

This one out!

Frantisek LANGER: Always Cinema /Stale kinema/

Writers' interest in the cinema can be ascribed, to a major degree, to the fact that this invention appears to be close to the theatre, and thus happens--perhaps only seemingly--to intervene in the writer's metier who is saying to himself: "Maybe something could be done here," because the structure of the cinema is based on a plot and thus resembles a drama. The factors shaping a drama are arranged in the following sequence:

1. First there is ethics, a view of the world, culture or anything of that sort which is the pre-condition for the creation of a drama.
2. Then there is the poet--or let us put it less uncompromisingly--the writer as the creator.
3. Then follows the director and the actors as the drama's practical executors.
4. And finally, the spectator, the listener, a passive yet extremely valuable factor, on whose behalf the factors indicated sub 1. have activated the poet and then, secondly, the theater people.

In cinema, the order is completely different. In the first place are (both) theater practitioners. In the second place, if there is any, maybe by chance, the literary person. And the third, and rather as a rule the second independent factor, is the spectator. And if there is something higher, more spiritual, in the cinema, it is more of a nature of coincidence, a consequence of the spectator's feelings at a given moment.

Director and Actors

First of all we should be aware that the poetry of the cinema has a purely practical character. Here and there it is possible to observe a sort of photographic-artistic kind of film, where shadows and lights create an effect of vivid contrasts. With the exception of simple landscapes, those are the only images which will produce any optical impression in the spectator, as will the artificial photography in general, which today is beginning to replace the old art of painting. When we see in a film ^{actors} groups arranged in the form of tableaux vivants, ^{it} they strike us immediately as tasteless and disgusting, the same as would any photographic image of that kind. Thus there is nothing of graphic interest for us with the exception of the photography of light and shadow. Then there are two, more complex things, that will be of interest: interplay, which is the director's concern, and the play of gestures, which is the actor's bailiwick. That means two sides of dramatic reproduction, springing solely from the practical activity of people of the theater.

On the whole, the director is representing the theatrical practice the same way the writer is the representative of the theatrical idealism. Hence the eternal disputes among them. In cinema, direction is the most practical activity one can think of. Its duty is to go so far as to become totally invisible, so that the hand of the director blends with the resulting

reality making any intentionality quite unnoticeable. The direction of the film must blend together with the reality, that is the style of cinematographic direction.

The actor's activity is somewhat nuanced. The actor must contrast his natural being with the constantly present consciousness that he is playing before an apparatus and that this apparatus is ^{taking} making so many ^{pictures} shots per second. And that this apparatus will then reproduce his acting. This means that ^{the rhythm} his natural self is ~~rhythmically~~ ^{of} changed, that his action ^{and movements} ~~is~~ ^{is} bound by rhythm other than his natural character, dictates ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~movements~~. You can see right away which actor is a cinema professional and which is a dilettante. It is not only by number of gestures ^{that} ~~in which~~ they differ. (The professional uses just a few, but very marked movements, he uses a kind of sign language, where certain gestures have always the same meaning; the amateur uses a lot of them, without choosing.) At a first glance they differ rhythmically. The professional ~~already~~ seems to feel the speed of the projection, as if he knew how to put his gestures into a series of permanent states captured in a fracture of a second by the device. The amateur--for example, all local actors playing in the films of Prague companies-- they thrash around waving hands and legs, they rush forward and get ahead of the speed of the pictures, so that in the end the entire film is nothing but a smudged photograph.

Today it is already possible to differentiate qualitatively

between the most frequent representatives of film stories. Film needs new actor types: Extremely expressive faces and figures. There are two popular types among the top film artists. The first type is popular for its factual, actor substance, for genuine art of acting: Asta Nielsen, skinny and ugly, but perfectly tiresome in mime and gestures, however, extremely simple; M. Prinz, a minor-actor for young roles, of the same quality; Bumry, ^athe fat man, but an incomparable comic with mimics as plastic as possible. I still remember a little blonde, from American films, who was good on horseback and whose face ^{sweet} played ^{part} everything, from ^athe ~~clean~~ girlish and lovelorn ~~traits of~~ a Shakespeare's Juliet to the ~~expression of~~ an energetic and collected young American woman. Other favorites keep above the stream either by their willingness to sacrifice themselves by putting up with beatings, falls and foolishness, or by their elegance through which they represent the world of the upper crust to the cinematographic public. That is, through non-actor, purely external characteristics. Otherwise, I am unable to explain interest in such bad actors as Max Linder, Waldemar Psylander or H. Porden.

Writer's Role

The writer's role is really only one: to create the foundation for direction. This means that the writer lends the cinematograph his spiritual property, though untreated in

literary manner, because its verbal expression never takes place. The writer supplies the director with his configuration or fantasy, in short, with his idea. Even in those cases where the director is dealing with already completed works (such as, for example, "Les miserables," "Quo vadis," "Human Tragedy," etc.) he does not extract from them their literary contents, but draws only on their ^{plots} ~~fabulated~~, invented substrata, that is, anecdotes. ~~From such a substratum~~ the cinema does not even like contents produced by fantasy, that is to say, the most literary ones. And since it is possible to find a configuration or an accidental idea in any citizen, it is not even necessary to turn to a writer. Thus there is no relationship between the cinema and the writer. The writer can bring an accidental idea to fruition, but it is not his duty to appropriate or take command of this luminous stage. A somewhat greater contents of plays is supplied only by the director's selection from the material which he obtained from people who do not have to be differentiated by profession. In the fall Kurt Pinthus will publish in Leipzig a book of such foundations for film. It is quite irrelevant that only writers contributed to it. I doubt that film can give a writer any inner satisfaction, at most it can offer a feeling of activity, occupation, pleasure from a toy, something like a common pleasure one feels when a joke went off well at a coffee-house table.

Somebody might object that there is a possibility for

cinematograph to have a style and therefore a possible branch of artistic activity in the future. Maybe. Probably. And maybe the opposite. It is possible that cinema shall remain interesting only as long as its novelty irritates, that for the next generation it will lose its attraction. And what about the style? Well, yes, but that would be a matter for some new pontineurs whose interest is quite different from the literary or graphic. So far, there is really no work for a writer, it is all the director's affair. Cinema is the photography of direction. The writer can only contribute by writing the director's book. But that does not reach the stage proper.

Spectator

In art, spectator, reader, listener is a problematical object. For any creative spirit he is of complete indifference. However, in an invention like the cinema, the spectator has an important role because cinema is a priori something democratic, popular, directly created for a wide public. Not only from the financial viewpoint but also in its core essence. What is the fundamental difference between theater (let us be clear): between good theatre and cinema (with a few changes we could also talk about variety, circus, sports spectacles and such)? Relative to the spectator the theater is superior. In order for somebody to be a good theatrical audience, a certain, at times even considerable

talent is needed. Similarly, at the opera or a concert the audience must have either a natural or further cultivated musical talent. A good spectator (audience) is a passive artist, sometimes even considerably advanced. Cinema, however, picture, is of the same order as the visitor. Cinema is a photograph of reality, it is a report about something seen - figuratively by the camera lens, but it could have been also witnessed by human eyes. The film is therefore an event and the spectators are pedestrians in the street who have stopped to look. Just as they would stop on the street to look at something interesting, maybe at a fallen horse, or because down on the Vltava River they are cutting and loading ice. Thus the relation between the picture and the spectator is the simplest one imaginable. Of course, in the film more can be seen, events much less frequent, like an automobile accident, a family quarrel, reckless gambling, safe robbery, murder, and ~~all that in a one with~~ everyday life events--family lunch, lovers' engagement, comings and goings, work, etc. And so spectators observe, nothing else.

Do they also think? It is possible, ^{short} at least a spectator will develop in his mind some of previous events, or some small, left out interplays, but these are really given by the whole. But, in general, a picture does not offer much food for thought, its changing of images is quite fast, but at most probably reaching the speed equal to the thinking ability of the average

visitor. The images thus proceed simultaneously, at the same tempo as the realization, and require only visual perception and attention.

Does the spectator feel something? - That belongs in the last chapter.

Spiritual Results

The greatness of any act can be measured only by the greatness of the ^{feelings} ~~sentiments~~ it provokes. Because A fact, an act, is something objective and may become measurable and valuable only relative to a subject. I have said that cinema is a depiction of facts, events. And not spiritual, but material facts, or at very least real facts. We can find out what sentiments the cinema is evoking in two ways. One, self-inspection, by observing oneself, and the other, by logical consideration of the train of thought in the minds of other spectators. They are sometimes so kind that they communicate quite loud behind you what their sentiments are. Actually I have had only once in my life a strong feeling in the cinema: somewhere in Rome, where I was wandering for several weeks between the stones of architecture and sculptures, I saw in a picture a part of the Rhine, small quiet turns and leafy woods with grass and bushes. And such a tremendous longing seized me to laze on the banks of the Sazava River, a terrible homesickness for the forests and quiet nature. At other times a

quietly powerful and pleasant feeling comes over me when I see some place which I know and where I liked to stay just as if I saw a dear, well-known face.

In the simple spectator probably the strongest and mostly predominant feeling must be one of compassion when disaster strikes and sadness invades the persons on the screen. That feeling can be quite naturally considerable because what the spectator sees is a photograph, which does not lie, so the spectator is directly affected by the photographed reality.

After that, suspense, terror, etc., are quite frequent, feelings provoked by sensations, perhaps feelings which are most attractive for the spectator since they excite him most agreeably. More scarce is malicious pleasure, due to the damage suffered by funny people (cuckolded husbands and such). Also a feeling of moral superiority, most frequent among women. And pride in the physical and moral abilities of his brother-fellowman, unfurled before the spectator on the white projection surface.

Then there is yet another thing which makes the cinema--and it alone is quite sufficient--very valuable. For example, a girl will see in the film the execution of simple household chores--sometimes watering of flowers on the windowsill, caring for a canary, at other times laying the table, etc. For a simple girl this means an elevation of her simple life into this higher world she sees in the film. It means that some value is

accorded to work she has been been doing until now without any consciousness. Let us also keep in mind what the act of photography means for a simple person: he is accustomed to being photographed only on very special occasions--when he is joining the Army, when he is getting married, and a girl when she goes to confirmation, or at their children's weddings. On such occasions it feels elevated, that is why in the photographs people have such rigid, but Sunday faces and figures. And now he sees all those simple things, his daily work, matters which he does not consider as important as some great life occasions also being photographed, and thus ceremoniously translated. He therefore pays attention to them, now he sees a piece of himself, he is analyzing and objectifying himself, albeit only physically, but he does recognize himself and that is a great multiplication of his life consciousness. This result is hardly noticeable, and I would have also missed it had not a young girl, who goes only to second places in the biographs, said to me: "Now I like to wash, clean and do the laundry much more since I see how pretty it looks in the cinema."