 1964) and most of the histories of the Far West.

18. Theodore Huff, *Charles Chaplin* (Gallimard, 1953).

19. This type of elliptical image was also used by Thomas Ince, notably in *Civilization* (1916); we see the shadow, playing across the face of a young peasant woman waiting by the side of the road with her children clutched to her bosom, of the pointed helmets and bayonets of the Prussian army on the march.

20. Mitry's italics. André Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," *Esprit*, June-July 1951.

21. *Les Cahiers du film*, December 15, 1933.

22. Editor's note: An unfounded assertion, we are bound to say.

23. Roland Caillois, "Le tragique à la scène et à l'écran," *Revue de Filmologie*, no. 4.

24. Éditions du Cerf, 1964.

25. The version held by the Cinémathèque has even more scenes missing—intentionally or not it is hard to say—than the version shown at the Ursulines in 1926. It lasts only three hours and twenty minutes.

26. J. Domarchi, "Littérature et cinéma," *Cahiers du cinéma*, 1959.

27. This assertion is always true for the cinema as it is. In a darkened auditorium, films are run with no possibility of running back, which gives them a kind of inevitable duration different from that of the novel. All the same, one must allow that the widespread use of video (and to a lesser extent 16 mm) enables us to prove the point in a way not possible a few years ago; with the proviso, however, that the quality of the video image is not that of the big screen and it does not always allow—far from it—a section or sections to be seen again properly.

28. R. Barthes, "Éléments de sémiologie," *Communications*, no. 4 (December 1964).

29. In *Communications*, no. 4 (December 1964).

30. We have seen that the major fault in certain sequences in *October* is due to the fact that

the connotations are—or try to be—explicit; which means that they are tacked onto the action, not contained within it.

31. If it turned out that it was all a dream, then these objections would not hold water. But then the narrative is at fault, because the chain of circumstances must conform with the logic of the dream or, in this case, the logic of reality (cf. *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, *Exterminating Angel*, *Le Chien andalou*, *L'Âge d'or*, etc.).

32. In *Revue de Filmologie*, no. 3 (1948).

33. Henri Agel, "Du film en forme de chronique," *Revue des lettres françaises*, nos. 36-38.

34. Ibid.

35. He is referring to *La Fête espagnole*, shot by Louis Delluc and Germaine Dulac in 1919.

36. Henri Fescourt, "Cheminements," *Artsept*, no. 2 (1963).

37. In *La Femme de nulle part*, directed by Louis Delluc in 1922, a woman who has left her husband returns to the place they lived in together. A young woman, the actual tenant of the villa, is about to run off with her lover, just as the other woman had done. She succeeds in dissuading them. Thus the relationship between past and present is examined for the first time in drama, the young couple being as it were the projection of the past into the future, memory serving as the linking mechanism.

38. *Charlot et la fabulation Chaplinesque* (Editions Universitaires, 1957). It is obvious that these remarks are not relevant to the first Chaplin pictures, directed as genuine ballets—ballets, however, which are choreographic developments of a specific circumstance or moment in time.

39. Bernard Pingaud, "Alain Resnais," *Premier Plan*, no. 18.

40. Among whom there are Ernest Fischer, Emil Utitz, Erich Auerbach, Thomas Munroe, D. W. Gottschalk, Berthold Brecht.

41. Stefan Morawski, "Réalisme catégorie artistique," *Revue Internationale*.

42. Brice Parain writes: "It is not the object which provides the sign with its signification but the sign which forces us to imagine for ourselves an object for its significations." Certainly both sign and signification transcend the signified. Yet I find myself unable to imagine "an object of the signification of the sign" except insofar as the (conceptualized) object gives its meaning to the

sign. I can only imagine the object of the signification of the word *chair* inasmuch as the chair gives the word its *raison d'être* and provides it with a real existence. For a fuller examination of this question, see J. Mitry, *La Sémiologie en question* (Paris, Cerf, 1987), pp. 255-64.

43. We should note that Munier is referring mainly to the *average* photographic image, devoid of any compositional sense. Yet, as we have seen, the average image is already, in itself, composed.

44. It is not important to know whether the signification is obtained through editing together three separate shots or through a single camera movement. The question has nothing to do with style but with the *effect* of signifying. And this example is associated (indirectly) with Kuleshov's experiments. Not only is the object of the observation different, but the observation itself. The intention is quite clear. It is not a question of creating a picture puzzle but of organizing a narrative, following a *potential* action simply by revealing its meaning.

45. In *Mercure de France*, June 1962.

46. Dina Dreyfus, "Cinéma et langage," *Diogène*, July 1961.

47. Pingaud, "Alain Resnais."

48. We use the word *intrinsic* here in the sense which Buyssens uses it; but we prefer to give the word *extrinsic* a much wider and general meaning than he gives it. In fact, for him, an extrinsic signification is an unmotivated signification. For us, it is quite simply a signification imposed "from the outside." Cf. Eric Buyssens, *Les Langages et les discours* (Brussels, Office de Publicité, 1943).

49. Roman Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale* (Éd. de Minuit).

50. Adam Schaff, "Sur la rigueur de l'expression," *Diogène*, July 1961.

51. As Ryle writes in *The Concept of Mind*, "It is because we know how to act and speak and, therefore, have actual experience of acting and speaking that we understand philosophers' errors when they talk about the way we act and speak."

52. When *Citizen Kane* was released in Paris in 1945 it was appreciated only by a handful of fanatics and was a commercial disaster. Rereleased fifteen years later, it was a success.

INDEX

- A bout de souffle* (Godard), 237
abstract painting, 340
accelerated montage, 173–74
L'Acte perceptif et le cinéma (Wallon), 161, 163
adaptations, 55–56, 316–17, 321–24, 326–33; transposition and, 330–32
Les Aventures de Nick Carter (Jasset), 288
aesthetic attitude, 379
aesthetic composition, 75
aesthetic effect, 338
aesthetic perception, 123–24
aesthetics, 1–3, 2, 159, 199, 379; painting and, 2–3
The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema (Mitry), x
Aesthetik des Rhythmus (Meumann), 126
Agel, Henri, 16, 48, 270–71, 355–56
Alexander Nevsky (Eisenstein), 30, 60, 144, 187, 190, 227, 274, 352
Alexandrov, Gregory, 257; “Manifesto of Orchestral Counterpoint,” 230–31
Alexeyev, Sergei, 260; *A Night on Bare Mountain*, 257–58, 260
alienation, 80, 378–79
All Quiet on the Western Front (Milestone), 61, 156–57
Allain, Marcel: *Fantomas*, 289
Allendy, 20
alliteration, 24–25
allusive image, 24–25
ambiguity, 55
Amengual, Barthélémy: *Le Je, le Moi, le Il au cinéma*, 209–10, 212
American music-hall comedy, 309
American shot, 60
Amore in città (Antonioni), 152
analogical relationships, 346, 347
analogon, image as, 43–49, 79, 88, 130, 368
analytic images, 214–15, 246. *See also* subjective camera
anchoring, 221–22
Andrew, Dudley: *The Major Film Theories*, ix
animated films, 254–56, 258, 384n.38; pinboard animation, 258
Annenberg, Max, 288
anticipation, 84
antithesis, use of, 17
Antonioni, Michelangelo, 178, 227, 359, 362, 371; *Amore in città*, 152; *The Red Desert*, 227–29
Aperçus de la littérature américaine (Coindreau), 55
Apollinaire, Guillaume, 112
Arabesque (Dulac), 257
Arabesques (Mitry), 268–70
Arbatov, Boris, 136
architectonic proportion, 108
architecture, 107–108, 301
Arnheim, Rudolf, 2
L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (Lumière brothers), 65, 93, 300
art, 119–20, 149–50, 157, 339, 365; art for art’s sake, 337, 338–39, 357; audiences and, 89–90; definition of, 87; reality and, 364–66; responsibility of the cinema and, 379
L'Art de le geste (d’Udine), 256
Art et réalité au cinéma (Chartier), 91, 161
artificiality. *See* authenticity
artists and artisans, 8–10
The Aryan (Barker and Smith), 295–96
The Aryan (Ince), 90
L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise (Calmette), 278–79
association, 165–66, 168–69, 175, 296, 374, 376, 378; definition of, 165; of image and music, 263–71
associationism, 19
associative relationships, 346–47
assonance, use of, 24–25
Astruc, Alexandre, 230; *Le Rideau Cramoisi*, 239
At Last, That Awful Tooth (G. A. Smith), 92
The Attack on a China Mission (Williamson), 93, 95
The Attack on a Stagecoach, 94
The Attack on Grand Rapids (Porter), 95, 281
L'Auberge rouge, 60
audiovisual structures, 256–60; in animated films, 254–56, 258, 384n.38; in the films of Eisenstein, 260–63; thematic association of image and music, 263–71
auteurs. *See* authorship
authenticity, 50–51, 189, 352, 363. *See also* reality
authorship, xv, 4–5, 8, 10; production and, 10–13; standard production practices and, 4–7
avant-garde cinema, 109–12, 114–17, 349–50, 356; influence of painters on, 112–14; music and, 111–13, 115–16, 117, 118–20
Avenging Conscience (Griffith), 70
Bachelard, Gaston, 104, 266, 269
The Bad Luck of Santa Inez (Barker and Smith), 294–95
Badger, Clarence, 312
Baker, George D., 286, 287, 310
Balázs, Bela, 2
Ballet mécanique (Léger and Murphy), 114
Barker, Reginald: *The Aryan*, 295–96; *The Bad Luck of Santa Inez*, 294–95; *The Fugitive*, 294, 295

- Barrault, Jean-Louis, 12
 Barthes, Roland, 41–43, 127, 343–44, 367
Bâtons, chiffres et lettres (Queneau), 237–38
Battle of Gettysburg (Ince), 90
The Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein), 61, 98, 102, 133, 143, 144, 145–46, 156, 183, 374, 377; rhythm in, 146–50; symbolism in, 39–40, 42, 43, 343, 372
 Baudrier, Yves: *Musique et cinéma*, 252–53
 Bauer, Geo, 99
 Bayer, Raymond: *Le Cinéma et les études humaines*, 121
 Bazin, André, 54, 178–79, 186, 201, 239, 243–44, 307, 314, 317, 318, 322; *Connaissance du cinéma*, 58; *Défense de Rossellini*, 171, 172, 173; on depth-of-field, 192–98; on editing, 155, 175, 176; on essences, 45, 170, 270–71; *Evolution du langage cinématographique*, 169–70; on montage, 172–73; *Ontologie de l'image photographique*, 169; *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, 130, 154–55; on reality, 169–72
 Beaumont, Harry, 312
 Becker, Jacques: *Falbalas*, 208, 209
Beethoven (Gance), 249
 behavioral psychology, 10
Being and Nothingness (Sartre), 370
Belles de nuit, 247
 Benveniste, Émile, 367
 Bergman, Ingmar: *The Silence*, 348–49
 Bergson, Henri-Louis, 19–20, 31, 37, 157, 255; *Le Rire*, 384n.38
 Berthon, 224
The Best Years of Our Lives (Wyler), 196–98
The Big Swallow (Williamson), 93
 Binet, Alfred, 44
 Biograph film company, 94, 277, 283, 286–87, 310, 386n.7
Birth of a Nation (Griffith), 67, 90, 96, 274, 291, 298, 311
The Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche), 268
 Blackton, Stuart, 286, 287; *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag*, 283–87
The Blue Angel (von Sternberg), 232, 309
 Boetticher, Bud: *Seven Men from Now*, 226, 229
 Bondarchuk, Sergei: *Destiny of a Man*, 215
Bonjour, cinéma (Epstein), 71, 207
 boredom, aesthetics of, 362
 Boulez, Pierre, 385n.48
 Bourdet, Yvon: *La Prétendue passivité du spectateur*, 202–203
 Bradley, 31
 Brahms, Johannes: *Hungarian Dances*, 255
 Brecht, Bertolt: *A Little Organum for Theater*, 203–204
 Brelet, Bisèle, 271
 Bremond, Claude, 344
 Bresson, Robert, 364; *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, 329; *Pickpocket*, 252; *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé*, 252
- Breton, André, 25
Brief Encounter, 211–12, 241
Broadway Melody, 231
Broken Blossoms (Griffith), 96, 207, 217, 291, 304, 311, 353–54
Broken Lullaby (Lubitsch), 219
 Brooke, Van Dyke, 286, 287
 Brooks, Richard: *Karamasov*, 227
 Brunswick constant, 75, 81
 Bühlér, 33–34
 Buñuel, Luis: *Un Chien andalou*, 180–81
- cadence, 106
Cahiers du cinéma, 132
 Caillois, Roland, 319–20, 352
 Calmette: *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, 278–79
 camera angle, 60–61; framing and, 92
 camera movement. *See* moving camera
 camera position, 217–18
 Canudo, Ricciotto, 1, 257
Capital versus Labor, 284
 Carlo, Carlo di, 227
 Carné, Marcel: *Le Jour se lève*, 6, 58, 251–52, 314, 361; *Les Enfants du paradis*, 7
Il Carozze d'oro, 226
 Carta, Jean, 152, 204–205
 Casenbroot, Jacques de: *Combourg, visage de Pierre*, 239
 catharsis, 83, 86–87
 Cava, Gregory la: *Private Worlds*, 247
 Caveing, Maurice, 39; "La Dialectique du Concept du Cinéma," 38
 Cendrars, Blaise, 78
C'est arrivé demain (Clair), 11
 Cézanne, Paul, 342
 Chaplin, Charles, 43, 313–14, 357; *The Great Dictator*, 255; *Modern Times*, 179, 255, 347–48
 characters/characterization, 50–51, 55, 56–58, 235, 291–92, 293, 324–26, 327
 Charcot, Jean-Martin, 23
Charlot et la fabrication Chaplinesque (Mitry), 357
 Chartier, Jean-Pierre: *Art et réalité au cinéma*, 91, 161
 chase films, 280, 310
 Chevassu, François: *Le Langage cinématographique*, 180–81, 183
Un Chien andalou (Buñuel), 180–81
 children, cinema and, 25, 202–203
 Chomette, Henri: *Jeux et reflets de la lumière et de la vitesse*, 114
Chronique d'un été (Rouch), 151–52
 Cicero, 120
Le Cid (Corneille), 329
 cinedialectic montage, 139–43, 173, 342–43, 382n.20

- cinema, 83-84, 100-101, 283, 315. *See also* word, image and
 –as an art, viii, 132
 –as anti-art, 86-87
 –dreams and, 38, 82-83, 110, 188, 202
 –essential nature of, 16
 –hypnosis and, 81, 206
 –ideographic writing and, 14
 –language and, viii, x-xi, xiii, xiv-xv, 13-16, 16-19, 38, 42, 58-59, 367-70; criticisms of semiology, 370-74
 –literature and, 9-10, 13-14, 18, 50-51, 158-59, 213-14, 275, 280-81, 289, 324-25, 344; adaptations, 326-33; dialogue in, 245-47; differences between, 333-36; signification and, 49-50, 53-56, 57-59
 –as a means of expression, 13-16, 54, 59, 67, 369
 –as a mirror, 79-80, 85
 –morality and, 283-87, 292-93
 –music and, 11, 107, 111-13, 115-16, 117, 118-20, 121
 –painting and, 54, 72, 73, 122, 123, 299
 –photography and, 72, 73
 –poetry and, 149, 158-59, 294
 –purpose of, 123
 –reality and, 3, 15, 51, 58, 87-88, 366, 375
 –responsibility of, 379
 –rhythm and, 118, 256, 272-73, 274
 –short story and, 297-98
 –as spectacle, 323, 335
 –theater and, xv, 57, 65-66, 67, 160, 162, 204, 232, 235-38, 244-45, 278-80, 296, 314-17, 318-19, 324, 350-52, 359; adaptations, 321-24; spectators in, 320-21; time in the theater, 319-20, 323
 –as a tool of scientific observation, 151-53
 cinema, development of, xiv, 1, 50-61, 65-72, 352-58, 355. *See also* silent films
 –in Europe, 109-12, 276-77, 278-81, 289-90
 –Expressionism, 303-304
 –in Scandinavia, 301-303
 –talking films, 308-10
 –in the United States, 281-85, 297-98, 304-306; Cecil B. de Mille and, 310-13; D. W. Griffith and, 286-87, 386n.7; independent producers and, 288-89, 386nn.7, 13; space in, 299-303; Thomas Ince and, 290-97, 386n.13
 cinema, history of. *See* cinema, development of
Le Cinéma chez les adolescents (Zazzo), 202
Le Cinéma du diable (Epstein), 111, 160
Le Cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie (Merleau-Ponty), 241
Le Cinéma et la tentation Shakespearienne (Le maître), 322
Le Cinéma et les études humaines (Bayer), 121
Cinéma et littérature (Micha), 331-32, 333
Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire (Morin), 183
Le Cinéma soviétique (Moussinac), 145
 CinemaScope, 200-201
 cinematic effect, 14, 71
 cinematic rhythm, 104-105, 120-21. *See also* montage; rhythm
 –the Avant-Garde and Pure Cinema, 109-12, 114-17; influence of painters, 112-14; music and, 111-13, 115-16, 117, 118-20
 –forms and theories of editing, 125-29; cinedialectic montage, 139-43, 173, 342-43, 382n.20; constructional montage, 129-30, 133-34; intellectual montage, 130, 135; lyrical montage, 129, 130-33; montage of attractions, 135-39; narrative montage, 129, 130; reflex montage, 143-50
 –perception and, 121-25
 –psychology of montage and, 153-55, 164-66
 Cinematograph, 277
 Cinerama, 76-77
Citizen Kane (Welles), 30, 51, 166, 176, 177, 212, 213, 217-19, 239, 242; achronological narration in, 361-62; depth-of-field in, 62, 63, 191, 192-93
 Clair, René, 231; *C'est arrivé demain*, 11; *Le Milleion*, 247, 248-49; *Sous les toits de Paris*, 231
 Claparède, Édouard: *La Genèse de l'hypothèse*, 165-66
 class difference, 283-86
 close medium shot, 60
 close two-shot, 60
 closed structures, 352, 357
 closeups, 69-72, 78, 130, 134-35, 201, 296
 Cocteau, Jean: *Les Parents terribles*, 236, 315
Le Coeur fidèle, 60
 Coeuroy, André, 259
 Cohen-Séat, Gilbert, 51, 370; *Problèmes du cinéma*, 124, 161-62, 163
 Cointreau: *Aperçus de la littérature américaine*, 55
 color, 113-14; development of, 224-26; signification of, 227-30; subjectivity and, 226-30, 383n.19
 colored rhythm, 112-14
Combourg, visage de Pierre (Casenbroot), 239
 comedies, 308-11, 376
 comedy of manners, 310
 commentary, 214, 238-39, 241-44, 246
 comparative association, 374
 comparative relationships, 346, 347
 composers, 251
 composition, 75; in-depth, 194
 comprehension/comprehensibility. *See* spectators
 concrete reality. *See* reality
Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé (Bresson), 252
Connaissance du cinéma (Bazin), 58
 connotation, 360, 376-78; signification and, 343-48
 consciousness, 35-37

- constructional montage, 129–30, 133–34
 content, definition of, 336–37
 continuity, 65, 68, 144, 155, 162, 169, 234, 273; development of, 66, 93, 311–12; editing and, 127–28; memory and, 162–63; montage and, 129–30; spatial continuity, 162, 168; temporal continuity and, 168
 contrast, use of, 17
 contrast cutting, 95
 Corneille, Pierre, 317, 322; *Le Cid*, 329
 counterpoint, 249, 262, 267–68, 358n.48
Cours de composition musicale (d'Indy), 106
 covering the scene, 175
A Coward (Ince), 311
 crane shot, 61, 184
The Cranes Are Flying (Kalatosov), 61
 creative form, 341–42
Le Crime de Monsieur Lange (Renoir), 178–79
 Croce, Benedetto, 15
 Crooked Lens, 100
 Cros, Charles, 224
 cross-cutting, 93, 95, 96–98, 346–47
The Crowd (Vidor), 184, 326
 Cubism, 114
 dance, 190, 255
 Daquin, Louis: *Le Metteur en scène et le dialogue*, 238; *Premier de Cordée*, 208
A Darling Burglary in Broad Daylight, 94
 David, Jacques-Louis: *The Oath of the Horatii*, 341–42
Dawn (Murnau), 184, 188, 304–306
 De Mille, Cecil B., 310–13; *Don't Change Your Husband*, 311; *Forfaiture*, 292–93
 De Mille, William, 310–13
 Debussy, Claude, 268
Défense de Rossellini (Bazin), 171, 172, 173
 Delacroix, Henri, 19, 106
 Delluc, Louis, 48, 71, 294, 356, 357; *La Femme de nulle part*, 356, 387n.37
 Delons, André: *Le Mélange des genres*, 247
 denotation, 367–70, 376–78
 depth, effect of, 32–33, 73
 depth-of-field, 29–30, 62–63, 135, 175, 190–92, 199–200, 216, 217; André Bazin and, 192–98; CinemaScope and, 200–201; realism and, 194–96; spectators and, 192–98, 199. *See also* shot-in-depth
 descriptive image, 214–15, 218–19. *See also* subjective camera
 descriptive shots, 217
 descriptive subjectivism, 217–18
Design for Living (Lubitsch), 11
Destiny of a Man (Bondarchuk), 215
 "La Dialectique du concept au cinéma" (Cavenging), 38
 dialogue, 230–35, 245–47, 316, 317, 359; characters and, 235; commentary, 238–39, 241–44; dialogue of ideas, 239–41; in film and theater, 235–38, 244–45, 319–20; stage dialogue, 235–36
 dialogue writers, 5
 didactic films, 336
 diegesis/diegetic, 72
 dimensionality, 76, 381n.16
 directors, xv, 9, 11, 251; authorship and, 6, 10–12; as scriptwriters, 12; standard production practices and, 5–8
 discontinuity, rhythm and, 120
 Disney, Walt: *Fantasia*, 263–64
Disque 957 (Dulac), 257
 dissolves, 65
 distanciation, 203–205, 206
Dix femmes pour un mari (Hatot), 94
Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Mamoulian), 214–15
 documentary, 59, 99, 172
La Dolce vita (Fellini), 217
 dolly shot, 184–85
 Domarchi, Jean, 331
 domesticity, representation of, 285
Don't Change Your Husband (De Mille), 311
The Doors of Hell, 226
 Dorchain, Auguste, 25
 Dos Passos, John, 98; *Manhattan Transfer*, 56
 Dovzhenko, Aleksandr: *Earth*, 141, 346
 dramatic composition, 75
 dramaturgy: in early cinema, 352–58; in modern cinema, 358–62
 dreams: cinema and, 82–83, 110, 188, 202; film image and, 38
 Drew, Sidney, 310
 Dreyer, Carl Theodor, 11, 364; *Passion of Joan of Arc*, 220
 Dreyfus, Dina, 370–71
Du cinéma sonore à la musique réelle (Honegger), 259
 Duchamp, Marcel, 112
 Dufrenne, Mikel, 86, 87, 124–25; *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*, 122–23
 Dulac, Germaine, 1, 112, 114, 260, 264; *Arabesque*, 257; *Disque* 957, 257
 Dumesnil, René, 108
 Dupont, E. A.; *Variety*, 61, 207, 214, 345–46, 374
 duration, 144–46, 168, 172–74, 183, 200, 297, 299, 352; dramaturgy and, 361–63; in film and literature, 333–36; *Greed* and, 325–26; impression of, 125–26, 166–67; moving camera and, 188–89; music and, 248, 253, 265; perception of, 161; psychology and, 298, 307, 334–35; temporality and, 361–63. *See also* temporality
 Dutch tilts, 219–20
 dynamic continuity, 65

- Earth* (Dovzhenko), 141, 346
Eastmancolor, 225, 226
Ebbinghaus, Hermann: Précis de psychologie, 120
Echt paar ten voeten uit (Hals), 55
Eclectic-Pathé film company, 289
Edison film company, 277
Edison Trust, 283
 editing, 1, 12, 62, 64, 65, 80, 92, 94, 157, 163, 174-76, 190, 287, 358, 366; continuity and, 127-28; cross-cutting, 93, 95, 96-98, 346-47; development of, 67-72; difference from moving camera, 189; Eisenstein on, 133-39; in modern cinema, 174-75; montage and, 69, 127-30; perception and, 121-25, 159-64; reverse angle, 62, 178-79; rhythm and, 125-29, 182; shot-reverse-shot, 62, 155, 178, 199, 207; signification and, 176-77; in silent films, 172-74; Soviet film and, 69, 98-101, 102-103, 127-28, 130, 182, 384n.27. *See also* montage
 Edwin, Walter, 288
 effect-montage, 176-77, 179
 Eggeling, Vicking, 112, 256
 —*Symphonie diagonale*, 114, 382n.8; editing and, 69, 127-28, 130, 182
 d'Eichtal, E., 104, 108
 Eisenstein, Sergei, ix, x, 2, 68, 84, 118, 128, 133, 146, 260, 264
 —*Alexander Nevsky*, 30, 60, 144, 187, 190, 227, 274, 352
 —*The Battleship Potemkin*, 61, 98, 102, 133, 143, 144, 145-46, 156, 183, 374, 377; rhythm in, 146-50; symbolism in, 39-40, 42, 43, 343, 372
 —editing and, 69, 127-28, 130, 135-39, 182, 262-63, 384n.27
 —*Film Form*, 40, 136, 148
 —*The Film Sense*, 260
 —*The General Line*, 144, 227
 —*Ivan the Terrible*, 144, 187, 190, 227, 262, 352
 —“Manifesto of Orchestral Counterpoint,” 230-31
 —*The Mexican*, 136-37
 —*Montage* 38, 142-43
 —music and, 260-63, 263-71
 —*Notes of a Film Director*, 149, 150, 157
 —*October*, 139-40, 142, 144, 146
 —poetry and, 143-44
 —*Romance sentimentale*, 257
 —*The Sage*, 137
 —*Strike*, 138-39
 —theater work, 136-38
 —*Theory of Cinedialectics*, 1
El Dorado (L'Herbier), 110-11, 208, 217
 ellipsis, use of, 16-17, 65, 166
 elliptical image, 312, 386n.19
 emotions, role of, 9, 13-14. *See also* spectators
 Empire Trust, 283
The End of St. Petersburg (Pudovkin), 103, 140
Les Enfants du paradis (Carné), 6
 Engel, Samuel, 11
 English cinema, 94
 enumeration, use of, 17
 epic code, 296
 Epstein, Jean, 1, 48, 60, 71, 89, 207-208, 248, 349; *Bonjour, cinéma*, 71, 207; *Esprit du cinéma*, 109-11; *Le Cinéma du diable*, 111, 160
 Ermler, Friedrich: *Fragment of an Empire*, 152-53
Esprit du cinéma (Epstein), 109-11
Essai sur le rythme (Ghyka), 104, 105, 108
 essence, definition of, 45
L'Essence du théâtre (Gouhier), 318
 establishing shot, 60, 64
Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma (Mitry), vii-ix, x, xiii-xiv
 eurhythms, 104, 105
The Evil Star (Ince), 90
Evolution du langage cinématographique (Bazin), 169-70
The Ex-Convict (Porter), 95
 Experimental Laboratory, 100
 Expressionism, 117, 200, 297, 300-301, 303-304, 366
The Face at the Window, 286
 fades, 65
 fairy tales, 323, 362-63
Falbalas (Becker), 208, 209
Fantasia (Disney), 263-64
 fantasy films, 247, 362-63
Fantomas (Feuillade), 63
Fantomas (Soustestre and Allain), 289
 Faulkner, William, 56, 98
 Faure, Elie, 1
Faust (Murnau), 184, 331
 Federal Industrial Commission, 97
 Feher, Friedrich: *The Robber's Symphony*, 263
FEKS (Factory of the Eccentric Actor), 99-100
 Fellini, Federico: *I Vitelloni*, 356; *La Dolce Vita*, 217; *La Strada*, 240, 336
La Femme de nulle part (Delluc), 356, 387n.37
La Femme du Boulanger, 48
 Fescourt, Henri, 356
Feuillade, Louis, 287; *Fantomas*, 63
 Feyder, Jacques, 232; *Visages d'enfants*, 217
 fiction time, 297, 298
 field of view, 67; definition of, 59
 film-audience relationship. *See* spectators
 film code, 350
 film d'art, 115, 117, 278-79
 film effect, 71
 film fascination, 204-206
Film Form (Eisenstein), 40, 136, 148
 film grammar, 182, 373

- The Film Sense* (Eisenstein), 260
 film studies, vii; Jean Mitry and, vii-ix
Film Technique (Pudovkin), 132
 film theory, vii-ix, 1-2; Jean Mitry and, xiii-xv
 filmophany, 72
 Fischinger, Oskar, 260, 264; *Komposition in Blaue*, 256
 fixed-circle tracking shot, 61
 Flaherty, Robert J., 120, 275; *Louisiana Story*, 133; *Man of Aran*, 133; *Nanook of the North*, 155-56
 flashbacks, 53, 209, 211
 Ford, John, 11; *The Grapes of Wrath*, 11, 56; *How Green Is My Valley*, 241; *The Informer*, 11, 301; *My Darling Clementine*, 11; *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, 198-99; *Stagecoach*, 11, 252; *The Whole Town's Talking*, 198
 Foregger, 99, 100
Forfaiture (De Mille), 292-93
 form, 121; definition of, 336, 337; reality and, 339-41; rhythm and, 113
 form and content, 100-101, 275, 291, 327-38, 330-32, 336-38, 363, 366
 — connotation and, 343-48
 — creative form, 341-42
 — the dramaturgy of film: duration and, 361-63; in early cinema, 352-58; in modern cinema, 358-62
 — film semiology, 366-67; criticisms of, 370-74; signification and, 367-70, 387n.44
 — in painting, 339-40
 — realism and reality, 363-64; misconceptions concerning, 364-66
 — separation of, 338-41
 formalism, 338-41, 342
The Fox Is Not a Coward, 284-85
Fragment of an Empire (Ermller), 152-53
 Fraisse, Paul, 167, 385n.50; *Les Structures rythmiques*, 271, 274
 the frame, 29; as absolute standard of reference, 75, 77; aesthetic requirements of, 76; definition of, 75; effect of, 78-80, 88, 168-69, 222; painting and, 77; tracking shots and, 77-78
 framing, 72-77, 127, 135; camera angles and, 92; effect of, 78-80, 88, 91; rhythm and, 91; space and, 77-78
 Francastel, Pierre, 339
 French cinema, 280-81. *See also* avant-garde cinema
 — the Avant-Garde and Pure Cinema, 109-12
 — development of, 109-12, 114-17; influence of painters on, 112-14; music and, 111-13, 115-16, 117, 118-20
 French New Wave, 237, 359, 360-61
 Frost, Willy: *The Unfinished Symphony*, 249
The Fugitive (Barker and Smith), 294, 295
The Fugitive (Ince), 70-71
 Fusco, Giovanni, 253
 Galeen, Henrik, 2
A Gamble in Souls (Sidney), 292
 Gance, Abel, 1-2, 101, 173; *Beethoven*, 249; *La Roue*, 61, 98, 109, 173, 207, 274; *Le Professeur Tube*, 110, 382n.3; *Le Temps de l'image est venu*, 112; *Napoléon*, ix, 61
 Gassendi, Pierre, 20
 Gaumont Ltd., 94, 277, 279
 Gavault, Paul, 279
 General Electric, 283
The General Line (Eisenstein), 144, 227
 general view, 60
La Genèse de l'hypothèse (Claparède), 165-66
 gestalt psychology, 33, 105, 134, 183
The Ghost That Will Not Return (Room), 153, 154
 Ghyka, Matila, 107; *Essais sur le rythme*, 104, 105, 108
 Giraudoux, Jean, 318
 Godard, Jean-Luc, 332, 360; *A bout de souffle*, 237
 golden section, 149-50
 Gouhier, Henri: *L'Essence du théâtre*, 318
 Goulding, Edmund: *The Old Maid*, 186
 gradation, use of, 17
 grammar. *See* film grammar
The Grand Canal at Venice (Promio), 61
Grandma's Reading-Glass, 92
The Grapes of Wrath (Ford), 11, 56
The Great Dictator (Chaplin), 255
The Great Train Robbery (Porter), 66
Greed (von Stroheim), 324-26, 357
 Griffith, D. W., 61, 66, 69-71, 90, 281-82, 286-87, 291, 386n.7; *Avenging Conscience*, 70; *Birth of a Nation*, 67, 90, 96, 274, 291, 298, 311; *Broken Blossoms*, 96, 207, 217, 291, 304, 311, 353-54; *Intolerance*, 63, 90, 96, 97, 184, 274, 291, 297, 311; *Judith of Bethulia*, 70, 386n.7; montage and, 95-98; *A Rich Revenge*, 96; *True Heart Susie*, 291, 311, 354; *Way Down East*, 346-47, 354
Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, 7
 Guy, Alice, 94
 Hageman, Richard, 252
Hallelujah!, 248-49
 Hals, Franz: *Echt paar ten voeten uit*, 55
Hamlet (Kozintsev), 236
Hamlet (Olivier), 317
 hand-held camera, 61
 harmonic proportion, 107-108
 harmony, 108
 Hathaway, Henry: *Peter Ibbetson*, 181, 198
 Hatot, Georges: *Dix femmes pour un mari*, 94
 Hauron, Ducos du, 224
 Hawks, Howard, 68; *Rio Bravo*, 7
 head and shoulders shot, 60

- Hecht, Ben, 11
 Heidegger, Martin: *La Vérité cinématographique*, 55
Henry V (Olivier), 226, 236
Her Romance, 285
L'Herbier, Marcel, 1-2, 110; *El Dorado*, 110-11, 208, 217; *L'Homme du large*, 207-208, 217
Hiroshima, mon amour (Resnais), 204, 213, 241-44, 253, 361, 378
Histoire du cinéma mondial (Sadoul), 264
 Hitchcock, Alfred: *Rope*, 62; *Shadow of a Doubt*, 164, 185
 hold of the unknown, 206
L'Homme du large (L'Herbier), 207-208, 217
 Honegger, Arthur, 248, 260, 267, 284n.35, 385n.48; *Du cinéma sonore à la musique réelle*, 259; *Pacific* 231, 257
 horizontal montage, 128, 233, 384n.26
How Green Is My Valley (Ford), 241
 Howard, William K.: *Thomas Garner*, 212, 239, 242, 361
 Howey, Walter, 288
 Huff, Theodore, 312
 Hugo, Victor, 25
 Hume, David, 40
Humorous Facial Expressions (G. A. Smith), 92-93
Hungarian Dances (Brahms), 255
 Huppertz, Gottfried, 248
 Husserl, Edmund, 33, 35, 36-37
 Huxley, Aldous, 98
 hylé, 35
 hyperbole, use of, 17
 hypnosis, cinema and, 81, 206
 Ibert, Jacques, 258-59
 identification, 82, 83-84, 84-86; definition of, 84.
See also participation; spectators
 ideographic writing, 14
Illusion (Miller), 292
 image, 38, 320
 —definition of, 29
 —image as analogon, 43-49, 79, 88, 130, 368
 —image as sign, 38-43, 343
 —indefinite image, 29-30, 32, 59
 —mental image, 32-38, 44, 83
 —music and, 263-71
 —perception and, 30-33
 —psychology of, 218-24
 —reality and, 30-33, 45-46, 48-49, 79-80, 150-51, 332-33, 337
 —representation and, 46-48
 —structures of: angles, 60-61; camera movement, 61-62; depth-of-field, 62-63; editing, 62, 64; effect of the frame, 78-80; framing and composition, 72-77; framing and space, 77-78; identification, 82, 83-84, 84-86; participation, 80-81, 83, 84; shot, 59-50, 64
 —as a syncretic expression, 54
 —verbal expression and, 49-51, 53-56, 57-59
 —word: and thought and language, 19-20; and idea, 20-21
L'Image fascinante (Munier), 45-46, 381n.5
Images pour Debussy (Mitry), 268
 impressionistic music, 259-60
In the Firelight, 285
 Ince, Thomas, 70, 290-97, 386n.13; *The Aryan*, 90; *Battle of Gettysburg*, 90; *A Coward*, 311; *The Evil Star*, 90; *The Fugitive*, 70-71
 indefinite image, 29-30, 32, 59
 independent film producers, 288-89, 386nn.7, 13
 index, signification and, 346
 d'Indy, Vincent, 104, 263; *Cours de composition musicale*, 106
The Informer (Ford), 11, 301
 Ingarden, Roman: *Das Literarische Kunstwerk*, 121
 integrated montage, 101
 intellectual montage, 130, 135
 intellectualism, 213
 intensity, relationships of, 91, 125
 intentionality, 35-36, 47-48, 163, 359
 interior monologue, 211-12, 242, 245, 246
 intertitles, 291-92
Intolerance (Griffith), 63, 90, 96, 97, 184, 274, 291, 297, 311
L'Intransigeant, 258-59
 inverse subjective shot, 216, 383n.13
The Italian (Sidney), 293
 Italian cinema, 280; Italian Neorealism, 349-50, 359, 361
Ivan the Terrible (Eisenstein), 144, 187, 190, 227, 262, 352
 Jakobson, Roman, 374
 James, William, 165
Jammin the Blues (Milie), 257
 Japanese theater, 136
 Jasset, Victorin, 60, 282; *Les Aventures de Nick Carter*, 288
 Jaubert, Maurice, 251; *La Musique de Film*, 250-51
Le Je, le Moi, le Il au cinéma (Amengual), 209-10, 212
Jean Mitry and the Aesthetics of the Cinema (Lewis), ix
 Jeanson: *Lady Panama*, 316
Jeux et reflets de la lumière et de la vitesse (Chomette), 114
Jezebel (Wyler), 191, 200, 215-17
 Johnson, Nunnally, 11
Le Jour se lève (Carné), 6, 58, 251-52, 314, 361
 Jourjon, Charles, 279
Le Journal d'un curé de campagne (Bresson), 329
 Jousse, Marcel, 109

- Joyce, James, 50
Judith of Bethulia (Griffith), 70, 386n.7
 jump cut, 182-83
- Kabuki theater, 136
 Kalatosov, M.: *The Cranes Are Flying*, 61
 Kalmus, Herbert T., 224
 Kammerspiele film, 303-304
 Karamasov (Brooks), 227
 Katz, David, 116, 167
 Kaufman, Michael, 99
 Keller-Dorian color process, 224, 225
 Kessel, Joseph, 56
 Köhler, W., 40
 Kinemacolor, 224
 Kingsley, Pierce: *The Life of Buffalo Bill*, 288
 Kino-Glaz (Kino-Eye), 99
 Klages, Ludwig: *Vom Wesen des Rythmus*, 106
The Kleptomaniac (Porter), 95
 Koffka, Kurt: *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, 220
Komposition in Blaue (Fischinger), 256
 Koopman, 283
 Kozintsev, Grigori: *Hamlet*, 236
 Kozintzev, Gregory, 99
 Kraft, William: *The Life of Buffalo Bill*, 288
 Krzhitsky, Sergei, 99, 100
 Kuleshov, Lev, 2, 100
 Kuleshov effect, 100-101, 102-104, 173
- La Fontaine, Jean de, 329
The Lady of the Lake (Montgomery), 208, 209-11
The Lady of the Lake (Blackton & Kent), 288
Lady Panama (Jeanson), 316
 Laffay, Albert, 159
 Lang, Fritz, 2, 11, 297; *M*, 181, 309, 374; *A Woman on the Moon*, 184; *You Only Live Once*, 353
Le Langage cinématographique (Chevassu), 180-81, 183
Le Langage cinématographique (Martin), 179, 254
 language: cinema and, viii, x-xi, xiv-xv, 13-16, 16-19, 38, 42, 58-59, 367-70; criticisms of semiology, 370-74; codes of, 373; definition of, 14; essence of, 16; logic and, 23-26, 375-76; lyrical and logical, 21-23, 28; thought and, 19-20; verbal image and, 23-26. *See also* image as sign; signification; word and image
The Last Days of Pompeii, 280
The Last Laugh (Murnau), 60-61, 184, 188, 207, 304
Last Year at Marienbad (Resnais), 378
 law of coalescence, 165
 Lean, David, 329
 LEF (Social front of art), 138
 Léger, Fernand, 112; *Ballet mécanique*, 114
 Lemaître, Henri: *Le Cinéma et la tentation Shakespearienne*, 322
 Lenin, Vladimir Illich, 283-87
 Leonardo da Vinci: *The Virgin of the Rocks*, 327
 Lessey, George A., 286
Lettres de Sibérie (Marker), 204
 Lewis, Brian: *Jean Mitry and the Aesthetics of the Cinema*, ix
 Life as it is (Feuillade, series), 287
Life Is Good (Pudovkin), 232
The Life of an American Fireman (Porter), 66, 69, 94
The Life of Buffalo Bill (Pierce and Kraft), 288
The Life of Moses, 281, 288
 lighting, 191-92
Das Literarische Kunstwerk (Ingarden), 121
 literary cinema, 348, 371
 literature: cinema and, 9-10, 13-14, 18, 50-51, 158-59, 213-14, 275, 280-81, 289, 324-25, 344; adaptations of, 326-33; dialogue in, 245-47; differences between cinema and, 333-36; poetry and, 16-19, 24; signification and, 49-50, 53-56, 57-59
 litotes, use of, 17
The Little Doctor (G. A. Smith), 92
The Little Foxes (Wynler), 63, 191
A Little Organum for Theater (Brecht), 203-204
 Littré, Maximilien-Paul-Émile, 104
 locations, use of, 299-303, 304, 306
 logic, 21, 375-79; language and, 23-26
 logical language, 21-23, 28
Une Loi du cinéma (Porte), 209
 long medium shot, 60
 long shot, 60, 134
 long take, 178-79
Louisiana Story (Flaherty), 133
 love, representation of, 285
Love and the Suffragette, 310
Love Parade (Lubitsch), 232
 Lubitsch, Ernst, 232-33, 309; *Broken Lullaby*, 219; *Design for Living*, 11; *Love Parade*, 232; *Trouble in Paradise*, 11, 232, 233-34
 Lukács, Georg, 365
 Lumière brothers, 94, 276; *La sortie des usines Lumière*, 65; *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, 65, 93, 300
 Lussy, Mathis, 107
 Lye, Len, 256, 260
 lyric drama, 264
 lyrical films, 305, 308
 lyrical language, 21-23, 28; verbal image and, 23-26
 lyrical montage, 129, 130-33
 M (Lang), 181, 309, 374
Macbeth (Welles), 236, 315
 MacCutcheon, Wallace, 94, 310
 MacKenzie, Donald: *The Perils of Pauline*, 289

- MacLaren, Norman, 256, 264, 384n.38
Madame de . . . (Ophuls), 186
The Magnificent Ambersons (Welles), 55, 186, 197, 333
The Major Film Theories (Andrew), ix
 Malraux, André, 11, 86, 213; *Psychologie du cinéma*, 4, 67; *Sierra de Teruel*, 208
 Mamoulian, Rouben: *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 214–15
Man of Aran (Flaherty), 133
Manhattan Transfer (Dos Passos), 56
 "Manifesto of Orchestral Counterpoint" (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov), 230–31
 Manuel, Roland, 249; *Rythme cinématographique et musical*, 254
 Marker, Chris, 43, 243–44; *Lettres de Sibérie*, 204
 Martin, Marcel: *Le Langage cinématographique*, 179, 253
Marty, 6
 Marxism, 337, 338, 340, 365–66
Mary Jane's Mishap (G. A. Smith), 94
 match on action, 69
 Maxim, Hudson, 283, 287
 Mayer, Carl, 2, 303–304
 McCormick, Robert, 289
 measure, rhythm and, 106–107
The Medium (Menotti), 263
 medium shot, 60
Le Mélange des genres (Delons), 247
 Méliès, Georges, 69, 92, 109, 276, 277; *Voyage à travers l'impossible*, 66
 melodrama, 353
 memory, 52, 229, 361; continuity and, 162–63; effect of, 37; mental image and, 35, 37–38; representation of, 53; role of, 31; subjective image and, 211–13
 Menotti, Gian-Carlo: *The Medium*, 263
 mental image, 32–38, 44, 83
 mental shapes, 17
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 51, 208–209, 222, 235, 369; *Le Cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie*, 241; *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 221
 message plays, 292–93
 metaphor, 17–18, 141–42, 179–80, 346, 347, 373–74, 376, 377–78
 meter, 105–107, 126
 metonymy, 374
Le Metteur en scène et le dialogue (Daquin), 238
 Meumann, Ernest, 108, 116; *Aesthetik des Rhythmus*, 126
 Meunier, Mario, 270
The Mexican (Eisenstein), 136–37
 Meyerhold, Vsevolod, 100
 Micha, René, 55; *Cinéma et littérature*, 331–32, 333
 Michotte, Albert, 86, 161
 mid-shot, 60
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Reinhardt), 323
 Milestone, Lewis: *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 61, 156–57
 Milie, Djon: *Jammin the Blues*, 257
 Miller, Charles: *Illusion*, 292
 Miller, Winston, 11
Le Million (Clair), 247, 248–49
Miracolo a Milano, 247
 mirrors: cinema as, 79–80, 85; use of, 198–99
 mise-en-scène, 175, 282, 297, 315
 Mitry, Jean, xiv–xv; *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, x; *Arabesques*, 268–70; career of, ix–x; *Charlot et la fabrication Chaplinesque*, 357; *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, vii–ix, x, xiii–xiv; film studies and, vii–ix; film theory and, xiii–xv; *Images pour Debussy*, 268; *Pacific* 231, 260, 265, 266, 267, 268; *Symphonie mécanique*, 385n.48
 Mocquereau, Dom, 108
Modern Times (Chaplin), 179, 255, 347–48
Moi, un noir (Rouch), 152
 Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), 317
The Money King, 287
 monistic ensemble, 136
 montage, 2, 68–69, 91–92, 101, 127–28, 193, 357–58, 382n.19; Bazin on, 172–73; cinedialectic, 139–43, 173, 342–43, 382n.20; constructional, 129–30, 133–34; continuity and, 129–30; D. W. Griffith and, 95–98; definition of, 1, 233; editing and, 69, 127–30; effect-montage, 176–77, 179; horizontal, 128, 233, 384n.26; intellectual, 130, 135; Kuleshov effect and, 102–104; lyrical, 129, 130–33; of attractions, 135–39; music and, 249; narrative, 129, 130; origins and discovery of, 90, 92–95; psychology of, 153–55, 159–66; reflex, 143–50; in silent films, 172–74; Soviet film and, 98–101; vertical, 233, 384n.26. See also cinematic rhythm; editing
Montage 38 (Eisenstein), 142–43
 Montgomery, Robert: *Lady of the Lake*, 208, 209–11
 morality, cinema and, 283–87, 292–93
 Morawski, Stefan, 365–66
 Morin, Edgar, 48, 142, 201–203; *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*, 183
 Moscow Opera, 99
 Mother (Pudovkin), 61, 131, 155, 156, 179, 180, 347, 374
 Motion Picture Patents Company, 283
 Moussinac, Léon, 2; *Le Cinéma soviétique*, 145; *Naissance du cinéma*, 111–12, 115–16
 movement matching, 68
 moving camera, 61–62, 76, 80, 91, 135, 178–79, 183–86, 217, 273–74, 358; difference from editing, 189; duration and, 188–89; justification and, 185–86; psychology of, 184, 185–86. See also subjective camera

- Mozhukhin, Ivan, 100
 Munier, Roger, 369, 374; *L'Image fascinante*, 45-46, 381n.5
 Murnau, F. W., 2, 11, 68, 297; *Dawn*, 184, 188, 304-306; *Faust*, 184, 331; *The Last Laugh*, 60-61, 184, 188, 207, 304; *Taboo*, 306-307; *Tartuffe*, 331
 Murphy, Dudley: *Ballet mécanique*, 114
 music: cinema and, 11, 107, 111-13, 115-16, 117, 118-20, 121; duration and, 248, 253, 265; Eisenstein and, 260-63, 263-71; French avant-garde and, 111-13, 115-16, 117, 118-20; image and, 263-71; impressionistic, 259-60; montage and, 249; realism and, 251, 252-54; rhythm and, 118, 126, 256, 272-73, 274; role of, 249-52; signification and, 249-52, 271-72; use in silent films, 247-48; use in sound films, 248-49. *See also* audiovisual structures; counterpoint
La Musique de film (Jaubert), 250-51
Musique et cinéma (Baudrier), 252-53
 Mussorgsky, Modest Petrovich, 258
My Darling Clementine (Ford), 11

Naissance du cinéma (Moussinac), 111-12, 115-16
Nanook of the North (Flaherty), 155-56
Napoléon (Gance), ix, 61
 narration, 53, 245, 362; achronological narration, 361-62; voice-over narration, 245. *See also* interior monologue
 narrative, 53, 54, 130, 303, 312, 350; connotation in, 343-48; development of, 291-96; intelligibility and, 335. *See also* form and content, the dramaturgy of film
 narrative montage, 129, 130
La Nausée (Sartre), 358
New York Miami, 309
 New York Pictures, 290
 newsreels, 99, 133-34
 Nichols, Dudley, 11
 Nietzsche, Friedrich: *The Birth of Tragedy*, 268
Night and Fog (Resnais), 342
A Night on Bare Mountain (Alexeyev), 257-58, 260
Niveau mental et compréhension du cinéma (Zazzo), 160
 Nonguet, Lucien, 93, 94
Notes of a Film Director (Eisenstein), 149, 150, 157
 novel. *See* literature, cinema and
La Nuit fantastique, 247
Nuremberg 1936-Berlin 1945, 156

The Oath of the Horatii (David), 341-42
 objective cinema, 151-53
 objective reality. *See* reality
 objectivity, 156, 169
 objects, essence of, 170. *See also* association; reality
 oblique images, 219-24

October (Eisenstein), 139-40, 142, 144, 146
Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck), 55-56
Okraina, 247
The Old Maid (Goulding), 186
 Oldfield, R. C., 81
 Olivier, Laurence, 323; *Hamlet*, 317; *Henry V*, 226, 236
One-Way Street (Wyler), 185-86
Ontologie de l'image photographique (Bazin), 169
 open structures, 357
 Ophuls, Max, 201; *Madame de . . .*, 186
Opus (Ruttman), 114
 orthochromatic film, 191
The Outlaw and His Wife, 302-304, 311
The Outrage (West), 292
 overlapping movement, 68

Pacific 231 (Honegger), 257
Pacific 231 (Mitry), 260, 265-68
 Pagnol, Marcel, 201, 231, 315-17, 318
 painting, 2-3, 77, 87, 340; aesthetics and, 2-3; cinema and, 54, 72, 73, 112-14, 122, 123, 299; creative form and, 341-42; form and content in, 339-40; influence on avant-garde cinema, 112-14; representation and, 47
Paisan (Rossellini), 346, 374
 panchromatic film, 191-92
 panning shot, 61, 95
 Parain, Brice, 21
 parallel action, 63, 95. *See also* cross-cutting
 parallel editing. *See* cross-cutting
Les Parents terribles (Cocteau), 236, 315
 participation, 80-81, 83, 84, 165, 201-203, 205, 213. *See also* identification; spectators
Passion of Joan of Arc (Dreyer), 220
 passive consciousness, 201-203
 Patar, Benoît, x
 Pathé, Charles, 279
 Pathé-Exchange Company, 289
 Pathé film company, 277
 Pathécolor, 224
 Paulhan, Jean, 24
 perceptible reality, 89, 99
 perception, viii, 2, 10, 51, 81, 84, 131, 135, 261, 366, 385nn.39, 50; of duration, 161; editing and, 121-25, 159-64; film image and, 30-33; meaning and, 121-25; memory and, 37; mental image and, 34-37; rhythm and, 121-25
 perceptual compensation, 220
 perceptual expectation, 164-66
 Peret, Léonce, 280
The Perils of Pauline (MacKenzie), 289
 periodicity, rhythm and, 271
 periphrasis, use of, 17
 Perrot, Victor, 13
 persistence of image, 104

- Personal*, 94
 perspective, 32–33
Pete Wants a Job, 284
Peter Ibbetson (Hathaway), 181, 198
Phèdre (Racine), 329
Phénoménologie de la perception (Merleau-Ponty), 221
Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique (Dufrenne), 122–23
 phenomenology, xiv, 33
 photogenics, 46, 48, 111, 381n.5
 photography, 46, 72
 Piaget, Jean, 162, 164–65; *Psychologie de l'intelligence*, 165
 Picabia, Francis, 112
 Pick, Lupu, 2
Pickpocket (Bresson), 252
 Piéron, Henri, 163
 pinboard animation, 258
 Pingaud, Bernard, 244, 245, 361, 371
 Pirandello, Luigi, 213; *Right You Are If You Think You Are*, 57
 plastic composition, 75
 plastic relationships, 91–92
 plot line, subject matter and, 336
 poetic effect, 24
 poetic feeling, 26
 poetic image, 24
 poetry, 21, 98, 106, 118, 143, 370; cinema and, 149, 158–59, 294; Eisenstein and, 143–44; language and, 24; rhythm and, 272, 273
La Pointe courte (Varda), 240–41, 243
 polysemy, 42
 Ponge, Francis, 45
 popular language, rational language and, 21
 Porte, Pierre: *Une Loi du cinéma*, 209
 Porter, Edwin S., 94–95, 283–86; *The Attack on Grand Rapids*, 95; *The Ex-Convict*, 95; *The Great Train Robbery*, 66; *The Kleptomaniac*, 95; *The Life of an American Fireman*, 66, 69, 94
 Pouillon, Jean, 152
 Powers Pictures, 288
Précis de psychologie (Ebbinghaus), 120
Premier de cordée (Daquin), 208
 presence of the actor, 318–19
 presentification, actualization and, 194, 358
La Prétendue passivité du spectateur (Bourdet), 202–203
 Prevert, Jacques, 6
Principles of Gestalt Psychology (Koffka), 220
The Prisoner of Shark Island (Ford), 198–99
Private Worlds (Cava), 247
Problèmes du cinéma (Cohen-Séat), 124, 161–62, 163
 production: artists and artisans, 8–10; auteurs and, 4–7; authorship and, 10–13; standard practices, 5–7; standard practices in the U.S., 7–8
Le Professeur Tube (Gance), 110, 382n.3
 projection-identification. *See* participation
 projective association, 223
 Prokofiev, Sergey Sergeyevich, 262
proletkult (People's Theater), 136–38
 Promio, Alexander: *The Grand Canal at Venice*, 61
 propaganda, 283–87
 proportion, sense of, 107–109
 Proust, Marcel, 50
 psychological duration, 298, 307
 psychological realism, 194
Psychologie de l'intelligence (Piaget), 165
Psychologie du cinéma (Malraux), 4, 67
 psychology, 10, 19, 33, 218–24; of duration, 334–35; duration and, 298, 307, 334–35; of the moving camera, 184, 185–86; psychology of montage, 153–55, 159–66; spectators and, viii, 2; tracking shot and, 188–90. *See also* gestalt psychology; spectators
Public Opinion, 311–13
 Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 2, 68, 69, 118, 127–28, 144, 146, 151; *The End of St. Petersburg*, 103, 140; *Film Technique*, 132; *Life Is Good*, 232; "Manifesto of Orchestral Counterpoint," 230–31; *Mother*, 61, 131, 155, 156, 179, 180, 347, 374
 punctuation devices, 65
 pure cinema, 111–12, 114–17; influence of painters, 112–14; music and, 111–13, 115–16, 117, 118–20
 Queneau, Raymond: *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres*, 237–38
Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? (Bazin), 130, 154–55
Quo Vadis, 280, 386n.7
 Racine, 317, 322; *Phèdre*, 329
 Ramain, Paul, 248
 Ramsay, Terry, 288–89
 Raphaëlson, Samson, 11
 rational language, popular language and, 21
 Ray, Man, 112
 Ray, Nicholas: *Rebel without a Cause*, 7
 reading/readers, 50
 realism, xv, 45, 172, 300–303, 307, 325–26, 363–64; bourgeois, 337; definition of, 364–65; depth-of-field and, 194–96; in Expressionist film, 304; misconceptions concerning, 364–66; music and, 251, 252–54
 reality, x, 30, 50, 67, 75, 300, 340, 363–64; ambiguity and, 195; André Bazin on, 169–72; art and, 364–66; cinema and, 3, 15, 51, 58, 87–88, 366, 375; film space and, 155–59; form and, 339–41; the image and, 30–33, 45–46, 48–49, 79–80, 150–51, 332–33, 337; impression of, 81, 82, 206; mental image and, 34; metaphysical interpretation of, 169–72; misconceptions con-

- cerning, 364-66; perceptible, 89, 99; represented, 78, 79, 89, 169-72, 189-90, 344-45; time and, 51-53
- Rebel without a Cause* (Ray), 6
- The Red Desert* (Antonioni), 227-29
- reflex montage, 143-50
- The Regenerates* (West), 292
- La Règle du jeu* (Renoir), 63, 191
- Reinhardt, Max: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 323
- relief: effect of, 73; impression of, 32-33
- Rendez-vous par annonce*, 94
- Renoir, Jean, ix; *La Règle du jeu*, 63, 191; *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, 178-79
- repetition, use of, 17, 166
- representation, 46, 53, 58, 79, 88, 122; the image and, 46-48; reality and, 78, 79, 169-72; theater and, 317
- representation time, 167, 323
- Resnais, Alain, 243; *Hiroshima, mon amour*, 204, 213, 241-44, 253, 361, 378; *Last Year at Marienbad*, 378; *Night and Fog*, 342; *Toute la mémoire du monde*, 342
- reverse angle, 62, 178-79
- rhythm, 23, 90-91, 96, 98, 113, 146, 150, 167, 182, 257, 270, 271-72, 273-75, 299, 350; in animated films, 254-56, 258; in *Battleship Potemkin*, 146-50; in cinema and music, 118, 126, 256, 272-73, 274; definition of, 104, 107; editing and, 125-29, 182; framing and, 91; music and, 105-106, 118, 126, 248, 256, 272-73, 274; organic rhythm, 105-107; perception and, 120-21; poetry and, 272, 273; proportion and, 107-109; symmetry and, 108. *See also* cinematic rhythm
- Rythme cinématographique et musical* (Manuel), 254
- rhythmic association, 263
- rhythmic cells, 272
- rhythmic editing, 182
- rhythmic period, 104
- rhythmic prose, 118, 119
- Rhythmus 21* (Richter), 114
- Ribot, Théodule-Armand, 20
- A Rich Revenge* (Griffith), 96
- Richter, Hans, 112, 255, 256; *Rhythmus 21*, 114
- Le Rideau Cramoisi* (Astruc), 239
- Right You Are If You Think You Are* (Pirandello), 57
- Rio Bravo* (Hawks), 7
- Le Rire* (Bergson), 384n.38
- The Road to Happiness*, 286
- The Robber's Symphony* (Feher), 263
- Rohmer, Eric, 170
- Romance sentimentale* (Eisenstein and Alexandrov), 257
- Romantic poetry, 98
- Room, Abram: *The Ghost That Will Not Return*, 153, 154
- Rope* (Hitchcock), 62
- Rossellini, Roberto: *Paisan*, 346, 374
- Rouch, Jean: *Chronique d'un été*, 151-52; *Moi, un noir*, 152
- La Roue* (Gance), 61, 98, 109, 173, 207, 274
- Roussel, Albert, 258
- Roy, Claude, 153
- rule of common proportion, 78
- Russell, Bertrand, 375, 376
- Ruttman, Walter, 112, 255, 256, 384n.38; *Opus*, 114
- Ruyssen, 19
- Ryle, Gilbert, 376
- Sadoul, Georges, 92, 94, 287; *Histoire du Cinéma mondial*, 264
- The Sage* (Eisenstein), 137
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 34, 35, 193; *Being and Nothingness*, 370; *La Nausée*, 358
- satire, 310
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 367
- scale, relationships of, 91
- Scandinavian cinema, 301-303
- Scenes of Comic Life (film series), 310
- Scenes of True Life (film series), 282, 286, 287
- Schaeffer, Pierre, 267
- Schaff, Adam, 375, 376
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 108
- Schklovsky, Victor, 146
- Schloezer, 123
- screen effect, 72-73
- screenwriters, xv, 6
- script supervisor, 68
- scriptwriters, 5-7, 11; directors as, 12
- Selig film company, 288-89
- seme, signification and, 372
- semi-reverse shot, 62
- semiology, ix, 343-44, 366-67; criticisms of, 370-74; signification and, 367-70, 387n.44
- semisubjective camera, 216
- semisubjective image, 214-17
- Sennett, Mack, 90, 376
- sensory-contents, 20-21, 381n.2
- sequence, definition of, 64-65
- serial music, 118
- serials, 288-89
- Servien, Pius, 22, 104
- set designers, 5, 6
- Sève, Lucien, 73, 87
- Seven Men from Now* (Boetticher), 226, 229
- Shadow of a Doubt* (Hitchcock), 164, 185
- Shakespeare, William, 317, 322-23
- Sheffield film company, 94
- shock effects, 161-62

- shooting script, 5-6, 101, 128, 175, 251, 297; authorship and, 8
- short story, cinema and, 297-98
- the shot, 59-60, 64; as a cell, 144, 169, 174, 366; definition of, 29; difference from the take, 64; types of, 60-65
- shot-in-depth, 62-63, 93, 195. *See also* depth-of-field
- shot-reverse-shot, 62, 155, 178, 199, 207
- shot sequence, 64, 174, 193
- Showboat*, 231
- Sidney, Scott: *A Gamble in Souls*, 292; *The Italian*, 293
- Sierra de Teruel* (Malraux), 208
- sign, 15, 20, 338, 387n.42; definition of, 38, 46; image as sign, 38-43, 343; symbol and, 181. *See also* semiology
- signification, 38-43, 54, 69, 130, 296, 359-60, 366, 387n.42; adaptations and, 327-29; cognition and, 121-22; of color, 227-30; connotation and, 343-48; criticisms of semiology, 370-74; editing and, 176-77; false, 348-49; motivation and, 372; music and, 249-52, 271-72; in the novel, 49-50, 53-56, 57-59; semiology and, 367-70, 387n.44; syntax and, 43; verbal, 53-54. *See also* analogon, image as; form and content signified, 41, 366; signifier and, 39, 57, 367-70. *See also* signification
- The Silence* (Bergman), 348-49
- silent films, 172-74, 186-88, 190, 307-308; role of music in, 247-48. *See also* cinema, development of
- Silly Symphonies*, 255
- simile, in cinema, 139-41
- Sjöström, Victor, 300; *The Wind*, 303
- slapstick comedy, 310, 376
- Smith, Albert, 283
- Smith, Cecil: *The Aryan*, 295-96; *The Bad Luck of Santa Inez*, 294-95; *The Fugitive*, 294, 295
- Smith, George A., 66-67, 92, 224; *Humorous Facial Expressions*, 92-93; *At Last, That Awful Tooth*, 92; *The Little Doctor*, 92; *Mary Jane's Mishap*, 94
- social dramas, 293-94
- Socialist Realism, 365
- Soirées de Paris*, 112-14
- Sonnenschein, A., 104
- The Sorrows of Love* (West), 292
- La Sortie des usines Lumière* (Lumière brothers), 65
- sound distortion, 247
- sound films, music in, 248-49
- Souriau, Etienne, 106, 107, 266; *L'Univers filmique*, 72
- Sous les toits de Paris* (Clair), 231
- Souvestre, Pierre: *Fantomas*, 289
- Soviet film, 98, 109; burlesque films, 100; editing and, 98-101, 102-103. *See also* Eisenstein, Sergei
- space, 299-303, 307-308, 358; framing and, 77-78; in literature and cinema, 57-58; reality and, 155-59; spatial orientation, 219-24; in theater and cinema, 162
- space, modulation of, 162
- spatial continuity, 162, 168. *See also* depth-of-field
- spatial reality, 67, 333
- spectators, viii, 2, 89-90, 91, 102, 142, 164, 201-203, 320-21, 377, 378; comprehension and, 121-22, 134-35, 335; depth-of-field and, 192-98, 199; distanciation and, 203-205, 206; filmmakers and, 164; spatial orientation and, 219-24; subjective camera and, 210-11. *See also* identification; participation
- Spencer, Herbert, 104
- Stagecoach* (Ford), 11, 252
- Steinbeck, John: *Of Mice and Men*, 55-56
- Sternberg, Josef von, 11; *The Blue Angel*, 232, 309
- Stielow affair, 97
- Stiller, Mauritz, 300, 309, 312
- stimuli-response relationships, 164
- Stop Thief!* (Williamson), 94
- story/storytelling, xiv, 359-60
- La Strada* (Fellini), 240, 336
- strike breakers, representation of, 284
- Strike* (Eisenstein), 138-39
- Stroheim, Eric von, 172, 303; *Greed*, 324-26, 357
- structuralism, 367
- Les Structures rythmiques* (Fraisse), 271, 274
- style, 11, 16-17; definition of, 337. *See also* form and content
- the subjective camera, 60-61, 206-10, 213; descriptive image and, 218-19; descriptive subjectivism and, 217-18; inverse subjective shot and, 216, 383n.13; literature and, 213-14; oblique images and, 219-24; the semisubjective image and, 214-17; spectators and, 210-11
- the subjective image, 211-13, 218
- subjectivity, 217; color and, 226-30, 383n.19
- Sullivan, Gardner, 292, 297
- Survage, Léopold, 112-14
- suspension, use of, 17
- syllepsis, use of, 17
- symbol/symbolism, viii, x-xi, xv, 98, 103, 138, 154, 179, 180-82, 190, 293, 300-303, 304-307; in *The Battleship Potemkin*, 39-40, 42, 43, 343, 372; connotation and, 346-49; sign and, 15, 181, 338
- symbolism, color, 226-30
- symmetry, 104
- symphonic poem, 258
- Symphonie Diagonale* (Eggeling), 114, 382n.8
- Symphonie mécanique* (Mitry), 385n.48

- syncretism, 54, 135
 synecdoche, 17, 374
 syntax, cinema and, 43, 373, 377
- Taboo* (Murnau), 306–307
Tartuffe (Murnau), 331
Tearing Down the Spanish Flag (Blackton), 283–87
 Technicolor, 224–25
 tempo, 254–55, 299
 temporality, 164, 200, 245, 290, 320, 327, 356–57,
 358; duration and, 361–63; extension of, 145–
 46; in film and literature, 326, 333; objective
 reality and, 51–53; temporal continuity, 168;
 temporal displacement, 361; time in the the-
 ater, 319–20, 323. *See also* duration
Le Temps de l'image est venu (Gance), 112
Ten Wives for One Husband (Hatot), 94
 tense, in cinema, 51–53
 tertiary image, 26
 theater, 79, 317–18; adaptations, 321–24; cinema
 and, xv, 57, 160, 162, 204, 232, 278–80, 296,
 314–17, 318–19, 324, 350–52, 359; dialogue in,
 235–38, 244–45, 319–20; early film and, 65–66,
 67, 276–77, 287–88, 290, 298–303, 304, 307;
 spectators in, 320–21; time in the, 319–20, 323
 theatricality, 187, 314, 317, 351, 361
 thematic association, 263
Theory of Cinedialectics (Eisenstein), 1
Thérèse Desqueyroux, 274–75
Thérèse Raquin (Zola), 330
 third dimension, 76, 381n.16
Thomas Garner (Howard), 212, 239, 242, 361
Threepenny Opera, 248–49
 tilt shot, 21–20, 60, 75, 217, 219–20
 time. *See* temporality
 tinting, 227
 Todd-AO, 200
 Toland, Greg, 191
 toning, 227
 total image, 218, 219
Touch of Evil (Welles), 61
Toute la mémoire du monde (Resnais), 342
 tracking shot, 61, 98, 127, 177, 183–86, 214–15,
 273, 274; the frame and, 77–78; psychology of,
 188–90
 tragedy, 298–99, 352–54
 transcendental realism, 45
 transference, process of, 377
 transposition, adaptations and, 330–32
 Trauberg, Leonid, 99
The Treasure of Arne, 302
Trial by Fire, 302–303
 trichromatic color process, 224
 Trimble, Larry, 286
Trouble in Paradise (Lubitsch), 11, 232, 233–34
True Heart Susie (Griffith), 291, 311, 354
 trusts, 283–87
Twelve Angry Men, 6
 Tzékhánovsky, 257
- d'Udine, Jean: *L'Art de le geste*, 256
The Unfinished Symphony (Frost), 249
 union leaders, representation of, 284
L'Univers filmique (Souriau), 72
 unrealistic films, 362–63
- Van den Berck, Michotte, 72–73
 Varda, Agnès: *La Pointe courte*, 240–41, 243
Variety (Dupont), 61, 207, 214, 345–46, 374
 Vendryes, 238
 verbal expression, 49–51, 53–56, 57–59, 127
 verbal image, 23–28
 verism, 287
La Vérité cinématographique (Heidegger), 55
 vertical montage, 233, 384n.26
 Vertov, Dziga, 2, 99, 133, 382n.19
 Vidor, King, 11, 68, 303; *The Crowd*, 184, 326
 Viot, Jacques, 6
The Virgin of the Rocks (Leonardo da Vinci), 327
Visages d'enfants (Feyder), 217
 Visconti, Luchino, 361
 visual music, 173
 visual rhythm, 274
 Vitagraph film company, 95, 277, 282, 283, 286–
 87, 288, 310
I Vitelloni (Fellini), 356
Vom Wesen des Rhythmus (Klages), 106
 Von Bulow, Hans, 108
Voyage à travers l'impossible (Méliès), 66
 Vuillermoz, Emile, 111, 115, 259
- Wallon, Henri: *L'Acte perceptif et le cinéma*, 161,
 163
 Warrain, Francis, 104, 108
Way Down East (Griffith), 346–47, 354
 Weiszäcker, 164
 Welles, Orson, 11, 12, 154, 200, 323
 – *Citizen Kane*, 30, 51, 166, 176, 177, 212, 213,
 217–18, 239, 242; achronological narration in,
 361–62; depth-of-field in, 62, 63, 191, 192–93
 – *Macbeth*, 236, 315
 – *The Magnificent Ambersons*, 55, 186, 197, 333
 – *Touch of Evil*, 61
 Wertheimer, Max, 221
 West, R. B.: *The Outrage*, 292; *The Regenerates*,
 292; *The Sorrows of Love*, 292
 Westerns, 293, 294–96
What We See through a Telescope, 92
The Whole Town's Talking (Ford), 198
 wide-angle lenses, 29–30, 191
 wide-angle shot, 60, 134–35
 wide screen, 200–201

- Williamson, James, 66–67, 92, 93–94; *The Attack on a China Mission*, 93, 95; *The Big Swallow*, 93; *Stop Thief!*, 94
The Wind (Sjöström), 303
wipes, 65
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 39
Wolff, Albert, 258
A Woman on the Moon (Lang), 184
Woolf, Virginia, 98
word and image: lyrical language and logical language, 21–23; thought and language, 19–20; the verbal image, 23–28; word and idea, 20–21
workers, representation of, 284
Wuilleumier, Marie Claire, 152
Würzberg psychologists, 33–34, 36
Wyler, William, 383n.12; *The Best Years of Our Lives*, 196–98; *Jezebel*, 191, 200, 215–17; *The Little Foxes*, 63, 191; *One-Way Street*, 185–86
Yevreinov, Nikolai, 100
You Only Live Once (Lang), 353
Young, James, 310, 312
Zavattini, 349
Zazzo, René, 87, 162; *Le Cinéma chez les adolescents*, 202; *Niveau mental et compréhension du cinéma*, 160
Zecca, Ferdinand, 92–93, 94
Zola, Émile: *Thérèse Raquin*, 330
zoom shot, 185
Zukor, Adolph, 290