

one person; in the unforgettable images of this spare and pure story we can discern the effort of an entire nation.

Anyone who is sincere and still capable of emotion will feel that the film has *something* other than what one usually sees. I think one critic said that one can't be mistaken: *The Road to Life* reveals the pulse of an entire society, taken as a whole at a specific historical moment. Do you understand now why Ekk's film, even to a greater extent than the other works of the young Soviet cinema—including the allegorical *General Line* [Eisenstein, 1929]—is a *testimony*, and one of the rare *documents* worthy of survival?

Kuble Wampe: the unemployed masses' struggle for life in Germany. *The Road to Life*: the forward march of an entire people. In these films both the anxiety and the pride of the masses are given expression. But how many more revelations could we have through our "window"! What spectacle would become visible if we turned the lens toward Asia? What would the Hindu masses tell us? What could we learn from the American farmer, lost among the fruits of his land accumulated in heaps and no longer marketable?

Finally, what would we ourselves express, moved by so many fears and hopes? Who will evoke for us the true face of France in 1932?

MARCEL CARNÉ (1909—) was a journalist, scriptwriter (for advertising films), assistant cameraman—on Feyder's *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* (1929) and Oswald's *Cagliostro* (1929)—and assistant director—on Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930) and Feyder's *Le Grand Jeu* (1934). At the time, Carné had made one short documentary film, *Nogent, Eldorado du dimanche* (1930).

¹ *Kuble Wampe* was written by Bertolt Brecht (1898–1952) and Ernst Ottwald (1901–1943), directed by Slatan Dudow (1903–1963), and scored by Hans Eisler (1898–1962). For further information, see the section devoted to the film in *Screen 15* (Summer 1974), 41–73.

² *Road to Life*, according to Jay Leyda, was probably the first Soviet film conceived and written as a sound film. It was based on the GPU Labor Commune for "wild children" at Lyubesets and starred Nikolai Batalov as the teacher-hero as well as many boys who actually had graduated from such labor communes. This was Nikolai Ekk's one critically acclaimed film; otherwise he was known primarily for directing the first Soviet color film and first Soviet Shakespeare film.

LÉON MOUSSINAC, "The Condition of International Cinema"

From "Etat du cinéma international" [1933], *L'Age ingrat du cinéma* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1967), 331–54.

THE CONSEQUENCES of the general economic crisis have come to be added to the permanent crisis of the cinema, and appear in different

guises. In general, it doesn't seem that we have attached sufficient importance to these.

The death of the avant-garde, for example.

We have designated as avant-garde the effort to bring about, on the one hand, the production of experimental films and, on the other, the organization of groups whose purpose was to exhibit these works and thus struggle, to a certain degree, against the capitalistic mentality. The cinemas themselves also took part in this.

Such manifestations, which were often reduced to the presentation of laboratory experiments, have hardly been useless to the development of cinematic technique, nor any less so to the fundamental improvements in film as a means of expression. A good number of methods which are usefully employed today by every director were first tested in avant-garde films. This independent activity stimulated counteractions that were absolutely necessary against routines and stereotypes—yes, they existed even then—through discussions among technicians or critics; and, moreover, it provided all those who truly considered the cinema as an original mode of expression with a means of comparison and study, a complement of indisputable information which was useful in education.

Although anarchic as a movement—lacking a theoretical base and simply curious about any new undertaking—the so-called avant-garde cinema was the only organization which showed any interest in the development of the Soviet film and which had the means (because a bourgeois movement doesn't arouse the suspicions of the police) to screen the principal works of Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Dovjenco, and Dziga Vertov, for example.¹ And the ciné-clubs, consequently, allowed many debuting *cinéastes* to attract the necessary financial assistance for the production of their projects.

One could say all that now belongs to the past, that is, to the first period of cinematic creation: that of the "silent" film. The manifestations of the avant-garde, *insofar as they discovered new personalities [or auteurs]* (I'm not saying insofar as they were a means of education, *initiation*, or propaganda), for all practical purposes have been suspended: given the current technical and financial crisis, they could be resumed only in completely different conditions and only if a new equipment base were established, which would considerably reduce the costs of setting up and projecting a sound film or talkie.

This, then, is an exclusively economic phenomenon.

The production of a sound film "experiment," however modest, represents such an investment of capital that it has become the monopoly of the big companies. Exhibition in a specialized cinema, even supposing the film is a hit, simply would not permit the amortization of the invested money. Patronage? We have had several rare examples. Undoubtedly also the last.

And the films produced under these conditions either find no mercy with the censors (see Buñuel's *L'Age d'or*) or else search in vain for a cinema which will accept them for exhibition.² There are such things as contracts. The cinema *circuits* are in charge.

Thus, for having envisaged the problem only from the aesthetic perspective, for having sought to ignore the economic laws which controlled it, the avant-garde is dead.

There is only one source of power strong enough at its *base*, one revolutionary organism, which might be able to resume and develop such an experimental effort, methodically, because the interests of the Revolution would find it advantageous.³

Certainly, the bourgeois state sometimes speaks of creating a scientific laboratory for the cinema, a sort of studio standard, because it has understood that the cinema can be an admirable class weapon; but this project is opposed by the interests of the industrialists who only see in it the threat of competition, an intolerable "tyranny" as they put it.⁴ That's blackmail, obviously, which allows them to obtain decreases in duties and taxes, and even subsidies, on the basis of certain exchange values—that is, of bourgeois propaganda: from the police, religion, the military, and others.

And then, bourgeois democracy has other "moral" and budgetary preoccupations: it possesses neither the will nor the money that would be necessary to undertake such an enterprise; it could only be done, as they are beginning to realize, as a propaganda factory comparable to the factories for toxic gases and war material.

In the present period of transition—the period of the sound film or talkie—we cannot envision the possible organization—on the technical level, of course—of an undertaking that would correspond to what had been operating—whether good or bad, at least *it had been operating*—in the period of the silent film: the so-called "avant-garde" cinema.

I MUST ALSO speak of another consequence of the capitalistic concentration, particularly in the course of the last decade.

Before the existence of the great trusts, several years ago, there were organizations created concurrently with a number of cinemas which had "independent" owners (that is, they were still free to choose their own programs), small companies that endeavored to hire the more interesting directors by offering them certain facilities of production for subjects that were dear to them. It even happened, often enough, that the successful *cinéastes* found the necessary financial assistance directly, given certain more or less serious concessions—and that they sometimes established their own companies. In that way, one could say that several artists enjoyed a relative degree of freedom of action (the commercial conditions being always as-

sumed). But it's thanks to such an economic situation that the initial *cinéastes* were able to come forward before the public: Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc, to cite only the French pioneers who today are largely out of date.⁵

Being a *cinéaste* then still meant, to a certain degree, being in a profession. Today, it is no more than a business career. All the screen artists have become ordinary salaried employees. As specialized technicians, they are paid for a job decided on in advance: in its planning character, and spirit. It's a "take it or leave it" proposition. Those who wish to live as professionals, to improve their evolving technical skills, and to renew themselves constantly have been condemned to this forced labor. The youngest especially. Nevertheless, the situation of the oldest is scarcely any better.

In order, at least provisionally, to resolve its contradictions, capitalism has gradually destroyed the relative independence of cinema artists. One must submit or refuse, accept the job or change professions. The exceptional situation which still exists today for some in the world—such as King Vidor, Stroheim, Pabst, René Clair—will not last much longer. It forces *cinéastes* into a continual exercise of tightrope walking. . . .

These past few years have been marked by a debilitating increase in monymaking practices. And here, as always, the press, both the daily press and the specialized press, plays its role. Certain large newspapers, such as *L'Intransigeant*, *Le Journal*, and *Le Petit Parisien*, have *their own* cinemas. *L'Intransigeant* has the Miracle cinema where it recently screened the latest film of René Clair, *14 Juillet* [1933]; and it publishes a big illustrated weekly, *Pour Vous*, which is chauvinistic, given over totally to publicity, and consecrated almost exclusively to cinema stars. *Le Journal* has opened a specialized cinema for the screening of "newsreels." *Le Petit Parisien* possesses a large cinema on the Champs-Élysées and also publishes an illustrated weekly on the cinema: *Ciné-Miroir*.

All the efforts of the threatened film industry are actually given over to stars, theater stars who, thanks to the talkie, are becoming cinema stars. More and more, the industry is tending to merge the two, for reasons of economy as well, because a yearly contract allows a company to exploit an artist on *both* the stage and the screen. From this comes the recent interest that the cinema masters have taken in the difficult situation of certain Paris theaters, which they intend to acquire, not in order to transform them into cinemas as before, but to use their stars there for publicity purposes, with the help of revues specially written to make the most of them.

It was probably inevitable that the interference of the state in the film industry would increase. The bankruptcy of Gaumont, which led to the failure of a great French bank, La Banque Nationale de Crédit (200 million francs), obliged the government for once to intervene to avoid a scandal.⁶

On the other hand, for the purposes of a colonial and chauvinistic propaganda, the state has granted subsidies to certain enterprises and strengthened its censorship.

This censorship is exercised particularly with regard to Soviet films, of course. Recently, after the private presentation of Yutkevich's *Golden Mountains* [1931], the police seized the copy of the film. *Enthusiasm* [1931] has been shown only once since the visit of Dziga Vertov to Paris [in 1929]. And if one exempts Ekk's *Road To Life* [1931], authorized without any other excisions than that of the "Internationale" from the musical soundtrack of the film, the Soviet films projected publicly over the last few years have been completely deformed and mutilated.

This has been the case of *The General Line* [1929] projected under the title of *La Lutte pour la terre* and Ermiler's *Fragment of an Empire* [1929] projected under the title of *L'Homme qui a perdu la mémoire*; Trauberg's *Blue Express* [1929] became *Le Train Mongol*; *Cain et Artem* became first *Le Géant rouge* and then *Haim, le juif!* This manner of exhibiting Soviet films has created a huge scandal in Paris. The mutilations of *Blue Express* were especially odious. *L'Humanité* has conducted a vigorous campaign against such practices, and working-class spectators have often demonstrated in the cinemas through speeches or tracts on the subject.

Le Cercle de la Russie neuve has been able to organize a good number of screenings of *Turksib* [1929], *Igdenbu*, *Le Grand Chasseur*, and *Holiday of Saint Jorgen* [1930].⁷

As a consequence of all this, bourgeois ideology has increasingly sought the protection of French films. Thus, during the past few years more than ever before, the cinema has been celebrating individualism, the division of labor, a return to the earth, naturism, sport, and other means of domination, which it is turning into profits; thus, the representation of the various superstructures of bourgeois society—principally having to do with religion, science, and the morality of the state, with its police, its justices, its family, and its patriotism—have been more marked than ever in recent films. It's even reached the point where they are directly attacking the workers and communism, as in *David Golder* [Duvivier, 1930] and *Cognasse* [Mercanton, 1931].

The High Mass of Cinema, organized each year at the Church of the Madeleine by the Catholic committee on the cinema, is turning out a considerable volume of propaganda; all the official representatives of the cinema and the government participate in this ceremony to which the church gives a solemn character through the presence of its highest prelates. The Catholic cinema produces a huge number of films with the collaboration of the industry, which finds it profitable to do so. It publishes its weekly *Chosir*, where the criticism of the week's films is concerned with informing fami-

lies about what is *good* and what is *bad*. Catholic patronage chiefly uses 16mm films, whose network of distribution is organized to perfection.⁸

The fascist film, to call it by its proper name, has yet to make its appearance on French screens, but it will not be long in coming. Already we are finding singular encouragement in the journal, *La Critique cinématographique*, where several weeks ago we could read this: “The French cinema, whose effect on the masses is considerable, soon ought to agree with . . . what everyone has always known full well, that in the face of neighboring dictatorships France can only be saved through a dictatorship . . . that it should begin to show us Hitler and Mussolini on our screens, especially in the newsreels; it’s through examples that we best have an effect on the spirit of the people.”

Of course, it has been possible these last few years to see several nonconformist films, but they are becoming more and more rare. American films: *Underworld* [1927], *The Crowd* [1928], Chaplin’s *City Lights* [1931], the films of Stroheim such as *The Wedding March* [1928]; Trivas’s *No Man’s Land* [1931], Pabst’s *Kameradschaft* [1931], Dudov and Brecht’s *Kuhle Wampe* [1932], René Clair’s *A Nous la liberté* [1931], Buñuel’s *L’Age d’or* [1930], Jean Vigo and Boris Kaufmann’s *A Propos de Nice* [1930], the films of Joris Ivens, Jean Lods, and Prévert—all these have of course achieved little success because of the conformism of the mass of already intoxicated spectators, who still cannot conceive readily enough that an ideology other than the capitalist ideology can exist. . . .

LÉON MOUSSINAC (1890–1964) was an early friend of Louis Delluc, an ardent ciné-club organizer, and the most important Marxist film critic (*L’Humanité*, *Le Crapouillot*, *Mercur de France*) of the previous decade. Besides hundreds of articles and essays, he published three books on film: *Naissance du cinéma* (1925), *Le Cinéma soviétique* (1928), and *Panoramique du cinéma* (1929). In the 1930s, Moussinac devoted his writing and organizing skills more exclusively to the French Communist Party. This is his last major piece on the cinema.

¹ Here Moussinac distinguishes between the Ciné-Club de France, for example, which he himself helped found in 1924, and the Amis du Spartacus, the only overtly leftist ciné-club to appear in Paris, which was disbanded by the police in 1928, just six months after its founding by Moussinac and his French Communist Party colleagues.

² Buñuel’s *L’Age d’or* and Cocteau’s *Le Sang d’un poète* were both produced under the patronage of the Vicomte Noailles.

³ An oblique reference to the French Communist Party, which everyone in Moussinac’s audience would have assumed.

⁴ A reference to the growing government concern over the precarious state of the French film industry, which would culminate in a series of inquiries, reports, and recommendations between 1935 and 1939.

⁵ All five of these filmmakers at one time or another set up their own film companies to produce films—L’Herbier’s Cinégraphic (1922–1926) was probably the most ambitious. But Moussinac probably is also referring to companies such as the Société Générale des Films, which produced Gance’s *Napoléon* (1927), Volkoff’s *Casanova* (1927), Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928), and Epstein’s *Finis terrae* (1929).

⁶ The bankruptcy and reorganization of Gaumont or GFFA was just one of several scandals that rocked the French film industry as it finally felt the full effects of the Depression in 1933–1934. Another was the arrest and imprisonment of Bernard Natan on charges of fraud and the consequent near collapse of the Pathé-Natan company in 1934.

⁷ Le Cercle de la Russie neuve might have been a ciné-club that Moussinac directed under the auspices of the French Communist Party in the early 1930s.

⁸ This paragraph constitutes one of the few references in the early 1930s to the extensive network of Catholic film production, distribution, exhibition, and criticism that had continued to develop in France since the early decades of the century.

LE CORBUSIER, “Spirit of Truth”

From “Esprit de vérité,” *Mouvement*, 1 (June 1933), 10–13.

SPIRIT of truth!

Here, too, and fundamentally. In the cinema: spirit of truth.

I have claimed it insistently for architecture; and, in 1924, at the time of the preparations for the International Exposition of Decorative Arts, I intimated clearly by that insistence that decorative art had no right to exist—at least as the distressingly encumbered, bloated facade that it had become.

The splendor and drama of life emerges from the truth; and 90 percent of the cinema’s production is delusion. It simply exploits a remarkable technical advantage: the elimination of transitions, the easy possibility of suppressing “dead spaces.” Thus, it soothes us with images, sometimes engaging ones. And we wait patiently, we wait.

We await the truth.

Assuredly, everything is architecture, that is, ordered or arranged according to proportions and the selection of proportions: *intensity*. But intensity is possible only if the objects considered are precise, exact, sharply angled (a fogbank cannot very well be considered as a precise event).

Therefore, it’s necessary to *conceive* and then to *see*. It’s necessary to have the *notion* of vision. For, to seek out men who see is to test the experiment of Diogenes.¹

The theater and theater people who tell stories have led the cinema into perdition. These people who are so full of bombast and grandiloquence have interposed themselves between us and the true *voyeur*: the lens.

Since we have fallen so low, it would be useful, for a time, to put our trust once again in technique itself, in order to return to essential things. To the basic elements. To culminate, consequently, in a recovery of the consciousness of the possibilities of the cinema. And thus to be able to *discover life, in what there is that’s true*, in what it contains that’s so prodigiously intense, varied, multiple.

The base is the apparatus of physics, the lens of the camera—as eye.