

The Searching Measure

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LA TERRA NUOVA

The act of filming should be a source of thought and discovery. I am opposed to the film director's conception of theatrical mise-en-scène *in front of the camera* and to the cameraman being asked to create a *style* for the image. By dividing the act of filming between director and cameraman, the image is reduced to illustrating a preconception; whereas, in the hands of a filmmaker, the camera functions to create an image that is newly seen, one that projects into the past and future.

Like the roots of a plant reaching down into the ground, filming remains hidden within a complex act, neither to be observed by the spectator nor even completely seen by the filmmaker. It is an act that begins in the filmmaker's eyes and is formed by his gestures in relation to the camera. In a sense he *surrounds* the camera with the direction of his intuition and feeling. The result retains certain physical qualities of the decisive moment of filmmaking—the quality of light and space—but it is equally surprising how a filmmaker draws what he searches for towards the lens.

The basic intentions for a particular work are balanced against the opportunities and obstacles that appear during the actual filming. A branching out of intention continues to develop as the filming progresses. The original impulse may suddenly encounter an obstacle that sends the filmmaker in a different direction towards a stronger image. The result is recognized without hesitation because it is measured against an interior sense of balance. The filming is *a search for correct contours*, and it is activated by a physical sense that is similar to trying to find a location that has been seen only once. Memory searches for the right direction.

Drawing together details and hints, this sense is nearest to touch in its awareness of proportion. It is this quality in the filming that I compare to the roots of a plant.

This same search leads to the film's individual perspective, which the spectator will later enter as the single living participant. Taking an example from Michelangelo's *Sacra Famiglia*, I would suggest that the circular form of the painting is completed by the curved wall and figures in the background that draw the viewer into a "totally rounded orb." Imagine how a film can extend such a perspective in time, bringing it closer to the subjective sense of how we see. It was with such an impulse that I used the full circle of the camera lens in *Amor*, turning it in front of the aperture to create a movement like the eye turned upwards or cast downwards. I allowed the lens to suggest a rounded field of vision amplified in the form of the film: a "totally rounded orb, in its rotundity joying" (Empedocles).

A continuity develops for the filmmaker between the physical structure of the medium and each action involved in the filming, whether simple or complex, and this bodily sense is extended in other ways during the editing. The same hand that operated the camera now places each image within the phrases of edited film. Even the simple unwinding and rewinding of film rolls is part of this process and can help to release an insight leading to the film's distinct form. <=>

From one side:

Each film should contain its own invention. A filmmaker maintains a continuity in his work; he reaches in one direction and returns in another with something new in hand.

The film does not follow in the footsteps of a thought; it is released from the thought without abandoning it. I am aware of the way in which "observing" becomes "directing," aware of the power that exists in Seeing. The making of a film allows one to move back and forth, observing-directing.

The value of the actual filming is seen in the action of a moment. It is hidden until one makes the choice that reveals it and can neither be achieved by correction nor fully explained.

Excellence—Enchantment: this has a clear source in *disegno*. Harshness, vulgarity, and the continuous opposition of profit may appear to overwhelm, yet a sense within the eye and hand maintains its own strength, its own point of origin, and becomes a protection against deceptive choices.

As a way to concentrate, a filmmaker may remove himself or herself from any expectation of acceptance by the public. There is no fear of isolation while the filming continues; its development should be response enough. Instances of understanding also arise that are more a direct agreement in life than appreciation of aesthetic qualities in the work.

"...*sine avaritia, quod ist maximum; nullum enim opus vere sine fide et castitate fieri potest.*" ("...without greed, that is most important; no real work can be done without faith and clean hands.")—Vitruvius

From the other side:

Seeing the projected image contains a search, then the sense of having found what was sought and of this carrying one further.

The spectator must discover why an image was chosen, and the silence of such a discovery is a moment of release. A filmmaker's work is to make the film and to protect what he does in the serenity of a thought without words.

Projection is the means. Memory creates the actual seeing. One of the realities of Film is the delay with which certain images reveal their worth. It will not happen during a first viewing, and it may not happen until a much later one, that an image discloses its *emblematic meaning* equal to the entire film.

The image is central. The order is based on the way the image *holds in projection*. It is as different from a natural view as a musical note is from noise.

A balance of opposites exists between the film and the spectator, whose sight is heightened and enlivened by the projection. An editing movement or camera movement causes the spectator to be still to observe it. He is transported in his stillness, in the lightness that is natural to sight, weightless and open. <3>

HIS IMAGE—THE NATURE OF A FILMMAKER

“Actor” and filmmaker face each other in a relation that is the source for how a figure is presented in the film. It is the recourse of one to the other rather than the actor himself who appears in the film. Each gesture of self-assertion or denial is transformed and becomes part of the vital space of the film frame.

Rather than beginning with a character or presenting a predetermined psychology, the filmmaker finds the reality of form in the physical expression of the features of a particular face, in the harmony of light resting upon and within this face. In certain movements lasting less than a second, each feature of the actor's face projects beyond its boundaries.

To recognize the outline of a person's nature—*his image*—is not a common experience. It happens at that moment when habits of seeing open toward a sudden self-awareness, when the filmmaker registers the other's face opposite him. Imagine the complex pattern that is made by the eyes' movements, how they move away from and directly or indirectly back to the point of attention, then consider how the movements between the eyes of the actor and filmmaker establish a stillness at certain moments. These are the moments in which the figure of the actor gains its distinctness in the images of *one* film. Unlike casting, the search is for a reality within the actor's individual physiognomy, for a generosity that will not fade, all of which is suggested by the phrase “the outline of a chosen person's nature.” The face carries a double sense, first as a direct element within the film frame and second as a performance. Only when both are present will the face be like a voice containing its own lyric within the film as a whole.

Because of this symmetry the face is both meaning and mask. One looks upon the actor's face as much as into it. Between profile and frontal or upper and lower halves of the face, each angle of the features suggests a particular sense. A face sometimes takes on the ambiguity of a pattern, or at other moments possesses a subjectivity that turns back upon itself to *see* its own outline. Each close-up allows the features to equal the entire figure. Details that might be considered too insignificant to carry expression can for that very reason hold a key to the later editing of image and sound. <3>

EDITING AND THE UNSEEN

The living quality of the film image: it is enough in itself to discover a means to achieve this. The many hours of patient editing, this listening to the image and waiting for it to speak and reveal its pattern. Often unexpected, it is recognized in its rightness.

There is the choice of what to discard and the direction of what is included. The discipline comprises never *editing out* as a means of correcting the image. The scale of the film, its dimensions, is a result of how the editing is sustained without interruption. A filmmaker must guard against moments of lost concentration when the moment of growth, narrative growth, might be lost.

I place the pieces of film that are of no further use in one corner of the table. When these have accumulated, I must clear them from the table; their presence alone is an obstacle. They must be out of view to make a space for the next choice in the editing.

I memorize the image and movement while holding the film original in hand; the memorizing gains a weight and becomes a source for the editing. To view the film on an editing table would only distract me from this process and create the illusion that editing is done in the viewing.

The editing responds to holding the image in hand and to the weighting of memory and is protected from an over-determined intention. There should be almost no need to view the film projected until the editing is completed.

Sustained by the awakening of emotion united to strength, I reach beyond the life-likeness of the actor and the shadow of his performance to his figure gathering the life that is in the light of the image.

Where is the strength found to gather the images in a pattern that instills life in the editing? *From within a solitude of being where the filmmaker endures and accepts moments when a single color is the only sign of feeling in an environment where all else is opposition.* The great reality of color: *I respond to it directly in the editing, when one image is set after another in a phrase unified by the variations of one tone.*

The choice of length is a judgment of worth enlarged beyond the filmed image into the clarity of the edited film phrase. *I approach the image through the unseen order of the phrase.* Like the repeated walking to the filming site, this is created by a pattern of returning and adding to the film as it develops in the editing.

The total and true direction of the work is seen finally as each film continues to grow by the decisions made even after the film's completion. <@>

THE SENSES

Anticipation is a fateful quality that exists outside the simple line of time. A spectator's senses are alive within their own past, drawn together into a unity. The weight of this moment before seeing or hearing is balanced between the gathered physical sum of the senses and the self reaching forward into awareness.

Attention creates a different tense. We are alive through anticipation in the present moment, colored by this reaching forward into the future. The movement of the eyes is a question answered by "It is here." The image nourishes how we see. It enlivens all our senses by concentration and praises the instant.

What may appear as mere elements of image and sound in projection can speak to us in the shape of the interval as the pattern of the film rests upon the screen. The spectator builds the narrative like a bridge in the vibrant lightness of his attention. The coherence is not imposed nor does it exist as literature to be discarded by a discursive understanding.

To hold the image more than to be held by it. The quiet of this corresponds to the strength in restraint from which the fullness of anticipation and recognition arises. Anything seen or heard truly cannot be submerged by later circumstance. It lives within one's own being even when not visible.

The necessity that is woven into the film by the filmmaker and the psychic direction of the spectator create at certain moments a congruence fed by eros, history, and temperament...and by the always changing physical world. It is at this distance that the pattern of the film can be seen and heard.

The scale of the film is not separate from its length but entails more—it entails the choice that gives each measure and detail its eloquence. This is what lasts after a projection and remains with the spectator as an attunement, adding to how he or she sees the world.

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These essays appeared in substantially different versions in the annual Temenos film programs presented in Greece in the 1980s, and in the following publications:

"La Terra Nuova" and "Editing and the Unseen": *Millennium Film Journal* No. 32/33, Fall 1998.

"Em·blem": *Views from the Avant-Garde*, New York Film Festival, 1999.

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