ESSENTIAL
DEREN

COLLECTED WRITINGS ON FILM BY

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Photographs: page 1, portrait of Maya Deren by Alexander Hammid; pages 13, 15, and 129, Mishles of the Afternoon; page 187, Ritual in Transfigured Time; Page 265, A Study in Choreography for Camera.
Amateur versus Professional

The major obstacle for amateur film-makers is their own sense of inferiority vis-à-vis professional productions. The very classification “amateur” has an apologetic ring. But that very word—from the Latin amator, “lover”—means one who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity. And this is the meaning from which the amateur film-maker should take his cue. Instead of envying the script and dialogue writers, the trained actors, the elaborate staffs and sets, the enormous production budgets of the professional film, the amateur should make use of the one great advantage which all professionals envy him, namely, freedom—both artistic and physical.

Artistic freedom means that the amateur film-maker is never forced to sacrifice visual drama and beauty to a stream of words, words, words, words, to the relentless activity and explanations of a plot, or to the display of a star or a sponsor’s product; nor is the amateur production expected to return profit on a huge investment by holding the attention of a massive and motley audience for 90 minutes. Like the amateur still-photographer, the amateur film-maker can devote himself to capturing the poetry and beauty of places and events and, since he is using a motion-picture camera, he can explore the vast world of the beauty of movement. (One of the films winning Honorable Mention in the 1958 Creative Film Awards was Round And Square, a poetic, rhythmic treatment of the dancing lights of cars as they streamed down highways, under bridges, etc.) Instead of trying to invent a plot that moves, use the
movement of wind, or water, children, people, elevators, balls, etc., as a poem might celebrate these. And use your freedom to experiment with visual ideas; your mistakes will not get you fired.

Physical freedom includes time freedom—a freedom from budget imposed deadlines. But above all, the amateur film-maker, with his small, lightweight equipment, has an inconspicuousness (for candid shooting) and a physical mobility which is well the envy of most professionals, burdened as they are by their many-ton monsters, cables and crews. Don’t forget that no tripod has yet been built which is as miraculously versatile in movement as the complex system of supports, joints, muscles and nerves which is the human body, which, with a bit of practice, makes possible the enormous variety of camera angles and visual action. You have all this, and a brain too, in one neat, compact, mobile package.

Cameras do not make films; film-makers make films. Improve your films not by adding more equipment and personnel but by using what you have to its fullest capacity. The most important part of your equipment is yourself: your mobile body, your imaginative mind, and your freedom to use both. Make sure you do use them.

Cinema as an Art Form

To my father, who, when I was a child, once spoke to me of life as an unstable equilibrium.

Even the most cursory observation of film production reveals that the entire field is dominated by two main approaches: the fiction-entertainment film, promoted internationally by commercial interests; and the documentary-educational film, promoted by individuals and organizations interested in social reform, visual education and cultural dissemination. What is conspicuously lacking is the development of cinema as an art form—concerned with the type of perception which characterizes all other art forms, such as poetry, painting, etc., and devoted to the development of a formal idiom as independent of other art forms as they are of each other.

The seriousness of this gap in our cultural development is in no way lessened by the utilitarian validity of the camera, as an instrument for recording and infinitely reproducing imaginative or factual material which would otherwise be accessible to a very limited audience. Nor should this lack of cinematic form be obscured by the growing body of sometimes sensational film techniques which are developed and exploited in the interest of a more effective rendition of the subject matter.

However, the most serious aspect of the entire situation is the passive acceptance and casual neglect of this state of the cinema by those whose active, compulsive interest and devotion is responsible for the varying but constant vitality of other art forms. This passivity on the part of those who should, presumably, be the most
My extended analysis and criticism of the naturalistic method in art is inspired by my intimate awareness of how much the very nature of photography, more than any other art form, may seduce the artist (and spectator) into such an aesthetic.

The most immediate distinction of film is the capacity of the camera to represent a given reality in its own terms, to the extent that it is accepted as a substitute proper for that reality. A photograph will serve as proof of the “truth” of some phenomenon where either a painting or a verbal testimony would fail to carry weight. In other art forms, the artist is the intermediary between reality and the instrument by which he creates his work of art. But in photography, the reality passes directly through the lens of the camera to be immediately recorded on film, and this relationship may, at times, dispense with all but the most manual services of a human being, and even, under certain conditions, produce film almost “untouched by human hands.” The position of the camera in reference to reality can be either a source of strength, as when the “realism” of photography is used to create an imaginative reality; or it can seduce the photographer into relying upon the mechanism itself to the extent that his conscious manipulations are reduced to a minimum.

The impartiality and clarity of the lens—its precise fidelity to the aspect and texture of physical matter—is the first contribution of the camera. Sometimes, because of the physical and functional similarity between the eye and the lens, there is a most curious tendency to confuse their respective contributions. By some strange process of ambiguous association (which most photographers are only too willing to leave uncorrected) the perceptiveness and precision of a photograph is somehow understood to be an expression of the perceptiveness of the eyes of the photographer. This transcription of attributes is more common than one might imagine. When the primary validity of a photograph consists in its clarity or its candidness (and these are by far the most common criteria) it should be signed by those who ground the lens, who constructed the fast, easily manipulated camera, who sweat over the chemistry of emulsions which would be both sensitive and fine-grained, who engineered the optical principles of both camera and enlarger—in short, by all those who made photography possible, and least of all by the one who pushed the button. As Kodak has so long advertised: “You push the button, rr does the rest!”

The ease of photographic realism does not, however, invalidate the documentarist’s criticism of the “arty” efforts (characteristic of a certain period of film development) to deliberately muffle the lens in imitation of the myopic, undetailed, and even impressionistic effects of painting where, precisely, the limitations of human vision played a creative role in simplifying and idealizing reality.

On another level, the realists are critical, and again justifiably so, of the commercial exploitation of film as a means of reproducing theater and illustrating novels...almost as a printing press reproduces an original manuscript in great quantity. Out of respect for the unique power of film to be itself a reality, they are impatient with the painted backdrops, the “furnished stages,” and all the other devices which were developed as part of the artifice of theater and drama. If it is possible, they say, to move the camera about, to capture the fleeting, “natural” expression of a face, the inimitable vistas of nature, or the unstageable phenomenon of social realities, then such is the concern of film to be exploited, as distinct from other forms.

Such a concept of film is true to its very origins. The immediate precursor of movies was Marey’s photographic series of the successive stages of a horse running. Between this first record of a natural phenomenon, and the more recent scientific films of
insect life, plant life, chemical processes, etc., lies a period of increasing technical invention and competency, without any basic change in concept.

In the meantime, however, a concern with social reality had branched off as a specific field of film activity. The first newsreels of important historical events, such as the coronation, differ from the newsreels of today only in terms again of a refined technique, but from them came the documentary film, a curious amalgamation of scientific and social concerns. It is not a coincidence that Robert Flaherty, who is considered the father of the documentary film, was first an explorer, and that his motivation in carrying a camera with him was part anthropological, part social, and part romantic. He had discovered a world which was beyond the horizon of most men. He was moved both by its pictorial and its human values; and his achievement consists of recording it with sympathetic, and relative accuracy. The documentary of discovery—whether it records a natural, a social, or a scientific phenomenon—can be of inestimable value. It can bring within the reach of even the most sedentary individual a wealth of experience which would otherwise come only to the curious, the painstaking, and the heroic.

But whenever the value of a film depends, for the most part, upon the character of its subject, it is obvious that the more startling realities will have a respectively greater interest for the audience. War, as a social and political phenomenon, results in realities which surpass the most violent anticipations of human imagination. Because it also played an immediate role in our lives, we were obsessed with a need to comprehend them. And so, since the reality itself was more than enough to hold the interest of the audience (and so required least the imaginative contributions of the film maker) the war documentaries contain passages which carry naturalism to its farthest point.

I should like to refer to two examples which are strikingly memorable but essentially representative. In a newsreel which circulated during wartime, there was a sequence in which a Japanese soldier was forced from his hideout by flame throwers and ran off, burning like a torch. In the documentary Fighting Lady there is an exciting sequence in which the plane which carries the camera swoops down and strafes some enemy planes on the ground. This latter footage was achieved by connecting the shutter of the camera with the machine gun so that when the gun was fired the camera would automatically begin registering.

An analysis of these examples can serve to illuminate the essential confusion, implicit in the very beginnings of the idea of the natural form in art, between the provinces and purposes of art and those of science, as well as the distinctions between those art forms which depend upon or extend reality, and those which themselves create a reality. The footage of the burning soldier points up the reliance upon the accidents of reality (so prevalent in photography) as contrasted to the inevitabilities, consciously created, of art. The essential amorality and ambiguity of a "natural" form is also apparent here; for were we not prepared by previous knowledge,—by an outside frame of reference—we would undoubtedly have deep compassion for the burning soldier and a violent hatred for the flame thrower.

In the case of the camera which is synchronized with the machine gun, the dissociation between man and instrument, and the independent relationship between reality and camera, is carried to an unanticipated degree. If this film can be said to reflect any intention, it must be that of death, for such was the function of the gun. In any case, the reality of the conflict is itself entirely independent of the action of the camera, rather than a creation of it, as is true of the experience of an art form.

Nor is it irrelevant to point out here that the war documentaries were achieved with an anonymity which even science, the most objective of professions, would find impossible. These
films are the product of hundreds, even thousands, of unidentified cameramen. This is not another deliberate effort of the “top brass” to minimize the soldier-cameraman. It is a reflection upon a method which, unrestricted by budgetary considerations of film or personnel, could be carried to its logical conclusion. These cameramen were first instructed carefully in the mechanics of photography—not in the form of film—and were sent out to catch whatever they could of the war, to get it on photographic record. The film was then gathered together, sorted according to chronology or specific subject, and put at the disposal of the film editors. If the material of one cameraman could be distinguished from another, it was in terms of sheer technical competence; or, perhaps, occasionally a consistent abundance of dramatic material which might testify to an unusual alertness and a heroic willingness to risk one’s life in order to “capture” on film some extraordinary moment.

This whole process is certainly more analogous to the principle of fecundity in nature than to that of the economical selectivity of art. Of all this incalculably immense footage, no more than a tiny percentage will ever be put to function in a documentary or any other filmic form.

Let me make it clear that I do not intend to minimize either the immediate interest or the historical importance of such a use of the motion-picture medium. To do so would require, by logical analogy, that I dismiss all written history, especially since it is a much less accurate form of record than the film, and value only the creative, poetic use of language. But precisely because film, like language, serves a wide variety of needs, the triumphs which it achieves in one capacity must not be permitted to obscure its failures in another.

The war years were marked by a great interest in the documentary, just as they were characterized by the overwhelming lionization of foreign correspondents, and for the same reason. But such reportage did not become confused in the public mind with the poem as a form, simply because they both employed language. In spite of the popularity and great immediate interest in journalism, the poem still holds its position (or at least such is my fervent hope) as a distinguished form of equal, if not superior, importance in man’s culture; and although it may, in certain periods, be neglected, there is never an implication that, as a form, it can be replaced by any other, however pertinent, popular, or refined in its own terms.

I am distressed, for this reason, by the current tendency to exalt the documentary as the supreme achievement of film, which places it, by implication, in the category of an art form. Although an explicit statement of this is carefully avoided, the implication is supported by an emphasis upon those documentaries which are significant not for their scientific accuracy, but for an undertone of lyricism or a use of dramatic devices—values generally associated with art form. Thus the campaign serves not so much to point up the real values of a documentary—the objective, impartial rendition of an otherwise obscure or remote reality—but to cast suspicion upon the extent to which it actually retains those documentary functions. A work of art is primarily concerned with the effective creation of an idea (even when that may require a sacrifice of the factual material upon which the idea is based), and involves a conscious manipulation of its material from an intensely motivated point of view. By inference, the unconsidered and unmodified praise which has recently attended the documentarist requires of him, again by inference, that he function also in these latter terms.

In this effort he has not failed altogether. When the reality which he seeks to convey consists largely of human and emotional values, the perception of these and their rendition may require of the documentarist a transcription similar to that which I discuss elsewhere, when the art reality becomes independent of the reality by which it was inspired. Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright and John Taylor), sections of Forgotten Village (Steinbeck, Hackenschmied
and Klein, _Rien Que Les Heures_ (Cavalcanti), _Berlin_ (Ruttman), the Russian _Turksib_ and the early work of Dziga Vertov are among those documentaries which create an intensity of experience, and so have validity quite irrespective of their accuracy. They are the counterpart, in literature, of those travel journals which inform as much of the subtleties of vision as of the things viewed, or of those impassioned reportages which convince as much by the sincere emotion of the reporter as by the fact reported.

But the documentary film-maker is not permitted the emotional freedom of other artists, or the full access to the means and techniques of this form. Since the subjective attitude is, at least, theoretically discouraged as an impediment to unbiased observation, he is not justified in examining the extent of his personal interest in the subject matter. And so he finds himself occupied, to an enervating degree, with material which does not inspire him. He is further limited by a set of conventions which originate in the methods of the scientific film. He must photograph "on the scene" (often a very primitive one) even when material circumstances may hamper his techniques, and force him to select the accessible rather than the significant fact. He must use the "real" people, even if they are camera-shy or resentful of him as an alien intruder, and so do not behave as "realistically" as would a competent professional actor. If I were to believe in many of the documentaries which I have seen, I would deduce that most "natives" are either predominantly hostile, taciturn or simply ill-humored, and capable of mainly two facial expressions: a blank stupidity punctuated by periods of carnival hysteria. Even in our urban, sophisticated society, the portrait photographer inspires an uneasy rigidity. It would be a rare native indeed who, confronted by the impressive and even ominous mechanism of the camera and its accoutrements (and that in the hands of a suspect stranger), could maintain a normally relaxed, spontaneous behavior. These are but some of the exterior conditions rigidly imposed upon the

documentary film-maker, in addition to the creative problems within the form itself.

Yet the products created under these conditions are made subject, by the undefined enthusiasms of their main "appreciators," to an evaluation in terms usually reserved for the most creative achievements of other art forms. And so the documentarist is driven to the effort of satisfying two separate demands, which are in conflict. He fails, in the end, to completely satisfy one or the other.

I am sure that few, if any, of the so-called documentaries would be acceptable as sufficiently objective and accurate data for either anthropologists, sociologists or psychologists. On the other hand, few, if any, are comparable in stature, authority, or profundity, to the great achievements of the other arts.

The documentarist cannot long remain oblivious of his ambiguous position. The greater his understanding of truly creative form, the more acute is his embarrassment at finding his labors evaluated in terms which he was not initially permitted or presumed to function. Whereas, formerly, he might have been able to maintain some middle ground, the insistence of the current campaign precipitates the basic conflicts, and forces upon him the necessity of a decision. It will succeed, in the end, in driving the more creative workers, embarrassed by the exaggerated, misdirected appreciation, out of the field. And it will be left in the hands of skilled technicians where, perhaps, it rightfully belongs.

Since these ideas are in opposition to the current wave of documentary enthusiasm, and would, perhaps, be ascribed to the prejudice of my own distance from that form, I should like to quote from an article by Alexander Hammid. He has been recognized as an outstanding talent in documentary film for 18 years, both here and abroad. He is the director of the _Hymn of the Nations_ (the film about Toscannini) and other films for the OWI,
and (as Alexander Hackenshmied) photographed and co-directed _Forgotten Village, Lights Out in Europe, Crisis_, and a multitude of documentaries which have been circulated only in Europe. It therefore must be admitted that he would be at least “conversant” with the problems of his field.

It is revealing that Mr. Hammid devotes considerable space to the fact that, in order to achieve a “realism” of effect, it is often necessary to be imaginative in method.

“In their [the early documentarists’] drive towards objectivity, they brushed aside the fact that the camera records only in the manner in which the man behind it chooses to direct it. I believe that the necessity of subjective choice is one of the fundamentals of any creation. In other words, we must have command of our instrument. If we leave the choice to our instrument, then we rely upon the accident of reality which, in itself, is not reality. The necessity of choice and elimination which eo ipso are a denial of objectivity, continues throughout the entire process of film making;... Many people believe that if there is no arrangement or staging of a scene, they will obtain an unadulterated, objective picture of reality... But even if we put the camera in front of a section of real life, upon which we do not intrude so much as to even blow off a speck of dust, we still arrange: by selecting the angle, which may emphasize one thing and conceal another, or distort an otherwise familiar perspective, by selecting a lens which will concentrate our attention on a single face or one which will reveal the entire landscape and other people; by the selection of a filter and an exposure...which determine whether the tone will be brilliant or gloomy, harsh or soft... This is why, in films, it becomes possible to put one and the same reality to the service of democratic, socialist or totalitarian ideologies, and in each case make it seem realistic. To take the camera out of the studio, and to photograph real life on the spot becomes merely one style of making films, but it is not a guarantee of truth, objectivity, beauty or any other moral or esthetic virtue. As a maker of documentary films I am aware of how many scenes I have contrived, rearranged or simply staged... These films have been presented in good faith and accepted as a ‘remarkably true picture of life.’ I do not feel that I have deceived anyone, because all these arrangements have been made in harmony with the spirit of that life, and were designed to present its character, moods, hidden meanings, beauties and contrasts... We have not reproduced reality but have created an illusion of reality.”

And Mr. Hammid pursues his observations with relentless logic—right out of the documentary field, as it is generally understood.

“I believe that this reality, which lives only in the darkness of the movie theater, is the thing that counts. And it lives only if it is convincing, and that does not depend upon the fact that someone went to the great trouble of taking the camera to unusual places to photograph unusual events, or whether it contained professional actors or native inhabitants. It lies rather in the feeling and creative force with which the man behind the camera is able to project his visions.”

If we accept the proposition that even the selected placing of the camera is an exercise of conscious creativity, then there is no such thing as a documentary film, in the sense of an objective rendition of reality. Not even the camera in synchronization with the gun remains, for it could be argued that such an arrangement was itself a creative action. And, many documentarists, confronting in the principle of objectivity an implication of their personal, individual uselessness, salvage their ego and importance by a desperate reversal. They attempt to establish, as the lowest common denominator of creative action, the exercise of even the most minuscule discrimination.

If such a low denominator is not acceptable, does it become so according to the degree and frequency of selectivity? Such a gra-
dation can be enormous, as Mr. Hammid's reference to angles, lenses, filters, lighting, suggests. In the final analysis, is creative action at all related to elements and the act of selection from them? For would not such a concept make creativity commensurate with the accessibility of elements, so that a man of broad experience would have a high artistic potential, whereas the shy, retiring individual would not? Or does it begin, as Mr. Hammid last implies, on a level different entirely, where the elements are recombined, not in an imitation of their original and natural integrity, but into a new whole to thus create a new reality.

For the serious artist the esthetic problem of form is, essentially, and simultaneously, a moral problem. Nothing can account for the devoted dedication of the giants of human history to art form save the understanding that, for them, the moral and esthetic problems were one and the same: that the form of a work of art is the physical manifestation of its moral structure.

So organic is this relationship that it obtains even without a conscious recognition of its existence. The vulgarity and cynicism, or the pompousness and self-conscious "impressiveness" of so many of the films of the commercial industry—these "formal" qualities are their moral qualities as well. Our sole defense against, for example, the "June-moon" rhymes and the empty melodies of Tin Pan Alley lies in the recognition that the "love" there created has nothing in common with that profound experience, known by the same name, to which artists have so desperately labored to give adequate, commensurate form.

And if the idea of art form comprehends, as it were, the idea of moral form, no one who presumes to treat of profound human values is exonerated from a moral responsibility for the negative action of failure, as well as the positive action of error.

Least of all are the documentarists exonerated from such judgment, for in full consciousness they have advanced, as the major plank of their platform, not an esthetic conviction but a moral one. They have accepted the burden of concerning themselves with important human values, particularly in view of the failure of the commercial industry to do so adequately. They stand on moral grounds which are ostensibly impregnable.

Yet it is my belief, and I think that I am not alone in this, that the documentaries of World War II illuminate precisely how much a failure of form is a failure of morals, even when it results from nothing more intentionally destructive than incompetency,
understood as an inversion of values. When applied to a recognizable person or scene, it conveys a sense of a critically qualitative change, as in its use for the landscape on the other side of death in Cocteau’s *Orpheus*.

Both such extreme images and the more familiar kind which I referred to earlier make use of the motion-picture medium as a form in which the meaning of the image originates in our recognition of a known reality and derives its authority from the direct relationship between reality and image in the photographic process. While the process permits some intrusion by the artist as a modifier of that image, the limits of its tolerance can be defined as that point at which the original reality becomes unrecognizable or is irrelevant (as when a red reflection in a pond is used for its shape and color only and without contextual concern for the water or the pond).

In such cases the camera itself has been conceived of as the artist, with distorting lenses, multiple superpositions, etc., used to simulate the creative action of the eye, the memory, etc. Such well-intentioned efforts to use the medium creatively, by forcibly inserting the creative act in the position it traditionally occupies in the visual arts, accomplish, instead, the destruction of the photographic image as reality. This image, with its unique ability to engage us simultaneously on several levels—by the objective authority of reality, by the knowledges and values which we attach to that reality, by the direct address of its aspect, and by a manipulated relationship between these—is the building block for the creative use of the medium.

*The Placement of the Creative Act and Time-Space Manipulations*

Where does the film-maker then undertake his major creative action if, in the interests of preserving these qualities of the image, he restricts himself to the control of accident in the pre-photographic stage and accepts almost complete exclusion from the photographic process as well?

Once we abandon the concept of the image as the end product and consummation of the creative process (which it is in both the visual arts and the theater), we can take a larger view of the total medium and can see that the motion-picture instrument actually consists of two parts, which flank the artist on either side. The images with which the camera provides him are like fragments of a permanent, incorruptible memory; their individual reality is in no way dependent upon their sequence in actuality, and they can be assembled to compose any of several statements. In film, the image can and should be only the beginning, the basic material of the creative action.

All invention and creation consist primarily of a new relationship between known parts. The images of film deal in realities which, as I pointed out earlier, are structured to fulfill their various functions, not to communicate a specific meaning. Therefore they have several attributes simultaneously, as when a table may be, at once, old, red, and high. Seeing it as a separate entity, an antique dealer would appraise its age, an artist its color, and a child its inaccessible height. But in a film such a shot might be followed by one in which the table falls apart, and thus a particular aspect of its age would constitute its meaning and function in the sequence, with all other attributes becoming irrelevant. The editing of a film creates the sequential relationship which gives particular or new meaning to the images according to their function; it establishes a context, a form which transfigures them without distorting their aspect, diminishing their reality and authority, or impoverishing that variety of potential functions which is the characteristic dimension of reality.

Whether the images are related in terms of common or contrasting qualities, in the causal logic of events which is narrative,
or in the logic of ideas and emotions which is the poetic mode, the structure of a film is sequential. The creative action in film, then, takes place in its time dimension; and for this reason the motion picture, though composed of spatial images, is primarily a time form.

A major portion of the creative action consists of a manipulation of time and space. By this I do not mean only such established filmic techniques as flashback, condensation of time, parallel action, etc. These affect not the action itself but the method of revealing it. In a flashback there is no implication that the usual chronological integrity of the action itself is in any way affected by the process, however disrupted, of memory. Parallel action, as when we see alternately the hero who rushes to the rescue and the heroine whose situation becomes increasingly critical, is an omnipresence on the part of the camera as a witness of action, not as a creator of it.

The kind of manipulation of time and space to which I refer becomes itself part of the organic structure of a film. There is, for example, the extension of space by time and of time by space. The length of a stairway can be enormously extended if three different shots of the person ascending it (filmed from different angles so that it is not apparent that the identical area is being covered each time) are so edited together that the action is continuous and results in an image of enduring labor toward some elevated goal. A leap in the air can be extended by the same technique, but in this case, since the film action is sustained far beyond the normal duration of the real action itself, the effect is one of tension as we wait for the figure to return, finally, to earth.

Time may be extended by the reprinting of a single frame, which has the effect of freezing the figure in mid-action; here the frozen frame becomes a moment of suspended animation which, according to its contextual position, may convey either the sense of critical hesitation (as in the turning back of Lot's wife) or may constitute a comment on stillness and movement as the opposition of life and death. The reprinting of scenes of a casual situation involving several persons may be used either in a prophetic context, as a déja-vu; or, again, precise reiteration, by inter-cutting reprints, of those spontaneous movements, expressions, and exchanges, can change the quality of the scene from one of informality to that of a stylization akin to dance; in so doing it confers dance upon non-dancers, by shifting emphasis from the purpose of the movement to the movement itself, and an informal social encounter then assumes the solemnity and dimension of ritual.

Similarly, it is possible to confer the movement of the camera upon the figures in the scene, for the large movement of a figure in a film is conveyed by the changing relationship between that figure and the frame of the screen. If, as I have done in my recent film The Very Eye of Night, one eliminates the horizon line and any background which would reveal the movement of the total field, then the eye accepts the frame as stable and ascribes all movement to the figure within it. The hand-held camera, moving and revolving over the white figures on a totally black ground, produces images in which their movement is as gravity-free and as three-dimensional as that of birds in air or fish in water. In the absence of any absolute orientation, the push and pull of their interrelationships becomes the major dialogue.

By manipulation of time and space, I mean also the creation of a relationship between separate times, places, and persons. A swing-pan—whereby a shot of one person is terminated by a rapid swing away and a shot of another person or place begins with a rapid swing of the camera, the two shots being subsequently joined in the blurred area of both swings—brings into dramatic proximity people, places, and actions which in actuality might be widely separated. One can film different people at different times and even in different places performing approximately the same gesture or movement, and, by a judicious joining of the shots in
such a manner as to preserve the continuity of the movement, the action itself becomes the dominant dynamic which unifies all separateness.

Separate and distant places not only can be related but can be made continuous by a continuity of identity and of movement, as when a person begins a gesture in one setting, this shot being immediately followed by the hand entering another setting altogether to complete the gesture there. I have used this technique to make a dancer step from woods to apartment in a single stride, and similarly to transport him from location to location so that the world itself became his stage. In my At Land, it has been the technique by which the dynamic of the Odyssey is reversed and the protagonist, instead of undertaking the long voyages of search for adventure, finds instead that the universe itself has usurped the dynamic action which was once the prerogative of human will, and confronts her with a volatile and relentless metamorphosis in which her personal identity is the sole constancy.

These are but several indications of the variety of creative time-space relationships which can be accomplished by a meaningful manipulation of the sequence of film images. It is an order of creative action available only to the motion-pictures medium because it is a photographic medium. The ideas of condensation and of extension, of separateness and of continuity, in which it deals, exploit to the fullest degree the various attributes of the photographic image: its fidelity (which establishes the identity of the person who serves as a transcendent unifying force between all separate times and places), its reality (the basis of the recognition which activates our knowledge and values and without which the geography of location and dislocation could not exist), and its authority (which transcends the impersonality and intangibility of the image and endows it with independent and objective consequence).

...
of walking or for the leisurely panorama of landscapes seen from a car or train window. Only when new things serve the same purpose better do they replace old things. Art, however, deals in ideas; time does not deny them, but may merely make them irrelevant. The truths of the Egyptians are no less true for failing to answer questions which they never raised. Culture is cumulative, and to it each age should make its proper contribution.

How can we justify the fact that it is the art instrument, among all that fraternity of twentieth-century inventions, which is still the least explored and exploited; and that it is the artist—of whom, traditionally, the culture expects the most prophetic and visionary statements—who is the most laggard in recognizing that the formal and philosophical concepts of his age are implicit in the actual structure of his instrument and the techniques of his medium?

If cinema is to take its place beside the others as a full-fledged art form, it must cease merely to record realities that owe nothing of their actual existence to the film instrument. Instead, it must create a total experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means. It must relinquish the narrative disciplines it has borrowed from literature and its timid imitation of the causal logic of narrative plots, a form which flowered as a celebration of the earthbound, step-by-step concept of time, space and relationship which was part of the primitive materialism of the nineteenth century. Instead, it must develop the vocabulary of filmic images and evolve the syntax of filmic techniques which relate those. It must determine the disciplines inherent in the medium, discover its own structural modes, explore the new realms and dimensions accessible to it and so enrich our culture artistically as science has done in its own province.