CHAPTER V

The film image

> 'Let us put it like this: a spiritual—that is, significant—phenomenon is "significant" precisely because it exceeds its own limits, serves as expression and symbol of something spiritually wider and more universal, an entire world of feelings and thoughts, embodied within it with greater or less felicity—that is the measure of its significance.'
>
> —Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

It is hard to imagine that a concept like *artistic image* could ever be expressed in a precise thesis, easily formulated and understandable. It is not possible, nor would one wish it to be so. I can only say that the image stretches out into infinity, and leads to the absolute. And even what is known as the 'idea' of the image, many dimensional and with many meanings, cannot, in the very nature of things, be put into words. But it does find expression in art. When thought is expressed in an artistic image, it means that its one form has been found, the form that comes nearest to conveying the author's world, to making incarnate his longing for the ideal.

What I want to attempt here is to define the parameters of a possible system of what are generally termed images, a system within which I can feel spontaneous and free.

If you throw even a cursory glance into the past, at the life which lies behind you, not even recalling its most vivid moments, you are struck every time by the singularity of the events in which you took part, the unique individuality of the characters whom you met. This singularity is like the dominant note of every moment of existence; in each moment of life, the life principle itself is unique. The artist therefore tries to grasp that principle and make it incarnate, new each time; and each time he hopes, though in vain, to achieve an exhaustive image of the Truth of human existence. The quality of beauty is in the truth of life, newly assimilated and imparted by the artist, in fidelity to his personal vision.

Anyone at all subtle will always distinguish in people's behaviour truth from fabrication, sincerity from pretence, integrity from

Mirror *The Director at the site for the fire.*

Mirror *The fire sequence.*

affectation. From experience of life a kind of filter grows up in the perception, to stop us giving credence to phenomena in which the structural pattern is broken—whether deliberately so or inadvertently, through ineptness.

There are people incapable of lying. Others who lie with inspiration, convincingly. Others again don't know how to, but are incapable of not lying, and do so drably and hopelessly. Within our terms of reference—namely, precise observation of the logic of life—only the second category detect the beat of truth and can follow the capricious twists of life with an almost geometrical accuracy.

The image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness, bound as the latter is by Euclidean space. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality.

The image is an impression of the truth, a glimpse of the truth permitted to us in our blindness. The incarnate image will be faithful when its articulations are palpably the expression of truth, when they make it unique, singular—as life itself is, even in its simplest manifestations.

The image as a precise observation of life takes us straight back to Japanese poetry.

What captivates me here is the refusal even to hint at the kind of final image meaning that can be gradually deciphered like a charade. Haikku cultivates its images in such a way that they mean nothing beyond themselves, and at the same time express so much that it is not possible to catch their final meaning. The more closely the image corresponds to its function, the more impossible it is to constrict it within a clear intellectual formula. The reader of haikku has to be absorbed into it as into nature, to plunge in, lose himself in its depth, as in the cosmos where there is no bottom and no top.

Look at these haikku by Basho:

The old pond was still
A frog jumped in the water
And a splash was heard.

Or:

Reeds cut for thatching
The stumps now stand forgotten
Sprinkled with soft snow.

Or again:

Why this lethargy?
They could hardly wake me up.
Spring rain pattering.

How simply and accurately life is observed. What discipline of mind and nobility of imagination. The lines are beautiful, because the moment, plucked out and fixed, is one, and falls into infinity.

The Japanese poets knew how to express their visions of reality in three lines of observation. They did not simply observe it, but with supernal calm sought its ageless meaning. And the more precise the observation, the nearer it comes to being unique, and so to being an image. As Dostoievsky said, with remarkable insight, 'Life is more fantastic than any fiction.'

In cinema it is all the more the case that observation is the first principle of the image, which always has been inseparable from the photographic record. The film image is made incarnate, visible and four dimensional. But by no means every film shot can aspire to being an image of the world; as often as not it merely describes some specific aspect. Naturalistically recorded facts are in themselves utterly inadequate to the creation of the cinematic image. The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of an object.

To take an illustration from prose: the end of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* tells how an unkind, limited man, who is dying of cancer and has a nasty wife and a worthless daughter, wants to ask their forgiveness before he dies. At that moment, quite unexpectedly, he is filled with such a sense of goodness, that his family, preoccupied as they are only with clothes and balls, insensitive and unthinking, suddenly seem to him profoundly unhappy, deserving of all pity and forbearance. And then, on the point of death, he feels he is crawling along in some long, soft black pipe, like an intestine . . . In the distance there seems to be a glimmer of light, and he crawls on and can't reach the end, can't overcome that last barrier separating life from death. His wife and daughter stand by the

bedside. He wants to say, 'Forgive me.' And instead, at the last minute, utters, 'Let me through.'* Clearly that image, which shakes us to the very depths of our being, cannot be interpreted in one way only. Its associations reach far into our innermost feelings, reminding us of some obscure memories and experiences of our own, stunning us, stirring our souls like a revelation. At the risk of banality—it is so like life, like a truth that we had guessed at, that it can rival situations that we have already known or secretly imagined. In the Aristotelian thesis, we recognise as something familiar what has been expressed by a genius. How deep and multidimensional it becomes will depend on the psyche of the reader.

Let us look at Leonardo's portrait of 'A Young Lady With a Juniper', which we used in *Mirror* for the scene of the father's brief meeting with his children when he comes home on leave.

There are two things about Leonardo's images that are arresting. One is the artist's amazing capacity to examine the object from outside, standing back, looking from above the world—a characteristic of artists like Bach or Tolstoy. And the other, the fact that the picture affects us simultaneously in two opposite ways. It is not possible to say what impression the portrait finally makes on us. It is not even possible to say definitely whether we like the woman or not, whether she is appealing or unpleasant. She is at once attractive and repellent. There is something inexpressibly beautiful about her and at the same time repulsive, fiendish. And fiendish not at all in the romantic, alluring sense of the word; rather—beyond good and evil. Charm with a negative sign. It has an element of degeneracy—and of beauty. In *Mirror* we needed the portrait in order to introduce a timeless element into the moments that are succeeding each other before our eyes, and at the same time to juxtapose the portrait with the heroine, to emphasise in her and in the actress, Margarita Terekhova, the same capacity at once to enchant and to repel. . . .

If you try to analyse Leonardo's portrait, separating it into its components, it will not work. At any rate it will explain nothing. For the emotional effect exercised on us by the woman in the picture is powerful precisely because it is impossible to find in her anything that we can definitely prefer, to single out any one detail from the whole, to prefer any one, momentary impression to another, and make it our own, to achieve a balance in the way we look at the image

* In Russian 'Forgive me' is *prosteete*; 'let me through' is *propoosteete*. —Tr.

presented to us. And so there opens up before us the possibility of interaction with infinity, for the great function of the artistic image is to be a kind of detector of infinity . . . towards which our reason and our feelings go soaring, with joyful, thrilling haste.

Such feeling is awoken by the completeness of the image: it affects us by this very fact of being impossible to dismember. In isolation, each component part will be dead—or perhaps, on the contrary, down to its tiniest elements it will display the same characteristics as the complete, finished work. And these characteristics are produced by the interaction of opposed principles, the meaning of which, as if in communicating vessels, spills over from one into the other: the face of the woman painted by Leonardo is animated by an exalted idea and at the same time might appear perfidious and subject to base passions. It is possible for us to see any number of things in the portrait, and as we try to grasp its essence we shall wander through unending labyrinths and never find the way out. We shall derive deep pleasure from the realisation that we cannot exhaust it, or see to the end of it. A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings.

It is not possible to catch the moment at which the positive goes over into its opposite, or when the negative starts moving towards the positive. Infinity is germane, inherent in the very structure of the image. In practice, however, a person invariably prefers one thing to another, selects, seeks out his own, sets a work of art in the context of his personal experience. And since everybody has certain tendencies in what he does, and asserts his own truth in great things as in small, as he adapts art to his daily needs he will interpret an artistic image to his own 'advantage'. He sets a work into the context of his life and hedges it about with his aphorisms; for great works are ambivalent and allow for widely differing interpretations.

I am always sickened when an artist underpins his system of images with deliberate tendentiousness or ideology. I am against his allowing his methods to be discernible at all. I often regret some of the shots I have allowed to stay in my own films; they seem to me now to be evidence of compromise and found their way into my films because I was insufficiently singleminded. If it were still possible, I would now happily cut out of *Mirror* the scene with the cock, even though that scene made a deep impression on many in the audience. But that was because I was playing 'give-away' with the audience.

When the exhausted heroine, almost at fainting-point, is making up her mind whether to cut off the cockerel's head, we shot her in close-up at high speed for the last ninety frames, in a patently unnatural light. Since on the screen it comes out in slow motion, it gives an effect of stretching the time-framework—we are plunging the audience into the heroine's state, putting a brake on that moment, highlighting it. This is bad, because the shot starts to have a purely literary meaning. We deform the actress's face independently of her, as it were playing the role for her. We serve up the emotion we want, squeeze it out by our own—director's—means. Her state becomes too clear, too easily read. And in the interpretation of a character's state of mind, something must always be left secret.

To quote a more successful example of a similar method, again from *Mirror*: a few frames of the printing-press scene are also shot in slow motion, but in this case it is barely perceptible. We made a point of doing it very delicately and carefully, so that the audience would not be aware of it straight away, but just have a vague feeling of something strange. We were not trying to underline an idea by using slow motion, but to bring out a state of mind through means other than acting.

In Kurosawa's version of *Macbeth* we find a perfect example. In the scene where Macbeth is lost in the forest, a lesser director would have the actors stumbling around in the fog in search of the right direction, bumping into trees. And what does the genius Kurosawa do? He finds a place with a distinctive, memorable tree. The horsemen go round in a circle, three times, so that the sight of the tree eventually makes it clear that they keep going past the same spot. The horsemen themselves don't realise that they long ago lost their way. In his treatment of the concept of space Kurosawa here displays the most subtle poetic approach, expressing himself without the slightest hint of mannerism or pretentiousness. For what could be simpler than setting the camera and following the characters around three times?

In a word, the image is not a certain *meaning*, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as a drop of water. Only in a drop of water!

There are no technical problems of expression in cinema once you know exactly what to say; if you see every cell of your picture from within and can feel it accurately. For instance, in the scene of the heroine's chance meeting with a stranger (played by Anatoliy

Solonitsyn), it was important that after he leaves some sort of thread should be drawn to link these two who seem to have met quite fortuitously. Had he turned as he was walking away and glanced back at her expressively, it would all have been sequential and false. Then we thought of the gust of wind in the field, which attracts the stranger's attention because it is so unexpected: that is why he looks back . . .. In this case there is no question of, so to speak, 'catching the author out' because his game is so obvious.

When the audience is unaware of the reasons why the director has used a certain method, he is inclined to believe in the reality of what is happening on screen, to believe in the life the artist is observing. But if the audience, as the saying goes, catches the director out, knowing exactly why the latter has performed a particular 'expressive' trick, they will no longer sympathise with what is happening or be carried along by it, and will begin to *judge* its purpose and its execution. In other words the 'spring' against which Marx warned is beginning to stick out of the upholstery.

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not signify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness. What then is true to type, and how does what is original and singular in art relate to it? If the image emerges as something unique, then is there any room for what is true to type?

The paradox is that the unique element in an artistic image mysteriously becomes the typical; for strangely enough the latter turns out to be in direct correlation with what is individual, idiosyncratic, unlike anything else. It is not when phenomena are recorded as ordinary and similar that we find what is true to type (though that is where it is generally thought to lie), but where phenomena are distinctive. The general could be said to thrust the particular forward, and then to fall back and remain outside the ostensible framework of the reproduction. It is simply assumed as the substructure of the unique phenomenon.

If that seems strange at first sight, one has only to remember that the artistic image must evoke no associations other than those which speak of the truth. (Here we are talking of the artist who creates the image rather than of the audience who see it.) As he starts work the artist has to believe that he is the first person ever to give form to a particular phenomenon. It is being done for the first time, and as only he feels it and understands it.

The artistic image is unique and singular, whereas the phenomena of life may well be entirely banal. Again, haikku:

No, not to my house.
That one, pattering umbrella
Went to my neighbour.

In itself, a passer-by with an umbrella whom you have seen at some time in your life means nothing new; he is just one of the people hurrying along and keeping himself dry in the rain. But within the terms of the artistic image we have been considering, a moment of life, one and unique for the author, is recorded in a form that is perfect and simple. The three lines are sufficient to make us feel his mood: his loneliness, the grey, rainy weather outside the window, and the vain expectation that someone might by a miracle call into his solitary, god-forsaken dwelling. Situation and mood, meticulously recorded, achieve an amazingly wide, far-ranging expression.

At the beginning of these reflections we deliberately ignored what is known as the character image. At this point it could be useful to include it. Let us take Bashmachkin[17] and Onegin. As literary types they personify certain social laws, which are the precondition of their existence—that is on the one hand. On the other, they possess some universal human traits. All this is so: a character in literature may become typical if he reflects current patterns formed as a result of general laws of development. As types, therefore, Bashmachkin and Onegin have plenty of analogues in real life. As types, certainly! As artistic images they are nonetheless absolutely alone and inimitable. They are too concrete, seen too large by their authors, carry the latter's viewpoint too fully, for us to be able to say: 'Yes, Onegin, he's just like my neighbour.' The nihilism of Raskolnikov in historical and sociological terms is of course typical; but in the personal and individual terms of his image, he stands alone. Hamlet is undoubtedly a type as well; but where, in simple terms, have you ever seen a Hamlet?

We are faced with a paradox: the character image signifies the fullest possible expression of what is typical, and the more fully it expresses it, the more individual, the more original it becomes. It is an extraordinary thing, this image! In a sense it is far richer than life itself; perhaps precisely because it expresses the idea of absolute truth.

Do the images of Leonardo or Bach mean anything in functional

terms? No—they mean nothing at all beyond what they mean themselves; that is the measure of their autonomy. They see the world as if for the first time, with no experience to weigh them down. They look at it with the independence of people who have only just arrived!

All creative work strives for simplicity, for perfectly simple expression; and this means reaching down into the furthest depths of the recreation of life. But that is the most painful part of creative work: finding the shortest path between what you want to say or express and its ultimate reproduction in the finished image. The struggle for simplicity is the painful search for a form adequate to the truth you have grasped. You long to be able to achieve great things while economising the means.

The striving for perfection leads an artist to make spiritual discoveries, to exert the utmost moral effort. Aspiration towards the absolute is the moving force in the development of mankind. For me the idea of realism in art is linked with that force. Art is realistic when it strives to express an ethical ideal. Realism is a striving for the truth, and truth is always beautiful. Here the aesthetic coincides with the ethical.

Time, rhythm and editing

Turning now to the film image as such, I immediately want to dispel the widely held idea that it is essentially 'composite'. This notion seems to me wrong because it implies that cinema is founded on the attributes of kindred art forms and has none specifically its own; and that is to deny that cinema is an art.

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame. The actual passage of time is also made clear in the characters' behaviour, the visual treatment and the sound—but these are all accompanying features, the absence of which, theoretically, would in no way affect the existence of the film. One cannot conceive of a cinematic work with no sense of time passing through the shot, but one can easily imagine a film with no actors, music, décor or even editing. The Lumière brothers' *Arrivée d'un Train*, already mentioned, was like that. So are one or two films of the American underground: there is one, for instance, which shows a man asleep; we then see him waking up,

and, by its own wizardry, the cinema gives that moment an unexpected and stunning aesthetic impact.

Or Pascal Aubier's[18] ten-minute film consisting of only one shot. First it shows the life of nature, majestic and unhurried, indifferent to human bustle and passions. Then the camera, controlled with virtuoso skill, moves to take in a tiny dot: a sleeping figure scarcely visible in the grass, on the slope of a hill. The dramatic dénouement follows immediately. The passing of time seems to be speeded up, driven on by our curiosity. It is as if we steal cautiously up to him along with the camera, and, as we draw near, we realise that the man is dead. The next moment we are given more information: not only is he dead, he was killed; he is an insurgent who has died from wounds, seen against the background of an indifferent nature. We are thrown powerfully back by our memories to events which shake today's world.

You will remember that the film has no editing, no acting and no décor. But the rhythm of the movement of time is there within the frame, as the sole organising force of the—quite complex—dramatic development.

No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. And we can only talk about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion.

Nor can I accept the notion that editing is the main formative element of a film, as the protagonists of 'montage cinema', following Kuleshov and Eisenstein, maintained in the 'twenties, as if a film was made on the editing table.

It has often been pointed out, quite rightly, that every art form involves editing, in the sense of selection and collation, adjusting parts and pieces. The cinema image comes into being during shooting, and exists *within* the frame. During shooting, therefore, I concentrate on the course of time in the frame, in order to reproduce it and record it. Editing brings together shots which are already filled with time, and organises the unified, living structure inherent in the film; and the time that pulsates through the blood vessels of the film, making it alive, is of varying rhythmic pressure.

The idea of 'montage cinema'—that editing brings together two concepts and thus engenders a new, third one—again seems to me to be incompatible with the nature of cinema. Art can never have the interplay of concepts as its ultimate goal. The image is tied to the

Mirror
Sequence from the first dream.

concrete and the material, yet reaches out along mysterious paths to regions beyond the spirit—perhaps that is what Pushkin meant when he said that 'Poetry has to be a little bit stupid.'

The poetics of cinema, a mixture of the basest material substances such as we tread every day, is resistant to symbolism. A single frame is enough to show, from his choice and recording of matter, whether a director is talented, whether he is endowed with cinematic vision.

Editing is ultimately no more than the ideal variant of the assembly of the shots, necessarily contained within the material that has been put onto the roll of film. Editing a picture correctly, competently, means allowing the separate scenes and shots to come together spontaneously, for in a sense they edit themselves; they join up according to their own intrinsic pattern. It is simply a question of recognising and following this pattern while joining and cutting. It is not always easy to sense the pattern of relationships, the articulations between the shots; moreover, if the scene has been shot inexactly, you will have not merely to join the pieces logically and naturally at the editing table, but laboriously to seek out the basic principle of the articulations. Little by little, however, you will slowly find emerging and becoming clearer the essential unity contained within the material.

In a curious, retroactive process, a self-organising structure takes shape during editing because of the distinctive properties given the material during shooting. The essential nature of the filmed material comes out in the character of the editing.

To refer again to my own experience, I must say that a prodigious amount of work went into editing *Mirror*. There were some twenty or more variants. I don't just mean changes in the order of certain shots, but major alterations in the actual structure, in the sequence of the episodes. At moments it looked as if the film could not be edited, which would have meant that inadmissible lapses had occurred during shooting. The film didn't hold together, it wouldn't stand up, it fell apart as one watched, it had no unity, no necessary inner connection, no logic. And then, one fine day, when we somehow managed to devise one last, desperate rearrangement—there was the film. The material came to life; the parts started to function reciprocally, as if linked by a bloodstream; and as that last, despairing attempt was projected onto the screen, the film was born before our very eyes. For a long time I still couldn't believe the miracle—the film held together.

It was a serious test of how good our shooting had been. It was clear that the parts came together because of a propensity inherent in the material, which must have originated during filming; and if we were not deceiving ourselves about its being there despite all our difficulties, then the picture could not but come together, it was in the very nature of things. It had to happen, legitimately and spontaneously, once we recognised the meaning and the life principle of the shots. And when that happened, thank God! — what a relief it was for everyone.

Time itself, running through the shots, had met and linked together.

There are about two hundred shots in *Mirror*, very few when a film of that length usually has between five hundred and a thousand; the small number is due to their length.

Although the assembly of the shots is responsible for the structure of a film, it does not, as is generally assumed, create its rhythm.

The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them. Editing cannot determine rhythm (in this respect it can only be a feature of style); indeed, time courses through the picture despite editing rather than because of it. The course of time, recorded in the frame, is what the director has to catch in the pieces laid out on the editing table.

Time, imprinted in the frame, dictates the particular editing principle; and the pieces that 'won't edit' — that can't be properly joined — are those which record a radically different kind of time. One cannot, for instance, put actual time together with conceptual time, any more than one can join water pipes of different diameter. The consistency of the time that runs through the shot, its intensity or 'sloppiness', could be called time-pressure: then editing can be seen as the assembly of the pieces on the basis of the time-pressure within them.

Maintaining the operative pressure, or thrust, will unify the impact of the different shots.

How does time make itself felt in a shot? It becomes tangible when you sense something significant, truthful, going on beyond the events on the screen; when you realise, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity;

a pointer to life. Like the infinity of the image which we talked of earlier, a film is bigger than it is—at least, if it is a real film. And it always turns out to have more thought, more ideas, than were consciously put there by its author. Just as life, constantly moving and changing, allows everyone to interpret and feel each separate moment in his own way, so too a real picture, faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame, lives within time if time lives within it; this two-way process is a determining factor of cinema.

The film then becomes something beyond its ostensible existence as an exposed and edited roll of film, a story, a plot. Once in contact with the individual who sees it, it separates from its author, starts to live its own life, undergoes changes of form and meaning.

I reject the principles of 'montage cinema' because they do not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them on film. 'Montage cinema' presents the audience with puzzles and riddles, makes them decipher symbols, wonder at allegories, appealing all the time to their intellectual experience. Each of these riddles, however, has its own word-for-word solution; so I feel that Eisenstein prevents the audience from letting their feelings be influenced by their own reaction to what they see. When in *October* he juxtaposes a balalaika with Kerensky, his method has become his aim, in the way that Valéry meant. The construction of the image becomes an end in itself, and the author proceeds to make a total onslaught on the audience, imposing upon them his own attitude to what is happening.

If one compares cinema with such time-based arts as, say, ballet or music, cinema stands out as giving time visible, real form. Once recorded on film, the phenomenon is there, given and immutable, even when the time is intensely subjective.

Artists are divided into those who create their own inner world, and those who recreate reality. I undoubtedly belong to the first—but that actually alters nothing: my inner world may be of interest to some, others will be left cold or even irritated by it; the point is that the inner world created by cinematic means always has to be taken as reality, as it were objectively established in the immediacy of the recorded moment.

A piece of music can be played in different ways, and can therefore last for varying lengths of time. Here time is simply a

condition of certain causes and effects set out in a given order; it has an abstract, philosophical character. Cinema on the other hand is able to record time in outward and visible signs, recognisable to the feelings. And so time becomes the very foundation of cinema: as sound is in music, colour in painting, character in drama.

Rhythm, then, is not the metrical sequence of pieces; what makes it is the time-thrust within the frames. And I am convinced that it is rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema.

Editing exists in every art form, since material always has to be selected and joined. What is different about cinema editing is that it brings together time, imprinted in the segments of film. Editing entails assembling smaller and larger pieces, each of which carries a different time. And their assembly creates a new awareness of the existence of that time, emerging as a result of the intervals, of what is cut out, carved off in the process; but the distinctive character of the assembly, as we said earlier, is already present in the segments. Editing does not engender, or recreate, a new quality; it brings out a quality already inherent in the frames that it joins. Editing is anticipated during shooting; it is presupposed in the character of what is filmed, programmed by it from the outset. Editing has to do with stretches of time, and the degree of intensity with which these exist, as recorded by the camera; not with abstract symbols, picturesque physical realia, carefully arranged compositions judiciously dotted about the scene; not with two similar concepts, which in conjunction produce—we are told—a 'third meaning'; but with the diversity of life perceived.

Eisenstein's own work vindicates my thesis. If his intuition let him down, and he failed to put into the edited pieces the time-pressure required by that particular assembly, then the rhythm, which he held to be directly dependent on editing, would show up the weakness of his theoretical premise. Take for example the battle on the ice in *Alexander Nevsky*. Ignoring the need to fill the frames with the appropriate time-pressure, he tries to achieve the inner dynamic of the battle with an edited sequence of short—sometimes excessively short—shots. However, despite the lightning speed with which the frames change, the audience (at any rate those among them who come with an open mind, who have not had it dinned into them that this is a 'classical' film, and a 'classical' example of editing as taught at S.I.C.) are dogged by the feeling that what is happening

on the screen is sluggish and unnatural. This is because no time-truth exists in the separate frames. In themselves they are static and insipid. And so there is an inevitable contradiction between the frame itself, devoid of specific time-process, and the precipitate style of editing, which is arbitrary and superficial because it bears no relation to any time within the shots. The sensation the director was counting on never reaches the audience, because he didn't bother to fill the frame with the authentic time-sense of the legendary battle. The event is not recreated, but put together any old how.

Rhythm in cinema is conveyed by the life of the object visibly recorded in the frame. Just as from the quivering of a reed you can tell what sort of current, what pressure there is in a river, in the same way we know the movement of time from the flow of the life-process reproduced in the shot.

It is above all through sense of time, through rhythm, that the director reveals his individuality. Rhythm colours a work with stylistic marks. It is not thought up, not composed on an arbitrary, theoretical basis, but comes into being spontaneously in a film, in response to the director's innate awareness of life, his 'search for time'. It seems to me that time in a shot has to flow independently and with dignity, then ideas will find their place in it without fuss, bustle, haste. Feeling the rhythmicality of a shot is rather like feeling a truthful word in literature. An inexact word in writing, like an inexact rhythm in film, destroys the veracity of the work. (Of course the concept of rhythm can be applied to prose—though in quite another way.)

But here we have an inevitable problem. Let us say that I want to have time flowing through the frame with dignity, independently, so that no-one in the audience will feel that his perception is being coerced, so that he may, as it were, allow himself to be taken prisoner voluntarily by the artist, as he starts to recognise the material of the film as his own, assimilating it, drawing it in to himself as new, intimate experience. But there is still an apparent dichotomy: for the director's sense of time always amounts to a kind of coercion of the audience, as does his imposition of his inner world. The person watching either falls into your rhythm (your world), and becomes your ally, or else he does not, in which case no contact is made. And so some people become your 'own', and others remain strangers; and I think this is not only perfectly natural, but, alas, inevitable.

I see it as my professional task then, to create my own, distinctive

flow of time, and convey in the shot a sense of its movement—from lazy and soporific to stormy and swift—and to one person it will seem one way, to another, another.

Assembly, editing, disturbs the passage of time, interrupts it and simultaneously gives it something new. The distortion of time can be a means of giving it rhythmical expression.

Sculpting in time!

But the deliberate joining of shots of uneven time-pressure must not be introduced casually; it has to come from inner necessity, from an organic process going on in the material as a whole. The minute the organic process of the transitions is disturbed, the emphasis of the editing (which the director wants to hide) starts to obtrude; it is laid bare, it leaps to the eye. If time is slowed down or speeded up artificially, and not in response to an endogenous development, if the change of rhythm is wrong, the result will be false and strident.

Joining segments of unequal time-value necessarily breaks the rhythm. However, if this break is promoted by forces at work within the assembled frames, then it may be an essential factor in the carving out of the right rhythmic design. To take the various time-pressures, which we could designate metaphorically as brook, spate, river, waterfall, ocean—joining them together engenders that unique rhythmic design which is the author's sense of time, called into being as a newly formed entity.

In so far as sense of time is germane to the director's innate perception of life, and editing is dictated by the rhythmic pressures in the segments of film, his handwriting is to be seen in his editing. It expresses his attitude to the conception of the film, and is the ultimate embodiment of his philosophy of life. I think that the film-maker who edits his films easily and in different ways is bound to be superficial. You will aways recognise the editing of Bergman, Bresson, Kurosawa or Antonioni; none of them could ever be confused with anyone else, because each one's perception of time, is expressed in the rhythm of his films, is always the same. On the other hand, if you take a few Hollywood films, you feel they were all edited by the same person; in terms of editing they are quite indistinguishable.

Of course you have to know the rules of editing, just as you have to know all the other rules of your profession; but artistic creation begins at the point where these rules are bent or broken. Because Lev Tolstoy was not an impeccable stylist like Bunin,[19] and his novels

Mirror *Margarita Terekhova: Arseniy Tarkovsky's poem,*
S UTRA YA TEBYA . . . — *FROM MORNING ON . . .*

From morning on I waited yesterday,
They knew you wouldn't come, they guessed.
You remember what a lovely day it was?
A holiday! I didn't need a coat.

You came today, and it turned out
A sullen, leaden day,
And it was raining, and somehow late,
And branches cold with running drops.

Word cannot soothe, nor kerchief wipe away.

Arseniy Tarkovsky
(*Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair*)

lack the elegance and perfection which mark many of Bunin's stories, Bunin cannot be declared greater than Tolstoy. You not only forgive Tolstoy his ponderous and often unnecessary moralising and his clumsy sentences, you even begin to be fond of them as a trait, a feature of the man. Faced with a really great figure, you accept him with all his 'weaknesses', which become the distinguishing marks of his aesthetic.

If you extract Dostoievsky's descriptions of his characters from the context of his work you cannot but find them disconcerting: 'beautiful', 'with bright lips', 'pale faces', and so on and so forth . . . But that simply doesn't matter, because we're talking not of a professional and a craftsman, but of an artist and a philosopher. Bunin, who had an infinite regard for Tolstoy, thought *Anna Karenina* abominably written, and, as we know, tried to rewrite it—with no success.

The same applies to editing: it is not a question of mastering the technique like a virtuoso, but of a vital need for your own, distinct individual expression. Above all you have to know what brought you into cinema rather than into some other branch of art, and what you want to say by means of its poetics. Incidentally, in recent years one has met more and more young people coming into cinema schools already prepared to do 'what you have to'—in the Soviet Union, or what pays best—in the West. This is tragic. Problems of technique are child's play; you can learn any of it. But thinking independently, worthily, is not like learning to do something; nor is being an individual. Nobody can be forced to shoulder a weight that is not merely difficult, but at times impossible to bear; but there is no other way, it has to be all or nothing.

The man who has stolen in order never to thieve again remains a thief. Nobody who has ever betrayed his principles can have a pure relationship with life. Therefore when a film-maker says he will produce a pot-boiler in order to give himself the strength and the means to make the film of his dreams—that is so much deception, or worse, self-deception. He will never now make *his* film.