ON CINEMATOGRAPHY:

Cinematography* is a writing with images in movement and with sounds.

*As will become clear, “cinematography” for Bresson has the special meaning of creative film making which thoroughly exploits the nature of film as such. It should not be confused with the work of a cameraman.

The truth of cinematography cannot be the truth of theater, nor the truth of the novel, nor the truth of painting. (What the cinematographer captures with his or her own resources cannot be what the theater, the novel, painting capture with theirs.)

Your film – let people feel the soul and the heart there, but let it be made like a work of hands.

Catch instants. Spontaneity, freshness.

Economy.
Make known that we are in the same place by repetition of the same noises and the same sonority.

Let it be the intimate union of the images that charges them with emotion.

The too-expected image (cliché) will never seem right, even if it is.

What no human eye is capable of catching, no pencil, brush, pen of pinning down, your camera catches without knowing what it is, and pins it down with a machine’s scrupulous indifference.

Cinematography: new way of writing, therefore of feeling.

Shooting. Wonderful chances, those that act with precision. Way of putting aside the bad ones, to attract the good ones. To reserve for them, in advance, a place in your composition.

Shooting. Stick exclusively to impressions, to sensations. No intervention of intelligence which is foreign to these impressions and sensations.

Shooting with the same eyes and the same ears today as yesterday. Unity, homogeneity.

The power of your (flattened) images have of being other than they are. The same image brought in by ten different routes will be a different image ten times.
Hide the ideas, but so that people find them. The most important will be the most hidden.

Not to shoot a film in order to illustrate a thesis, or to display men and women confined to their external aspect, but to discover the matter they are made of. To attain that “heart of the heart” which does not let itself be caught either by poetry, or by philosophy or by drama.

Cinema seeks immediate and definitive expression through mimicry, gestures, intonations of voice. This system inevitably excludes expression through contacts and exchanges of images and of sounds and the transformations that result from them.

A small subject can provide the pretext for many profound combinations. Avoid subjects that are too vast or remote, in which nothing warns you when you are going astray. Or else take from them only what can be mingled with your life and belongs to your experience.

The true is not encrusted in the living persons and real objects you use. It is an air of truth that their images take on when you set them together in a certain order. *Vice versa*, the air of truth their images take on when you set them together in a certain order confers on these persons and objects a reality.

Your imagination will aim less at events than at feelings while wanting these latter to be as *documentary* as possible.

Shooting. Put oneself into a state of intense ignorance and curiosity, and yet see things *in advance*.

Cinematography, a military art. Prepare a film like a battle.*

*Napoleon: “I make my battle plans from the spirit of my sleeping soldiers.”

**IMAGE:**

A whole made of good images can be detestable.

No absolute value in an image. Images and sounds will owe their value and their power solely to the use to which you destine them.

Images and sounds like people who make acquaintance on a journey and afterwards cannot separate.

Nothing too much, nothing deficient.

A thing that has failed can, if you change its place, be a thing that has come off.
Be the first to see what you see as you see it.

An old thing becomes new if you detach it from what usually surrounds it.

Dig into your sensation. Look at what there is within. Don’t analyze it with words. Translate it into sister images, into equivalent sounds. The clearer it is, the more your style affirms itself (Style: whatever is not technique.)

Shooting: Your film must resemble what you see on shutting your eyes. (You must be capable, at any instant, of seeing and hearing its entire.)

What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear.

If the eye is entirely won, give nothing or almost nothing to the ear (and vice-versa, if the ear is entirely won, give nothing to the eye.) One cannot be at the same time all eye and all ear.

When a sound can replace an image, cut the image or neutralize it. The ear goes more towards the within, the eye towards the outer.

A sound must never come to the help of an image, nor an image to the help of a sound.

If a sound is the obligatory complement of an image, give preponderance either to the sound, or to the image. If equal, they damage or kill each other, as we say of colors.

Image and sound must not support each other, but must work each in turn through a sort of relay.

The eye solicited alone makes the ear impatient, the ear unsolicited alone makes the eye impatient. Use these impatiences. Power of the cinematographer who appeals to the two senses in a governable way. Against the tactics of speed, of noise, set tactics of slowness, of silence.

IN THIS LANGUAGE OF IMAGES, ONE MUST LOSE COMPLETELY THE NOTION OF IMAGE. THE IMAGES MUST EXCLUDE THE IDEA OF IMAGE.

Your film will have the beauty, or the sadness, or what have you, that one finds in a town, in a countryside, in a house, and not the beauty, sadness, etc. that one finds in the photograph of a town, of a countryside, or a house.

Your film is not readymade. It makes itself as it goes along under your gaze. Images and sounds in a state of waiting and reserve.

When you do not know what you are doing and what you are doing is the best – that is the inspiration.
Images and sounds must sustain one another, from far and from near. No independent images or sounds.

To move people not with images likely to move us, but with relations of images that render them both alive and moving.

What I reject as too simple is the thing that is important and that one must dig into. Stupid mistrust of the simple things.

Many people are needed in order to make a film, but only one who makes, unmakes, remakes his images and sounds, returning at every second to the initial impression or sensation which brought these to birth and is incomprehensible to the other people.

The public does not know what it wants. Impose on it your decisions, your delights.

It is useless and silly to work specially for a public. I cannot try what I am making, at the moment of making it, except on myself. Besides, all that matters is to make well.

Have a painter’s eye. The painter creates by looking.

Always the same joy, the same astonishment at the fresh significance of an image whose place I have just changed.

Hostility to art is also hostility to the new, to the unforeseen.

In a mixture of true and false, the true brings out the false, the false hinders belief in the true. An actor simulating fear of shipwreck on the deck of a real ship battered by a real storm – we believe neither in the actor, nor in the ship nor in the storm.

Provoke the unexpected. Expect it.

Leonardo recommends (Notebooks) thinking hard of the end, thinking first and foremost of the end. The end is the screen, which is only a surface. Submit your film to the reality of the screen, as a painter submits his picture to the reality of the canvas itself and of the colors applied on it, the sculptor submits his figures to the reality of the marble or the bronze.

Ten properties of a subject, according to Leonardo: light and dark, color and substance, form and position, distance and nearness, movement and stillness.

It is profitable that what you find should not be what you were expecting. Intrigued, excited by the unexpected. Intrigued, excited by the unexpected.
Be as ignorant of what you are going to catch as is a fisherman of what is at the end of his fishing rod. (*The fish that arise from nowhere*).

It is with something clean and precise that you will force the attention of inattentive eyes and ears.

Create expectations to fulfill them.

Shooting is going out to meet something. Nothing in the unexpected that is not secretly expected by you.

These horrible days – when shooting a film disgusts me, when I am exhausted, powerless in the face of so many obstacles – are part of my method of work.

Face to face with the real, your taut attention shows up in the mistakes of your original conception (mistakes on paper). It is your camera that corrects them. But the impression felt by you is the sole reality of interest.

Shooting is not making something definitive, it is making preparations.

Several takes of the same thing, like a painter who does several pictures or drawings of the same subject and, each fresh time, *progresses towards rightness*.

Your camera catches not only physical movements that are inapprehensible by pencil, brush or pen, but also certain states of soul recognizable by indices which it alone can reveal.

**MUSIC & SOUND:**

No music as accompaniment, support, or reinforcement. *No music at all.* (except of course the music played by visible instruments)

A cry, a noise. Their resonance makes us guess at a house, a forest, a plain, a mountain; their rebound indicates to us the distance.

The noises must become music.

Silence, musical by an effect of resonance. The last syllable of the last word or the last noise like a held note.

Music. It isolates your film from the life of your film (musical delectation). It is a powerful modifier and even destroyer of the real, like alcohol or dope.

Be sure of having use to the full all that is communicated by immobility and silence.
Music takes up all the room and gives no increased value to the image which it is added.

Absolute silence and silence obtained by a *pianissimo* of noises.

*Rhythmic value of a noise.* Noise of a door opening and shutting, noise of footsteps, etc., for the sake of rhythm.

Reorganize the unorganized noises (what you think you hear is not what you hear) of a street, a railroad station, an airport ... Play them back one by one in silence and adjust the blend.

The exchanges that are produced between images and images, sounds and sounds, images and sounds, give the people and the objects in your films their cinematographic life and, by a subtle phenomenon, unify your composition.

The eye (in general) superficial, the ear profound and inventive. A locomotive’s whistle imprints on us a whole railroad station.

Not beautiful photography, not beautiful images, but necessary images, and photography.

Shooting. You will not know till much later if your film is worth the mountain range of efforts it is costing you.

Expression through compression. To put into an image what a writer would spin out over ten pages.

Things too much in disorder, or too much in order, become equal, one no longer distinguishes them. They produce indifference and boredom.

### ON ACTING AND WORKING WITH ACTORS:

Models. What they lose in apparent prominence during the shooting, they gain in depth and in truth on the screen. It is the flattest and dullest parts that have in the end the most life.

Models. Their way of being the people of your film is by being themselves, by remaining what they are. *(Even in contradiction with what you had imagined).*

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Your film is beginning when your secret wished pass into your models.

Your models must not feel they are dramatic.
Without abandoning the line, which must never be abandoned, and without letting go anything of you, allow camera and tape recorder to catch, in the space of a flash, the new and unforeseen which your model offers you.

The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders! … How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy!

**EDITING:**

Cutting. Passage of dead images to living images. Everything blossoms afresh.

Slow films in which everyone is galloping and gesticulating; swift films in which people hardly stir.

To move people not with images likely to move us, but with relations of images that render them both alive and moving.

See your film as a combination of lines and of volumes in movement apart from what it represents and signifies.

It is from being constrained to a mechanical regularity, it is from a mechanism that emotion will be born. To understand this, think of certain great pianists.