ESSENTIAL
DEREN

COLLECTED WRITINGS ON FILM BY

Maya Deren

Edited with a preface by
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Creating Movies with a New Dimension: Time

The biggest kick we film-makers get out of life is in showing an audience something new, in watching the reactions of our neighbors, friends, and strangers, to the end result of the hours of work which we have put into our films. Sometimes the audience is pleased, sometimes not. But whatever the emotion, as soon as the showing is over, there are questions. And the favorite question from my audience is: "Where do you get the ideas for your pictures? How can I get originality like that into my films?"

My answer is: Do not approach motion-picture photography in the conventional manner. Do not look upon movies as a mere extension of the still photograph. And pay *no* attention to those who tell you that the best approach to film-making is a sure grounding in photographic techniques through still photography. All this may sound revolutionary, and I mean for it to. For, apart from the problem of proper exposure and other basic technical routines (and these can be learned directly in connection with movies), the imaginative method of motion picture photography is very different from that of still photography. The superficial similarity of the fact that both techniques employ a lens and sensitive film usually serves to start the film-maker off on the wrong foot—full of habits of vision highly valuable to the still photograph, but actually harmful to the motion picture. Thus, I would say that the best study for the embryonic film-maker is one of the time arts—i.e., the dance or music—since, after all, motion pictures are concerned with time and with movement.

Popular Photography, December, 1946

The basic difference between still and motion pictures can be simply explained. A still photograph is concerned with the isolation of a moment or a second of time. The wealth of detail which usually escapes our attention as each moment passes is here arrested for our leisurely scrutiny and examination. The moment is stayed, is composed *within* a stable frame. But in films the problem is directly opposite, for films are concerned with the way in which the moment passes and becomes the next one. This metamorphosis cannot be composed within a frame, but only *through* frames, from one frame to the next. Such movement concerns itself not with details of space, but with details of movement in time.

Such a consideration may seem abstract, academic, or esoteric; yet it comes into play immediately in the selection of a lens for a specific shot. The sense of pace in a film is given by the time it takes for an object to travel from one side of the frame to another. Obviously if the area of the lens covers the length of two strides, the person will seem to be going faster than if it takes him many strides to go from edge to edge of the frame.

A movement which takes place at right angles to a long focal length lens (more than one inch) will seem to pass much more rapidly than if it takes place at right angles to a short focal length, wide angle lens. This is true either in the case of a person running across the field of vision of the camera frame or in the case of the camera's making a panoramic move across a landscape. This is the kind of timing concept which has no function at all in still photography but is of primary importance in motion pictures.

But, such specialized techniques should never be used as ends in themselves. Always, technique must be subordinate to idea. For example, my film, *A Study in Choreography for Camera*, is a demonstration of the idea that in dancing one achieves a more magic relationship to space than one does in the course of ordinary walking. After all, dancing is not only a way of moving

one's limbs—it also brings the dancer into a different relationship with his surroundings (both objects and space as a whole). It is, in short, qualitatively different from normal, naturalistic movement. And I wanted to show this not in terms of theater space but, by using techniques peculiar to the motion-picture camera, I wanted to put the entire world at the feet of the dancer.

In one shot for this film, I used a certain lens because of its effect on a time-space relationship. The location of this particular shot is the Egyptian Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Hall (which has natural illumination through a glass roof) is square, and small enough to permit a dancer to travel its length and back in a short period of time. If I had used the regular one inch lens, the shot might have been pleasing but hardly startling. However, I used a wide angle lens—my main purpose in doing this was not so much to solve the follow-focus problem, as it was to use the exaggerated perspective of a wide angle lens to achieve a startling relationship between time and space.

Through the lens, the dancer—moving towards the back of the hall—seemed to become distant in terms of size without taking a normally long time to do so. In terms of normal vision, the dancer would have had to run much longer and farther. But in a matter of seconds, with the aid of the wide angle lens, through which the hall appeared much deeper, the dancer, starting in close-up, danced into the depth of the hall where he looked tiny and distant, and, returning rapidly became large and close again. A still photographer, photographing a dancer in the Egyptian Hall, would have had entirely different considerations in mind.

Concern with the time elements of film is important, also, in the handling of the camera frame. For a motion picture camera presents one with all the potentialities of a moving frame. For example, in *Meshes of the Afternoon* a camera tilting from side to side was used to give the impression of a rocking stairway. This scene comes at a moment in the film in which it was necessary to

convey an impression that even an ostensibly inanimate staircase conspired (as do other objects in the film) to frustrate a girl in her effort to arrive somewhere. The figure which had preceded the girl climbed the stairs with ordinary ease. But those same stairs became active and seemed to throw the girl back when she tried to follow.

To shoot the scene, Alexander Hammid photographed with the camera hand-held, standing at the top of the stairs, and I, who happened to act in this sequence, started up the bottom of the stairs, towards the camera, simulating a heavy, uneven fall first to the right and then to the left. We so synchronized our movements that when I fell to my right, he tilted the camera to his left and vice versa. Thus, my falls seemed to be induced by a pitching of the stairs.

Here again, no special attention was paid to the spatial composition within an individual frame, but the movement over a series of frames was composed for a period of time. And note that the tilting was not merely a display of the technical virtuosity of which the motion picture camera is capable, but that it was used as the best method through which a particular emotion could be described.

The moving frame of a motion picture camera also makes it possible to determine not only *what* the audience sees (which is the completed intention of a still photograph) but also *when* they see it. This function can be used to portray not only the emotion of surprise and discovery—as when a room is revealed bit by bit during a panoramic shot—but it can also be used to conceal a manipulation of the camera. In one sequence of my film *At Land* I wished to establish the continuity of a girl walking down a road, and at the same time her relationship to a person walking with her, to her right, while the identity of that person remained fluid and uncertain. It is really a "change of identity" scene similar to the common dream in which one person's identity changes to another's before our eyes.

The scene begins with a long-shot of a deserted country road. A girl walks towards the camera, and when she has advanced into a closeup, the camera begins traveling with her, keeping her in a front view at a constant distance. When the camera shifts the view to the girl's side, it reveals a boy walking with her, also in medium closeup (although when we saw the girl at a distance, he was not there). He starts talking to her, and the camera shifts back to her as she answers him, and then back to him—except that now it is another boy. He picks up the conversation, the camera pans to her as she answers, then back to the right, but it is now still another boy. This same thing happens a number of times.

The effect was achieved very simply. The first boy fell in step with the girl while the camera held her in closeup. The other, alternating men, waited behind the camera, on the right side of the road. As the girl and first boy advanced towards them, the camera panned to the girl. Meanwhile, on the right side of the road, which was now out of frame, the first boy ducked behind the camera while the second boy took his place, so that when the camera returned to the right side of the road, it found another person there. Thus, the almost unreal effect, the almost dream-like quality, was easily achieved.

The fact that a camera can be moved from one location to another, and that the various shots can follow each other immediately, in the process of editing, is also a capacity unique to motion pictures. In the dance film, *A Study in Choreography for Camera*, I took a shot of the dancer Talley Beatty as he began to lower his leg in a birch tree forest. Then I took a shot, in closeup, of the leg being lowered into an apartment. When these two shots are cut together so as to keep the leg movement continuous, it seems as if he steps, without pause, from a forest exterior to an apartment interior, and conveys a sense of movement through space. In other words, I have used the integrity of a human movement—its continuity of rhythm and pacing—to bind together locations which are

otherwise unrelated. This is obviously a use of the time potentialities of film, in that it rests upon the rhythm of movement and upon the fact that two separate locations can be cut together on the strength of that rhythm.

The same technique was employed in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, where the girl rises from a chair and begins a walking movement forward. This is followed immediately by a series of closeups of the feet as the first stride lands on sand, the second on grass, the third on pavement, and the fourth on a rug. In walking across the room, the girl has covered the immense distance from ocean, through all the other elements, to another chair.

Still another manipulation of the time element in film—and its relationship to space—is made possible by the fact that the motion picture camera records as it runs, that the running can be interrupted at any moment, and resumed on the same frame. This is a camera function that can be used to express a quality best described as follows: All of us are given to day dreaming as we walk down streets or roads, across fields and beaches. We may walk several blocks without noticing how much space we have covered, how many stores we have passed by, how many buildings—which have not become a part of our conscious thought. That is the emotional reaction I wanted to reproduce in a part of my film *At Land*.

The sequence takes place on a series of sand dunes. It begins with a long shot of the dunes as a girl enters from the left edge of the frame, climbs a dune in the foreground, and disappears behind a dune on the right of the frame. At this point the camera stops, and great care is taken that it does not jar while it is not running.

Meanwhile, the girl walks on a considerable distance, and then disappears behind a dune much further along. At this point the camera motor is again started, but since it starts on the spatially identical frame as it stopped on there is nothing to indicate that

the running was interrupted. As soon as it starts, it begins panning towards the right, as if it had followed her while she was hidden behind the dune. However, instead of seeing her emerge from that dune, it discovers her emerging from a dune much further away. When it discovers her, the camera stops panning while she again climbs one dune and disappears behind another. Again the camera is stopped, again the girl walks ahead to a further dune. Then the camera starts again, pans, and discovers her—this time a mere speck, very far away.

Since the spatial location is not interrupted but is kept in continuity—that is, since the starting frame of the second part is identical with the stopping frame of the first shot—the action seems continuous. But it is not continuous in time, for it is actually interrupted to permit a certain activity—the long walking—to take place unregistered. And so the girl, who started out so near us, has, in a magic way, become rapidly distant. The alienation is out of proportion to the actual movement, just as in the course of personal relationships there grows, between two persons, a coolness which cannot be traced to any action on the part of either of them.

By these few examples, taken from my own work, I have attempted to explore new creative fields within the scope of the motion picture camera for the beginning film-maker. True, it is fun to picture the baby's third birthday party exactly as it occurs; but it is stimulating and exciting to translate the magic of thoughts and dreams to film. My purpose is to call the attention of all potential film-makers to those creative elements which are unique to the motion-picture camera, so that their efforts may result in new discoveries and new forms, rather than in imitations of the forms created by other mediums.

It is possible that people may take exception to the basic premise of my work. They may feel that it is the function of the photographer, or of any artist, to reproduce life as we see it. My opinion is that there is no particular value in duplicating something

which already exists—except, of course, for purposes of personal or historical record (as birthday parties or news events), or of greater circulation (as travelogues of countries which few people have had an opportunity to see at first hand). I am bored, frankly, and I believe most persons are, with repetitions and reiterations. And I am immensely grateful when someone creates, out of his talent and effort, something which I never could have experienced except through his creation of it.

The desire to discover and to experience something new is responsible for growth and development in the individual, progress in civilization. And so it seems to me that a labor which results in something created, to add to the sum total of the world, is infinitely more valuable than a labor devoted to the reproduction of something already familiar. Thus, the fact that the motion picture camera is capable of creating new relationships between time and space, different from those of any other medium, is what has led me to this emphasis upon the temporal considerations of film-making. But remember—whatever the technique, it must serve the form as a whole, it must be appropriate to the theme and to the logic of its development, rather than a display of method designed to impress other movie makers.

Creative Cutting

Much has been written on the techniques of shooting—exposure, lenses, lighting, angles, framing, etc.—with the result that the serious amateur can readily become a competent cameraman. But relatively little attention has been given to the circumstances that he is also required to be his own cutter; and the fact that he must fill both functions can result in far finer film-making than where there is a strict division of labor between the two functions. *It means that he is in a position to shoot to cut.* For, if he has the final, cut version of his film in mind, he can save footage by filming a room, for instance, from the one angle which would follow most logically from the previous shot, instead of shooting the same action from three different angles and then discarding two of them. More important, every detail of a shot—the direction of the light source, the rhythm and speed of the action, whether the person should enter the shot or should already be in the frame—can be meticulously designed to flow unbrokenly from the end of the previous shot, whether or not it has already been recorded. This complete control of one's film, if consciously exercised, makes possible a compelling continuity in the final product.

Certainly, it must be obvious that a motion picture consists not of individual shots, however active, exciting or interesting they may be, but that, in the end, the attention is held by the way shots are put together, by the relationship established between them. If the function of the camera can be spoken of as the seeing, registering eye, then the function of cutting can be said to be that of

Movie Makers, May and June, 1947

the thinking, understanding mind. By this I am saying that the meaning, the emotional value of individual impressions, the connection between individually observed facts, is, in the making of the film, the creative responsibility of cutting.

For example, the length of time which one permits a certain shot to continue is actually a statement of its importance. Let us imagine that one wishes to show a specific person entering a large building (an institution which must be identified in some way), in order to accomplish something there. This would probably call for two shots in succession; a wide angle shot from across the street would be required to identify the building, and a close (possibly "pan") shot would be required to show and identify the person who is going in. It is quite possible that the wide angle shot of the building, its height exaggerated by a low perspective, might be much more interesting, pictorially speaking, than the close shot "pan." But one would never hold both shots for the same length of time on the screen. If it was the action of entering the building which was important (as part of the plot, let us say) then any lengthy architectural treatment would delay the action and would give an importance to the actual appearance of the building, which, relative to the action, was unwarranted. One would hold the building shot only long enough for it to be identified, and then cut back, as rapidly as possible, to the continuation of the action. On the other hand, suppose that, in the action of the plot, the person has dreamed of coming to this spot—that the building (a university, perhaps) represented for him a place where hopes could be fulfilled, where he would make his home for a long time, or something of that sort. In such a case, the cutting time of the two shots would be exactly reversed, for the camera, as an eye, would stare and fix upon the building and perhaps even lovingly travel over its architecture. Pictorially, this long time spent upon the building would convey the idea that the structure itself, as a "place," was important to the person in question.

In cutting, then, duration serves not only to show or identify something, but it is also a statement of value, of importance. In determining the length of duration, the relative importance of each shot must be carefully weighed. And if this is done by the same person who is shooting, there will be a minimum of footage which ends up (or should end up) in the trash basket.

Timing, in the sense of duration, can actually become an even more active element when it creates tension. Here, it is a matter of the relationship between the duration of the object or action within the shot or duration of the shot itself. I should be inclined to say that, in general (there may be, in specific cases, exceptions), whenever the duration of the shot exceeds the duration of the action, there is a decrease in tension, and vice versa. For this reason a static shot of a building will become boring if it is held longer than the identification or appreciation of the building requires; the active curiosity of the eye is very soon satisfied. A panoramic examination of the building can be held much longer, given it constantly gives something new to be seen.

Moreover, in the static shot, we see something which, we know, lasts longer than the duration of the shot. We know that nothing critical will happen to the building after we no longer see it, and consequently there is no tension. But a static shot of a person balancing on one leg, for example, can be held much longer, for we know that the action must have some conclusion; and so, the longer we look, the more the tension increases, until, finally, the person actually falls, the action is completed, our anticipation has been satisfied and we relax.

It is the phenomenon of duration as tension which explains why slow motion—which may have in it very little activity—often makes for greater tension than normal or rapid motion, for the tension consists in our desire to have our anticipations satisfied. An example of the use of duration as tension is the very last sequence of my short dance film, *A Study in Choreography for*

Camera. The dancer takes off from the ground for a leap, and the shot is cut off while his body is still ascending in the frame. This is followed by a single shot against the sky of his legs traveling horizontally—the plateau of his leap. This is followed by a shot in which he moves descendingly through the frame, and this, in turn, is followed by one in which he lands on the ground. All this was filmed in slow motion; there is no sense of rapid or emphatic movement. Rather, the sequence has the quality of a slow floating. Yet, I should say that it creates more tension than any other sequence in my four films, for the simple reason that, cinematically, the leap endures much longer than it could in actuality. During this stretch of time the audience is waiting for the dancer to come down to earth, as it knows he must, eventually.

The fact that this sequence consists of four shots does not contradict the idea of duration, for these are so identical, cinematographically, that, to all intents and purposes, they comprise a single shot. Essentially, the point remains the same; namely that the image of leaping was given a duration which far exceeded the normal anticipation which was waiting to be satisfied.

It is also significant that this total duration of the sequence was achieved by not permitting any of the single shots to satisfy the normal necessity. That is, the first shot was cut off just at the point where the dancer began to descend, the second shot similarly, and the third was cut off just before the landing. In the second and third shots the ascent is also cut off, since, once he has leveled off, to show him rising again would have implied a fall in between shots. In other words, no single action was completed, and, consequently, the subsequent action was understood not as a new and independent action but as a continuation of the one which has not yet been completed. In this sense, movement or action is carried "across the splice." This principle of cutting into action is basic to the whole problem of the continuity of a film, even when the action is not so extreme as a leap. The failure to realize the importance of this technique accounts for the stuttering tempo of many amateur films. Over and over, an action is shown through to its completion. Our anticipation is satisfied, not to say glutted. We relax, and the subsequent action is a new one which must begin at the bottom again, in commanding our interest and attention.

This is so important a contribution to intensity and continuity that a film should actually be so planned as to have a maximum of its cuts occur in action. Let us say that an incident consists of two periods of action separated by a pause, as when a person comes up to a table, pulls out a chair and sits down. It is an action which must be filmed in two parts, a long shot showing the approach, and a closer shot showing, let us say, the details of the dinner which he is about to eat.

Normally (and let us assume that we wish to render the action normally), there is a pause at the moment when he arrives at the table, as he prepares to undertake the action of pulling out the chair. The temptation is to shoot his walk and arrival in long shot and to begin the closeup with his pulling out the chair, the cut taking place during the pause between these actions. But a much stronger continuity, tension and interest would be created by cutting off either the long shot, just before he comes to a stop, and picking up the close shot with his arrival (entering the frame) then the pause and then his pulling out the chair; or to hold the long shot until he had started to pull out the chair, and let the closeup cut in after the chair movement had already begun.

Obviously, such techniques demand that the cutting be decided upon before any shooting is done, unless, of course, one can afford to waste film by shooting the entire episode both in long-shot and in close-up and later throwing away half of each. It is difficult to put the scissors to one's own film, but the sacrifice of a few frames of action—those frames which bring it to a stop—is justified by the smooth, compelling flow of the film which it will achieve.

It is impossible to overestimate the compelling continuity of

duration which movement carried across the splice can create. Obviously a prerequisite of this technique is a consistency in the tempo or rhythm of the movement; but once this is achieved and carefully pointed up cinematographically (angle, light, etc.), it can be used to hold together even places which are completely separate in actuality. In the dance film, the dancer appears in a long shot sharply defined against the sky, as he begins to lower his leg from a high position in the air. The pace of this action is well established by the time the leg reaches waist level. At this point there is a cut. Against an interior apartment background, we see a close-up (so that the movement dominates the locale) of a leg being lowered from the top of the frame at exactly the same rate of speed that governed the previous long shot. The effect is that the dancer has stepped from exterior to interior in a single movement, so completely does the action across the splice dominate both sides of the splice.

This technique can even be carried a step further (or, more precisely, in a different direction), to give a repetitive action the illusion of being a continued action, for whenever a movement is not completed, we understand that the one which follows is a continuation of the uncompleted movement. The leap of the dance film, which I described a moment ago, is an example of this, for in actuality the same leap was repeated four times and was made continuous by not being completed until the end of the fourth shot. The same technique creates a long fall at the end of my most recent film, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. In this case the person dropped from a considerable height four times against a blank background. Both the area covered and the action were repeated; but, since the body fell vertically through the frame each time, so that the disappearance at the bottom of the frame was immediately followed by an appearance at the top of the frame in the next shot, the four shots joined together gave the effect of a continuous movement.

Both the leap and fall occur against rather neutral backgrounds which cannot be identified as repeated areas. But so compelling is the continuity of movement across a splice that even identifiable backgrounds become subordinate to it when assisted by a manipulation of angles. In my previous article for *Movie Makers*,† in which I dealt primarily with cinematography, angles, etc., I described a sequence in which a girl climbs up a large driftwood tree root. For emotional purposes in the film, it was necessary to extend the time of climbing far beyond the time it would actually take. Consequently, the girl climbed the tree three times, entering at the bottom of the frame and exiting at the top of the frame each time. The first shot was a downward angle, as if she were low; the second was a level angle, as if at eye height; and the third was an upward angle, as if she were overhead. The tree root was a very distinctive formation, and the shift in angle did not, actually, change its shapes beyond recognition, provided one expected to recognize it as a repeated area. But the movements through the frame and across the splice were so compelling that the three shots of the root seemed to be a continuation of an area which is only consistently similar in its construction. It is not recognized as being a repetition.

The furthest extension of this principle which I have thus far attempted occurs in the party sequence of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. My idea was that the reason people go to parties is to establish personal, social relationships; and that if all the long static conversational pauses were omitted, there would emerge a sort of dance, consisting of people moving towards one another, passing one person in order to reach another, greeting each other, etc. Above all, I wished to convey the idea that all these different people were there for the same reason and were doing essentially the same thing and even, as it were, making the same

†"Efficient or Effective," an essay Deren reworked into "Adventures in Creative Film-Making," see page 163 below.—*ed.*

movement—that the consistency of the total movement pattern transcended the variety of the individuals involved. First I made a series of shots in which different persons approached each other, gestured to each other, clasped hands, etc., in approximately the same way. Then I cut together, for instance, one couple as they first recognized each other and started to approach each other, and followed this by a shot of another couple in a further development of the same movement; then came two other persons who meet, clasp hands and start to turn; another couple finish a sort of turn about each other and start to separate; and then two persons, back to back, move in opposite directions. Since the people are all different, and since it is not a cumulative action—in the sense of adding up to any narrative story—the only thing which crosses the splice and makes one shot seem to come from the previous one is the movement which is never brought to a stop but is always continued by the following shot. If cutting into movement can be the principal tension and continuity for one hundred and fifty feet of film which does not have a story direction, then surely it can do wonders for the solution of simpler sequences in which interest is also maintained by character action, story plot and known characters.

II

In my earlier discussion, we were concerned mainly with the continuity and duration which are achieved by the direct cutting of action or movement arranged in an unbroken, uninterrupted line. But duration or continuity can also be achieved by a very careful and dextrous manipulation of interruptions. Known as intercutting, this method assumes that the action is understood to be continuous even during the period when it is not being shown.

The most common use of the intercut is in a relationship between two people which is intended to convey communication

between them. The shots are cut as "action, reaction, action," as when you have a closeup of someone speaking, someone answering, and then the first person answering back. In this case, the action initiated by one person is advanced by the other person and is, in turn, advanced or completed by the first. If this interaction is to be sustained, the individual actions must be interrupted. The ball must be kept bouncing between them and not come to a protracted rest on either side. If the timing of this bounce is rapid enough, and the situation or activity of each individual section is intense enough to be very memorable, it is possible to create the illusion of actions occurring simultaneously in divergent places. This is the case in sequences of parallel action, as when we see, alternately, the critical distress of the heroine, about to be run over by a train, and the violent effort of the hero as he rushes to her rescue. The timing of both the action and the cutting is furious, and it is the rapid shift from one action to the other which conveys the impression that they are occurring simultaneously and are related to each other. It is also possible, however, to create not only a time simultaneity, but also a sense of immediate spatial relationship (even when this latter is not actually so) with a slower cutting, if careful attention is paid, in shooting, to the orientation of the person within the frame. Thus, if one person is filmed facing sharply to the left (and therefore explicitly referring to something to the left outside of the visible frame) and if this is followed, let us say, by a shot of a person facing sharply to the right, the inescapable impression is that they are looking at each other. Obviously, either both, or at least one of them must be shown in closeup; for, to present a large space around both of them would be to destroy the impression of their proximity.

As a matter of fact, the continuity created by explicit spatial orientation can be quite as compelling as continuous movement in holding together even places which are, in actuality, separated. In my last film, I have a closeup of a young man looking intently

towards the right edge of the frame (this shot being made in New York); following this is a shot of a girl running diagonally away from left to right in the frame—this shot having been filmed on
148 a beach in Long Island. The consistency of direction (it having been previously established that she is running away from him) is here responsible for the impression that they are in the same place at the same time. If, however, such spatial orientation is supported by the kind of movement continuity which I described in the first [part of this] article, it is possible to create an altogether extraordinary order of simultaneity. In the final sequence of my film, *At Land*, the girl is filmed going through the action which originally took place in the seven locales which occur previously in the film. But in the middle of the action, she stops abruptly and looks sharply out of the frame, moving her eyes or head from left to right, as if she were following an action. Between each of these six or seven shots is cut a shot from a reverse angle of the same girl running rapidly from left to right through the opposite part of the same locale. Here the action "across the splice" is the movement—left to right—which is performed alternately by the watcher and the runner. The impression is that she is running backward through time, through all the actions which she herself has carried out, and which she can see herself still carrying out, and that she, who is carrying them out, can also see the one who runs by. The verbal description of this sequence is very awkward, but that is so because the reality created is so completely a visual one that it is almost impossible to convey in verbal terms.

Not only can different periods of time be made simultaneous by such manipulations, but *different orders of time* can be made to seem to occur simultaneously. In the opening sequence of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, there is a sequence in which one woman is winding a ball of wool as another woman holds the skein which feeds it. They are first shown sitting opposite each other, facing each other, and, after this has been established, medium close

shots of each of them in profile are alternately intercut. However, while the woman who winds up the ball does so at a constant rate of normal speed (24 frames a second), each successive shot of the woman with the skein is increasingly slow motion, the 149
first intercut of her being at 24 frames a second, the second one at about 48, the third at 64 and the fourth at 128. Thus the time of one woman remains the normal order, whereas that of the other becomes increasingly slow motion; but they are made to seem, by inter-cutting, to be taking place simultaneously.

I think that it is, by now, apparent that, once cutting is understood as an organic part of the planning of a film, in the sense that one shoots to cut, the combinations which can be worked out between motion across splices, timing, spatial orientations within the frame, etc., are endless or, at least, excitingly rich. There can be no rules established to govern when and where to follow closeup with long shot or vice versa, since this cannot be thought of as a cutting problem independent of the camera work and the film as a whole. In some conditions closeup must follow closeup, as when the proximity of people is to be established who are, in actuality, separated. In other cases such procedure would not even make sense, much less tension, continuity or any other film virtue.

Shooting and cutting cannot be approached separately without disastrous results, as anyone who has brought back a large collection of odd, improvised shots from a vacation trip, and could not put them together into a film, will acknowledge. However excellent the pictorial quality of these individual shots, they simply do not come together to make a film of any appreciable form or continuity, except where several shots, accidentally, may share rhythm, direction or some other editorial relationship.

One of the factors which may contribute to this state of affairs is that the exposed film is permitted to accumulate and is developed in a batch after returning home. My opinion is that, if

film-makers did all in their power to see what they have already shot before shooting any more, they would be able to shoot with their final cutting film in mind. I should have found it impossible
150 to make my films during the war were it not for the fact that the Ansco monochrome film which I used was processed promptly enough for me to be able to see the rushes on one day's work before proceeding further; for, no matter how careful the paper planning, it is in the actual film that one can see precisely the rhythm of movement which must subsequently be maintained, or the directional reference which must be answered in the intercut.

It would not be proper, I feel, to neglect, in an article on cutting, the idea of the invisible cut, in which both time and space are made to seem continuous and in which only the camera motor is interrupted. In a sequence of my last film I have, by this means, even managed to establish a continuity between different orders of time. My intention was to create a chase sequence in which the girl, running rapidly (photographed in normal speed) was being pursued by a man leaping in slow-motion, and that, eventually, he would catch up with her, as sometimes happens in dreams. I have first a static frame and the girl runs through it from left to right. The minute she has disappeared out of the right edge of the frame, the motor of the camera is stopped and while great care is taken not to lose the precise position of the camera, the speed is set for slow-motion, and the exposure adjusted accordingly. And now the motor starts again, but because it starts on the identical frame at which it has stopped, the interruption of the motor is not transferred either to an interruption of space or time. When the motor starts running, the camera pans quickly (since I was shooting at slow-motion a rapid pan seemed only normal in the final result) to the left, where it picks up, at some distance, the man leaping in slow-motion. Here, the cut is completely invisible. And this shot is followed by another in which there are two

successive invisible cuts. The dancer enters the frame in slow-motion, the camera pans ahead and, losing him, comes to a stop on a pillar. While it is held there the speed is set back to normal, the motor starts up and the girl runs out from behind the pillar 151
as if the camera had caught up to her just as she had disappeared behind it. She runs out of frame to right, the motor stops, is set for slow-motion, and now the dancer immediately enters the frame from left in slow-motion, a split second, apparently, after the girl left it in normal speed. The illusion is that there has been no interruption in the whole shooting of the sequence, but instead, that the slow-motion man is overtaking the girl.

With all such possibilities at the disposal of the film-maker, it is inconceivable that the creative possibilities of editorial planning should be longer ignored.

ods of production, one will arrive at a certain creative attitude towards the medium. Perhaps the fact that whichever one starts with, one ends with the other, is the best indication of how ir-

revocably the means and the ends are interrelated and how much the end is realized—and I use the word in its original sense, "to be made real"—by the means.

Adventures in Creative Film-Making

Remember if you can, as in a flash-back, the special excitement you felt when you were buying your movie camera. You stood there at the counter, with several models before you, listening to the salesman extol their various virtues; you stood there, balancing one after the other in your hand, to feel their heft, to see how they handled; you lifted one after another to your eye—as if you were about to capture some action—to see whether the eye fell in place naturally; you were concerned about the viewfinder—how it adjusted to the various lenses (for the different kinds of framing you might want to use) and for parallax; you weighed the advantages of the turret and of several speeds against the additional cost; you noted that a frame counter would make it possible to wind back for superimpositions, dissolves, and split-screen effects; perhaps you were willing to pay for a camera in which you could follow focus. Then there were all the possible accessories: irises and ready-made gimmicks for making wipes, etc.

You wanted to be able to do any and everything with your camera; and you even bought or planned to buy editing equipment. It would seem as if, in the back of your mind, you had already planned some astonishing, exciting film which would require the total resources of the motion-picture medium. For the sake of this imaginary film you spent more than you had intended. You make

your payment, or part payment to the cashier, and you walked out of the store as if into a new world of great expectations. Slow fade-out.

Home Movie Making, 1960

It is now some time later. Have you used all those things the camera could do, those special features that you paid extra for? Have you made that film that you seemed to be equipping yourself for, or anything like it? Or have you forgotten all those images and effects that went through your mind, all the inspired excitement you felt? Does your camera sit in the closet in its still shiny case to be brought out only on rare "family-record" occasions like your son's birthday party or the annual vacation trip? Is it all like a love affair so long gone that you cannot remember why you ever cared? But it is not the camera that has changed. The real question is, have you looked at it lately with the eyes of a true amateur (from the Latin "amator"—"lover").

The fact is that the camera and the editing—and the second is fully as important a part of film-making as the first—still have all the exciting possibilities that you saw when you first looked at them with the open, fresh eyes of a newcomer. After 15 years of making experimental films, I am not, precisely, a newcomer; but my excitment at the possibilities of the medium has increased, rather than diminished, because these possibilities were as invitations, and each time I accepted and followed through, it led me to still another possibility.

Somewhere along the line I realized that this was a trail leading me to film as an art form, and, about the same time, I realized that finding this was more important to me—as an artistic or professional occupation—then anything else. It was something like a detective story in which one gets involved accidentally, joins the search for a missing person because of civic-virtue and/or for the excitement of it, only to find out that the object of the search is one's own brother who one did not know had disappeared.

Film is so useful for recording nature, reality, and all the other art forms that very few people realize that film form, as such, has not yet been found. By film form I mean the creation of something which could not be accomplished by any other medium, just as a ballet is something which a novel cannot do and vice-versa. I am sure that if a posse of several thousand amateur film-makers set out to search for it, this missing film form would soon be found out. But I also realize that most of you are already committed, professionally and personally, and cannot put these aside to dedicate yourself.

However, I do say that you hold in your hands the point of departure for an exciting adventure and regardless of how little or how far you pursue it, the time you spend, and the filming you do as you go along, will be far more satisfying and rewarding for you yourself, if you approach it as an exploration.

The freedom to explore and create...

One of the most attractive elements in such an adventure for the amateur is that it has neither obligations nor dangers. He is his own boss. He is free to decide what he wants to do, and how to go about doing it, whose example to follow, and what advice to ignore. And if, by some chance, it doesn't come out as well as he expected, he is the only one who even knows that it didn't work; there are no penalties to pay, no harangue to listen to, and no job to lose. *This freedom, which is the first asset of the amateur, is the premise upon which everything else is built.* And for this reason, I personally have guarded it closely and have chosen to remain an amateur.

The other exhilarating fact about the film medium is that it contains vast areas of unexplored or virtually unpopulated territory in which the smallest effort can make you a discoverer. Pity the writer, for example, who, after centuries of accomplished literature, is quite unlikely to discover anything still untried which he could have the honor and credit of inventing. In motion-pictures it is only the standard areas of professionalism—the fiction and the documentary film—which have been thoroughly explored, one might even say to the point of complete exhaustion.

To explore the motion-picture medium is to explore the creative possibilities which are unique to it. By creative I do not mean some vague, mystical, inspirational and esoteric activity; I mean simply that
166 you end up with something which, but for the grace of yourself and the film medium, would not have existed. Or, inversely, I could say that if, *basically,* the event of the experience exists or can be made to exist by staging, *before* the mediun is involved, then it has been used as a recording medium, not as a creative one. And this principle applies not only to lyric and poetic ideas, but to all kinds of themes. As a matter of fact, the clearest and most familiar example can be drawn from comedy.

One of the standard scenes in the old Mack Sennett cop comedies involved a chase scene in which the cops pursue the thief in an automobile. It is all done at a rather frenetic pace, so we never clearly see them getting into the car. When it pulls to a stop, the door opens and the cops begin piling out. They keep coming and coming, eyes popping and sticks swinging, not just the four that we thought were in there, nor even the six who could conceivably squeeze in, but eight, ten, even twelve, until one has a sense of the car as a kind of machine which is spitting out cops as it might manufacture spoons. It is impossible to convey, verbally, the effect of this scene and it is even possible that modern taste might not find it so funny, but at one time such things seemed hilarious enough, to enough people, to make millionaires of those who were involved in these productions.

The essential point is that it is a comic turn that could be produced only on film—by stopping the camera while more cops got into the car, and starting it again as they got out without changing the framing so that the shot seemed continuous. Unfortunately, comedies today consist of photographing a comedian doing virtually the same thing he might do on the stage or on the floor of a nightclub. While I bow to no one in my admiration of Bob Hope and am very glad to see such records of his performance as show

up periodically in movie houses and on TV, I still do not think that a film of Bob Hope telling a joke is film comedy in the same sense as the Mack Sennett cop episode.

One major advantage of using the resources of the film medi- 167
um itself to create rather than to record is that in the first case *you are putting the burden on equipment which you have,* whereas in the second case *the burden is on what you are recording,* and most of us do not have a Bob Hope or a Cary Grant to perform, or a Tennessee Williams to write the play script, or a set designer, or a wardrobe department. None of us have comparable riches to place in front of the camera, but we do have the riches of the medium and the freedom to exercise them, and with these we can create—out of the place and people available to us—a fascinating film world.

...plus photographic reality and the controlled accident

The basic element in the motion picture is the photographic image. In this the film-maker starts out with an enormous advantage over workers in all the other forms of expression, for whom a major problem is to create a convincing image. A painting must be strong enough to seem to be a truth, not merely one man's impression; an actress in a play must not seem to be acting, etc. But photography is a process by which whatever is in front of the lens automatically creates its own image by the action of light. One cannot say of a photograph: "It is not real or true."

This, however, is no advantage at all if the scene or action in front of the camera is already a complete artifice, as if it were a play in a theatrical set. *To make use of the impact of reality which photography alone can convey, one must work with reality itself.*

This does not mean that, in turn, one must confine oneself to recording reality as it is—scenery of "candid" motion-picture photography. It means that, in the photography itself, one must maintain a delicate balance between what is there naturally and spontaneously, and the things or techniques which one introduc-

es to get across the ideas one wishes to convey. In a sense, *photography is the art of the controlled accident*. If one selects a beach which, in general, has the right aspect—whether grim or happy, deserted
168 or crowded—one does not have to arrange every pebble or person on it, as a painter would if he were painting such a scene.

Moreover, the event which you might invent to take place on the beach, although itself an artifice, would *borrow reality from the reality of the beach*—from the natural blowing of the hair of the person, from the irregular waves, etc. *In working with the controlled accident principle one sets up a context of limits within which anything that occurs is compatible with the intent of the scene.*

Shooting in a real place is one of the best ways to make a film convincing, as even the commercial film industry has discovered in its recent trend to location shooting, which has, for the amateur also, the distinct advantage of being free.

...plus portability

Location shooting makes use of the first thing you experienced about the camera as it was handed to you across the counter—its portability; and one of the prospects that undoubtedly excited you at the time was that you could take it everywhere with you.

Unfortunately, however, just as we accept the obvious fact that one of the major functions of photography is to identify, so we accept the portability of the camera as another of those elementary things which are so obvious that there does not seem to be anything to think about once we have grasped the initial fact. Curiously enough—and I intend the following example to shock everyone into a refreshed awareness and respect for all "obvious" things—it is a combination of these two elementary facts about the camera that makes up one of the most, if not the most, creative manipulations in my films.

In my very first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, a girl rises from a chair and begins a movement forward, of walking. This is followed

immediately by a series of close-ups of her feet (readily recognizable because of the slacks and sandals which have been carefully established as her costume). The first stride lands on sand (with the sea in the background); the second on grass; the third on pavement; 169
the fourth on a rug; and the sequence is concluded by a medium shot in which she arrives at the other side of the room. In walking across that room, the girl has covered the immense distance from the ocean, through all the other elements. It is an extremely effective symbolic statement of the vast psychological distances which lie between people who may be in close physical proximity. Yet, photographically, it uses no more than the *identifying function of the photographic image and the portability of the camera*, plus, of course, the fact that such images can be related creatively in the act of editing.

In my subsequent films, this technique was no longer merely a symbolic episode, but became an integral part of the development of the action of the film itself. In *A Study in Choreography for Camera* the dancer begins to lower his leg in a birch tree forest. This long shot, in which the leg has come down to about waist height was followed, in the film, by a medium close-up (actually photographed some three months later) showing only the leg completing its movement—from waist-level down—in an apartment. When these two shots were cut together, so that the leg movement was continuous, the dancer seemed to step directly from forest exterior to an apartment interior. The entire three minute film is basically structured on this principle, carrying the dancer through various other interiors and exteriors, including the Oriental Court of the Metropolitan Museum, and concluding finally on the cliff of the Palisades overlooking the Hudson river. Instead of a dance conceived for the quality and configurations of a theater stage, then, this is a film-dance in which the whole world is the stage of the action—an accomplishment based on the portability of the camera and the identifying function of the photographic image.

There are many other ways in which portability can be used to relate elements and events otherwise separate in time and place. Do any of these fail to occur to you because you have accumulated so many accessories that your equipment has almost ceased to be portable except by safari? If so, begin again with the camera, and question everything else very carefully before adding it to the burden.

...minus the tripod

In "everything," I include the tripod which, unfortunately, is too often thought of as virtually part of the camera, to be disengaged from it merely for convenience in transporting. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that most amateur film-makers prepare to shoot by first setting up their tripod and then unpacking the camera and screwing it on. Even if you do not find the tripod to be an excessive burden physically, and therefore no impediment to the portability of the camera, it is an obstacle, both physically and psychologically, to the *flexibility of the camera* relative to its own photography. It is in the interests of preserving the mobility of moving pictures that I make the unorthodox recommendation of eliminating the use of the tripod except for the rare sequences which require fixity, as in the Mack Sennett cops sequence cited earlier, which involved the interruption and resumption of photography while maintaining a precise continuity of framing.

Otherwise the function of the tripod is to assist you by holding the camera for you while you shoot. As a woman I am surely as disposed and accustomed as anyone else to having things held or carried for me; as a filmmaker, however, I long ago learned that the price of this assistance by the tripod is very high, photographically, since we tend then to shoot from the position in which the tripod can most comfortably assist us.

Tripod stability requires a spread of at least two feet, between each of the legs. This is easy in the middle of an empty room but if

you are trying to operate in an apartment with a normal amount of furniture and a normal lack of space, it is almost certain that the place which one leg should occupy is already occupied, not infrequently by the wall against which you would like to press in order to get a maximum distance. Not infrequently, another of the legs is where you yourself should be in order to look through the viewfinder comfortably and to operate the camera properly. Outdoors, uneven ground, tree roots, and stones require a separate adjustment for each leg; on public pavement the odds are high that someone will trip over one of them. If you are trying for a low angle the legs tend to spread, and if you are trying for a high angle they tend to wobble. Levelling the tripod is a performance in itself, which, once accomplished, discourages you from trying any other angle or any other position because that will have to be done all over again. In the end, you put the camera in the position which is comfortable for the tripod.

I can think of no other reasonable explanation for the fact that most amateur films depart so rarely from the straight-on eye-level placement which characterized the still photography of some twenty-five years ago, when the slow film and bulky apparatus of the camera made the tripod absolutely essential. As smaller boxes and faster film made it possible to hand-hold the camera, placement and angle became more flexible and are a major creative element in modern still photography. I shall not go into the general why and how of placement, framing and angle, since so many excellent articles on this subject have already been written in reference to still photography. It should be obvious that those same principles also apply to motion-picture photography and should be carefully considered during the shooting, since there is no darkroom stage during which composition and angle can be corrected or improved. Actually, framing and angle can be very importantly creative in film, when planned in conjunction with editing, as I shall point out when I come to the editing portion of this discussion.

The major argument against hand-holding the camera is that the shot is unsteady. And it is true, by my observations, that people who are otherwise extremely steady, and can balance full glasses of water with ease, do turn out somewhat unsteady shots at first. But it is also my firm belief that it is their conviction that they will be unsteady which makes them so nervous that they shake. And then they are even more nervous next time. I am not quite certain of the therapy for what is obviously a vicious psychological circle, but I am convinced that any normally healthy individual, with an average amount of muscular control, can easily learn to handle a camera with enough firmness to give an adequately steady image, providing he is not trying to film a close-up of lettering. Even a considerable tremor is barely perceptible if there is no strong, geometric object at the very edges of the frame. In general, if the activity in the central area of the picture is not strong enough to hold the attention, but permits the eye to wander to the frame edge and watch the centimeter of variation there, then there is something much more wrong with the shot than the tiny tremor.

...equals flexibility and mobility

Once you get the camera off of the tripod, you will find a new world of filmic possibilities. *As a supporting structure, the human body has no peer.* With your camera in your hand you can photograph from any position that you yourself can get into—pressed against the wall or leaning over an object, sitting on the floor for a low angle or standing on a ladder for a high one. Above all, there is nothing to discourage you from trying various angles and positions.

This flexibility is an advantage even in shots in which the camera is inactive; but the *motion in motion-picture medium can and should refer not only to activity within the frame but to the action of the moving frame itself.* The pan (from panorama) shot has not

been neglected by amateurs. On the contrary, it has been used and over-used, with neither care nor meaning, as if the primary purpose of its existence was to indicate that the photographer was operating a motion-picture camera.

The pan shot is another subject upon which many excellent articles have been written, and it is not my intention to duplicate these but only to suggest several extended uses of it. One of these is the "swing" or "swish" pan, which can be used to relate persons and activities which are, in reality, quite separate in time and/or place. The examples which I cited earlier—the striding sequence in *Meshes of the Afternoon*—and the dancer's leg movement in *A Study in Choreography for Camera*—used the continuity of the identity of the figure, along with the uninterrupted integrity of the movement, to accomplish this. There may be times, however, when you may wish to establish a relationship between two *different* persons, who are in different places at different times. To simply cut from one to the other will merely confuse. But if you swing away very rapidly (so as to cause a blur) at the end of the shot of the first person and if you begin the shot of the second person with a similar swing, you can then cut the shots together where they are blurred, and the effect will be as if you had merely hurried a regular pan-shot between two people who were simultaneously present.

In general, the pan shot is used to determine both what and when the audience will see something; in sum, to reveal. But it can also be used to conceal. In my film *At Land* this is used to create a change-of-identity sequence as follows: The scene begins with a medium close-up of a girl on a path; panning to her right it reveals a boy walking along with her (the camera is traveling in front of the girl); the boy turns towards her and says something to her, and the camera pans back to her for her response; when the camera pans right again, as if following the conversation, it is now another boy (who took the place of the first boy while the

camera was fixed on the girl) who picks up the conversation, and addresses the girl in reply; the camera again pans to her for her answer and when it returns to the right hand side of the road, we find that, again, the boy is a different one. Since the several boys in this sequence were selected because of a general resemblance to each other, the shift in their identity does not so much surprise as it recalls (and was meant to) that strange kind of dream in which your companion is first one person, then somehow becomes someone else, and, in some imperceptible manner, becomes suddenly someone else again, with this change affecting the continuity of the general activity of the dream.

...and frame action as film action

The moving frame, however, can be used not only as a means of viewing action, but under certain conditions, can become the action viewed, and this, in fact, is the basic concept underlying my most recent and perhaps most experimental film, *The Very Eye of Night*. My first use of this concept was, again, in an episode in my first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. In one sequence of the film it was necessary to convey the idea that even the ostensibly inanimate staircase in the house conspired (as do other objects in the film) to frustrate the girl in her effort to catch up with a figure she was pursuing. In the previous shot, this figure had gone up the stairs normally. When the girl starts to follow, however, the staircase begins to pitch from side to side, throwing the girl first against one wall and then the other. It is one of the most effective sequences in my films, so real that, at times members of the audience who are particularly susceptible to sea-sickness, have had to close their eyes. Yet this was accomplished very simply by a hand-held camera. The girl simulated a heavy, uneven fall, first to the right, then to the left, and so on, as she began staggering up the stairs, while the camera, shooting down the stairs towards the girl, was tilted, in each case, in the opposite direction to her fall.

The movement of the frame, in effect, had been transferred to the objects in the frame.

The point is that, regardless of whether it is the camera-frame itself or the figure in reality which moves, what matters in the final analysis, on the screen, is the *relationship between the figure and the frame*. And I realized, eventually, that *if there is no identifying background object to reveal that the total field is moving, then the tendency is to believe the frame to be stable and to ascribe all movement to the figure within the frame.*

The Very Eye of Night is the product of this observation and of several years of intermittent experimentation. It is a ballet of night, entirely in the negative, in which the dancers are constellations which orbit and revolve in the night sky. The horizon was eliminated by using large rolls of paper which curved from the vertical sides into the horizontal floor without an indication of floor line. By using bounced light for the entire area we solved what had proved to be the major problem, which was to eliminate any shadows which would reveal the presence of a stationary surface, whether vertical or horizontal.

Filming most of it from a cat-walk 25 feet up (it is the only one of my films which required studio rental) I shot the entire film with a hand-held camera which I revolved as much as 180 degrees during the course of a single shot. For example, while the dancers performed the movements (designed by choreographer Antony Tudor) I would pan down, in a curving diagonal movement, from right to left; would begin revolving the camera when I had centered the group; and would pan left and up until I was clear of them. On the screen, the image is of a constellation which rises in the lower left-hand corner of the frame, revolves, and exits by the lower right-hand corner. The entire film consists of this kind of gravity free movement, all of it created by the moving frame of a hand-held camera.

While it is doubtful that any of you would have occasion to

make such extreme use of the hand-held camera principle, nevertheless, the body, with its complex combination of joints, swivels, etc., mounted on very adequate legs, can put at the service of the

camera a variety and combination of movements which even the most elaborate tripod could not begin to offer. You can even dolly your camera by hand, if you take small steps and leave your ankles and knees relaxed enough to act as shock absorbers for the jar of each step. But if this seems too much, you might try at least combining a pan with a step and then a bend forward, into a close-up of the object or person. Naturally, this sort of thing requires rehearsing your movement several times, but once you accept the idea of the hand-held camera, and the use of your body movement—the freedom it gives you in being able to follow a moving object, to close in on or withdraw from something, etc.—you will find that putting the camera on a tripod will feel like putting on a straightjacket.

...plus the moving and fixed lens

Without doubt the most important and exciting extension of the motion picture camera has been the development of the *zoom lens, which has the time dimension built in.* I did not know that this was so, until very recently, when I had a brief opportunity to work with one myself, for no film that I had seen gave any evidence of its creative potential. It seems to have been used, exclusively, as simply an easier way of doing the same things I have been describing and recommending under the general category of the mobility of the camera and which film could and should have been doing all along. I am afraid that just because it can substitute for dolly shots or the kind of intercutting normally required to move from long shot to close-up, etc., there is an irresistible tendency to downgrade the zoom lens into merely a means of making old things easier to do, instead of creating new and more marvelous things altogether.

In the brief experience I have had with it, I have come to feel that the zoom lens can and should make a radical change in our basic concept of the design of a film. When combined with, instead of substituted for, the other techniques, it adds virtually a

third dimension to motion-picture photography. The most appropriate term which I find, at this moment, to describe my concept of its proper use is "choreography," for I do not think that it should be used within the discreet and passive limits of an eye or a point of view; rather, *it should function boldly and dynamically as a presence*. Combined with pan shots and integrated with all the other techniques, including editing, its approaches and withdrawals should be dramatic statements of the camera's relationship to the people and objects in the scene, not merely a way of viewing them.

Until the zoom lens entered my life with all its special and unique potential, I found that my wide angle and my one-inch lens took care of virtually all my filming. (In all these years, I have used my telephoto lens no more than three or four times.) Still photography is a spatial art; it makes its statement by spatial composition and deals in the very structure and texture of matter. Maximum definition, therefore, is, in a sense, the most important asset of a still camera lens. But motion-pictures are, or should be, *an art which makes its statement in terms of time and movement;* this medium is not so much concerned with any single instant as with the change from instant to instant. For this reason I have found that the depth of focus of a wide-angle lens, which does not limit the movement of a shot to a shallow plane but even permits the dynamic movement into and away from the camera, is the most important single quality of a lens for motion-pictures. Although, theoretically, the wide-angle lens does not actually exaggerate perspective, it is certainly useful in creating such illusions, as in the shot of the dancer in *A Study in Choreography for Camera* where, dancing away from the camera, he becomes tiny and dis-

tant in a very short time and, on his return towards the camera, seems to approach with extraordinary speed.

For closer shots, where the quality rather than the movement
178 of the object or person is important, the 1-inch lens is, of course, the one to use. If this lens did not enlarge the object sufficiently or did not eliminate undesired objects from the field, I have simply moved in closer. Any distance between my camera and the scene which I am shooting makes me strangely uneasy, probably because I fear that someone is going to walk right through the scene while I am shooting. The less room I leave for this, the safer I am. It is something all film-makers should bear in mind.

...plus motor

The motor of the camera is another of those elements of the medium, like the reality of photography and the portability of the camera, which has been so taken for granted that there seems nothing more to think about. Yet, it is this which has made the motion-picture camera both an instrument of discovery and the inventor of images hitherto unknown to human beings. If the lens can be thought of as a microscope and/or the telescope which reveals to us the very nature and structure of matter, then it is the motor of the motion-picture camera (in combination, of course, with that of the projector) which *reveals to us the very nature and structure of movement, the projection of matter in time.*

Viewed through the telescopic action of stop-motion time, a growing vine can be seen as virtually a conscious and deliberate act of intelligence as it persistently orientates itself to the shifting position of the sun. Used with inanimate objects, this same process has created the movement of life in all the various forms of animated film.

Slow-motion, on the other hand, reveals all the complexities of even the simplest act. Just as magnification shows us a mountainous craggy landscape in an apparently smooth surface, so

the slow-motion film of a casual conversation informs us of the multitude of hesitations, hostilities and hopes of which it is composed. I have used it precisely with this intention, as a statement of the anguished effort, the dimension of meaning, which lies 179
below the surface of action.

Applied to movement whose nature would be changed by a change in the speed of its performance—as in running—slow-motion not only reveals the hitherto unseen sequence of the million separate strains and efforts which compound it, but brings into reality that image of anguished frustration, otherwise experienced only in the dream nightmares of childhood, when our legs refused to move while the terror which pursued us came closer and closer.

Slow-motion is, actually, something which exists in our mind, not on the screen, and can be created only in conjunction with the identifiable reality of the photographic image. A square, as in an animated abstract film, can go either fast or slow but can never move in slow-motion. Slow-motion occurs when we see the image of a man running, and recognize it as such, so that the pulse which we know to belong to that action is set in motion within us; and it is because we are aware of the known pulse of the identified action while we watch it occurring at a slower rate of speed, that we experience the *double exposure of time which we know as slow motion.*

The expressive uses of slow-motion—as a revelation of effort or anguish, a statement either of ease or frustration, a kind of intimate and loving meditation on a movement, as a solemnity which lends importance to an action—are as numerous as the actions which can be photographed. It can even create movements which are deceptively normal. When a girl with long hair turns her head rapidly from side to side, her hair lifts and describes a horizontal movement around her head. I have a sequence in *At Land* in which the girl is on the top of a high rock and is looking for a way down. By photographing the action I just described, in

slow motion, I created an image in which her look from side to side for a way to get down takes place at a speed which is usual in such an action, except that the hair, lifted in a circling movement about her head, lends the moment a sense of suspense which is extremely effective.

A shot does not even have to be limited to a single motor speed. By careful rehearsal with a friend who will change the lens stop in synchronization with you, you can change the speed of the motor during the course of its action as I did to accelerate the speed of the dancers' pirouette in *A Study in Choreography for Camera*. This increase of speed, which cannot be accomplished in actual performance, contributed a sense of mounting tension which, in the shot immediately following, exploded, as it were, into a leap.

Not only the running of the motor, but the fact that it can stop and start again, without affecting the continuity of the image—as described in the early example of the Mack Sennett cop chase sequence—is a way of bringing separated times together by the continuity of the place in which they occur. This "invisible splice" achieves, in a sense, the exact reverse of the techniques by which different places are brought together by the continuity of the movement between them and the continuity in time which they are given in editing.

...plus film and printing

By now it should be obvious that no part of the mechanics and processes involved in motion pictures should escape our careful scrutiny for the creative purposes to which they can be put, above and beyond the function which they normally perform. This applies even to the film upon which all these images of which I have spoken are registered upon a permanent, incorruptible, strip of celluloid memory.

The split-screen, and superimposition, are familiar means by which two images can be brought together to create a third image, otherwise unobtainable. *Meshes of the Afternoon* is based on the action which develops from the inter-relationship of four images of the same girl, whose simultaneous existence is established in a series of split-screen shots and sustained by directional shooting and cutting. *The Very Eye of Night*, on the other hand, is double-printed from beginning to end, the live dance action being super-imposed on a layer of animated stars (holes punched in black paper) whose contrasting direction and speed of movement make the dance action seem even more gravity-free.

The sky of animated stars itself is a triple exposure, a technique I finally arrived at in an effort to give the sky depth. I applied the principle which everyone has observed when riding in a car or train, namely, that objects which are very close—telephone poles, etc.—pass by very rapidly; houses in the middle distance pass by at a much more moderate speed; while the mountains in the far distance seem to be virtually stationary, and even, at times, to be traveling with you in contrast to the movement in the middle and foreground. It is this variation in the rate of speed relative to your eye that creates the sense of depth in a landscape seen from a moving vehicle.

In order to create depth in my night sky, I first photographed the star effect by panning across it at a moderate speed. Using a battery motor in reverse to rewind, I did not cover the lens but made my second exposure in the process of rewinding, leaving the camera fixed. I now had what amounted to distant, stationary stars and a middle ground of constellations advancing across the sky at a moderate speed. My third exposure, running forward again over the same strip of film, consisted of more rapid pans and of dolly-shots, each specifically planned to complement the live action which would be printed with it. Thus, the fall of a figure through the frame (it was actually done by panning the camera from high angle up over the body of the dancer who was lying on the floor) was given additional impact and reality by filming,

for that particular shot, a rapidly rising movement of stars as a third exposure.

But the printing process, which is part of the film medium, need not be applied only as a means of double printing or for the copying of the film as a whole. Applied to a single selected frame it can suddenly arrest the movement of the film in mid-action and can become, in the life of the film, a moment of ominous suspended animation, of temporary, tentative reprieve, or even of death, according to the context in which it occurs. In *Ritual in Transfigured Time* the frozen frame is a theme which occurs, intermittently, throughout the film, once as a hesitation of the protagonist (here recalling the turning back of Lot's wife), later in reference to three women engaged in a relationship and activity which recalls the children's game "Statues," and finally in a frightening sequence in which an ostensibly harmless inanimate statue betrays, in a series of almost imperceptible changes of position, that it is capable of the pursuit which he finally undertakes in slow-motion solemnity.

Applied to individual scenes, reproduction by reprinting makes it possible for a sequence to contain two or more precise repetitions of the same action. When the scene consists of several people involved in casual relationship, the precise reiteration (by inserting reprints) of their spontaneous movements, expressions and exchanges, transforms the quality of the scene from one of informality to a kind of abstract formality akin to dance. It confers the stylization of dance upon non-dancers by shifting emphasis from the purpose of the movement to the movement itself. It is this technique of reprinting which I have used in a long sequence in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* to gradually and almost imperceptibly transform an informal party into a dance of ritual solemnity and dimension.

...plus a splicer

I have tried to approach the creative potentialities of the motion-picture medium in the most orderly fashion possible, moving step by step, from the front and outside of the camera, to the inside and back of it. And I have tried to illustrate each step with examples which, apart from the subject under discussion, referred back to prior, more elementary stages, which had already been discussed.

From the very beginning, however, it has been impossible to discuss the creative implications of even the portability of the camera, without reference to editing, which is ordinarily thought of as the last stage of the process. This should make it apparent that the order in which the images relate to create the meaning and convey the intent of the film is not, in fact, something which is determined after the shots have already been filmed, as a last stage. On the contrary, such decisions should be the very first process, for only by planning, in advance, how the shot is to relate to the one preceding and the one following it, and how this group will sit in the whole, can you know how best to film each shot.

There is, even, an entire body of creative manipulation in which the shots themselves are so simple that I could not discuss them as illustrations of a creative use of any particular aspect of motion-picture photography, for their value consists entirely of their position in the total sequence.

This is the case, for instance, in an early sequence of my film *At Land*, which opens with a scene in which the girl is thrown up on the beach by the sea. She is not drowned; rather, the scene implies a birth or passage from one element into another. She suddenly finds beside her a piece of driftwood, as if it had been deliberately provided as a means of reaching the next stage of her journey, and with a last look back at the sea of her origin, she proceeds, cautiously and laboriously, to climb the ladderlike construction of the driftwood to see where it will lead. Since this sequence was to be a statement of the distance between two worlds, the climb

had to be long and this required a piece of driftwood taller than any I had seen.

This sequence, then, was made up of three shots of action
184 over the *same small* piece of driftwood. The first shot was made from a high-angle, showing the ground beneath; the girl climbs up through this shot and into the second shot, made with a low-placed level camera, showing a horizon line; she continues, entering now a shot of the same driftwood filmed from a very low angle and showing only sky behind, and she continues out of the top of the frame, a movement which carries through into the following sequence which is a banquet table top. Because of the change in angle, the driftwood could not be recognized as the same piece. Apart from their pictorial value, there is nothing creative or meaningful about any of these shots individually. Seen in the sequence for which they were planned, they create not only the illusion of a tall, natural ladder, but the sense of a long and important climb.

While the editing can and does give meaning to individual shots, it cannot give intelligence to a haphazard assortment of images, filmed without regard for their position in the continuity of a meaningful sequence. The sequence described above required the precise framing, angle, and action of each shot, and could not have been edited out of, for example, three images filmed from the same angle. The entire burden of a film—both the filming and the editing—rests upon the initial conception and planning.

...equals the creative expression of an idea.

The planning of the film is, in turn, a function of the theme, purpose and intent of the film-maker, and no technique is valid which does not serve to make a statement. The techniques which I have described would have been of no interest at all, *if they were not conceived for the purpose of conveying a meaning*. The enormously rich resources which the motion-picture medium places at the

disposal of the film-maker are, in the final analysis, only the means; it is the film-maker's job to conceive the purpose they are to serve. In the case of each scene which I have cited as an illustration of the creative use of a technique I have included, however 185
briefly, an indication of the purpose or reason for its use. This is not because their purpose is obscure, but only because the meaning of each sequence depends, so organically, upon its position in the whole, that, in being singled out to serve as an illustration, they lost their meaning in losing their context.

The film-maker must have an idea before he can make meaningful use of the medium. But although the medium cannot initiate creative action, it can *inspire the initiator*—the film-maker. To simply know that a camera is portable is one thing, and not very much; but to *appreciate* the fact that it is portable leads you to wish to make meaningful use of that fact, to consider the meaning of the distance between places, to ponder the transcendent identity of the individual who is always himself and the same and not part of the place in which he finds himself. Your camera, then, is not only a means, but also a muse and can lead you, like a siren, into creative adventure in your medium.