

Karel Capek: A. W. F. Co.

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That big, strong man is Holbrook Blinn, the American
cine-actor, ~~or rather~~ a longshoreman, a man smoking a cigar, a
bum who spends his time in bars or outside in the sunshine, a
lazy athlete and a champion boxer; so lazy and stubborn that
even a friend, a man of ^{the} cloth, will not persuade him to take up
a better life. Both then wander lazily along the docks and look
at the beautiful ocean liners. At home the champion boxer does
the dishes for his mother, and we, the spectators, smile that he
has such a good heart.

Bets on the coming boxing match are made in the bars and we
see with pleasure many American faces; everybody throngs to the
spectacle. We are not, however, in the first row of the
spectators; ~~only~~ ^{we are only} between the legs of the front rows, ^{or} ~~do~~ ^{see} we the
legs of the boxers dance on the mat; or we run up to the gallery
and see from above only the shoulders of the contenders while
the band plays a languid waltz as accompaniment.

From the bet he won he sets up a bar. We see his longshoremen
buddies. His plan, however, is to establish a great freight
forwarding company and destroy, in competition, the old firm for
which he formerly worked. In the meantime he is just looking at

the enormous ships and New York dock warehouses with the eye of a conqueror.

American World Film.

That lovely girl is Alice Brady, cine-actress, daughter of the old freight forwarder and a beautiful blossom of wealth. She is not really beautiful, every third girl is prettier than she is, but how should I say it? None is more enchanting, never did we see such marvelous manners.

The champion boxer, plebeian of all plebeians, is in love with her. Power is courting beauty. American king is fighting for his happiness.

And the film unrolls further and further.

- But you, who sit here as if you were in the theatre or at a concert, why does it excite you, why do you hold your breath when the victorious champion horribly and calmly suffers with the vain love? It is only a film, a dumb play of shadows and surrogates of drama; a little more than shadows made by a child with its hands on the wall, a lie-art, dumbness, falsehood and sensation; not even a painting, or theatre, or concert, just film.

The A. F. W. Co. recognizes order and justice the same way as the spectator does, its film cannot do without character just as a Greek drama cannot be without Fate; for the company a public trial is a manifestation of world order.

Due to innate optimism, the A. W. F. Co. loves a happy end. Only from time to time it will film some European novel with a sad ending, perhaps to reveal the twisted character of the Old World. Its own, domestic branch is, however, full of confidence: everything shall end well, as the American philosophy urges.

The A. W. F. Co. does not cast any shadows on life. Its life view is firm and chivalrous. It relishes able and honest men who know very well how to wear their professions as well as their clothes, be it tails or a workman's bell-bottoms; it enjoys their physical capability as well as their moral character. Woman, however is a weak and lovely creature.

The A. W. F. Co. views a woman with feelings which are a mixture of respect and the secretive consciousness of male superiority. Above all it views her as something lovely, infinitely lovely in thousands of little movements of life. In all situations it finds the time to stealthily and tremblingly glance at her eyes, the slipper in the fold of her dress and her covert look at the mirror, how the woman powders her nose and dresses up, how she prattles in society and plays cards. The A. W. F. Co. loves elegance and endows its women with feathers as if they were Indian chiefs, and not with feathers alone: by the magic of delight and immediacy.

I hereby declare that Alice Brady has no equal.

The A. W. F. Co. loves New York, automobiles, nature and

children, society, wealth and family; love and marriage are the greatest riches, the most beautiful legend is about love and power, love and happiness are the only meaning of life.

The A. W. F. Co. refuses to imitate the stage drama barrel and stock.

It rejects false moustaches, wigs, theatrical scenery, machinery and illusions.

It also rejects the division of the world into leading and supporting roles, into actors and extras, into good actors playing lovers and bad actors playing servants. It recognizes only good lovers and good servants; a chance pedestrian who hardly flashes through the background of the film must be a great pedestrian, nonchalant and marvelous, overflowing with realistic invention.

The A. W. F. Co. completely believes in the reality of the external world: what you can see that is real, and the better you see it, the more realistic it will appear to us. And here the A. W. F. Co. made a new discovery: the more realistic a thing appears to us, the more wondrous and magical it becomes.

This discovery shows the road for the A. W. F. Co. to follow: invention of phenomena, fantasy of reality and magical unveiling of the visible world.

A natural movement is the most unexpected movement, immediacy is the most mysterious of all movements. But all things have their physiognomy of immediacy also: there are

moments when they appear to brim with mystery and cause a nearly fantastic impression with their bare and strange matter-of-fact quality. There are moments when the things in our room, our own table or bed, or even our own hand surprise us by their appearance, when they stand up pressingly before us sliding out of the worn surface of habit. Such surprising, child-like vision that is the magical vision of reality.

The A. W. F. Co. loves reality and never has enough of convincing itself about it; it will just as cut out a scene as show all of it, it will show it from different sides, it will take one, two faces and enlarge them to monstrosity, looking at them with an exciting and pressing closeness; it will ^{show} ~~notice~~ to a terrible degree their fear or pain; and all of a sudden it will show what is happening outside at the same moment, behind the walls of the house; it will reveal entire New York.

It photographs a street: there is an automobile going down the street, rushing, making a turn; there is a lovely woman in the car, hurriedly powdering her nose; a man is suppressing a yawn; another man is deep in thoughts; once more the entire long street is shown from which the automobile is disappearing. (A butterfly tossed by wind.)

A young man is thinking about his love; the memory becomes an image, and both illusion and reality, his present torment and delightful memory are projected into one, into the same mirage. (Dame aux camelias.)

Blanche Gordon is defending herself in court, now the entire courtroom is shown, now the tribunal alone; and now, very close up, the tall defendant: the judge, enlarged more than life-size, is ringing; the district attorney is hitting the table with his fist; the counsel rises; the key witness is sworn in; Blanche's husband is here, her girl-friends over there. Blanche is speaking and the action about which she speaks is projected on the screen. Blanche is wringing her hands in the hurried movement of desperation; the district attorney waves his hand at her: we do not fall for that. ² (The Suffering of Blanche Gordon.)

The A. W. F. Co. works with epic width; with delight it dwells on details and monumentalizes them like Homer had done with Achilles' shield. When it does wish to express a man's love and anxiety, it will show him bending down with an unexpectedly loving smile to strange children and, in truth, rarely have I read a more touching confession of love. - To understand each action, thus, in its unconscious phenomena, requires a tremendous knowledge of the world.

The reality is the flow of a great river and every moment is inexhaustible. Theater simplifies it. Film dissects it. It will investigate it from different angles, it will turn it upside down; but wherever it penetrates, it will once again find the unsimplified and the inexhaustible: it is never possible to reach the "bottom" ^F a human face and its expressions.

The virtue of the theater is its economy. Film is its opposite, film's strength rests on noneconomy, wastefulness and excesses; then, when it is the least ~~of~~ ^{the} a theatre, does it become a new and strange enjoyment, a new and fantastic spectacle.

In reality there is neither unity nor economy. Every real action is a cluster of countless events, chances and jumps; causal connection and theatrical connection are equally artificial constructs.

The A. W. F. Co. renounces unified causality, unity of action, one-dimensional time and an stationary point of view. Each action is understood as a cluster taking place here and there, in many places, jumping, simultaneously or at various times. We can circle around each thing, see it closeup or from afar, and only through these changes its surprising reality is felt. The wealth of phenomena that world offers to film is inexhaustible and it cannot be compressed into a rational unity. Its place is taken by speed and fullness; since even reality happens fast and without gaps.

The A. W. F. Co. does not show the world as we see it, it shows it more realistic than we are capable of seeing it; hence the strange phenomenon of the world in film. In film just as in literature the image of reality originates through invention, not through a copy. However, invention is really a creation, and the invention of beauty is art.

Beautiful is the shimmering light that envelops things;

beautiful is the transparent greyness in which phenomena appear with a bare, monumental, matter-of-fact quality: (no other films achieve a more beautiful light.) Through light, a cutout image, the size of objects, a combination of black and white, the choice of costumes and environment, through hundreds of unexpected inventions the A. W. F. Co. achieves new and unusual motives of pictorial beauty. How often would I like the fleeting, changing shadow to stay for a little while, but the most beautiful images in film, just as in life, have escaped me before I could forever capture them.

I would like that lovely, accidental movement to wait, I would fill my sight with all those details which escape me every passing second (and with every second which disappears before) (it showed my eyes all the wealth it contains; I would like to extend the blownup proximity of this luminous face, since there is not enough of proximity nor of human face.

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