The Evolution of Film Language

Naturally a filmmaker, like a theatre director, has room to interpret and inflect the meaning of the action. But this is only marginal to the event and in no way modifies its formal logic. Take, on the other hand, the montage of the stone lions in *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*): a series of skilfully juxtaposed sculptures gives the impression of a single animal rising up, like the people. The use of this admirable montage technique became unthinkable after 1932. As late as 1935 Fritz Lang, in *Fury*, showed a bunch of chickens clucking in a farmyard after a series of images of gossiping women. This holdover from the montage of attractions was already shocking at the time and, today, appears completely out of step with the rest of the film. As advanced as Marcel Carné's artistry is, as seen for example in the way he filmed the scripts for *Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows*) and *Le Jour se lève*, his *découpage* matches the reality it analyses. It is simply a way of seeing it better. This is why we find the almost complete disappearance of visual tricks such as superimpositions and even, especially in the United States, the close-up, whose too-violent visual effect would render the editing apparent. In a typical American comedy, the filmmaker returns as often as possible to shots of people from the knees up, which are most in keeping with viewers' natural attention and the point of equilibrium when they mentally adapt to the image before them.