

they demand collaborative efforts. In the current state of the cinema, who exactly is the author of a film? The scenario writer? The director? Can one work without the other, and both without a number of third parties? What would the set designer of *Caligari* say about that?

It would be a great advance for the artist to discover a medium in which he could exercise his talent in complete independence, without the meddling of other "personalities."

WE: In several arts, individualism is a necessity. In others, collective efforts are time-tested. Aside from the architect, who works with decorators, and Michelangelo, who is capable of creating Saint Peter's in Rome all by himself (in conception, of course, not in the construction), how many collaborations have there been with grandiose results?

A gothic cathedral wasn't even conceived by a single man, at least not in all its features. A number of artists of diverse talents, conforming to a conception of the ensemble, personally created a part of the work. There was agreement and harmony, above all! There was also that precious quality of the Middle Ages: humanity. The artist lived in the shadows; he worked so as to render a work immortal rather than to immortalize his own name.

Is the cinema an individualistic art? Perhaps . . . But let this individualism be dictated solely by a disinterested aesthetic! Plenty of doctrines would cause the uninitiated to think quite differently if they knew how keenly certain *cinéastes* were gnawed by the desire not to share the delights of fame with anyone.

An individual art? A collective art? Both concepts can work as long as one tries. When one creates, it's the work alone that matters; it's not a question of knowing how one can compose something that's more personal, but how one can compose something that's best. When the two qualities are combined, so much the better! But when an outside contribution can produce an improvement, the artist who refuses it is being criminal toward his work. . . .

### PIERRE PORTE, "Pure Cinema"

From "Le Cinéma pur," *Cinéa-Ciné-pour-tous* 52 (1 January 1926), 12-13.

**A**MONG FOREIGN "intellectuals," most stubbornly persist in considering the cinema merely as an instrument to convey actions, a machine to recite stories. For, seeing it confined within the genre of adventure stories alone, they want to believe it's inept at any other function, incapable of anything resembling speculation.

Certain *cinéastes*—all of them called "avant-garde"—have protested often against such an opinion, widespread even in cinegraphic circles, an

opinion that seeks to reduce the cinema to being no more than the craftsman of a single genre. They have claimed that this new art is capable of conveying something else besides adventures, of expressing as well as conveying, of revealing the expression of intellectual feats, and of bearing witness to the revelation of a transcendent poetry. Thus, in the face of the cinéphobes who persist in speaking badly of it, they attest to the power and richness of their art.

THESE *cinéastes*—and not the least of them—profess that, far from having to limit itself to the role of narrator, the cinema can have another ideal, the same ideal as the other arts, the ideal of elevating the spirit above and beyond the material.

They would like to create a genre in which the cinema, once it was uniquely and completely itself, would evoke in us the same transcendent feelings which poetry or music evokes, but through the harmonic and melodic play of that plastic movement of which it alone is master. And I say, “They would like to create this particular *genre*,” and not “They want to involve the whole cinema in such practices.”

They want to create a cinegraphic genre whose aim will be not only to arouse interest, amuse, or distract but whose end will be to fling us into that aesthetic emotion, so different from distraction and amusement, which—as everyone knows—is purely intellectual and completely disinterested.

They would like to form a genre in which the cinema seeks, not its pretext in a purely material adventure story, but rather its base, above and beyond the material, in the very inspiration of the artist.

They would like to realize a genre in which the cinema would use not just some of its means but each and all of them and in which, once completely autonomous, it would only have recourse to its very own forces.

They share the ideal of creating a cinegraphic genre that will be to the cinema which exists today something like what poetry is to prose in literature.

And they don't want actually to create this cinegraphic poetry so much as to reveal its possibility to the enemies of the cinema. To those who dispute this art or speak badly of it because they consider it purely material, because they imagine it slavishly copies the material, because, seeing it dependent on science, they want to believe it impassive, mechanical—to those, the devoted *cinéastes* bear witness to the existence of a cinema on which all of these petty arguments have no effect.

BUT BETWEEN the current cinegraphic genre which depends on action alone and this genre out of which certain filmmakers tomorrow will realize

a number of poems, what is the precise difference of opinion? If, on the one side, action is everything, is there nothing on the other? A delicate and controversial question.

For myself, the cinema exists above and beyond the plot and even the action—but not everyone agrees with this. So let's engage in discussion.

The cinema exists above and beyond the action—that doesn't mean that it must always, or even sometimes, be deprived of all action. That simply means that its principle source is not in action, that its aesthetic foundation is independent of any plot.

It's this which certain of our "avant-garde" wish to establish when they say that narrative is not the aim of cinema. Their actual concern is to demonstrate that this narrative role is far from the most interesting of those which could fulfill their art. Thus, when Epstein declares: "Generally, the cinema tells stories badly" and "Dramatic action is a mistake," or when he asks, "Why tell stories, tales?" he doesn't mean to claim that the cinema has to abandon narrative entirely, but only to show that there exists for him another field of action, above and beyond any chronicle or fable, in which he can flourish uninhibitedly and offer the boldest and most personal works. Thus, when René Clair says, "Perhaps we have to reach the point of divesting the cinema of all that is cerebral and seek out the direct expression of movement," one must not—as certain people have—misunderstand that the *cinéaste* wants to eliminate all connections with action, but rather that the cinema, by rejecting the anecdote, might form a genre where it would elucidate its genius more freely and marvelously.

Similarly, if literature was confined purely to adventure tales alone, wouldn't you applaud those who revealed that it might have an ideal other than the one which compelled it always to narrate?

Action is no more than a form of veneer to the art of the cinema. It isn't necessary to its very existence. That's why we say that, when they are mixed together, the one combines with the other in an amalgam, an amalgam so coherent that it's difficult to separate the elements, an amalgam so homogeneous that to certain people it can seem a single and quite simple substance.

Such a cinema, once isolated from the matrix in which we always see it incorporated, we call *pure cinema*, not wishing to claim that action can tarnish it but rather noting that, above and beyond the action, we can better contemplate its unique specificity.

The specificity thus manifested has nothing in common with any other among the arts. Its fundamental principle—completely original in aesthetics—is *to express itself through the harmony and melody of plastic movements*.<sup>1</sup>

A general formula that welcomes the narrative cinema—on the condi-

tion obviously that the story be “visual.” A formula that welcomes all experiments called *avant-garde*. A formula that welcomes a cinemagraphic genre where there would be no action and even a genre where emotion would result from the play of masses and colors *in movement* alone.

On the question of a cinema perfectly separated from all contingencies other than the harmony and melody of plastic movement, and thus perfectly pure, it seems that Poiret has just mounted an experiment on his barge *Orgues*, an experiment that seems to me to realize the famous “keyboard of colors.”<sup>2</sup> Rachilde described this effort enthusiastically in *Comœdia*:

A visual symphony stimulated not by sound but by daubs of color and lines on the screen. What nourishment for the imagination there! Clouds, blood-red curves, incisive verticals, subtle mauves, spirals, fugitive suns, madonna blues—all this rhythm of combined colors and coupled light and shadow evoked in our minds fleeting visions: oriental skies, superhuman conflagrations, fabulous moonlight, aurora borealis, morbid twilight. No sooner did a daub take the shape of a woman’s body than it disappeared. All that tortured our hearts, gnawed at our brains, and hollowed us out inside. There’s no story capable of transporting us like that.<sup>3</sup>

Such films or rather films in which, as Epstein says, “nothing happens but so what,” or rather films that would constitute pure visual poems—these are obviously only films of a certain “genre.” No one ever said or could say—unless he was mad—that *all* cinema must commit itself to such a path. Certain people have said, and we say it too, that on this path the cinema has an immense future ahead of it, that here it can explore its intense specificity completely, that here it can produce works which alone can express its genius and which, free of a dependency on plotting, can achieve that same ideal which the cinéphobes deny it.

Is that why, in a recent booklet, H. Fescourt and J. L. Bouquet endeavor to prove that the cinema always has to depend on the anecdote and can only exist by means of action alone?

PIERRE PORTE contributed dozens of theoretical essays to *Cinéa-Ciné-pour-tous* from 1924 to 1927.

<sup>1</sup> By *movement*, I mean not only the movement of the human body—without which the basis of the cinema closely merges with that of dance and music—but *all* forms of movement, in an absolutely general sense, from the slow evolution of a shot to the brusque leap from one shot to another.—AU.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Poiret (1879–1944) was the most influential French fashion designer of the early decades of this century. L’Herbier invited him to design the costumes for *L’Inhumaine* (1924). The “keyboard of colors” reference probably comes from Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907) and his Symbolist novel, *Au Rebour* (1884).

<sup>3</sup> Rachilde was the pseudonym of novelist Marguerite Valette (1862–1953) who published a biography of her close friend, Alfred Jarry, *Alfred Jarry ou le surmâle de lettres*, in 1928, and whose husband was one of the founding editors of *Mercure de France*.

### GERMAINE DULAC, "Aesthetics, Obstacles, Integral *Cinégraphie*"

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To Yvon Delbos,<sup>1</sup> friend of cinema

IS CINEMA an art?

Its burgeoning power that breaks through the still well-established barrier of incomprehension, of prejudice, and of laziness in order to reveal itself in the beauty of a new form, nobly substantiates its claims (to be an art).

Every art bears within itself a personality, an individuality of expression that confers upon it its value and independence. Until now, the cinema was confined to the task, simultaneously servile and splendid, of drawing its life's breath from the other arts, those ancient masters of the human sensibility and spirit. Regarded in this way, it had to abandon its creative possibilities in order to be cast, as demands required, according to traditionalist comprehensions of the past and to lose its character as the seventh art. Now (the cinema) is proceeding resolutely and gradually through adverse elements, occasionally stopping to do battle, and moving to surmount the obstacles in order to appear in the light of its own truth before the eyes of an astonished generation.

If, as we envisage it today, the cinema is merely a surrogate for, or an animated reflection, but only a reflection, of the expressive forms of literature, or of music, sculpture, painting, architecture, and the dance, it is not an art. Now, in its very essence, it is a very great art. Hence the constant and hurried transformations of its aesthetic that attempts, unceasingly and arduously, to free it from the succession of erroneous interpretations of which it is the object, in order finally to reveal its own appropriate inclinations.

The cinema is a young art. While the other arts have had long centuries to evolve and to perfect themselves, the cinema has had only thirty years in which to be born, to grow, and to move beyond its first stammerings to acquire a conscious form of speech capable of making itself understood. Through the forms that we have imposed on it, let us see what form it has, in its turn, little by little attempted to impose on us.

When it appeared, the cinema, a mechanical invention created to capture life's true continuous movement, and also the creator of synthetic