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AN art may have a large body of aesthetic tradition and be moribund. It may have none to speak of and be very much alive. The movies are this kind of art. It is not possible to understand them, much less truthfully see them, within the limitations, judgements, and discriminations of the aesthetic viewpoint. The movies are implicit in modern life; they are in their very exaggerations—as a living art often may be—an essentialization of that which they reflect. To accurately size them up, they should be seen functionally, phenomenalistically, in relation to their audience.

Like music, painting, and the drama in their primitive stages, the movies are manifestations in some kind of aesthetic form of a social will and even of a mass religion. They are in effect a powerful psychic magnet, an educing force which draws submerged dreams from hidden places to the surface of the common life. By releasing wishes which are on the margin of accepted behaviour, they partake of the social function of art. In a transitional civilization the *mores* of the people no longer reflect their real social and tribal requirements, nor to any appreciable extent their individual and social hungers. The movies help to disintegrate that which is socially traditional, and to clear the field for that which, if not forbidden, has been at least close to the shade of the tabooed.

Primitive art is usually recognized as art only after it has become classical. In the manner of all primitive expression, the movies violate accepted contemporary canons of taste. Even as they arouse the sentinels of moral tradition, so they draw the attack of aestheticians, who are unconsciously measuring expressive works by the standards of those arts that have completed their cycle, especially painting and sculpture. But it is absurd to praise or blame the movies in their present state, or do any more than try to understand them. Whether the movies or what they reflect represent the Good Life depends on whose Good Life is being selected. They exist—massively, ubiquitous. It will be time enough to judge them as an art when they become a historical method of presenting selected truth, mellowed and tested by time, and captured by an

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audience saturated with tradition—acclimated by use to an understanding of the laws, intentions, and refinements of the medium. The movies by that time will have lost their excitement, but at least they will be aesthetically correct.

The movie is a primitive art, equally as the machine age is a new primitive period in time. But being a machine, the motion camera is not a simple instrument. Like the pianoforte, it is an evolved instrument, predicated on the existence and development of other forms. It is itself still in an evolving state. Indeed those who make use of it and those who appreciate it without empirical knowledge of its use, have failed to grasp, except in a loose intuitive sense, a full understanding of the complicated laws that govern it. Here and there in its past performance are startling bits of technical excellence, discoveries of how the instrument may be properly used in its own field. Bound together these form a rude body of technique, already complicated, but not yet pushed to any important limits by personal genius, nor classified significantly in use by any development of important schools.

It is fashionable to say that the camera is impersonal, but those who use the camera know this is untrue. Indeed, even abstractly, it is no more impersonal than a steel chisel, or a camel's hair brush. The camera is on the one hand as intimate as the imagination of those who direct it; on the other hand it has a peculiar selective power of its own. Its mechanism is governed by an arbitrary set of rhythms—sixteen images to each foot of celluloid—and reality is seized by the camera according to a mathematical ratio, established between the tempo of what is in front of the lens and the tempo of the machine itself. The camera is also governed by another set of relations, which have to do with light and its refraction through lenses. These are no less arbitrary in a physical sense, but within their limits they are open to a large number of gradations and variations, according to the human will behind them. Far from being impersonal, the camera may be said to have pronounced prejudices of rhythm.

Most critical discussion of pantomime in the movies is vapour. Screen pantomime is not pantomime in the conventional Punch and Judy sense. In the theatre, pantomime is in the large, a matter of long curves of movement. On the screen the lens intervenes between the eye and its objective. The camera not only magnifies movement but it also analyses action, showing its incompletions. It is indeed more prejudiced than the human eye itself, helping the

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eye to detect false rhythms in the utterance of action, or an absence of relationship between sequences of movement, where the eye alone might fail. The intervention of the camera necessitates not only a modification of what might be called the wave length of pantomime for the screen, but also a more closely knitted flow of movement. Traditional pantomime on the stage is a highly schematized and rigid organization of units of movement in which every motion has a definite traditional meaning. But for the camera, movement must be living, warm, vital, and flowing rather than set and defined in an alphabet of traditional interpretation. Like Bergsonian time, it must seem to renew and recreate itself out of the crest of each present moment. It is in this sense that it resembles music. It is also because of this necessity that the stage actor who essays the screen is often exposed at the outset in all the barrenness of habitual gesture and stock phrasing of movement.

Experience rather than theory has taught many actors on the screen the need of plasticity, composure, modulation of gesture, and an understanding of how to space movement—a sense of timing. The screen actor at his best—the Beerys, Menjous, and Negris—tries to give fluency to pantomime, so that action may melt out of repose into repose again, even in those moments when an illusion of arrested action is intended. He recognizes that against his own movement as a living organic action is the cross movement of the celluloid. It is only by long experience that the motion picture actor discovers a timing which is properly related to the machine; but that experience has already produced screen pantomimists whose rhythmic freshness and vitality the modern stage can rarely match.

The actor is the living punctuation of reality. He is conscious and has the power to make his action valid in an imaginative sense. But Appearance—the face of Nature—is itself sprawling and only vaguely connotative. Words are packed with the reverberations of human history; Appearance on the other hand, must be selected, organized, and related to ideas that conform to the limitations and possibilities of the camera, before it can be robbed of inanity and made significant.

All this is the function of the director. The movies are full of mediocre directors. But, comparatively, there are not as many poor motion picture directors as there are poor musicians, painters, and creative writers in the world; it is easier to go to school and

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become any of these than it is to direct a motion picture. In its present state of development, motion picture direction demands not only logic, tact, sensibility, the ability to organize and control human beings and multifarious materials, and the power to tell a story dramatically, but it also requires a gift which cannot be learned in any school. This is a richness, even grossness, in the director's feeling for Life, an abundance of perception, a copious emotional reflex to the ill-assorted procession of existence.

Good motion picture direction has little to do with literacy or cultivation in its conventional sense. Several of the most cultivated and literate gentlemen in the movies are among the most prosaic directors. They have brought with them a knowledge of other arts, which has blinded them to the essential quality of the camera. They think of the movies as a form of the theatre, of literature, or of painting. It is none of these things. It demands at best a unique kind of imagination which parallels these arts but does not stem from them. It is true that the rigid economic organization of the modern studio demands the same kind of prevision and preparation on the part of the director as on the part of any other creator. Even aside from urgencies of this kind, the St Clairs, Lubitschs, Duponts, Einsteins, are under the same imaginative necessity to organize their material as a Cézanne or Beethoven. But there the similarity ceases. Directors of this kind know that their greatest need is the power to seize reality—in its widest sense—and make it significant in forms of motion. This power, this understanding, is a gift by itself. It requires a special kind of eye, a special kind of feeling about the relationship between things and things, events and events, and an intuitive as well as empirical knowledge of how to make the camera catch what that eye sees and that imagination feels. It has nothing to do with words, as such, nor with history or politics or any of the traditional matters which are politely assumed to represent cultivation, and which so often debase the metal of the imagination.

The movie is in other words a new way in which to see life. It is a way born to meet the needs of a new life. It is a way of using the machine to see what the machine has done to human beings. It is for this reason that the best motion picture directors arise from strange backgrounds, with a secure grasp on techniques of living rather than on academic attitudes. They are not always preoccupied with proving that life is so small that it can be caught in the

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net of art. It is the pragmatic sanction hovering over them which offends academicians.

Here and there are indications that the movie is arising out of its phenomenalistic background into the level now occupied by the novel, and the theatre, touched by the same spirit of light irony, and predicating the orientation of a special audience. But there are no signs at the moment that it can rise higher than this point. Pictures such as The Cabinet of Dr Caligari are interesting laboratory results in experimental psychology, but they have as little to do with the direct succession of the motion picture as Madame Tussaud's has to do with Rodin. The Last Laugh and The Battleship Potemkin are technical explosions, important only in their power to destroy old procedures and light the path ahead.

American directors have always mistaken cruelty on the one hand and sentimental realism on the other, for irony. Satisfaction for the sadistic hunger of the crowd is present in almost all popular entertainment. Griffith early understood this crowd desire, and his technique in exploiting it has filtered through a thousand pictures since. De Mille, Von Stroheim, Brennon, and the many unnamed have all used it in one form or other. But none has reached irony empty of brutality—an unobstructed godlike view of the miscalculations of existence, yet touched by human compassion. There are no Hardys nor Chekhovs in the movies. The Last Laugh dribbled out into German sentimentality, although in substance it seemed familiarly like one of Constance Garnett's translations. The comedians—Keaton and Langdon as well as Chaplin—have touched near the edge of true irony, but only as children might. Chaplin rose to the intention in A Woman of Paris, but his forms were conventional and worn, cast in the *clichés* of irony of cheap fiction.

In the end, what remains wonderful about the movie is its instrument. Its ideas are still sentimental or bizarre, reflecting the easy hungers of life, and of to-day's shifting surface of life; it fails as yet to draw from the deep clear wells of human existence. Aside from its need of another kind of audience—even another world, a deep ironic point of view in the motion picture would require a great individual spirit equipped with a true knowledge of the medium. And none of this kind has arisen. He is rare in any art and any time.

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