

## FILM

American films are the best of all films. I am not going to enumerate at length all their advantages, which have been mentioned elsewhere, nor talk about the way how many of their characteristic aspects intersect with some characteristics of modern painting and literature, which may have even gained something from the cinematographic technology.

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American films, undoubtedly the most valuable among them being those very few from the American World Film Company which we have seen, distinguish themselves by perfect execution and also a new and very refined presentation; their most frequently tendentious and moralist stories are presented with a powerful and at the same time spirited realism, totally distant from any routine jobs which are concocted for the European public. French products, which love to turn older novels into films taking care of excellent acting, are also generally good. From novels by authors like Dumas or Sardou with a rich, full and touching story, the French can create good film plays; on the other hand, the stories of German films are generally very thin, weak and unplastic, and devoid of any literary or dramatic value. The Anglo-Saxon concept is the one that builds most on today's world, its type of hero is generally a working man, daring and gaining success, but the dramatic conflict rests in the emotional, in love gained, lost and regained, where the heart crushed by injustice achieves happiness by repairing and overcoming evil. However, the story is never overburdened or pressed by the moralist tendency; it seems to be a natural part of the view on life and neither its esthetic effect can be omitted: the story should end with the victory of truth and goodness. Of course, such satisfying finales are not completely novel, but the American concept does not favor artificialities of fate and chance; the special manly and vital trait stands out everywhere, the ideal is strength aiming across obstacles and errors to correctness and goodness. However, we should not forget also the fragile emotionality, the non-sensual ardor, so important for the

Anglo-Saxon race apart from hardness . Compared with that the Roman concept is more passionate, more sensual, man is much more a toy of fate and chance governing over him often quite harshly and without recourse, evil is more powerful and ineradicable, tragical guilt being a more absolute element of the drama.

Closest to the French films are the Italian ones, working with pretty, effective scenery and are usually played well and full of suspense; Italians are born mimes. Danish and Norwegian films are rather boring and commonplace, they are made with little taste, played and built without tempo and penetration; they are on the whole too factory-like, shoddy. German films, apart from very few exceptions resulting rather from well thought-out direction than a proper film concept, are fabricated without any emotion and taste, the story is usual nonsensical, bordering on stupidity, frequently outright gross or unbearably sentimental; the great majority are products which can satisfy only the lowest demand. Worst still for comedy, which is vulgar and spiritless, and prefers to build on an incredibly low and undignified concept of man and life, on directly shameful devaluation of all human emotions and qualities.

I make no secret of the fact that until now the majority of film production as a whole is low, stupidifying, and that it serves no good purpose. That, however, is not a reason why we should not believe that it can be elevated artistically as well as morally.

Since I have written about photography, I am right now most interested in how a good American film appears to the eyes. It has a

much better effect than the others primarily due to its clarity and graphic presentation, and in most cases also by a good, happily sensed scale of figures and details in relationship to the story. The story is most expressively placed in the picture format, again and again entering the screen with greatness, fullness and so convincingly as possible, and it usually is well balanced and composed including very picturesque and plastic images for the delight of the eye and memory. The composition proceeds from the natural and tries to be as natural as possible, scenery is grandiose, chosen with good taste and understanding.

Film can very well concentrate (limit) the spectator's interest jumping or gradually narrowing on the story itself, on the main figure, on its face, on a single, really fundamental characteristic or trait. Figures can be large and can grow as needed for emphasis, and they can reach even supernatural size, so that we can see much better and more powerfully than if we saw them close up; elsewhere, the story, on the contrary, can be helped using greater distance, more far away perspective. The suggestive shifting and movement of the field of view makes the spectator participate more in the story, and the American film technique often uses these possibilities truly dramatically. The spectator's suspense and participation are escalated through this visual dramatization of the story, the film becomes more dynamic and rich. - Here we can say that the Americans do know how to work very expressively and picturesquely in film.

Thus the first possibility is to ~~to~~ sharpen and focus the moment of dramatic suspense most effectively. Simultaneously, it is possible to

support and extend it to maximum fullness by a multi-directional spatial widening, the co-action of several views; the story or the figure can be thereby endowed with the maximum of plasticity according to need and time. A moment can be divided and fixed in several dramatic parts and views, remote moments and places can be presented in simultaneous, directly connected pictures, it is possible to shape and freely and plastically work with space and time.

These, then, are quite new formative elements, which can be artistically and expressively exploited for quite special and specific effects which cannot be achieved by real theatre. Besides, the biograph cannot absolutely compete with the theatre by imitating it, nor can it replace it in anything and, therefore, it must try to achieve its own particular form which would honestly and sharply differ from the art of the theatre. We correctly feel that even excessive quantities of accompanying explanatory texts are to the detriment of the film, since they replace the spoken word of the theatre much too primitively and unsuitably. Also, when a film merely optically translates a complete theatrical play, recording just its outside, it becomes mute and empty. The technique of the theatre and the technique of the film should not have anything in common and cannot be identified. Of course, in both instances the actors have to carry the text, and even for a biography the actor should play as perfectly as possible. However, the formative presentation of the story has its very own and special laws on the film, because by its very essence film is an action in space.

All its open possibilities are directly offering themselves to

artistic creativity and also to a responsible presentation of the world, to a completely new and penetrating intervention in the dramatic mass, so far not treated in this manner. It is a penetrating and multifaceted look at the human drama represented by the actor, and at the world, which is the material reality since the film can very easily do without props. The picturesqueness of the film can originate only from a sense for truthfulness and from a new poetic fantasy, because this world and reality of ours are ~~to~~ presented as an immediate dramatic reality. This, of course, does not consist in researched picturesque and interesting details but in the rare sense of realism, which does not see in the world merely a cluster of things but space and environment of dramatic action.

American films are truly done best, with the greatest science, with the most lively and enterprising goal and in fact achieve new, surprising and seemingly fresh effects. A new and fresh power began to act here, and it has undertaken its new task very conscientiously. They are therefore outstanding due to their generally more perfect making. Their ~~photography~~ <sup>cinema</sup> has an incomparably more beautiful tone than, for example, German films, an extraordinary gentleness and a rich graduality of transitions and thereby also a more subtle expressiveness and quieter luminiscence and depth. It also excels because of its clearer and more monumental dressing of things in space, of its grandiose <sup>u</sup>modellation from dark to light. That already causes the reality not to appear so superficial, petty and tormentingly prosaic as happens in the worse European films.

An expert had explained to me that the balance of the tones and all

that refinement of work in general can be explained by the perfection of the material; and thus the sensitive layer on the plates, films and even papers of Western production is allegedly thinner than on the German ones, and therefore works in an incomparably gentler, softer and simultaneously more expressive manner; they also seem to be working with more light. However, I believe that attempts to improve material need a special motivation due to taste, otherwise it would be not be necessary to improve resources in that direction where comfort, speed or facility of work are not at stake, since this is done in order to make the most beautiful picture.

In Bohemia, practically nothing has been done in this field. If the very few experiments which have taken place signify the beginning of future work, then questions arise: just how our domestic production can compete with the foreign one. It cannot be in marvelous or adventurous scenery in which, for example, Italian films indulge; it cannot be in pictures of life struggle amidst large human and industrial agglomerations, as in American films, nor could and should it be high society stories set in real and rich surroundings which abound in the majority of the remaining film production. In fact, much is already decided by the already given natural live scenery. I do not believe that we should limit ourselves only to history and to incessant exploitation of Old Prague. While one can very well think of several of our historical films which could gain more general interest were they to be perfectly executed, next to them there is another open path to original valuable work. And that is to turn the scenic and story conception from

splendid externality to a more internal intimacy, to a serious profundization, to a sincere and compassionate feeling for less dazzling things, for the value of life, for the life being born here and struggling hard towards freedom; those are truthful pictures in the purest human and social sense that can be considered here.