

Mourn the death of the silent film? It is not a question of this, since all the technical and artistic discoveries of the silent film remain as acquisitions. Cinematographic movement, visual rhythm, the coordination of lenses, and optical interpretation—all remain as acquisitions of the sound film. To cinematic rhythm, which is still essential, have been added and blended the innumerable rhythms of the sounds of music and speech; infinite conjugations which are making of the sound cinema a complete mode of expression of an unlimited richness, a spectacle with more numerous possibilities than silent cinema, theater, and music hall combined.

THE DRAMA and the novel acquire, by the addition of sound and the word, the possibility of expressing all the nuances, all the conflicts, all the sentiments impossible to translate for the silent film: the possibility of painting characters, of studying characters, without falling into the pastiche of theater.

A cinematographic sound drama is, above all, cinema and not photographed theater; the fundamental difference can be expressed thusly:

*In the theater, the situation is created by words; in the cinema, the words should arise from the situation.*

That is to say, cinema does not approximate theater from the simple fact that the word has been added; it remains as distant from it as previously, and remains an art that is different, widened, liberated.

NEARLY six months before this article appeared, and after a dozen years of filmmaking in France, culminating in *Thérèse Raquin* (1928) and *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* (1929), JACQUES FEYDER (1885–1948) had gone to the United States to direct Greta Garbo in MGM's *The Kiss* (1929). He remained there, directing French, German, and English-language films for MGM until 1933, when he returned to France to make *Le Grand Jeu* (1934).

## RENÉ CLAIR, "Talkie versus Talkie"

From "Le Parlant contre le parlant," *Pour Vous*, 57 (19 December 1929), 7.

THE CINEMA must remain visual at all costs: the advent of theatrical dialogue in the cinema will irreparably destroy everything I had hoped for it. The talkies have led to a terrible misunderstanding for which certain journalists and dramatic authors are responsible. They are saying: finally, the reign of the director is coming to an end because he will need collaborators who will want their own autonomy. For myself, as a director, I remain the author of all my films, whether they be talking or silent: it is I who will do the speaking just as I do the acting. It's no exaggeration to assert that the director's importance will now become even greater, will

double, in fact. The talking cinema has to separate itself from the theater even more than the silent cinema had to; listen, I am convinced that the dramatic author—if he knows his craft and loves it—is the person who will most quickly misjudge the talkies. In the theater, what is seen exists only to serve what the actors say, their words; in the talking cinema, it's the opposite: the word gains its power only in relation to the image. We have to avoid what could be a great catastrophe for the talking cinema: its incapacity to reach the level of poetry (the animated film does: there sound recording has permitted the creation of a new formula which constitutes one of the real surprises of today's cinema).

I am very anxious to see what the talkies will bring. Insofar as I'm a craftsman, if I dare say so: I'm enthusiastic. I want to try out what I believe to be a workable formula: we have to cut our losses, but, in using all the new relations between image and sound (isn't language organized sound?), we ought not, for anything, lose the achievements of the silent film. We mustn't forget that up until now nothing that contributed the slightest thing to the cinema's grandeur ever spoke. I distinguish three kinds of scenes in my film [*Sous les toits de Paris*, 1930]: a purely visual scene in which sound plays the role of orchestral accompaniment; another in which the images are made comprehensible by means of [natural] sound; and a third in which speech is used either to produce a special effect or else to explain the action. No literature. I mean, now more than ever before, that politics, art, theater, etc., have nothing to do with cinema: I mean an *integral cinema*—for here the word is reduced to its strictly utilitarian function. To my mind, this is the path to take. . . . I am terribly individualistic, and I am obstinate enough to think that everything positive comes from individualism; the Russians give proof of that, despite what they say: we recognize Pudovkin and Eisenstein from among a hundred others. Well, today we are witnessing an offensive against individualism; in the cinema, see how everything is more and more conditioned by the economy. At the same time, the spectacle, theater, circus, and music hall are declining in every country. There's no more theater in America: plays, if they are any good at all, are only turned into films. This decline of the theater, is it there that we must search for the origins and justification of the talking film's existence? Whatever, let's not forget—no literature, ever—and if the director puts on the manner of a boor, mark my words, let him be a boor but have a good eye.

RENÉ CLAIR (1899–1981) was one of the first major French filmmakers successfully to make the transition from silent to sound films. Working consistently at the Paris studios of Films Sonores Tobis, he turned out *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930), *Le Million* (1931), *A Nous la liberté* (1931), and *Quatorze Juillet* (1932).