

lem is posed, there is a serious psychological error: it is in the nature of men and workers, even the revolutionary worker, to love the machine and detest only their fellow men. The beginning of *Metropolis* is a prodigious spectacle, but the conception of this barbarous universe comes from the mind of a false artist, who refuses to understand what he is seeing, and concludes that industry is to be damned simply because it makes too much noise.

Once again, the beginning images are quite lovely and almost cause us to forget the scenario's ineptitude, but I find it odd that Fritz Lang has put so much genius into producing the migraine fantasy of a four-year-old.

I also believe that spectators are realizing how much this work seeks to overwhelm them rather than to please them, which is curtailing their admiration. It was lovely, yes, but to what end? . . .

JEAN PRÉVOST (1901–1944) was a brilliant essayist and populist novelist who occasionally wrote articles on the cinema as well as film reviews in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, *La Nouvelle Revue française*, and *Le Crapouillot*, in the later 1920s.

<sup>1</sup> The scenario for *Metropolis* was written by Thea Von Harbou and Fritz Lang.

<sup>2</sup> The cinematography in *Metropolis* was done by Karl Freund and Günther Rittau.

<sup>3</sup> The special effects for *Metropolis* were done by Eugen Schüfftan.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923).

<sup>5</sup> The cast of *Metropolis* included Rudolf Klein-Rogge (Rotwang), Alfred Abel (Frederesen), Gustav Fröhlich (Freder), and Brigitte Helm (Maria).

## ANTONIN ARTAUD, "Cinema and Reality"

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**T**WO PATHS SEEM to be open to the cinema right now, neither of which, undoubtedly, is the right one.

On the one hand there is pure or absolute cinema, and on the other there is that kind of venial hybrid art which insists on translating into more or less suitable images psychological situations that would be perfectly at home on the stage or in the pages of a book but not on the screen, since they are merely the reflection of a world that depends on another source for its raw material and its meaning.

It is clear that everything we have seen up to now that passes for abstract or pure cinema is very far from meeting what seems to be one of the essential requirements of cinema. For although the mind of man may be able to conceive and accept abstraction, no one can respond to purely geometric lines which possess no significative value in themselves and which are not related to any sensation that the eye of the screen can recognize or classify.

No matter how deeply we dig into the mind, we find at the bottom of every emotion, even an intellectual one, an affective sensation of a nervous order. This sensation involves the recognition, perhaps on an elementary level, but at least on a tangible one, of something substantial, of a certain vibration that always recalls states, either known or imagined, that are clothed in one of the myriad forms of real or imagined nature. Thus the meaning of pure cinema would lie in the re-creation of a certain number of forms of this kind, it would lie in a movement and follow a rhythm which is the specific contribution of this art.

Between a purely linear visual abstraction (and the play of light and shadow is similar to the play of lines) and the fundamentally psychological film which relates the development of a story that may or may not be dramatic, there is room for an attempt at true cinema, of whose substance or meaning nothing in the films that have been presented to date gives any suggestion.

In heavily plotted films, all the emotion and all the humor depend solely on the text, to the exclusion of the images; with a few rare exceptions, all the thought in a film is in the subtitles [intertitles], and even in films without subtitles the emotion is verbal, it requires the clarification or support of words, for the situations, the images, the actions all turn on a clear meaning. We have yet to achieve a film with purely visual situations whose drama would come from a shock designed for the eyes, a shock drawn, so to speak, from the very substance of our vision and not from psychological circumlocutions of a discursive nature which are merely the visual equivalent of a text. It is not a question of finding in visual language an equivalent for written language, of which the visual language would merely be a bad translation, but rather of revealing the very essence of language and of carrying the action onto a level where all translation would be unnecessary and where this action would operate almost intuitively on the brain.

In the screenplay [of *La Coquille et le clergyman*] that follows, I have tried to carry out this idea of a visual cinema in which even psychology is engulfed by actions. No doubt this screenplay does not achieve the absolute image of all that can be done in this direction; but at least it points the way. Not that the cinema must renounce all human psychology: that is not its principle—on the contrary—but it must give psychology a form that is much more vital and active, and without those connections that try to reveal the motives for our actions in an absolutely stupid light instead of spreading them before us in their original and profound barbarity.

This screenplay is not the re-creation of a dream and should not be considered as such. I shall not attempt to excuse its apparent incoherence by the facile subterfuge of dreams. Dreams have more than their logic. They have their life, in which there appears an intelligent and somber truth.

This screenplay seeks the somber truth of the mind in images which have issued solely from themselves and which do not derive their meaning from the situation in which they develop, but from a kind of powerful inner necessity that casts them in a light of inescapable clarity.

The human skin of things, the epidermis of reality: this is the primary raw material of cinema. Cinema exalts matter and reveals it to us in its profound spirituality, in its relations with the spirit from which it has emerged. Images are born, are derived from one another purely as images, impose an objective synthesis more penetrating than any abstraction, create worlds which ask nothing of anyone or anything. But out of this pure play of appearances, out of this so to speak transubstantiation of elements is born an inorganic language that moves the mind by osmosis and without any kind of transposition in words. And because it works with matter itself, cinema creates situations that arise from the mere collision of objects, forms, repulsions, attractions. It does not detach itself from life but rediscovers the original order of things. The films that are most successful in this sense are those dominated by a certain kind of humor, like the early Buster Keatons or the less human Chaplins. A cinema which is studded with dreams, and which gives you the physical sensation of pure life, finds its triumph in the most excessive sort of humor. A certain excitement of objects, forms, and expressions can only be translated into the convulsions and surprises of a reality that seems to destroy itself with an irony in which you can hear a scream from the extremities of the mind.

ANTONIN ARTAUD (1896–1948) was an actor in Charles Dullin's *Atelier Théâtre* as well as a poet, playwright, and dramatic theorist. He was a member of the Surrealist group from 1925 to 1927 and again briefly in 1928, around the time of the release of *La Coquille et le clergyman*. Artaud performed in a number of important late 1920s French films—for instance, Gance's *Napoléon* (1927), Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (1928), Poiriers's *Verdun, vision d'histoire* (1928), and L'Herbier's *L'Argent* (1929).

## JEAN EPSTEIN, "Art of Incidence"

Translated by Tom Milne in *Afterimage* 10 (Autumn 1981), 9–16. Reprinted by permission. The original French text first appeared as "Art d'événement," *Comœdia* (18 November 1927), 4.

**I**GNORING three analogous assignations made with or by three different women, a young man, happy to be on holiday as it were, alone and free, takes his sports car out of the garage and speeds away . . . until he smashes himself up on the road to Deauville. With a little stab of its beak between his eyes, a swallow flying even faster than the speeding car had killed this refugee from love.

The fifteen pages of Paul Morand's short story, "*La Glace à trois faces*,"