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WALTER RUTTMANN**The Isolated Artist**

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Film comprises negative and positive. In the negative, black is white; in the positive, white is black.

Further, film comprises art and commerce. In art, commerce is anyone's guess; in commerce, art is generally negative. The only positive certainty is that, in the case of art and commerce, it has never been possible to establish the self-evident, mutually dependent relationship between negative and positive that characterizes film technology. "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."¹

It is clear that this relationship between art and commerce, which is adversarial as a matter of principle, is untenable. For both rely on each other. Art prepares the commerce of tomorrow, while commerce feeds on the art of yesterday. The proper solution would be to find a compromise between yesterday and tomorrow geared toward today—because that would be not a compromise but, rather, simple rationality. But who can initiate this rationality?

For commerce, the concept of art exists only as a decorative element—as a means to tax exemptions and as a decoy. And what place does this uncomfortable, incalculable, numerically indeterminate something have in the transactions of an industry that refuses on principle to count on long-term profitability and whose entire structure is dependent on making people devour its products immediately as if by surprise attack? Thus, for them, art comes into consideration only as an occasionally appealing figurehead, and it is useful only in a very diluted, denatured, and adulterated form.

It is conceivable that there could be a reconciliation and balancing of art and commerce with the help of an external power factor: a patron or the state. But patrons exist only in fairy tales or for the promotion of divas, and the state seems—at least in our capitalist countries—to be totally uninterested in this question for the time being.

So only the initiative of art remains. But who will represent the arts for film?

In France, maybe also in Holland and elsewhere, there is the possibility for a coalition, a united front made up of those who want art and find it necessary. They call this the “avant-garde,” have recognized its existence, and reckon with it to a certain extent, because it has proven that there is demand. In these culturally rich countries, there are cinemas that, in spite of resisting dominant trends, are able to continue growing in number.

However, this success that has been achieved elsewhere is not easy for us to imitate in Germany. We do not have a talent for making collective will into something expansively productive. Here, any recognition of a shared impulse automatically leads at best to the establishment of a new regulars’ table, which secures its bylaws and closes itself off, rather than colonizing other areas.

Thus, we can only hope for a personality that is strong enough to risk all compromises without degrading itself, a personality that is elastic enough to weasel its way into the headquarters of the enemy—in order to convince him.

Note

1. Genesis 3:15 (King James Bible).

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HANS RICHTER

Avant-Garde in the Realm of the Possible

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For the time being, the realm of the possible would be “Kulturfilm and feature film.” Whether and to what extent a creative generation can contribute to industry productions depends both on the insight of the industry producing films and on the extent to which its goals correspond to those of the avant-garde.

If the industry realizes that its topics to date have been too limited, that an expansion is necessary (inasmuch as one can even describe the elimination of bad films as an “expansion”), then it will enlist the work of people with the will and qualifications to make avant-garde film.

If the industry notices that certain audiences no longer find any enjoyment in the current profit-driven productions, then it will pay attention to projects no one would have dared pursue up to now (since people made do with the current type of film).

If the industry comes to understand that completely different ways of filming, directing, and acting are still possible, that these elements can lend films more charms than the ones demanded and permitted up to now—then it will promote new forms of filming, directing, and acting.

If the industry senses that repeating the same routine is detrimental (not only to art but also to business), then it will have to seek out more of its employees among those who approach film as an art form in their work.

It is not true that so-called avant-garde artists, if they even exist, harbor utopian goals.

Their artistic program encompasses narrative films and Kulturfilms (no less than slapstick and poetic films). But the depravity and stupidity of contemporary entertainment film, its spiritual aimlessness and social irresponsibility, excludes the avant-garde a priori.

Up to now, the industry has allowed avant-garde artists to embellish normal films through visions, preludes, and impressions, and thus to demonstrate their technical abilities.

It had no use for alternative types of comedy, everyday films, and short films, let alone long narrative films.

But film as a whole remained on the old path.

If the state of film is really as bad as people constantly claim today, then why keep taking the same path that led us here in the first place?

The development of Russian film has shown how important the avant-garde can be for an industry that operates not on economic but on cultural principles.