It is natural, therefore, that not even specialist critics have the delicacy of touch required to dissect for analysis the idea of a work and its poetic imagery. For an idea does not exist in art except in the images which give it form, and the image exists as a kind of grasping of reality by the will, which the artist undertakes according to his own inclinations and the idiosyncrasies of his worldview.

In my childhood my mother suggested I read War and Peace for the first time, and for many years afterwards she would often quote from the novel, pointing out to me the subtlety and depth of Tolstoy’s prose. War and Peace thus became for me a kind of school of art, a criterion of taste and artistic depth; after that it was no longer possible to read trash; it would give me an acute feeling of disgust.

Merezhkovsky in his book about Tolstoy and Dostoievsky criticises those passages where Tolstoy’s characters engage in philosophy, formulating as it were their ideas on life... However, although I agree entirely that the idea of a poetic work must not be put together purely intellectually, or at any rate agreeing in general terms that this is so, I still have to say that we are talking about the significance of an individual in a literary work, where the sincerity of his self-expression is the only pledge of his worth. And even though I think Merezhkovsky’s criticism is based on perfectly sound reasoning, it doesn’t stop me from loving War and Peace even, if you like, for those passages that are ‘a mistake’. For the genius is revealed not in the absolute perfection of a work but in absolute fidelity to himself, in commitment to his own passion. The passionate aspiration of the artist to the truth, to knowing the world and himself in the world, endows with special meaning even the somewhat obscure, or, as they are called, ‘less successful’ passages in his works.

One might even go further; I don’t know a single masterpiece that does not have its weaknesses or is completely free of imperfections. For the individual bias that makes the genius, and the singleness of purpose which sustains his work, are the source not only of the greatness of a masterpiece but also of its lapses. Again — can lapses be the right name for something that is organically part of an integral world outlook? The genius is not free. As Thomas Mann wrote: ‘Only indifference is free. What is distinctive is never free, it is stamped with its own seal, conditioned and chained.’

CHAPTER III

Imprinted time

Stavrogin: ... in the Apocalypse the angel swears that there’ll be no more time.

Kirillov: I know. It’s quite true, it’s said very clearly and exactly. When the whole of man has achieved happiness, there won’t be any time, because it won’t be needed. It’s perfectly true.

Stavrogin: Where will they put it then?

Kirillov: They won’t put it anywhere. Time isn’t a thing, it’s an idea. I’ll die out in the mind.

— F. Dostoievsky, The Possessed

Time is a condition for the existence of our ‘I’. It is like a kind of culture medium that is destroyed when it is no longer needed, once the links are severed between the individual personality and the conditions of existence. And the moment of death is also the death of individual time: the life of a human being becomes inaccessible to the feelings of those remaining alive, dead for those around him.

Time is necessary to man, so that, made flesh, he may be able to realise himself as a personality. But I am not thinking of linear time, meaning the possibility of getting something done, performing some action. The action is a result, and what I am considering is the cause which makes man incarnate in a moral sense.

History is still not Time; nor is evolution. They are both consequences. Time is a state: the flame in which there lives the salamander of the human soul.

Time and memory merge into each other; they are like the two sides of a medal. It is obvious enough that without Time, memory cannot exist either. But memory is something so complex that no list of all its attributes could define the totality of the impressions through which it affects us. Memory is a spiritual concept! For instance, if somebody tells us of his impressions of childhood, we can say with certainty that we shall have enough material in our hands to form a complete picture of that person. Bereft of memory, a person becomes the prisoner of an illusory existence; falling out of
time he is unable to seize his own link with the outside world—in other words he is doomed to madness.

As a moral being, man is endowed with memory which sows in him a sense of dissatisfaction. It makes us vulnerable, subject to pain.

When scholars and critics study time as it appears in literature, music or painting, they speak of the methods of recording it. Studying Joyce or Proust, for instance, they will examine the aesthetic mechanics of existence in the retrospect of the works, the way the individual who does the recollecting actually records his experience. They will study the forms used in art to fix time, whereas I am interested here in the inner, moral qualities essentially inherent in time itself.

The time in which a person lives gives him the opportunity of knowing himself as a moral being, engaged in the search for the truth; yet this gift which man has in his hands is at once delectable and bitter. And life is no more than the period allotted to him, and in which he may, indeed must, fashion his spirit in accordance with his own understanding of the aim of human existence. The rigid frame into which it is thrust, however, makes our responsibility to ourselves and others all the more starkly obvious. The human conscience is dependent upon time for its existence.

Time is said to be irreversible. And this is true enough in the sense that ‘you can’t bring back the past’, as they say. But what exactly is this ‘past’? Is it what has passed? And what does ‘passed’ mean for a person when for each of us the past is the bearer of all that is constant in the reality of the present, of each current moment? In a certain sense the past is far more real, or at any rate more stable, more resilient than the present. The present slips and vanishes like sand between the fingers, acquiring material weight only in its recollection. King Solomon’s rings bore the inscription, ‘All will pass’; by contrast, I want to draw attention to how time in its moral implication is in fact turned back. Time cannot vanish without trace for it is a subjective, spiritual category; and the time we have lived settles in our soul as an experience placed within time.

Cause and effect are mutually dependent, forwards and retrospectively. One begets the other by an inexorably ordained necessity, which would be fatal for us if we were able to discover all of the connections at once. The link of cause and effect, in other words the transition from one state to another, is also the form in which time exists, the means whereby it is materialised, in day to day practice. But, having made its effect, the cause is not then discarded like the used stage of a rocket. Given any effect, we constantly go back to its source, its causes—in other words, we could be said to be turning time back through conscience. Cause and effect may, in a moral sense, be linked retroactively; and then a person does, as it were, return to his past.

In his account of Japan the Soviet journalist Ovchinikov wrote: ‘It is considered that time, per se, helps to make known the essence of things. The Japanese therefore see a particular charm in the evidence of old age. They are attracted to the darkened tone of an old tree, the ruggedness of a stone, or even the scruffy look of a picture whose edges have been handled by a great many people. To all these signs of age they give the name, saba, which literally means “rust”. Saba, then, is a natural rustiness, the charm of olden days, the stamp of time. [—or patina—A.T.]

‘Saba, as an element of beauty, embodies the link between art and nature.’

In a sense the Japanese could be said to be trying to master time as the stuff of art.

Here one is inevitably reminded of what Proust said of his grandmother: ‘Even when she had to make someone an ostensibly practical gift, when she had to give an armchair, a dinner service or a walking-stick, she would look out for “old” ones, as if these, purged by long disuse of their utilitarian character, were able to tell us how people had lived in the old days, rather than serve our modern needs.’

Proust also spoke of raising “a vast edifice of memories”, and that seems to me to be what cinema is called to do. It could be said to be the ideal manifestation of the Japanese concept of saba; for, as it masters this completely new material—time—it becomes, in the fullest sense, a new muse.

I should not want to impose my views on cinema on anybody else. All I hope is that everyone I am addressing (in other words, people who know and love the cinema) has his own ideas, his particular view of the artistic principles of film-making and film criticism.

A mass of preconceptions exists in and around the profession. And I do mean preconceptions, not traditions: those hackneyed ways of thinking, clichés, that grow up around traditions and gradually take
them over. And you can achieve nothing in art unless you are free from received ideas. You have to work out your own position, your individual point of view—subject always, of course, to common sense—and keep this before you, like the apple of your eye, all the time you are working.

Directing starts not when the script is being discussed with the writer, nor during work with the actor, or with the composer, but at the time when, before the interior gaze of the person making the film and known as the director, there emerges an image of the film: this might be a series of episodes worked out in detail, or perhaps the consciousness of an aesthetic texture and emotional atmosphere, to be materialised on the screen. The director must have a clear idea of his objectives and work through with his camera team to achieve their total, precise realisation. However, all this is no more than technical expertise. Although it involves many of the conditions necessary to art, in itself it is not sufficient to earn for the director the name of artist.

He starts to be an artist at the moment when, in his mind or even on film, his own distinctive system of images starts to take shape—his own pattern of thoughts about the external world—and the audience are invited to judge it, to share with the director in his most precious and secret dreams. Only when his personal viewpoint is brought in, when he becomes a kind of philosopher, does he emerge as an artist, and cinema—as an art. (Of course he is a philosopher only in a relative sense. As Paul Valéry observed, ‘Poets are philosophers. You might equally well compare the painter of sea-scapes to a ship’s captain.’)

Every art form, however, is born and lives according to its particular laws. When people talk about the specific norms of cinema, it is usually in juxtaposition with literature. In my view it is all-important that the interaction between cinema and literature should be explored and exposed as completely as possible, so that the two can at last be separated, never to be confused again. In what ways are literature and cinema similar and related? What links them?

Above all the unique freedom enjoyed by practitioners in both fields to take what they want of what is offered by the real world, and to arrange it in sequence. This definition may appear too wide and general, but it seems to me to take in all that cinema and literature have in common. Beyond it lie irreconcilable differences, stemming from the essential disparity between word and screened image; for
the basic difference is that literature uses words to describe the world, whereas film does not have to use words: it manifests itself to us directly.

In all these years no single binding definition has been found for the specific character of cinema. A great many views exist, either in conflict with each other, or worse—overlapping in a kind of eclectic confusion. Every artist in the film world will see, pose and solve the problem in his own way. In any case there has to be a clear specification if one is to work in the full consciousness of what one is doing, for it is not possible to work without recognising the laws of one’s own art form.

What are the determining factors of cinema, and what emerges from them? What are its potential, means, images—not only formally, but even spiritually? And in what material does the director work?

I still cannot forget that work of genius, shown in the last century, the film with which it all started—L’Arrivée d’un Train en Gare de La Ciotat. That film made by Auguste Lumière was simply the result of the invention of the camera, the film and the projector. The spectacle, which only lasts half a minute, shows a section of railway platform, bathed in sunlight, ladies and gentlemen walking about, and the train coming from the depths of the frame and heading straight for the camera. As the train approached panic started in the theatre: people jumped up and ran away. That was the moment when cinema was born; it was not simply a question of technique, or just a new way of reproducing the world. What came into being was a new aesthetic principle.

For the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means to take an impression of time. And simultaneously the possibility of reproducing that time on screen as often as he wanted, to repeat it and go back to it. He acquired a matrix for actual time. Once seen and recorded, time could now be preserved in metal boxes over a long period (theoretically for ever).

That is the sense in which the Lumière films were the first to contain the seed of a new aesthetic principle. But immediately afterwards cinema turned aside from art, forced down the path that was safest from the point of view of philistine interest and profit. In the course of the following two decades almost the whole of world literature was screened, together with a huge number of theatrical plots. Cinema was exploited for the straightforward and seductive purpose of recording theatrical performance. Film took a wrong turn; and we have to accept the fact that the unfortunate results of that move are still with us. The worst of it was not, in my view, the reduction of cinema to mere illustration: far worse was the failure to exploit artistically the one precious potential of the cinema—the possibility of printing on celluloid the actuality of time.

In what form does cinema print time? Let us define it as factual. And fact can consist of an event, or a person moving, or any material object; and furthermore the object can be presented as motionless and unchanging, in so far as that immobility exists within the actual course of time.

That is where the roots are to be sought of the specific character of cinema. Of course in music too the problem of time is central. Here, however, its solution is quite different: the life force of music is materialised on the brink of its own total disappearance. But the virtue of cinema is that it appropriates time, complete with that material reality to which it is indissolubly bound, and which surrounds us day by day and hour by hour.

Time, printed in its factual forms and manifestations: such is the supreme idea of cinema as an art, leading us to think about the wealth of untapped resources in film, about its colossal future. On that idea I build my working hypotheses, both practical and theoretical.

Why do people go to the cinema? What takes them into a darkened room where, for two hours, they watch the play of shadows on a sheet? The search for entertainment? The need for a kind of drug? All over the world there are, indeed, entertainment firms and organisations which exploit cinema and television and spectacles of many other kinds. Our starting-point, however, should not be there, but in the essential principles of cinema, which have to do with the human need to master and know the world. I think that what a person normally goes to the cinema for is time: for time lost or spent or not yet had. He goes there for living experience; for cinema, like no other art, widens, enhances and concentrates a person’s experience—and not only enhances it but makes it longer, significantly longer. That is the power of cinema: ‘stars’, story-lines and entertainment have nothing to do with it.

What is the essence of the director’s work? We could define it as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes


everything that is not part of it — so the film-maker, from a ‘lump of
time’ made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off
and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an
element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the
 cinematic image.

Cinema is said to be a composite art, based on the involvement of
a number of neighbour art forms: drama, prose, acting, painting,
music . . . In fact the ‘involvement’ of these art forms can, as it
turns out, impinge so heavily on cinema as to reduce it to a kind of
mishmash, or — at best — to a mere semblance of harmony in which
the heart of cinema is not to be found, because it is precisely in those
conditions that it ceases to exist. It has to be made clear once and for
all that if cinema is an art it cannot simply be an amalgam of the
principles of other, contiguous art forms: only having done that can
we turn to the question of the allegedly composite nature of film. A
mold of literary thought and painterly form will not be a cinematic
image: it can only produce a more or less empty or pretentious
hybrid.

Nor must the laws of movement and the organisation of time in a
film be replaced by the time laws of theatre.

Time in the form of fact: again I come back to it. I see chronicle as
the ultimate cinema; for me it is not a way of filming but a way of
reconstructing, of recreating life.

I once taped a casual dialogue. People were talking without
knowing they were being recorded. Then I listened to the tape and
thought how brilliantly it was ‘written’ and ‘acted’. The logic of the
characters’ movements, the feeling, the energy — how tangible it all
was. How euphonic the voices were, how beautiful the pauses! . . .
No Stanislavsky could have found justification for those pauses, and
Hemingway’s stylistics seem pretentious and naive in comparison
with the way that casually recorded dialogue was constructed . . .

This is how I conceive an ideal piece of filming: the author takes
millions of metres of film, on which systematically, second by
second, day by day and year by year, a man’s life, for instance, from
birth to death, is followed and recorded, and out of all that come two
and a half thousand metres, or an hour and a half of screen time. (It is
curious also to imagine those millions of metres going through the
hands of several directors for each to make his film — how different
they would all be!)

And even though it would not be possible to have those millions of
metres, the ‘ideal’ conditions of work are not as unreal as all that, and
they should be what we aspire to. In what sense? The point is to pick
out and join together the bits of sequential fact, knowing, seeing and
hearing precisely what lies between them and what kind of chain
holds them together. That is cinema. Otherwise we can easily slip
onto the accustomed path of theatrical playwriting, building a plot
structure based on given characters. The cinema has to be free to
pick out and join up facts taken from a ‘lump of time’ of any width or
length. Nor do I think that it’s necessary to follow one particular
person. On the screen the logic of a person’s behaviour can transfer
into the rationale of quite different — apparently irrelevant — facts
and phenomena, and the person you started with can vanish from
the screen, replaced by something quite different, if that is what is
required by the author’s guiding principle. For instance it is possible
to make a film in which there is no one hero character figuring
throughout the film, but where everything is defined by the
particular foreshortening effect of one person’s view of life.

Cinema is capable of operating with any fact diffused in time; it
can take absolutely anything from life. What for literature would be
an occasional possibility, an isolated case (for instance the
interpolation of ‘documentary material’ in Hemingway’s book of
short stories, *In Our Time*) is for cinema the working of its fundamental artistic laws. Absolutely anything! Applied to the fabric of a play or a novel that 'absolutely anything' could appear limitless; it is most limited for a film.

Juxtaposing a person with an environment that is boundless, collating him with a countless number of people passing by close to him and far away, relating a person to the whole world: that is the meaning of cinema.

There is a term which has already become commonplace: 'poetic cinema'. What is meant by it is cinema that boldly moves away, in its images, from what is factual and concrete, as pictured by real life, and at the same time affirms its own structural wholeness. But there is a hidden danger for cinema in moving away from itself. 'Poetic cinema' as a rule gives birth to symbols, allegories and other such figures—that is, to things that have nothing to do with the imagery natural to cinema.

Here I feel one more point needs clarification. If time appears in cinema in the form of fact, the fact is given in the form of simple, direct observation. The basic element of cinema, running through it from its tiniest cells, is observation.

We all know the traditional genre of ancient Japanese poetry, the haiku. Eisenstein quoted some examples:

Coldly shining moon;  
Silent in the field
Near the ancient monastery  
A butterfly was flying
A wolf is howling.  
Then it fell asleep.

Eisenstein saw in these three-line verses the model for how the combination of three separate elements creates something different in kind from any of them. Since this principle was already there in haiku, however, it is clearly not exclusive to cinema.

What attracts me in haiku is its observation of life—pure, subtle, one with its subject.

As it passes by  
The dew has fallen,
The full moon barely touches On all the spikes of blackthorn
Fishhooks in the waves.  
There hang little drops.

This is pure observation. Its aptness and precision will make anyone, however crude his receptivity, feel the power of poetry and recognise—forgive the banality—the living image which the author has caught.

And although I am very chary of making comparisons with other art forms, this particular example from poetry seems to me close to the truth of cinema, with the difference that prose and poetry use words by definition, while a film is born of direct observation of life; that, in my view, is the key to poetry in cinema. For the cinema image is essentially the observation of a phenomenon passing through time.

There is one film that could not be further removed from the principle of direct observation, and that is Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. Not only is the whole film a kind of hieroglyphic, it consists of a series of hieroglyphics—major, minor and minute. There is not a single detail that is not permeated with the author's intent. (I have heard that Eisenstein himself once spoke ironically in a lecture of these hieroglyphics and arcane meanings: Ivan's armour has a picture of the sun and Kurbsky's of the moon, since the essence of Kurbsky is that he shines with reflected light). Nonetheless the film is astonishingly powerful in its musical and rhythmic composition. Everything about it, editing, shot transitions, synchronisation, is developed with subtlety and discipline. That is why *Ivan the Terrible* is so compelling; for me, at least at the time, the rhythm of the film was positively bewitching. The characterisation, the harmonious composition of the images, the atmosphere, take *Ivan the Terrible* so
close to the theatre (the musical theatre), that it almost ceases—in my own purely theoretical view—to be a cinematic work. (‘Day-time opera,’ as Eisenstein once said of a colleague’s film.) The films made by Eisenstein in the twenties, above all Potyomkin, were very different; they were full of life and poetry.

The cinema image, then, is basically observation of life’s facts within time, organised according to the pattern of life itself, and observing its time laws. Observations are selective: we leave on film only what is justified as integral to the image. Not that the cinematic image can be divided and segmented against its time-nature, current time cannot be removed from it. The image becomes authentically cinematic when (amongst other things) not only does it live within time, but time also lives within it, even within each separate frame.

No ‘dead’ object—table, chair, glass—taken in a frame in isolation from everything else, can be presented as it were outside passing time, as if from the point of view of an absence of time.

You only have to by-pass this condition to make it possible to take over any number of properties from one of the neighbour arts. And with their help you can indeed make very effective films; only from the point of view of cinematic form these will be incompatible with the true development of the nature, essence and potential of cinema.

No other art can compare with cinema in the force, precision and starkness with which it conveys awareness of facts and aesthetic structures existing and changing within time. I therefore find particularly irritating the pretensions of modern ‘poetic cinema’, which involves breaking off contact with fact and with time realism, and makes for preciousness and affectation.

Contemporary cinema contains several basic lines of formal development, but it is no accident that the one that stands out and commands attention is the tendency towards chronicle; this is so important and so rich in potential that attempts are often made to imitate it, almost to the point of pastiche. But a faithful record, a true chronicle, cannot be made by shooting by hand, with a wobbling camera, even making blurred shots—as if the camera-man hadn’t quite managed to focus—or by any other gimmicks of that kind. It’s not how you shoot that is going to convey the specific, unique form of
the developing fact. Often enough shots which purport to be casual are quite as contrived and pretentious as the meticulously made frames of 'poetic cinema' with their empty symbolism. In either case the concrete, living, emotional content of the object filmed is cut off.

We should also analyse what are known as artistic conventions, for not all of these are valid: some are irrelevant, and could more properly be called preconceptions.

On the one hand are conventions which have to do with the very nature of a given art form: for instance the perpetual concern of the painter with colour and with the relationships of colour on the surface of the canvas.

On the other are the illusory conventions that have grown up out of something passing — perhaps from an imperfect understanding of the essence of cinema; or an incidental stricture on means of expression; or simply from habit and acceptance of stereotype; or from a theoretical approach to art. Look at the facile convention that equates the frames of a shot and of a canvas: that is how preconceptions grow up.

One of the binding and immutable conditions of cinema is that actions on the screen have to develop sequentially, regardless of the fact of being conceived as simultaneous or retrospective or what have you. In order to present two or more processes as simultaneous or parallel you have necessarily to show them one after the other, they have to be in sequential montage. There is no other way. In Dovzhenko's Earth the hero is shot dead by the kulak, and in order to convey the gunshot, the camera cuts away from the scene where the hero collapses; somewhere in the fields startled horses lift up their heads, and then the camera cuts back to the scene of the murder. To the audience the raised heads of the horses spoke of the shot ringing out. When sound came in there was no longer any need for that kind of montage. And it's no good harking back to the brilliant shots of Dovzhenko in order to justify the alacrity with which gratuitous use is made of intercutting in modern cinema. You have someone falling into the water, and then in the next shot, as it were, 'Masha looks on.' There is usually no need for this at all, such shots seem to be a hangover from the poetics of the silent movie. A convention dictated by necessity has turned into a preconception, a cliché.

In recent years developments in film technique have given birth to (or degenerated into) a particular aberration: the wide screen is divided into two or more parts, in which two or more actions can be shown happening in parallel at the same time. In my view this innovation is ill-conceived; pseudo-conventions are being fabricated that are not organically part of the cinema, and are therefore sterile.

Some critics are terribly anxious to see a filmic spectacle shown simultaneously on several—even on six—screens. But the movement of the film frame has its own nature, which is not that of the musical note; 'polyscreen' cinema should be compared not with a chord, or harmony, or polyphony, but rather with the sound produced by several orchestras playing different pieces of music at the same time.

The only result would be chaos, the laws of perception would be broken, and the author of the polyscreen film would inevitably be faced with the task of somehow reducing simultaneity to sequence, in other words of thinking up for each instance an elaborate system of conventions. And it would be rather like putting one's right arm all the way round one's left ear in order to touch the right nostril with the right hand. Is it not better to accept, once and for all, the simple and binding condition of cinema as a succession of visuals, and to work from that starting-point? A person is quite simply not capable of watching several actions at once; it is beyond his psychophysics.

A distinction has to be made between those natural conditions which are immanent in the nature of a given art form—which define the difference between real life and the specific limitations of that art form—and illusory, artificial conditions which have to do not with basic principles but with slavish acceptance of received ideas, irresponsible fantasssing or the adoption of the tenets of related art forms.

One of the most important limitations of cinema, if you like, is the fact that the image can only be realised in factual, natural forms of visible and audible life. A picture has to be naturalistic. I do not use the term here in its accepted literary connotation — as associated, for instance, with Zola; what I mean is that we perceive the form of the filmic image through the senses.

What then, you may ask, of the author's fantasies, what of the interior world of the individual imagination, how is it possible to reproduce what a person sees within himself, all his dreams, both sleeping and waking? . . . It is possible, provided that dreams on the screen are made up of exactly these same observed, natural forms of life. Sometimes directors shoot at high speed, or through a misty
veil, or use some other trick as old as the hills, or bring in musical effects—and the well-trained audience react instantly: 'Ah, he's remembering!' She's dreaming! But that mysterious blurring is not the way to achieve a true filmic impression of dreams or memories. The cinema is not, and must not be, concerned with borrowing effects from the theatre. What then is needed? First of all we need to know what sort of dream our hero had. We need to know the actual, material facts of the dream: to see all the elements of reality which were refracted in that layer of the consciousness which kept vigil through the night (or with which a person functions when he sees some picture in his imagination). And we need to convey all of that on the screen precisely, not misting it over and not using elaborate devices. Again, if I were asked, what about the vagueness, the opacity, the improbability of a dream?—I would say that in cinema 'opacity' and 'ineffability' do not mean an indistinct picture, but the particular impression created by the logic of the dream: unusual and unexpected combinations of, and conflicts between, entirely real elements. These must be shown with the utmost precision. By its very nature cinema must expose reality, not cloud it. (Incidentally, the most interesting or frightening dreams are the ones where you remember everything down to the minutest detail.)

I want to make the point yet again that in film, every time, the first essential in any plastic composition, its necessary and final criterion, is whether it is true to life, specific and factual; that is what makes it unique. By contrast, symbols are born, and readily pass into general use to become clichés, when an author hits upon a particular plastic composition, ties it in with some mysterious turn of thought of his own, loads it with extraneous meaning.

The purity of cinema, its inherent strength, is revealed not in the symbolic aptness of images (however bold these may be) but in the capacity of those images to express a specific, unique, actual fact. In Buñuel's Nazarin there is an episode set in a plague-stricken village, parched, rocky, built of limestone. What does the director do to create an impression of a place bereft of heirs? We see the dusty road, shot in deep focus, and two rows of houses, going into the distance, shot centrally. The street goes uphill, so the sky is not visible. The right side of the street is in shadow, and the left in sunshine. The street is completely empty. Along the middle of the road, from the depths of the frame, a child is walking straight towards the camera, dragging behind him a white—brilliantly white—

sheet. The camera slowly pans. And at the very last moment, just before cutting to the next shot, the field of the frame is suddenly covered over, again with a white cloth, which gleams in the sunlight. One wonders where it can have come from. Could it be a sheet drying on a line? And then, with astonishing intensity, you feel 'the breath of the plague', captured in this extraordinary manner, like a medical fact.

And a shot from The Seven Samurai. A mediaeval Japanese village. A fight is going on between some horsemen, and the samurai who are on foot. It is pouring with rain, there is mud everywhere. The samurai wear an ancient Japanese garment which leaves most of the leg bare, and their legs are plastered with mud. And when one samurai falls down dead we see the rain washing away the mud and his leg becoming white, as white as marble. A man is dead; that is an image which is a fact. It is innocent of symbolism, and that is an image.

But perhaps it happened by chance—the actor was running, then he fell down, the rain washed the mud away, and here we are taking it as a revelation on the part of the film-maker?

A further word about mise en scène. Film mise en scène, as we know, means the disposition and movement of selected objects in relation to the area of the frame. What purpose does it serve? Nine times out of ten you'll be told that it serves to express the meaning of what is happening; and that is all. But to set that as the limit of mise en scène is to start along a path that leads only one way: towards abstraction. In the final scene of Give Anna Giacca a Husband de Santis puts his hero and heroine on either side of a metal gate. The gate clearly states: now the couple are split up, they'll never be happy, contact is impossible. And so a specific, individual, unique event is turned into something utterly banal because it has been forced to take on a trivial form. The spectator immediately knocks his head against the 'ceiling' of the director's so-called thought. The trouble is that lots of audiences enjoy such knocks, they make them feel safe: not only is it 'exciting' but the idea is clear and there's no need to strain the brain or the eye, there's no need to see anything specific in what is happening. And on that sort of diet the audience starts to degenerate. Yet similar gates, fences, hedges have been repeated many a time in many a film and always mean the same thing.

What then is mise en scène? Let us turn to the best works of
literature. I come back to something I've written about before, the final episode of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, when Prince Myshkin comes into the room with Rogozhin, and through the doorway the murdered Nastasya Filippovna is lying and, as Rogozhin says, already stinking. The two sit facing each other on chairs in the middle of the enormous room, so close that their knees are touching. When you picture this it's frightening. Here the *mise en scène* arises out of the psychological state of particular characters at a particular moment, as a unique statement of the complexity of their relationship. The director, then, to build up a *mise en scène*, must work from the psychological state of the characters, through the inner dynamic of the mood of the situation, and bring it all back to the truth of the one, directly observed fact, and its unique texture. Only then will the *mise en scène* achieve the specific, many-faceted significance of actual truth.

It is sometimes suggested that the actors' position makes no difference: have them standing here by the wall, and talking; take them in close-up and then her; and then they part. But of course the most important thing has not been thought out; and it is not just a question of the director, but also, very often, of the screenwriter.

If one ignores the fact that a screenplay is intended for a film (and in that sense is a 'half-finished product'—not more, but not less either) it will not be possible to make a good film. It may be possible to make something else, something new, and even to make it well, but the script writer will be dissatisfied with the director. Accusations to the effect that the director has 'spoiled a good idea' are not always justified. The idea is often so literary—and interesting only for that reason—that the director is obliged to transform and break it in order to make the film. At best the strictly literary side of a script (apart from the dialogue) can be useful to the director as a pointer to the emotional content of an episode, a scene, or even of an entire film. (For example Friedrich Gorenstein wrote in a script that the room smelt of dust, dead flowers and dried ink. I like that very much because I can begin to picture how that interior looks, feel its 'soul', and if the artist were to bring his sketches I should immediately be able to tell which ones are right and which are not. All the same, such stage directions are not enough to form the basis of the key images of the film; as a rule they simply help to find the atmosphere.)

Anyhow, for me a real screenplay is one that is not intended of itself to affect the reader in any complete and final way, but is designed entirely to be transformed into a film and only thus to acquire its finished form.

Screen writers, however, fulfil an important function, and one which demands true literary talent in terms of psychological insight. This is where literature does bring an influence to bear on cinema which is both useful and necessary, and which does not strangle or distort it. Nothing in cinema at the present time is more neglected or superficial than psychology. I'm talking about understanding and revealing the underlying truth of characters' states of mind; this is largely ignored. And yet it is this that stops a man dead in his tracks in the most uncomfortable position, or makes him jump out of a fifth-floor window.

For every single case cinema demands of both director and script writer enormous knowledge; the author of a film has thus to have something in common with the psychologist-screenwriter, and also with the psychiatrist. For the plastic composition of a film depends largely, often critically, on the particular state of a character in particular circumstances. And the script writer can, indeed must, bring to bear on the director his own knowledge of the whole truth about that inner state, even to the point of telling him how to build up the *mise en scène*. One can simply write: 'The characters stop by the wall', and go on to give the dialogue. But what is special about the words that are being uttered, and do they correspond with standing by the wall? The meaning of the scene cannot be concentrated within the words spoken by the characters. 'Words, words, words'—in real life these are mostly so much water, and only rarely and for a brief while can you observe perfect accord between word and gesture, word and deed, word and meaning. For usually a person's words, inner state and physical action develop on different planes. They may complement, or sometimes, up to a point, echo one another; more often they are in contradiction; occasionally, in sharp conflict, they unmask one another. And only by knowing exactly what is going on and why, simultaneously, on each of these planes, can we achieve that unique, truthful force of fact of which I have spoken. As for *mise en scène*, when it corresponds precisely with the spoken word, when there is interaction, a meeting-point between them, then the image is born which I have called the observation-image, absolute and specific. That is why the scenarist has to be a true writer.

When the director is handed the script and starts to work on it, it
always happens that however profound its conception and however 
precise its objective, the script invariably undergoes some sort of 
change. It never materialises on the screen literally, word for word, 
mirrored; there are always distortions. Collaboration between 
screen-writer and director therefore tends to be beset by difficulty 
and argument. A valid film can be realised even when the original 
conception has been broken and destroyed during their work 
together, and a new idea, a new organism, has emerged from the 
ruins.

Generally speaking it is becoming harder to separate the functions 
of director and screen-writer. As is only natural, in cinema today 
directors are leaning more and more towards authorship, while script 
writers are expected to have an ever more thorough grasp of 
directing. Perhaps therefore we should consider it normal for the 
conception to develop integrally rather than be broken or distorted, 
in other words for the film-maker to write the script himself, or, 
conversely, for the screen writer also to be responsible for the 
directing.

It is worth stressing the point that the author's work springs from 
his thought, his intention, from the need to make a statement about 
something important. This is obvious; it can't be any other way. Of 
course it can happen that the author, starting out to solve purely 
formal problems (and there are plenty of instances of this in the other 
arts), may be faced with a major obstacle and then find himself 
seeing things from a new angle; but all the same this only happens 
when an idea comes to him unexpectedly—in a particular form, 
imposing itself on his theme, on the thought which—consciously 
or not—he has been carrying with him in his life for a long time. 
(If I am not mistaken, Godard's A Bout de Souffle [Breathless] is an 
example.)

Clearly the hardest thing for the working artist is to create his own 
conception and follow it, unafraid of the strictures it imposes, 
however rigid these may be. It is far easier to be eclectic, to follow 
the routine patterns which abound in our professional arsenal; less 
trouble for the director and simpler for the audience. But there is a 
danger here of becoming hopelessly entangled.

I see it as the clearest evidence of genius when an artist follows his 
conception, his idea, his principle, so unwaveringly that he has this 
truth of his constantly in his control, never letting go of it even for the 
sake of his own enjoyment of his work.

Solaris
The mirror-room; a 
during shooting.
There are few people of genius in the cinema; look at Bresson, Mizoguchi, Dovzhenko, Paradzhanov, Buñuel: not one of them could be confused with anyone else. An artist of that calibre follows one straight line, albeit at great cost; not without weaknesses or even, indeed, occasionally being far-fetched; but always in the name of the one idea, the one conception.

In world cinema there have been many attempts to create a new concept in film, always with the general aim of bringing it closer to life, to factual truth. Hence pictures like Cassavetes’ Shadows, Shirley Clarke’s The Connection, Jean Rouch’s Chronicle of a Summer. These notable films are marked, apart from anything else, by a lack of commitment; complete and unconditional factual truth is not consistently pursued.

The artist has a duty to be calm. He has no right to show his emotion, his involvement, to go pouring it all out at the audience. Any excitement over a subject must be sublimated into an Olympian calm of form. That is the only way in which an artist can tell of the things that excite him.

I am reminded of how we worked on Andrey Rublyov.

The film is set in the fifteenth century, and it turned out to be excruciatingly difficult to picture ‘how everything was’. We had to use any sources we could: architecture, the written word, iconography.

Had we gone for reconstruction of the picturesque tradition of the picturesque world of those times, the result would have been a stylised, conventional ancient Russian world, of the kind that at best is reminiscent of miniatures or icons of the period. But for cinema that is not the right way. I have never understood, for instance, attempts to construct mise en scène from a painting. All you will be doing is bringing the painting back to life, and duly being rewarded with superficial acclaim: ‘Ah, what a feeling for the period!’ ‘Ah, what cultivated people!’ But you will also be killing cinema.

Therefore one of the aims of our work was to reconstruct for a modern audience the real world of the fifteenth century, that is, to present that world in such a way that costume, speech, life-style and architecture would not give the audience any feeling of relic, of antiquarian rarity. In order to achieve the truth of direct observation, what one might almost term physiological truth, we had to move away from the truth of archaeology and ethnography. Inevitably there was an element of artificiality, but this was the antithesis of that of the revived painting. Had someone from the fifteenth century suddenly appeared to witness it, he would have found the filmed material a strange enough spectacle; but no more so than us and our own world. Because we live in the twentieth century, we have no possibility of making a film directly from material six hundred years old. I remain convinced, nonetheless, that it is possible to attain our objectives, even in such difficult conditions, provided we go the whole way, unswervingly, along the path we have chosen, despite the Herculean labour involved. How much simpler it would be to go into a Moscow street and start filming with a concealed camera.

We cannot reconstruct the fifteenth century exactly, however thoroughly we study all the things that remain from it. Our awareness of that time is totally different from that of the people who lived then. But nor do we think of Rublyov’s ‘Trinity’ in the same way as his contemporaries, and yet the ‘Trinity’ has gone on living through the centuries: it was alive then, and is so now, and it is a link between the people of that century and this. The ‘Trinity’ can be taken simply as an icon. It can be taken as a magnificent museum piece, perhaps as a model of the style of painting of that particular epoch. But this icon, this memorial, can be seen in another way: we can turn to the human, spiritual meaning of the ‘Trinity’ which is alive and understandable for us who live in the second half of the twentieth century. And this is how we approached the reality which gave birth to the ‘Trinity’.

Given such an approach we had deliberately to introduce elements that would dispel any impression of archaism, of museum reconstruction.

The script includes an episode in which a peasant, who has made himself a pair of wings, climbs up on to the cathedral, jumps, and crashes to the ground. We ‘reconstructed’ this episode, checking its essential psychological element. Evidently it was a case of a man who all his life had been thinking of himself flying. But how would it really have happened? People were running after him, he was hurrying. Then he jumped. What would this man have seen and felt as he flew for the first time? He didn’t have time to see anything, he fell and was shattered. The most he could have known was the unexpected, terrifying fact of falling. The inspiration of the flight, its symbolism, were eliminated, for the meaning was straightforward and basic, and related to associations which are perfectly familiar to
us. The screen had to show an ordinary, dirty peasant, then his fall, his crash, his death. This is a concrete happening, a human catastrophe, observed by onlookers just as if now, as we watched, someone were to dash out for some reason in front of a car and finish up lying there crushed on the asphalt.

We spent a long time working out how to destroy the plastic symbol on which the episode was built, and reached the conclusion that the root of the trouble was in the wings. And in order to dispel the Icarus overtones we decided on an air balloon. This was a clumsy object put together from skins, ropes and rags, and we felt it rid the episode of spurious rhetoric and turned it into a unique happening.

The first thing to describe is the event, not your attitude to it. Your attitude has to be made clear by the film as a whole, to be part of its total impact. In a mosaic each separate piece is of a particular, single colour. It may be blue, or white, or red — they are all different. And then you look at the completed picture and see what the author had in mind.

... I love cinema. There is still a lot that I don't know: what I am going to work on, what I shall do later, how everything will turn out, whether my work will actually correspond to the principles to which I now adhere, to the system of working hypotheses I put forward. There are too many temptations on every side: stereotypes, preconceptions, commonplace, artistic ideas other than one's own. And really it's so easy to shoot a scene beautifully, for effect, for acclaim ... But you only have to take one step in that direction and you are lost.

Cinema should be a means of exploring the most complex problems of our time, as vital as those which for centuries have been the subject of literature, music and painting. It is only a question of searching, each time searching out afresh the path, the channel, to be followed by cinema. I am convinced that for any one of us film-making will turn out to be a fruitless and hopeless affair if we fail to grasp precisely and unequivocally the specific character of cinema, and if we fail to find in ourselves our own key to it.