

THE FILM SPECTATOR

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Page Thirty-five

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

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ONE of the trade papers says that Howard Hughes, having bought Multicolor, is going to spend a lot of money in an effort to make the public and the motion picture industry colored-film conscious. This information interests me a good deal, because it shows the strange workings of the motion picture mind, something I must admit I thought Hughes was too astute a business man to possess.

No amount of money, of course, can force the public to do anything it doesn't want to do, and if it doesn't care to see colored pictures, Mr. Hughes can spend money until he is blue in the face without putting over Multicolor. The public has the final word on anything in the entertainment line, as the producers discovered when they attempted to manufacture screen stars from stage material in the first hysterical days of the sound revolution. The attempt to force color on the public, however, is not quite so typical of the motion picture mind as is something else Mr. Hughes plans to do.

According to the trade papers, in which I read about the Hughes color campaign, the producer of *Hell's Angels* is going to make all his pictures in color in an effort to prove that tinted films are better than black and white ones. If this report is true, Hughes certainly has gone movie, for all or nothing seems to be the watchword of the more short-sighted producers, who are overwhelmingly in the majority in Hollywood. They suffer from an absolute lack of any sense of proportion. When sound came in, they did not stop to consider which of their stories could be improved by the addition of dialogue, and which would not; they put dialogue into everything. When songs came to their attention, they stuck them in everything. Every character in a picture seemed to have an irresistible impulse to vocalize at every opportunity. If they had made *Hamlet*, the melancholy Dane's soliloquy probably would have been set to music. As a result of this, the public stayed away from picture theatres and developed a passion for knocking golf balls through lengths of water pipe. Even this was better than watching Rudy Vallée, looking like a halibut with a secret sorrow, crooning a Tin Pan Alley atrocity down Sally Blane's neck.

This faithlessness of the fans nearly broke the hearts of the producers. They were so badly affected that they began to make some pictures with what approximated sanity again, and the public, spurred by the approach of winter, deserted their water pipes and trooped back into the theatres. However, if Howard Hughes makes any money from his plunge into the color business, the producers will discard the black and white film with the same celerity and completeness with which they disposed of the old silent picture methods. Then when the public demonstrates that it doesn't like color in every picture, they will throw it away with their usual enthusiasm.

What Hughes ought to do, in order to convert both the public and the picture industry to the use of color, is use his newly acquired process only on those stories which will benefit by it. There are plenty of outdoor dramas or sea stories which can be filmed with color very advantageously, but not every picture is fitted for it. *The Front Page*, which is supposed to be the next Caddo production, has about as much use for color as the printers of *The Spectator* have, which is just exactly none at all. If Hughes insists on tinting everything he makes, he is going to find that the money he has

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spent on Multicolor is going to be wasted. Discrimination in the use of new development is something the makers of pictures should cultivate.

I must admit that I will be surprised if Hughes comes a cropper over the color business, because I regard him as the particular bright, shining hope of those who are interested in the development of the screen as a stable, commercial project, let alone the art angle. He has made one very important step in the direction which the screen must take before it can consider itself soundly established. This is his exploitation of the Caddo and Hughes names until they mean more to the people seeing films than those of the actors and directors connected with the organization. As I said in a previous *Spectator*, no business should be so dependent upon personalities as the motion picture industry is. Thus it is better to exploit directors rather than actors, and it is even better to build up the company's name in preference to that of the director. In that way, the entire structure which has been built up is not in danger of being swept away by the death or disability of one man.

No other business in the world is run as the picture industry is. It would be just too bad for the Campbell Soup Company, for instance, if they had exploited the name of Doctor Dorrance, their president and founder, to the point where the public believed that he was the only person who could assure them of good soup. If that had been the case, the whole, huge business would have collapsed upon the death of Doctor Dorrance, which took place recently. Those at the helm of the picture industry must realize that the old, haphazard methods will have to go before the business will be free from the depressions which hitherto have occurred every few years, and which, to my mind, have done more to hold back the screen's progress than any one thing. If Hughes will keep on the way he has started, he will make a deep impression upon the picture industry, which presumably is what he is after primarily.

Howard Hughes also can do something, if he cares to, for that somewhat chimerical dream of students of films, a real art of the cinema, uncontaminated by the stage or stupid commercialism. By "stupid commercialism" I mean the senseless domination of the picture makers by sales organizations, which cater to the lowest tastes of the public under the impression that they are giving it what it wants. One of the absurd tenets of the sales organizations, apparently, is the belief that a picture is not box-office unless it ends in a clinch. However, not all commercialism need be stupid. I reiterate a statement made in another article that all real art must appeal to the masses, or it isn't art. That pseudo sophisticated phrase, "the discriminating few," and all belief in it, is rot. The few generally are the sort who assume an affected distaste for anything a lot of people like; and an affected person, inspected closely, usually proves to be a pinhead.

Hughes demonstrated, during the protracted time he was making *Hell's Angels*, that he had the courage of his convictions and couldn't be moved from the course of action he had planned. This firmness would be invaluable in a Crusader for artistic motion pictures. After the public has been given a chance at a few artistic pictures, it will demonstrate that it likes them, or I am very much mistaken. In the meantime, Hughes' firmness and unlimited financial resources will stand him in good stead.