He must be prepared to turn his attention to the form and to be able to judge *how* the engine, the lovers, the waiter, are depicted.

ARTISTIC UTILIZATION OF REDUCED DEPTH

Every object reproduced in film appears solid and at the same time flat. This fact contributes greatly to the impressive results achieved by the clever shots discussed in the last section. The worm's-eye view of a man appears as such a great distortion of nature because the depth effect is reduced. The same view looked at in a stereoscope seems much less distorted. The contrast between the vast bulk of the trunk and the disproportionately small head is much less forcible when it is perceived as being due to foreshortening. But if there is only slight feeling of space and if the three-dimensional volume of the pictured object is flattened out, a huge body and a little head are seen.

The purely formal qualities of the picture come into prominence only because of the lack of depth. Every good film shot is satisfying in a purely formal sense as a linear composition. The lines are harmoniously disposed with reference to one another as well as to the margins. The distribution of light and shade in the shot is evenly balanced. Only because the spatial effect is so slight, the spectator's attention is drawn to the two-dimensional pattern of lines and shadow masses. These, after all, are actually the components of three-dimensional bodies and become elements of the surface composition only through being projected onto a plane. It has already been mentioned above how the skirt of a dancer seen through a pane of glass seemed

to open and close like the petals of a flower. This is an entirely antifunctional effect in that it is not a normally characteristic feature of the skirt as a material object. The curious expansion and contraction of the edge of the skirt results only when it is looked at from one particular viewpoint and then projected upon a flat surface. It would be less noticeable in a stereoscopic view. Only when the feeling of depth is reduced does the up-and-down movement of the skirt give the effect of being an in-and-out movement. It is one of the most important formal qualities of film that every object that is reproduced appears simultaneously in two entirely different frames of reference, namely the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, and that as one identical object it fulfills two different functions in the two contexts.

The reduction of depth serves, moreover, to emphasize the perspective superposition of objects. In a strongly stereoscopic picture the manner in which these various objects are placed relative to one another does not impose itself any more than it does in real life. The concealing of certain parts of the various objects by others that come in front seems chance and unimportant. Indeed, the position of the camera in a stereoscopic picture seems itself to be a matter of indifference inasmuch as it is obvious that there is a three-dimensional space which may just as easily, and at the next moment probably will, be looked at from another point of view. If, however, the effect of depth is almost negligible, the perspective is conspicuous and compelling. What is visible and what is hidden strike one as being definitely intentional; one is forced to seek for a reason, to be clear in one's

own mind as to why the objects are arranged in this particular way and not in some other. There is no leeway between the objects: they are like flat surfaces stuck over one another, and seem almost to lie in the same plane.

Thus the lack of depth brings a very welcome element of unreality into the film picture. Formal qualities, such as the compositional and evocative significance of particular superimpositions, acquire the power to force themselves on the attention of the spectator. A shot like that described above where half of the girl's full face is cut off by the dark silhouette of the man's head, would possess only a fraction of its effectiveness if there were a strong feeling of space. In order to achieve the striking effect it is essential that the division across the face shall not seem accidental but intentional. The two faces must seem to be practically in one plane, with no leeway between them to show that they might easily be moved into different relative positions.

The fact that the lack of depth perception also leads to the almost total disappearance of the phenomena which the psychologist calls the "constancies" of size and form has already been discussed. The film artist takes advantage of their absence to produce remarkable effects. Everyone has seen a railway engine rushing on the scene in a film. It seems to be coming straight at the audience. The effect is most vivid because the dynamic power of the forward-rushing movement is enhanced by another source of dynamics that has no inherent connection with the object itself, that is, with the locomotive, but depends on the position of the spectator, or—in other words—of the camera.

The nearer the engine comes the larger it appears, the dark mass on the screen spreads in every direction at a tremendous pace (a dynamic dilation toward the margins of the screen), and the actual objective movement of the engine is strengthened by this dilation. Thus the apparent alteration in the size of an object which in reality remains the same size enhances its actual activity, and thus helps the film artist to interpret the impact of that activity visually.

The same principle is brought into play when Carl Dreyer in his *The Passion of Joan of Arc* stresses a monk suddenly jumping up excitedly from his seat by placing the camera closely in front of the actor so that through this forward movement his figure grows to an enormous size and occupies the whole screen. Here again the effect of actual dynamic force is intensified by something that is purely of the camera— the sudden rapid extension of the flat projection. If the camera had been placed at a distance of several yards from the monk, the perspective increase in size due to the forward movement would be so slight that it would hardly produce an effect at all.

Pudovkin makes excellent use of perspective alteration in size in *The End of St. Petersburg*. Two starving peasants come to the great city to find work. The vastness of the city compared with the two figures, their personal unimportance and that of their desires in these surroundings, are very strikingly shown in the following shot: In the foreground is a huge dark equestrian statue of a tsar, whose stone hand is imperiously raised. In the background is a wide empty square across which the two peasants are walking, looking like ants. If the depth effect in the shot were

great, that is, if the distance between the statue and the two peasants were wholly perceivable, firstly, the difference in size would not be so remarkable but would seem only the natural result of the distance; and, secondly, the two people and the statue would not be so clearly associated and therefore compared with one another. They would obviously lie in quite different planes. In the Pudovkin shot, the spectator sees a spatial situation that he can interpret on the basis of his past experience but that, nevertheless, presents itself to his eyes without the familiar depth effect. Hence two ants are seen to be crawling toward the colossus, and the ants and the colossus are obviously in some kind of connection with one another because their plane of action appears practically identical.

In reality, the two peasants are not much smaller than the statue, and the shot might easily have been taken the reverse way, so that the two would be huge in the foreground and dwarf the stone tsar to a mere accessory in the background. But the significance of Pudovkin's symbolism is to show the two peasants as pathetic, helpless, frightened little creatures, terrified by the size, the stony brutality, the might of the city. The director has cleverly used his power of altering the sizes to make his idea tangible. It has been achieved, again, without any distortion of the actual objects themselves comparable to that which the Egyptians were in the habit of making in their reliefs when they portrayed a victorious king enormously large and his enemies as tiny little figures.

In *The General Line* Eisenstein has in a similar manner rearranged the natural proportions symbolically. In one scene he wishes to depict a bureaucratic office setup, in which red tape obstructs any reasonable conduct of affairs. An official is seen dictating to a stenographer. The camera is placed immediately in front of the typewriter in order that the machine may appear very large. Its roller moves across the screen like a huge crane; the heads of the typist and the man dictating appear very small behind it. Then there is a bookkeeper: the ledger is enormous and the man writing in it quite small. What is first of all an abstract disparity is made tangible by a corresponding visual one.

In King Vidor's *The Crowd* the following impressive scene occurs: A little boy is sitting on the sidewalk with his friends and is telling them, "My father always says . . . ," when he sees a crowd in front of his home—an ambulance—a stretcher being carried into the house. He runs across full of misgivings. And now the following shot is shown: The camera is placed on the second-floor landing, facing down. The front door is seen below, very small, and from it the staircase leads up widening out in vigorous perspective. Downstairs people are crowding into the house through the front door, attracted by the news of the accident. They swarm below like ants. Suddenly the little boy pushes his way through them. He climbs up the stairs, slowly, fearfully, and yet burning with anxiety to learn what has happened. At first he is very small, then he grows larger, the steps become wider, the crowd remains below. He comes nearer, up the wide empty staircase, which grows ever larger

as he approaches the camera, and shows more and more empty space about him. He climbs up—terribly alone—a desolate child, bereft of his father.

The strength of this effect lies in the simplicity and naturalness of the means employed. Nothing is more commonplace than that a staircase gets larger with decreasing distance; but the trite fact, used in this manner, results in a deep, compelling symbolism such as is found in good folk songs.

It must be noted that in the achievement of such an effect much depends on the art of the cameraman. The director or the script-writer may have planned the shot admirably; but if the cameraman does not choose the position for the camera accurately, if he stations it six inches too high or too low, if he puts it exactly in the middle instead of a couple of feet farther over to the left, if he does not choose the lens with the appropriate focal length, the power of the perspective may not emerge in the shot and the idea fall flat. Moreover, the lights must be correctly placed—a little too much light in the background, a spotlight too near the center of the foreground, may radically change the whole shot and destroy the intended effect.

In the early days of the film the director was careful not to have any actor put his hands or his feet too near the camera and thus make them come out disproportionately large. That these apparent alterations in size might be exploited and used to achieve an artistic effect was only realized when the film began to be recognized as an art.

If the artistic capacity of reduced depth has been realized, the efforts of the engineers to create the three-

dimensional film will be watched with mixed feelings. In a film which gives a strong illusion of depth the perspective alterations in size have scarcely more effect than they have in real life. Their efficacy as an artistic device will be practically negligible. The two-dimensional relationships, of course, become almost as slight, and the manner in which one object appears behind another in space will be so obvious that the projective as well as any inherent symbolic connections will hardly make themselves felt at all. Engineers are not artists. They therefore do not direct their efforts toward providing the artist with a more effective medium, but toward increasing the naturalness of film pictures. It vexes the engineer that film is so lacking in stereoscopic quality. His ideal is exactly to imitate real life. It provokes him that film should be lacking in colors and sounds; and so he devotes his attention to color photography and sound film. The general, artistically untrained public feels much the same. An audience demands the greatest possible likeness to reality in the movies and it therefore prefers three-dimensional film to flat, colored to black-and-white, talkie to silent. Every step that brings film closer to real life creates a sensation. Each new sensation means full houses. Hence the avid interest of the film industry in these technological developments.

ARTISTIC USE OF LIGHTING AND OF THE ABSENCE OF COLOR

The question of color is similar to that of depth. When the film artist has to depend on black and white he is offered particularly vivid and impressive effects.

The painter, who does not—as color film does—take colors ready-made from nature but creates them afresh on his palette, is able by suitable choice of tones, by distribution of color masses, and so forth, to get as far away from nature as is necessary to convey his artistic intention. Judging from what we have seen up to now, the colors in a color film are at best naturalistic—and if owing to imperfect technique they are not yet so, this lack of naturalness does not provide the artist with a potentially useful medium of expression.

Whereas the artistic possibilities of color film are still wrapt in obscurity, black-and-white has for many years been a recognized and most effective medium. The reduction of actual color values to a one-dimensional gray series (ranging from pure white to dead black) is a welcome divergence from nature which renders possible the making of significant and decorative pictures by means of light and shade.

The film artist (herein lies the task of the cameraman which is hardly ever properly appreciated) possesses the power to determine very largely what black-and-white values the objects he photographs shall have when projected in the theater. According to how he places his lamps, where he arranges for the shadows to fall, how in out-of-doors work he sets up his camera with regard to the sun, how his screens catch and reflect the light, he can show the same object in the brightest light or in deepest shadow, he can place a light thing in equally light surroundings or let it stand out by contrast against a dark background. This is one of the most important aesthetic possibilities of film. The primitive but always effective symbolism of

light versus darkness, white purity versus black evil, the opposition between gloom and radiance, is inexhaustible.

In Sternberg's *The Docks of New York*, for example, the two principal actors of the film are characterized in this way. The white face, the white dress, the white hair of the girl are in visual contrast to the black figure of the ship's stoker. Thus, by a happy, artful congruence, the dramatic interplay of two human minds is made evident through the very elements of visual perception—black-and-white patches moving on the screen. It is obvious that the same effects could not be achieved with color film. In a similar way in Granowsky's *Song of Life* the gripping birth scene in the operating room achieves its deadly silence and harshness chiefly by the pictorial contrast between the long white operating coats, the white sterile sheets, the white cottonwool, and the dark rubber gloves of the doctors with their dark instruments. If this contrast had not been brought out so well by the cameraman, the whole effect of the scene would have been lost.

Consider the face of a blond woman in a film shot: the color of hair and complexion approximate to each other as a curious pale white—even the blue eyes appear whitish; the velvety black bow of the mouth and the sharp dark pencil lines of the eyebrows are in marked contrast. How strange such a face is, how much more intense—because unconventional—is the expression, how much more attention it attracts to itself and to its expression. How much more readily one observes whether the line with which a dense black braid of hair frames a white face is beautiful and

suitable. Anyone who has noticed how unreal most film faces appear, how unearthly, how beautiful, how they often give the impression of being not so much a natural phenomenon as an artistic creation—toward which, of course, the art of make-up helps considerably —will get the same pleasure from a good film face as from a good lithograph or woodcut. Anyone who is in the habit of going to film premières knows how painfully pink the faces of the film actors appear in real life when they come on stage and make their bows after the performance. The stylized, expressive giant masks on the screen do not fit beings of flesh and blood; they are visual material, the stuff of which art is made.

The composition of the film image is intelligible and striking chiefly because only black, white, and gray masses, black lines on a white ground, or white lines on a black ground, provide the raw material. A comparison may be made with music, in which articulate statements are possible only because definite pitches of sounds have been arranged in scales, and only these sounds are used in a composition. A sensation of pleasure is aroused by hearing how skillfully these sound values succeed one another. Just as music would be impossible without fixed tones and intervals, so any graphic art—apart from its descriptive and representational function—can have a formal value only if the medium with which the work has been done allows clear definition of shape, brightness, size. This is preëminently the case with black-and-white. All first-class films, especially the good Russian and American ones, show such pronounced black-and-white values —no uncharacteristic confusion of vague, indetermi-

ate tones—that their formal qualities instantly spring to the eye.

The effect of a landscape is almost entirely dependent upon the lighting. There is a famous shot in Walter Ruttmann's symphony of a great city, *Berlin*, in which an empty street in the north of Berlin is shown in the early dawn. The curious mistiness of the morning sky, the veiled darkness of the fronts of the buildings—the apportionment of the gray values, in other words—are what gives this shot its charm. The same street and the same camera angle might result in an utterly feeble and ineffective picture. And obviously these differences can be even more pronounced in the studio where the cameraman has the lights under his control. Ruttmann then has a few men walking down the empty street—workmen on their way to the factory. They are seen in black outline against the gray sky; and these figures in the somewhat lighter street help to emphasize the mystery of the dawn, the strange intermediate state between light and darkness.

One knows the effects that are achieved in crime films by the sudden appearance in a dark room of the spotlight of a pocket lamp that wanders over furniture or perhaps lights up a concealed figure. One knows the wonderful delight that can be given to perceptive eyes by the sensational white of a face that is brightly lit up and in strong relief, the play of clouds scudding across the moon, the shadows of moving leaves on the ground, the flashing of headlights, quivering reflections on water, the shining black of a spot of blood on white skin, the white telegraph wires in Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg* that seem to

be cut into the black night sky as with an etcher's needle. But these are delights that are only possible in black-and-white.

If light is cleverly used it also assists in articulating the shape of what is shown. It is only necessary to compare the face of Baranovskaya in one of her Russian films under Pudovkin and in a film made in a foreign studio, such as *Poison Gas*, or *Life's Like That*. It will be noticed that in the Russian film she has very clear-cut features, almost bony, a face vivid and animated by the strong contrasts of light and shade. The same face in the German films appears flat, indistinct, gray, and expressionless. Everything depends on the lighting and the skill with which the shots are taken. Or again, consider Greta Garbo in the German film *The Joyless Street* and in one of her American films. Leaving aside the fact that the German picture is older than the American ones, and that the art of make-up was less advanced when the German film was made, this wonderful woman's face will hardly be recognizable. In the German film it is chalky and masklike, the skin looks muddy and gray, the eyes are expressionless, the hair seems dusty. In any of the American films her skin has a subdued satiny luster, her clear cool eyes are extraordinarily piercing, and her soft silky hair seems to glow with a mysterious inner radiance. By the help of clever lighting, irregular features can be made to look harmonious, a face can be made to look haggard or full, old or young. It is exactly the same with interiors and landscapes. Depending on the lighting, a room may look warm and comfortable, or cold and bare, large or small, clean or dirty; it may be striking

at the first glance, or quite mediocre and insignificant. The effect of a bright beam of sunshine falling across a dark space could hardly be obtained with the same success in color. The strange fascination of a thundery landscape, the pallid light creeping in under a dark cover; the silhouette of a mountain range against the evening sky; the squalid grayness of an industrial area; waving cornfields; motes dancing in the sunshine between the shadows of tree trunks—all these are black-and-white effects by means of which desired moods may quite naturally be suggested in a narrative film. It is only necessary to remember the famous first act in Fritz Lang's *The Nibelungen Saga*, where Siegfried is riding through the magic forest.

The special delight in getting the sense of the texture of ordinary materials—such as dull iron, shining tin, smooth fur, the woolly hide of an animal, soft skin—in film or photograph is also heightened by the lack of hues. To be sure, texture is more faithfully reproducible in colors—as witness the famous paintings of silks by men like Terborch. If the art of giving the illusion of the reality of stuffs rouses great admiration even in painting, the effect is more uncannily exciting when it is obtained without the aid of color—simply in black and white. Occasionally a photographer succeeds in the supremely difficult art of registering surface qualities with an almost magical faithfulness, and thereby giving a particularly genuine picture of his subjects. On the other hand, one often notices how oddly a table set for a meal comes out in a film— what curious black things the people are eating, little blobs, and slimy-smooth shining balls and all kinds of flat things—they cut them up and put them cheerfully

into their mouths, but one cannot see what they are.

Light, just as other properties of film, has been called to serve definite decorative and evocative purposes only as film developed into an art. In the early days any conspicuous light effect was avoided, just as perspective size-alterations and overlapping were shunned. If the effects of the lighting sprang to the eye too obviously in the picture, it was considered a professional error. The American director Cecil B. de Mille tells an instructive story to this effect:

"I had been accustomed to stage work, and I wanted to use a particular light effect, which I had used in the theater, for a film I was then shooting. In the scene in question, a spy came creeping through a curtain, and in order to make the effect more mysterious, I decided to light only half the spy's face and to leave the rest in darkness. I looked at the result on the screen and found it extraordinarily effective. I was so pleased with this trick of lighting that I used it throughout the film, that is, I used spotlights from one side or the other— a method which is now freely practiced. After I had sent the film to the distributor's office I got a telegram from the manager that surprised me considerably. It ran:—'Have you gone mad? Do you suppose we can sell a film for its full price if you only show half a man?' "

The film was rejected until de Mille hit on the idea of bluffing his customers by referring to the recondite authority of a great European artist. He wired back: "If you fellows are such fools that you don't know Rembrandt chiaroscuro when you see it, don't blame me." That did it. The distributor launched the film with the slogan: "The first film lighted in the Rem-

brandt style," asked double the usual price, and got it.

This story shows to what extent our way of seeing has changed in the last few years. Nowadays even the general public is accustomed to light effects such as those with which de Mille experimented then. But in those days film meant the reproduction of natural objects, and any formative intrusion was regarded as detracting from truth to nature, that is, from the fundamental object of film. A man who is only half visible is only half a man, and in real life men are never bisected—so Mr. de Mille's picture was no good. A simple equation. The lights must be so placed that all the details of every object would be clearly recognizable; no "disturbing" shadows were wanted but a clear survey. It was only later that the use of light in the service of art was learned.

ARTISTIC USE OF THE DELIMITATION OF THE PICTURE AND OF THE DISTANCE FROM THE OBJECT

Since our eyes can move freely in every direction, our field of vision is practically unlimited. A film image, on the other hand, is definitely bounded by its margins. Only what appears within these margins is visible, and therefore the film artist is forced—has the opportunity—to make a selection from the infinity of real life. In other words, he can choose his "motif." The delimitation of the image is as much a formative tool as perspective, for it allows of some particular detail being brought out and given special significance; and, conversely, of unimportant things being omitted, surprises being suddenly introduced into the

shot, reflections of things that are happening "off" being brought in.

Moreover, a frame is an absolute essential if the decorative qualities of a picture are to be displayed; one can only consider the filling of the canvas, the allotment of space, and so forth, if there are definite limits to act as framework for the pictorial design. The frame of the image consists of two vertical and two horizontal lines. Every vertical and horizontal line occurring in the shot, therefore, will be supported by these axes. Slanting lines appear as slanting because the margins of the picture are straight, that is, vertical and horizontal; for every deviation requires some visible standard of comparison to show from what it deviates.

In a good film image, all lines and other directions stand in well-balanced relation to one another and to the margins. They support one another as parallels or are in contrast; they form a quiet or a restless pattern, a complicated or a simple one; and similarly with the distribution of dark and light masses. If the screen were infinitely large, there could be no question of a good organization of the surface, for, in order to achieve it, there must be a limited space to organize. There is no balance in the infinite, except perhaps in wallpaper designs where there is a serial uniformity, which, of course, is hardly applicable to the film.

The question of the size and proportion of the image is quite topical at present. Abel Gance in his Napoleon film took certain scenes for a triptych screen. At the performance three projectors operated simultaneously, so that a sort of panoramic strip resulted, which could be surveyed at a single glance only from a considerable distance. In America, too, various experiments have been made with enlarged screens. Nevertheless, the greater the surface of projection, the more difficult it is to organize the picture meaningfully. The temptation to increase the size of the screen goes with the desire for colored, stereoscopic, and sound film. It is the wish of people who do not know that artistic effect is bound up with the limitations of the medium and who want quantity rather than quality. They want to keep on getting nearer to nature and do not realize that they thereby make it increasingly difficult for film to be art.

The experiments with various-sized screens have once again raised the question as to how far the internationally standardized rectangular shape is artistically satisfactory. Statistical inquiries have been made to discover what shapes were preferred by the great masters. The Russian director Eisenstein during his stay in Hollywood gave a lecture advocating the square screen, within which horizontal and vertical rectangles of any proportion could be formed by using different-shaped masks. "Neither the vertical nor the horizontal shape alone is ideal," he said. "How may the vertical and horizontal tendencies of the film image be satisfied simultaneously? The battlefield for such a conflict is easily found—it is the square. The square is the only shape which is capable of producing all possible rectangles, if portions at the sides, or top and bottom are masked. It may also be used as a whole, in order to impress upon the spectator the cosmic finality of its squareness—particularly in a dynamic sequence of different dimensions, from a tiny

square in the middle up to the all-embracing square that includes the whole screen."

In the beginnings of photography, and thus also of film art, only all-inclusive images were taken, that is, pictures that contained the whole of the event or object to be represented. Close-ups—a pair of hands, or half a face—could have been taken then as now, but they were not. Things that are technically possible are utilized only after the idea has penetrated that by their means useful and valuable results can be achieved, and not merely forbidden or unsound ones. If one wanted to take a shot of a man, his complete figure, or at least the whole upper part of his body, had to be in the picture. The margins of the screen were considered only in a negative sense—they must not cut parts of anything off. Interest was concentrated entirely on what was to be photographed, and not at all on the manner in which this was to be done. That sections and isolated details could be used creatively was a revolution, the same revolution that had to take place for all the other features of the film medium before it could become art. Just as Cecil B. de Mille's customers objected to having pictures in which faces were only partially illuminated, so it seemed absurd intentionally to cut up a natural object by the margins of the picture. Nowadays, after only a few years have passed, it has become fashionable even for quite mediocre directors to let the range finder go wild from time to time.

In the film *The Cameraman*, Buster Keaton is in love with a girl who works at a press-photograph agency. The following scene takes place: It is early morning. The office is being opened up, the employees arrive.

The reception room with the counter at which customers are received is shown. This is where the girl works. She enters, takes her coat off, and settles down. Suddenly the camera is shifted a little, and now a hitherto invisible corner of the waiting room comes into the picture, and there sits Buster Keaton, staring stupidly in front of him. He has been sitting there all night waiting to see the girl. This shows that even a long shot may actually be, in a sense, nothing but a detail shot. "Long shot" is of course a relative and inexact term, which cannot be defined, unless by saying: "A long shot includes the whole of everything that is relevant to the particular total situation." In practice it would be called a long shot if (as in this case) a whole office were shown. But that crucial corner occupied by Buster Keaton does not come into the picture and the whole effect of the shot depends on this. The same event might have been shown in this way: the girl comes up the stairs, opens the door into the office and sees Buster Keaton sitting in the corner. But the whole absurd and extravagant effect arises from the fact that the spectator believes to be seeing all there is to see—an ordinary office with ordinary people working in it—and suddenly, as if he had fallen from the skies, the ridiculous, infatuated boy is discovered, as though waiting from time immemorial in the midst of this businesslike office, in which nothing out of the ordinary is expected. The psychological shock which is given to the spectator might be described theoretically as follows: a complete whole is shown, and the spectator has been lulled to a false security; suddenly the total structure of this whole is altered by an insignificant twist which seems

incongruous with what has gone before. Something of the same effect is achieved when Charlie Chaplin is seen in *Smart People* marvelously turned out in a top hat and tails; but only the upper part of his body is shown, and suddenly it is discovered that he has no trousers on and is standing there in his underpants. Here again the part that is shown (the upper part of the body) suggests a complete picture (smartly dressed man) and the disclosure shows in quite a different light what has already been seen, and turns it into a caricature.

Now for an example of an entirely different kind. Sternberg's *The Docks of New York* has a scene in which a suicide jumps off a boat. Nothing is shown in the shot except the quivering surface of the water in which is seen the reflection of the boat with the woman standing up and then jumping overboard. The woman is shown indirectly by her reflection in the water. The next moment, however, the woman herself is seen falling into the water, at the very spot where her reflection has been. This unexpected sequence of the direct upon the indirect view is most impressive. The effect is achieved by a careful choice of what is to be photographed. The camera is so placed that the most important part of the shot, namely, the boat with the woman on board, does not come in at all—a position which is quite absurd from the standpoint of ordinary representation of an object. The important part of the event, the only reason for which the shot has been taken, only throws its reflection into the picture. But the spectator, who perhaps might have watched a direct shot of the event with

merely passing interest, is caught and thrilled by the unusualness of the presentation.

Similar artistic "tricks" are used frequently. They have almost become conventions—such as the shadow of the creeping villain appearing dark against a light wall. Indeed a shadow often acts as the announcer: it appears before the person throwing it comes on the scene, and by this means directs the audience's interest and attention to whatever is approaching.

The true virtue of the delimited image appears from the "close-up." The smaller the detail to be photographed, the larger it comes out in the picture. The close-up not only helps the artist give an enlargement of something which would not be obvious as a mere detail of a long shot—for example, that someone's eyes are filled with tears or that a mouse is sitting in a corner of a room—but it also takes some characteristic feature out of the whole. Very often the film artist will introduce his audience to a new situation by means of some such detail. The pendulum of a clock may be shown, then the whole clock, then the camera travels farther back, and people appear sitting in a room and looking anxiously at the clock. The clock is the vital point of the scene and is therefore shown first. In Pabst's *The Diary of a Lost Girl* the reformatory is introduced in the following manner: The hard, ill-natured face of the teacher with hair strained back from her forehead is shown first; then that she is rhythmically beating a gong; then the camera is moved back, and it is seen that she is standing at the head of a table at which the girls are having dinner, and are putting the spoons to their mouths in time to the

strokes on the gong. Here again the central point, which is at the same time a detail illustrative of the situation, is picked out so as to direct the spectators' attention along the right lines, and also to provide a certain element of surprise; for a gradual revelation starting from the detail is much more exciting, seizes the spectators' interest much more than if the whole scene were given at once.

A sequence of scenes leading like this from the detail to the total picture can be given in various ways. Either the whole and the detail can be taken separately and joined together in the finished strip, in which case the shots go from one to the next with a jerk; or else the camera is moved backward, the shot being continuously turned, so that what appears on the screen becomes at the same time smaller and more comprehensive—that is, the detail which was at first large becomes gradually small and slips into its place in the whole scene. Or, thirdly, the camera may be left in position, while the operator works with mobile masks, so that at first the greater part of the picture remains dark and some detail of the scene—say a head—is seen in a small (round) setting, as if through a hole in a curtain. Starting from this hole, then, the whole shot "fades in."

There are still other ways of using close-ups, and these are much less easy to fit into any definite scheme. In *The Docks of New York* there is a love scene between a sailor and a prostitute. They are sitting drinking, and there is not much sign of love. Then a close-up is cut in, an uncannily lewd detail: she lustfully strokes his naked arm with indecent tattoo marks all over it, as he ripples the muscles on it for her amusement. The

same scene taken as a long shot would not be nearly as effective. Instead of the whole man, only his arm appears, a sturdy, naked, lewdly decorated thing—a clever application of the principle of *pars pro toto:* this woman sees nothing of the man but power, nudity, muscle.

Similar examples can be found in any film: the feet of a man going upstairs, so as to indicate visually the sound of the steps; the legs of a couple of lovers. Feyder's *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* has a scene depicting the ceremonial opening of a number of new buildings in a workmen's colony. The Minister is in a hurry and makes his inspection more and more rapidly, until the whole procession is positively running. Then comes a close-up: a fat man in the procession, no one in particular, mopping his brow. This man has been picked out as the type of all his fellow sufferers. In Pudovkin's *Mother* the scenes taking place in the law courts are ushered in by rapidly successive close-ups of the cold gray ashlars of the building, and in one case a huge shot of the boot of one of the soldiers on guard, a dark uncanny apparition, which is an excellent introduction to the mood of the following scenes. The Russians, indeed, have created an entirely new technique of close-ups.

The possibility of varying the range of the image and the distance from the object thus provides the film artist with the means of splitting up the whole of any scene easily without interfering with reality. Parts may represent the whole, suspense may be created by leaving what is important or remarkable out of the picture. Certain portions may be emphasized so as to induce the spectator to seek symbolic meaning in

their appearance. Particular attention may be focused on essential details.

The close-up, however, has one serious drawback. It easily leaves the spectator in the dark as to the surroundings of the object or part of the object. This is especially true in a film where there are too many close-ups, where hardly any long shots are given, as for instance in Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, or in a number of Russian films. The close-up shows a human head, but one cannot tell where the man is to whom the head belongs, whether he is indoors or outdoors, and how he is placed in regard to other people—whether close or distant, turning toward them or away from them, in the same room with them or somewhere else. A superabundance of close-ups very easily leads to the spectators having a tiresome sense of uncertainty and dislocation. Thus a film artist will generally find himself obliged not to use close-ups alone but only in conjunction with long shots that will give the necessary information as to the situation in general.

On the other hand, however, the film artist has a valuable means of expression, which is denied to the stage, in the power of choosing his distance from his subject. In a theater the spectator always remains at the same distance from the scene of action, and hence events and objects can only be shown within certain limits of size. The subtleties of facial expression, for instance, are lost for the majority of the spectators, who are not seated close to the stage. Indeed unless gifted with very sharp eyes or by making use of the unsatisfactory, because falsifying, assistance of opera glasses, the audience even in the first balcony will be

able to catch only a fraction of what is shown on the stage.

It is, however, not only technical matters of visual acuity that are under discussion. The constant distance of the spectator from the stage makes for an unchangeable evaluation of properties and actions on the stage "according to size," which is most important aesthetically. From a visual standpoint the movements of the actors, their costumes, the sets, are only effective up to a fairly low degree of differentiation. Film can enlarge this range of validity and, which is more important, it can shift it. The spectator may have been looking at a whole room but the next minute the camera can provide quite a different scene on the same spot, in which quite different things form the center of interest, quite different objects come out large and important, and possibly everything that was important in the long shot a moment ago has been omitted. Of a room containing two people only a tiny half-yard-square patch of the table remains and lying on it a flower that had before been unnoticed or, in any case, had taken up only a minute portion of the picture. Toward this flower, now the center of the action, grope the fingers of a hand, equally large, equally important, which was small and inconspicuous and played no part previously.

The sphere of operation of the film compared with that of the theater is thereby enormously enlarged. It must be added that, even if it were technically possible, emphasis upon the nonhuman element in the theater would be hardly appropriate. The theater depends on the spoken word; ordinary dramatic scenes, whose meaning lies in the dialogue, could

never combine to give a homogeneous effect with scenes in which inarticulate things like animals or flowers carried on the action simply by their appearance or by movements accompanied or unaccompanied by sounds. Anything of this kind is only very exceptionally possible on the stage; and even in the kind of sound film that is based essentially on dialogue the introduction of such scenes at important points would produce a disturbing and incoherent effect.

Perhaps the point has never been made explicitly—and it seems significant that it occurs to very few theatergoers—how unnatural, how stylized, all stage art is because the actors never stop talking. Every action is overlaid and clothed with words. Even in the first outline, every scene is so planned that the plot shall be unfolded by unceasing conversation. Indeed every preponderance of mere action over the spoken word is regarded as a defect. The spoken word, the most important distinguishing trait of the drama, has developed into a medium of radical purity during the evolution of the art through thousands of years. That this method of presenting an event is not a matter of course will be clearly realized only after seeing from a good silent film how the action proceeds quite easily without any use of words at all.

Film can make inanimate objects attract attention to themselves. Let us suppose again that in a particular scene on the stage a flower is lying on a table. This flower could never, except with the help of the actors, attract the attention of the audience. The stage director or the playwright cannot rely on the possibility that the audience might in the course of the play notice the insignificant detail because the audience's attention

must always be directed to the precise point of the action.

The film artist has the best possible control of his audience's attention; for by placing the camera just where he wishes he brings onto the screen whatever is of greatest importance at the time, and is able to give proper significance to objects without there being any need for the flower to call out "Now look at me." The interest of the spectator is necessarily directed to it because at the time he is shown nothing else. Similarly other small events—a fly crawling, or the smoke of a cigarette—which would not be nearly emphatic enough on the stage to draw attention to themselves are given the requisite stress.

In a film, these little events, these roles played by accessories, are exactly of the same type as the "macroscopic" ones, those represented by the human actors. And hence arises a most satisfactory homogeneity.

The possibility of rapidly changing the distance from the object leads naturally to a relativization of the standards of size. Insofar as the spectator cannot use his past experience to judge what he sees—insofar as he does not know, for instance, that a fly is objectively small and a mountain large—he has nothing to go on in judging the objective size of what is shown. He has no means of knowing how far the camera stood from the object. A newsreel of an architectural exhibition showed several shots of houses that had been erected on the grounds, and immediately afterward, shots of a little plaster model of the city of Rome. To the spectator both sets of buildings appeared of equal size, although in one they were of ordinary height and taken at the necessary distance,

and in the other the models were only a few inches high and photographed close to. Experience was here of no use to the spectator in judging the relative sizes.

This relativization results, on the one hand, in the possibility of making things of quite different sizes appear the same size, and thus of being brought into connection one with another. In a film on German university life the rounded belly of a corps student, who is snoring on a sofa, dissolves into a landscape shot—a similarly formed, gently rounded hill near Heidelberg. These two things which actually are of totally different sizes are simply and easily made to coalesce by the stomach being photographed from close to and the hill from far away; and thereby the opportunity is given of making an amusing comparison between them.

On the other hand, particular effects may be induced by the spectators being deceived as to the real size of what is shown. A critic once referred to a scene in the film version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as a standard example of the idiom of film art. A room is shown, and suddenly a huge hand is put into it, and thereby it is made clear that the room is actually quite small and only part of a doll's house. At first glance the room is assumed to be of normal size, for in the picture itself there is nothing to indicate that anything exceptional—a toy—is involved. The sudden change brought about by perfectly natural means—the normal-sized human hand—brings home the symbolism of the happening to the spectator in the best way. What is only a conceptual identification of the human house and the toy house actually takes place here. Thus once again a "drawback" in film—the im-

possibility of giving any absolute standard of size—is turned to advantage, and used for artistic effect.

ARTISTIC USE OF THE ABSENCE OF THE SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM

Unlike real life, film permits of jumps in time and space. Montage means joining together shots of situations that occur at different times and in different places. Theorists, and especially the Russians, have hitherto investigated montage more thoroughly than any other branch of film art.

It was the Russians who first realized the artistic potentialities of montage; and it was they who first made an attempt to define its principles systematically. At the same time they have often carried their enthusiasm for it too far. They are inclined to consider montage as the only important artistic film feature—as witness their frequently excessive use of it. Indeed the impression is sometimes left that they consider a single uncut strip of film simply a piece of reality—as though an edited film were, so to speak, cut nature. Pudovkin begins his book *Film Technique* with the statement that montage is the foundation of film art. We have tried to show above how even a single shot is in no sense a simple reproduction of nature; how even in the single shot most important differences exist between nature and the film image; and how seriously artistic formative processes must be considered.

It can be easily seen, however, why montage might be thought of as the royal road to film art. The single image, after all, arises from a recording process, which

FILM
AS
ART

Rudolf Arnheim

1968

FOREWORD

An unexpectedly brisk second wind has kept this book moving after it was reshaped and revived a dozen years ago. The sustained demand, especially on the part of the ever-increasing number of young film friends, must mean that the thesis of the book stands the test of time. In fact, these days whenever some scenes of a new or old film exert the spell of art, they do so by the direct impact of moving shapes and sounds, not by talk. The indirectness of language, so magically evocative in its own domain of literature and drama, makes words fade into meaningless noise when they are forced to compete on an equal footing with the immediacy of visual and auditory action. Television proves daily how revealing a small gesture, caught from life, can be for the eye of the beholder and, on the other hand, how tediously absurd is the endless exposure of talking human bodies. Speech, wisely subordinated, supplements, explains, and deepens the image; but the image continues to rule the screen, and to explore its properties remains a topical task.

Confirmed again, it seems to me, is the observation that the film derives its principal strength from the realism of the photographic medium. How hopelessly artificial looks the puppet play of pretentious mystery-making in the Swedish manner or the slick window display of tangled nudes in the French way! And how promptly are such contrivances infused with momentary life, almost against their will, by the spontaneity of an unspoiled actor or landscape.

The authentic realism of the film image has recently produced its most striking artistic results not so much by