

A FORM-OF-INHABITING MOVIE: Some Geography About its Physical Features

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Some Geography About its Physical Features

by Rachel Morgan Strickland

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ABSTRACT:

A

PROLONGING
STRUCTURAL PERUSAL OF MOTION-PICTURE "SPACE"
CONSIDERING THE SPACES IN BUILT
& ON-THE-SPOT -FORM
EXPLOR ING DOCUMENTARY FILM-
FORM

IN A SENSE OF RE- CONSTRUCTING PHYSICAL PLACES
IN MOTION-PICTURE

&

SOUND

&

INSISTING ABOUT DETAILS
IN WHICH CONVENTIONS OF FILM ASSEMBLAGE
WHICH PERTAIN TO ITS
CONTINUITY/DISCONTINUITIES

&

CAMERA ORIENTATIONS/MOBILITIES/DISTANCES

&

SCALE RELATIONSHIPS

&

EDGES

&

DENSITY

&

LIGHT/DARK

&

COLORS

&C.

--DIVESTED OF FAMILIAR NARRATIVE/DRAMATIC OR
EXPRESSIONISTIC CONNOTATIONS--
ARE CONSTRUED AS ANALOGS FOR 3-DIMENSIONAL MATERIAL--
SPATIAL PHENOMENA

&.

Thesis Supervisor: John H. Terry
Title: Assistant Professor of Cinema

SOME FORM-MAKING OBSERVATIONS

A building is the verb for how it has happened. A movie-making is a building. It happens to be likening itself to landscape. This project is concerned with a new way of describing architectural space, and with exploring how the format of film (by motion-picture structure and by spatial analog) lends itself to the reconstruction of anyplace in particular. In an architectural sense it is a form-of-inhabiting movie. In a filmic sense it reverses the conventional interrelationship between background scene & foreground event.

Here is everything so far I have and furthermore to write about using motion picture space for making sense of the physical place in a movie. Any methodical elaboration of this exploration (not so much the idea of it) wants film construction more than verbal construction. So these paper notes are not for specifying a cinematic treatment but really wishing for convenience to suggest an attitude about motion-picture-sound, that by developing certain obvious generic parallels between the structure of movement in movies and the architectural-spatial structure of a place where people might be, I can use the filmmaking for building some definition about the space of people's inhabiting.

MOTION PICTURE does more than record the surfaces of physical things; it RECONSTRUCTS PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS. By respecting fairly ordinary interpretations of motion picture anatomy

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and documentary "realism," the project aims at

(a. developing an object/place sensibility intrinsic in conventional film vocabulary (such sense of film that does have some notable exponents in dramatic cinema while documentary/narrative and architecture/travelogue films have traditionally ignored it.

(b. making some place for humanbeing in an "architecture" film.

The approach means to be general (or as science is precise, is); I am interested in in developing a documentary film technique which could be extrapolated to ANY PLACE

any particular set of physical definitions which in location & in time accommodates some determinate if variable range of life and use.

In a specific case, I am interested in how such a "topological" approach does develop according to local/cultural attitudes about privacy & physical proximity, social grouping, territoriality, physical maintenance, the deterioration of parts &c.

SOME FILM-MAKING OBSERVATIONS

Motion picture is simply discovering a way in particular to love moving & how things move and that is what you discover when you make a film and of course you had always known about a thing how it moved but anyway you do discover it.

Further detail for the curiosity you proceed with exploring this or that subject more particularly or wondering quite how this technical maneuver will convey something particular about that and how precisely you can make the film summarily to register these curiously proceedings.

The motion picture has a direction & connections & it has various density and in the gaps of it you make some space for tightening connections or else elaborating them. Using film of all things for experimenting is never a step-for-step matching problems with solutions and it is possibly not merely accumulating some empirical data to occupy the interval between a problem & a solution. Because a motion picture from the very beginnings of it does have this density and also these gaps which are always optional for you to add or to take some away. Whenever you do wonder in particular what the movie for instance really amounts to and how it is gaping, either you already knew the answer or else you never know and obviously the film doesn't survey these gaps in its movie and surely you are not wishing and waiting for how an audience may come across them for you. You are using the gaps not really to fill them up, but more for

the space where you can work at them and still have some extra space for deciding about knowing. You are using these gaps in the movie for questions that you wonder to keep up with what you are knowing. "Knowing is what you know and in asking these questions although there is no one who answers these questions there is in them that there is knowledge" ¹ and is it fascinating.

Considering that making film is a way of exploring to discover how things move, one does think sometimes why bother when things do move anyway & you do observe that & film is expensive & everybody living already knows that things move & how they do of course I mean why bother making a production about it. That is why I am not very excited with using film for verifying or simulating something, because if that is what it does then it is never as substantive as the very thing itself and it is never so much present. Just the discrepancy in a semblance could always be very nostalgic. Of course it is possible to invent imitating sounds & movements in film, making it to be like eyes & ears or whatever, and it is true that filmmakers do these things but that has really nothing to do with film. Film is a real thing itself which is not an imitation of real things moving or of their sounds or time & space. It is really an "intellectual recreation." ² And how fascinating that filmmaking always does occasion realizing this movement of something in order to recreate it.

More words after themselves are a trick for marking time & saving the money which you don't have yet when you are waiting for it, especially when you are otherwise losing speed of your own goings on with the work all these days after themselves while you are needing this money to support your habit.

SOME PRACTICE MAKING OBSERVATIONS

These words are real things themselves, just as the film is another real thing, in the way more solid than medium that they need so much pushing around. As these wordy conceptions of it are not exchangeable for the filmmaking but aside from it they do occasionally yield some fringe benefit and other times they are just so much clutter to bother getting all exhausted & out of breath.

For saving time & money, many of these movie formulations have been hypothetical, and many of the hypotheses were my notes in the margin of filming & editing a motion picture of people's maneuvers in a Roman piazza last January. However incidentally this movie has been projective for the thesis is how I had some actual material at hand for keeping track of the new discoveries.

Had the movie eventually amounted to a film, I thought of naming it AN AROMATIC TROPISM INCIDENTALLY SHORT-CIRCUITING ITS PROLONG. But as it was, more incident than film, more work in progress, anonymously home movie during itself deliberately succeeding to have this progress & connection, if never does begin & does not end but spills over into too much black leader at both extremities, still waiting for me to insist when I do that there is either an appropriate continuation or a satisfactory termination to make heads or tails of it.

I was proceeding in this exercise to discover how I could make the movie associate with proportions of human physical mobility, to re-locate people in a spatially connected but filmically disconnected communal place by concentrating on how they maneuver their individual &

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collective bodies in relation to formidable objects there. Usually the movie is about how people are pushing/dragging/carrying/carting/lifting/dropping/leaving things which have some characteristic ways to be moved, especially regarding that the human body itself has more characteristic ways to be moved than any.



By architecturally considering animate body as a conveyance which uses some space by transporting itself and the other portable definitions there, I especially differentiated three kinds of animate mobility with respect to things:

(1. If moving the thing is a task, and if it is easy enough, then considerable effort gets absorbed by somebody's will/disposition.

(2. If moving has to do with making/finding one's (body's) way through the clutter (including surprises) then muscular reflex does function as shock absorber, and the form of movement is measure of a body's grace.

(3. If moving has to do with accommodating one's own physiognomy, shrugging & shuffling aimless energy or managing to get out of the way, then the movement is demonstrative grace, sometimes very unwieldy.

How succinctly might I venture to characterize this piazza film exercise as a study of three-dimensional awkwardness. While shooting, I wanted to associate the camera's mobility more with the movements of bodies than those of their eyes. So the editing was concerned with how I could construct this awkwardness in film without trimming away all the abruptnesses of it into an easygoing 15 minute dance step, and still without having it fall apart in the uneasy disjointedness which I wanted to save shot by shot.

I was devising some new rules for myself about cutting (rules are necessarily useful absolutely of course they are made to be broken). The "SHORT-CIRCUITING" refers to cutting around the most abrupt & jerky parts of movements rather than how my practiced instinct would ordinarily prompt me to cut gesture in between a stroke & a glide. It also means that whenever shot juxtaposition was not elaborating upon gesture, I had to develop some visual logic about haptic or topographical continuity for replacing the geometrically conceivable conventions of visual-visual continuity. The sense of being in a place which is TROPISM and persuasion of how ONE PERCEPTION IMMEDIATELY & DIRECTLY LEADS TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. **4**

The sound of this movie corresponds with picture in locality but not in time. Noises which I recorded in the same places, but earlier or later or in between making pictures, have been re-phrased with picture according to their tendency to convey spatial continuity of a particular zone over a spatially discontinuous succession of shots. Each abrupt variation of angle or distance which usually occurs at a picture cut interrupts the spatial continuity of picture. Sound in movies spatially approximates "real" noise, maintains its original 3-dimensional & dynamic characteristics more than moving picture on a screen ever approximates visual perception. Nicole Rouzet-Abagli has commented about movies that "sound comes first in relation to the image: it is more enfolding, more profound. In freeing itself [from the screen] it makes the distance of an image possible." **5**

The conformation of sound with picture in the piazza movie is non-“naturalistic” inasmuch as I chose to not isolate identifiable meanings from the rest of noise or so much exaggerate their proportion. I wanted the noise to have varying degrees of insisting & presence in its density. Rather than sound always dominating picture always specifying one of all possible emphases, I would have the sound and picture independently attracting more or less attention to one another more or less insisting to what degree they were conforming. Instead of developing any analogy to a narrative or dialogue structure, the logic of the sound cut was similar to musical composition. So crude as it still is such a bother.

I never conjectured that this eventually canned & labelled sequence of the piazza movies was a film to finish. The shooting was never based on a preconceived “treatment” and I never was looking for any “story” and I was willfully experimenting with on-the-spot indecisions more often than really assuming a documentary now-or-never attitude toward what I was filming. I was determined to be practicing invention with this film. I was not making it in order to any plan and I did make some rules but I did not even make a rough cut because I wanted every splice intact, so as it is a catalogue of building details after all it is not exactly A Movie. A Movie for people does want something like a story, I think, to comprehend it, or however it does include in itself such an entity that they could diagram. Maybe someone is clever enough to build the film from a diagram and maybe someone is clever enough to discover this diagram in the filmmaking and really a movie can be very satisfying if someone accomplishes both.

10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10

February 1974^{etc.}
**HOW IS A MOVIE ABOUT
A PLACE** (continued)

Any place is particular. It is durable as well so now & again it may support some events of the citizens there that in their own temporary time these events transpire to support or even alter the place.

MOTION PICTURE does more than record the surfaces of physical things; it RECONSTRUCTS PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS whether by someone's design or in spite of anyone's oversight. People who assemble motion picture have developed conventions for structuring it to

a dramatic story or timing of remembering or chronology or music or dialogue or ideological insisting or seeing & hearing or recycle a myth or refurbish a mood etc. For this experiment **place-structure** takes precedence over all such as these practiced logics of film assemblage. **HERE & THERE** THIS MOVIE constructing no adventure not even sounding like a socio-political commentary on architectural aesthetics and gods forbid that any stiff hulk of building or ^{stiff} breeze of the old expiring agents might replace the wishfully-searched protagonist.

ONCE UPON A TIME & AGAIN Everybody after another is rediscovering this place, still definitely again, here how he is generating the space of his own movement in which to be moving where he moves. He is tending to find accommodation (he is making progress more than

design) here & elsewhere he does wish to stay a spell or else move on. His location never corresponds precisely with his inertia; of course under some steps this landscape inside a rock on a river out of the rain and even going over to a greener place he finds just where he is just now wishing to stop for lunch. But there is always more about here ("why the least arrangement of things in the least fraction of space fascinates him") the available choices out-itemize even his most elaborating motives.

Most of man's actions comprise a spatial aspect in the sense that the objects of orientation are distributed according to such relations as inside and outside; far away and close by; separate and united; continuous and discontinuous. 8

The movie is discovering or else expressing this "spatial aspect" of human being..... that a creature realizes it through complex ways of mobility, that mobility is a capability which includes stillness as well as movement, that it registers a place. The direction of motion picture at a frame corresponds with the ECCENTRICITY which is locating this creature's centre of balance, that he is forever shifting his weight.

He manages to walk without looking at his feet.

The guy will lose his way on a blank of desert more easily than ever among any crowd of the thicket...

This is messy geometry, always engaging with edges & limits & surfaces & people & rubber trees & army camouflage & backhoes & poison ivy & innertubes. Proximity & direction of somebody's

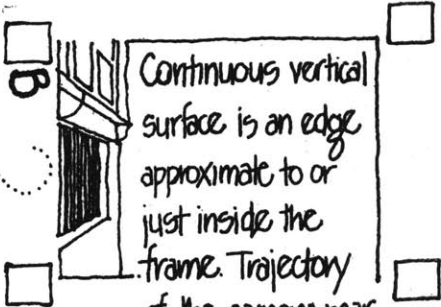
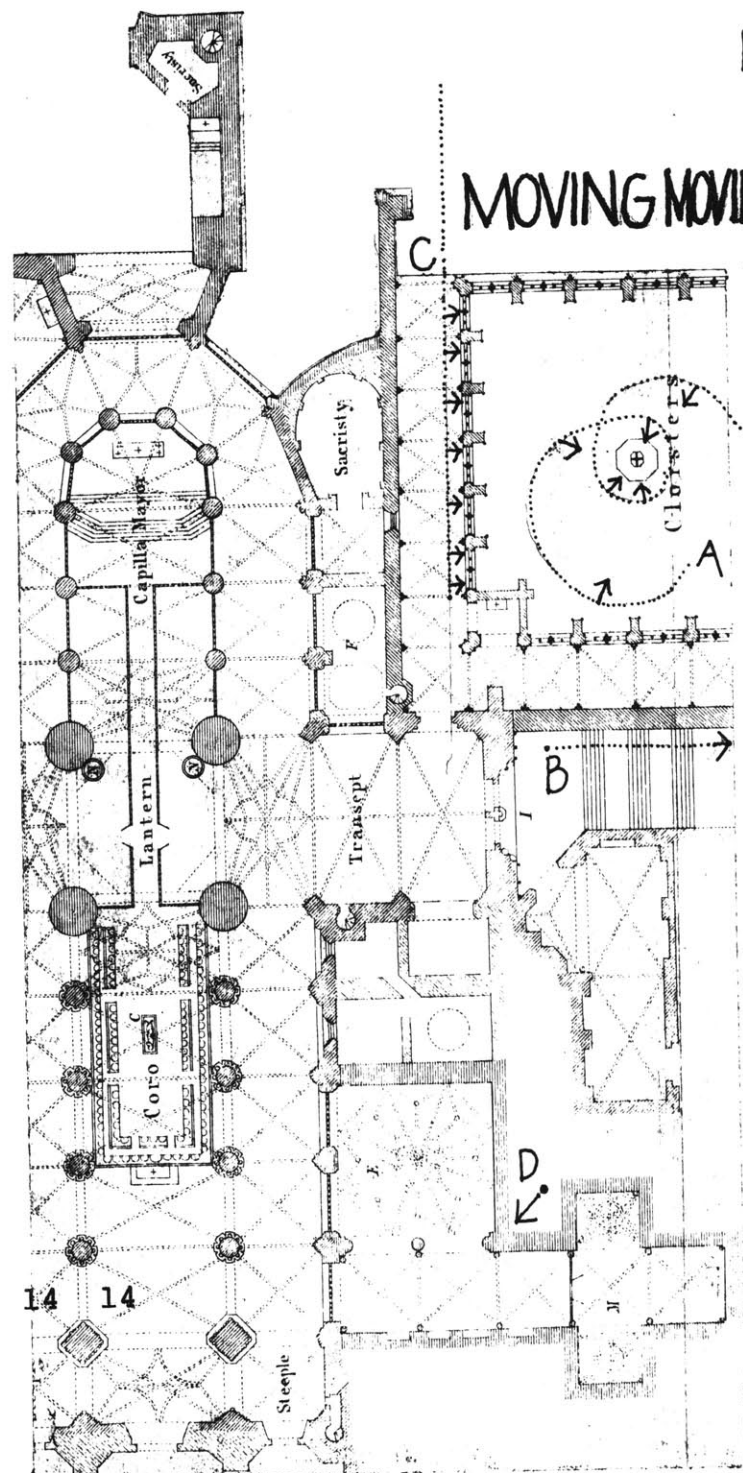
space are not conceivable in a way to map on Cartesian coordinates like the location & orientation of a door & a column & a wall & somebody else & every other thing that is more-or-less fixed among naughts & crosses. Every Thing is exactly defining about his space that it goes on that it does take time which is never else so concise to him as his presence; even for remembering it he has to use the fixed location of places where it happened for reference.

This filmmaking is exploring techniques of applying cinema verité methods to a set of assembly rules which consistently associate filmic structure with physical place structure. Conventions of motion-picture assemblage which pertain to its continuity/discontinuities, camera orientations/mobilities/distances, scale relationships, physical edges, density, light/dark, colors, etc.—divested of familiar narrative/dramatic or expressionistic connotations—are construed as analogs for 3-dimensional material-spatial phenomena. Without inventing set-ups, the shooting procedure assumes that any place functions as a set-up for people's occasional dwelling there. Camera among formidable objects which mechanically affect its dispositions and condition its movements, attention to transactions of the people there, chance possibility & improvising in the event.

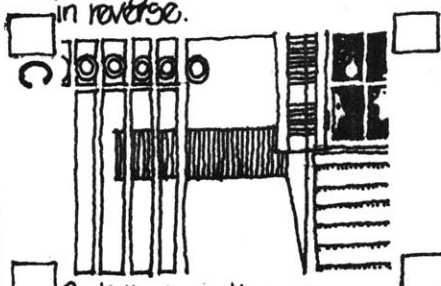


Free-standing vertical (pole, tree-trunk, man running in place, etc.) is a pivot so the camera chooses any path around by keeping it fixed in the frame.

MOVING MOVING MOVING MO



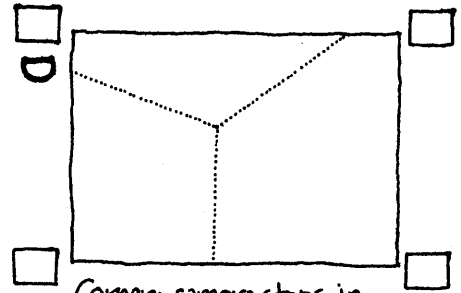
Continuous vertical surface is an edge approximate to or just inside the frame. Trajectory of the camera near a wall is parallel to the wall, forward or backward, always looking dead ahead or 180° in reverse.



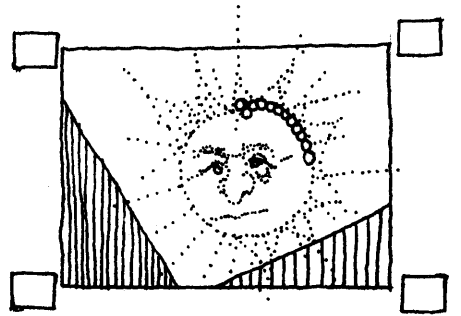
Partially discontinuous vertical surface (screen, arcade, a row of trees, etc.) Camera moves || looking

VING MOVING

Now gladly unscrewed from its tripod, the camera is in the hands of an ambulatory creature whose locomotive capability is less restricted than the tripod's. But because she is preferring not to smash herself, she is always conforming her way to a clearing that is fixed among formidable objects. In the interest of moving systematically she might classify these objects according to the configuration of movement zones which they respectively define. Her camera may regard them as "tripods in space," letting them control its mobility in the way that a tripod does. Rather than a contact attachment, the structural junction of camera & object occurs in the space between.



Corner: camera stops in its tracks. The junction of three planes is fixed in the frame. Or if it is two planes for instance the use of a tilt would be to look for an overhead escape route.



CONTINUITY^{dis} 1

A series of frames resting gradually on this perforated line goes running along in its own direction so it succeeds to become not many things strung out but one which each moment has its different insistence in succession.

Succession of the movie is so mechanically accomplished by wheels if only the film precisely does not ever get out of line or materially discontinue it. So mechanically almost automatically a steady photographing does succeed by force of material continuity to register in motion the physical continuity of the space toward the lens. But with this space all collapsed into a surface, and with successive motion confined to one precisely invariable direction, motion picture cannot be made to specify relative spatial directions in any literal way. (Axial rotation of the camera varies the viewing angle to a spot that is passing through the frame; a lateral tracking shot (discounting lens parallax) keeps this angle constant. So the film in due time does register changing orientation in a shot. But momentarily it always has only one orientation, which is too few to be relative.) The conventional logic of horizontal-vertical-orthogonal camera posture & mobility and shot juxtaposition is not dictated by any inclinations that the medium particularly has. It happens to resemble that arrangement of inhabited gravitational space most touching the quick of any insomniac alive. Why really it is how he personally generates

this space around his very body by staying & going. By consistently referring to this personal scheme of directions, film avoids complicating anybody's willingness to be immediately transposing the picture on screen to his habitual three-dimensional context.

Since the frame (of reference) is fixed forever inertly on a screen, and since a cut alters the disposition of space in that frame, and ever so abruptly also excludes the passing time of it. How interrupting the physical continuity of motion picture space is how a cut is positively disorienting. I mean do not suppose conversely that a perpetual shot caressing every inn and out of a place from all angles and distances in succession might resemble the place at all intelligibly. The point is that motion picture does not at all relate direction in space like any creature at all does know it personally. The other point, which is even stopper to verbalize, is something like "perception is not continuous, it has to be achieved through accumulation: there are points of impact." So what is the critical proportion of audio-visual fixation to aching ass.

A cut is so positively disorienting that splicing one piece with another is really the only device in film for hoping to construct any obvious reference to physical orientation at all. *
So there is continuity, and there is considering orientation, as the motion picture can possibly register either but not both exactly at the same time.

* It needs such attention to succeed. It needs such attention for this interruption to occur in time with the succession. It does sometimes

occur to the audience to hesitate at these interruptions and it never occurs to the projector to hesitate and that is enough to make anybody uneasy. A fade is for giving pause in the film to an interruption that is hesitating to succeed, so when the audience naturally does pause between stopping & starting they will not get themselves so much syncopated with the film running on. A dissolve is for putting them in a stupor while an interruption is hesitating to succeed so they will not have enough sense to be nervous, so what if they do not snap out of it.

Cutting is so traumatic in film
it is more than anything IN-

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
SUSTAINING on some very considerable
joinery to put the thing back together.

dis- CONTINUITY 2

You ordinarily have at least two methods for finding your nose when blindfolded. You can 1 point to your nose. 2 You can take hold of it. Almost every sound human body can grasp its nose, but it is true that a few people in the world cannot point to their noses. Ordinarily you are lucky.

There is my arm seen as sustaining familiar acts, my body as giving rise to determinate action having a field or scope known to me in advance, there are my surroundings as a collection of possible points upon which this bodily action may operate,---and there is, furthermore, my arm as a mechanism of muscles and bones, as a contrivance for bending and stretching, as an articulated object, the world as a pure spectacle into which I am not absorbed,

but which I contemplate and point out. As far as bodily space is concerned, it is clear that there is a knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with that place, and which is not simply nothing, even though it cannot be conveyed in the form of a description or even pointed out without a word being spoken. A patient of the kind discussed above, when stung by a mosquito, does not need to look for the place where he has been stung. He finds it straight away, because for him there is no question of locating it in relation to axes of co-ordinates in objective space, but of reaching with his phenomenal hand a certain painful spot on his phenomenal body, and because between the hand as a scratching potentiality and the place stung as a spot to be scratched a directly experienced relationship is presented in the natural system of one's own body. The whole operation takes place in the domain of the phenomenal; it does not run through the objective world, and only the spectator, who lends his objective representation of the living body to the acting subject, can believe that the sting is perceived, that the hand moves in objective space, and consequently find it odd that the same subject should fail in experiments requiring him to point things out.

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A splice A/B draws attention to the positional relativity of A moving/changing to B by immediately eliminating some space/time lapse that of course involves how A is proceeding to B. A shot ... A...B... is engaging this proceeding that elapses from A to B, finding the nose while grasping it. Even if no editor knew that this were so, you would want to understand that it is so because you observe it so. Any splice is especially pointing attention to this positional relation of A and B, whether

this relation is displacement or transformation, whether it is space or more time that the splice is leaving out.

A splice is naturally insisting to alter the natural nature of this positional relation that you understand A and B do of course have. Probably but perhaps not. That is what Eisenstein meant by "collision," and that is why some cinema verité filmmakers do not believe in montage.

Among all possible events surrounding a camera's presence, shooting film is irreversibly and linearly discovering this progress among them, how like film running, and editing this film is mounting suspense insisting for some chance again to entertain a discoverable plurality of possibilities. Obviously, Godard saying "Such is the nature of dialectic in the cinema: one must live rather than last. It is pointless to kill one's feelings in order to live longer." **11**

CONTINUITY 3

Dis - In the space of the movie, just as well as heartbeats I could develop some conventions of filmic (dis)continuity that would correspond to various (dis)continuities of a physical place. eg.

*street, corridor, "circulation" path, "distributor," etc.

Assuming that this camera is moving usually (a. A tracking halt indicates transfer from a zone for movement* to some focal location. This arrest might have to do with the fixed structure of a place (you succeed to eventually arrive dead-centre standing on the drain of the Pantheon with rain spilling in your face), or it might have to do with temporary array of transient matter (people, traffic, etc.) in the camera's way, or it might have to do (as it does) with any abrupt fix of the camera's attention or change of person.

(b. There is some way of using a jump cut to signify sudden discontinuity in the ground surface.

- (c. Black leader could be smashing against a wall.
- (d. DARK/black leader/underexposed picture on
LIGHT/clear leader/overexposed picture
the cut might indicate the edge of shadow meeting sunshine or abrupt temperature deviations

A sound cut calls attention to itself more or less than a picture cut does. Almost never the same but always definitely more or less. A picture cut discontinues picture, and if it is something like night and day suddenly you do squint a little until your irises stop down enough, but a picture cut can never really induce your seeing to discontinue so exactly as sound can give rushes and rests to your hearing. Or you can make cuts in the sound to be almost imperceptible; you really cannot do that with picture discontinuities almost at all.

A sound cut that is simultaneous with a picture cut is wanting to make the discontinuity more emphatic. Butt cuts in movies, like butt connections in building construction, need more fancy hardware than any passing junction to save the thing from absolutely breaking. Of course sometimes you do conspicuously want to have these interruptions definitely.

CONTAINMENT

THE EDGES OF A MOVIE ARE DEFINITELY FRAMING IT

← right there on the screen where picture is moving in that rectangle but never an inch outside.

Sometime there has been a lot of talk about the horizontal disposition of this rectangle associating it with animate types of movement, which tend to enter the frame and exit at the sides, like a proscenium stage. Lately there is less talk because there is less controversy over format, and that really has to do with the manufacturers so it is not particularly

interesting. It is not nearly so interesting as the possibility of making a variable frame within this very ordained frame by masking some of the picture area. You could of course do that optically. Even more interesting, you probably do it in a way photographically, with things in the foreground. And why do you.

LITERAL & PHENOMENAL BOUNDARIES:

If there is space in the movie that is the contents of this frame & if there is any physical containment in this space, the frame itself draws attention to such containment mostly by parallelling and duplicating its boundaries. If the

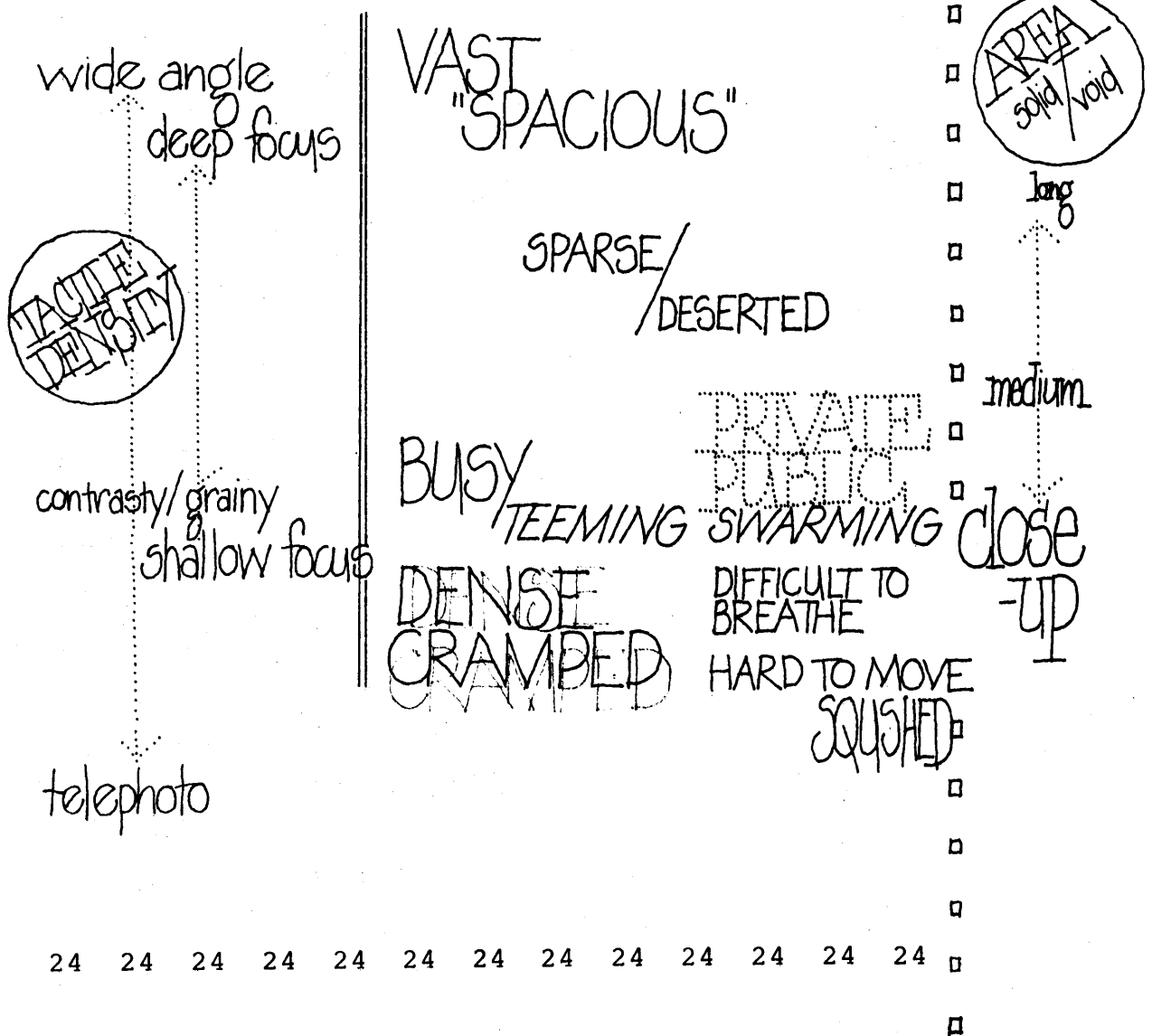
territory under consideration is contained by material boundaries, then the frame would include these boundaries peripherally or else substitute its own edges for them (this guy leaning against the side of the format). If such boundaries are not material to physically obstruct space, but more

like some territorial preference of the people there maintaining vacant intervals between themselves,

then you might want the frame to overlap a virtual boundary, including the outermost of two adjacent territories, for making their adjacency central. (Something to watch in the marketplace.)



CERTAIN OPTICAL QUANTITIES SCALED TO ^{rate of} VACANCY SURROUNDING



NOTES

1 Gertrude Stein, "Plays" in Lectures in America, 1935, p. 102.

2 Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar" in Lectures in America, p. 238.

3 How good to come across some curiosity of a similar notion applied to graphic means of expression in Paul Klee's Notebooks, vol. 2: The Nature of Nature, 1973, pp. 155-165. He was suggesting a three-part organization of this human "movement proportion," involving "will-active, muscle-medial, bone-passive." Oh yes do have a look at his diagrams.

4 Charles Olson, "Projective Verse" in Human Universe and Other Essays, 1967, pp. 52-53.

... "It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!"

5 Nicole Rouzet-Abagli, "Concrete Cinema" in Living Cinema by Louis Marcorelles, 1973, p. 132.

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 1962. Particularly the chapters on Body and Motility, Sense Experience, and Space.

7 Francis Ponge, "Still Life & Chardin" in Things, translated by Cid Corman, 1971, pp. 109-115. That citation was a device for mentioning this poem in the references, that the particulars are there, that I would not be interested in attempting a synopsis.

8 Christian Norberg-Schultz, Existence, Space & Architecture, 1971, p. 9.

9 Nicole Rouzet-Abagli, op. cit., p. 132.

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

11 Jean-Luc Godard, Godard on Godard, p. 27.

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