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**WALTER RUTTMANN**

**Painting with Time**

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The era in which we live is characterized by a peculiar sense of perplexity in artistic matters. A desperate insistence on a long-outdated approach to art coexists with the growing conviction that entire branches of art have lost their effectiveness—indeed, that we Westerners no longer have any use for the arts since they too are organic creatures subject to the laws of death (be it only intermittent deaths).

But neither of these attitudes—neither the reactionary nor the skeptical—can be characterized as an honest confrontation between contemporary man and the intellectual

developments of our time. Both are nothing more than gestures of perplexity vis-à-vis the particular structure underlying the intellectual character of our time.

This specific character derives, in the main, from the “tempo” of our era. Telegraphy, express trains, stenography, photography, high-speed presses, and so on—although not cultural achievements in and of themselves—have resulted in a previously unknown velocity in the transmission of intellectual information. For the individual, this increased speed of knowledge transmission results in a constant inundation with material that can no longer be processed using the old methods.

People seek to remedy the situation by means of association. Historical comparisons, the citations of historical analogies, facilitate and expedite the effort to cope with new phenomena. But the ascertainment and assimilation of these phenomena naturally suffer from this method. What results might be a preoccupation with one’s time but not a “being of one’s time.” For it is evident that individuals cannot achieve an ideal, intimate connection to their time if they attempt to grasp phenomena using the gloves of analogy. But since the overwhelming proliferation occasioned by the specific tempo of our era does not allow us to process individual results directly without associations, and since ascertainment via analogy is insufficient or at best secondary, a completely new approach becomes necessary.

And this approach arises organically from the fact that, under the increased velocity with which individual data are cranked out [gekurbelt], our gaze is drawn away from individual contents toward the total trajectory of the curve formed from the individual points, a phenomenon unfolding *in time*. Thus the object of our observation is no longer the static coexistence of individual points, but temporal development and the constantly transforming physiognomy of a curve.

Here we also find the reasons for our desperate perplexity in relation to the products of visual art. Increasingly pressed toward the observation of temporal phenomena in intellectual matters, the gaze no longer has any use for static, reductive, and timeless schemas in painting. It is no longer possible to experience the action of a painting, reduced to a single moment or symbolized through a “pregnant moment,” as genuine life.<sup>1</sup>

Where is salvation?

We will never find it in the reactionary violation of our intellect, never by forcing the mind into medieval or ancient costumes. We must provide the mind with the nourishment that it demands and that it can digest.

And this nourishment would be a completely new art.

Not a new style or some such thing. Rather, a new means of expression distinct from all known art forms, a completely new sense of life: “painting with time.”

An art for the eyes, which differs from painting because it occurs in time (like music) and because the artistic emphasis does not reside (as in painting) in the reduction of a (real or imaginary) process to a moment, but rather in the temporal development on the formal level. Since this art unfolds in time, one of its most important elements is the temporal rhythm of optical events. For this reason, a completely new type of artist—one that previously existed only as a latent possibility—will emerge, positioned, as it were, midway between painting and music.

The types of optical events depicted will of course depend on the artist’s personality. One can offer only hints and examples of what we will see here.

The technology for displaying the new art is cinematography.

For example, the projection screen might show a chaotic mass of black angular planes moving together in a clumsy and sluggish rhythm. After some time, they are joined by a similarly dark and lumbering wavelike movement, which stands in a formal relation to the angular black forms. The stiffness of the movement and the darkness increase until a certain rigidity is

attained. Then this dark rigidity is torn apart by lightning-like illuminations, repeated several times with increasing intensity and temporal succession, and a starry center of light forms on a certain part of the screen—the wavelike movement from the beginning appears again, but now increasingly illuminated by lively animation in connection to the crescendo of the central light. Round, soft, and bright spots begin to blossom—and glide into the black angular planes from the beginning and finally cover the entire image with a radiant, joyful brightness and dance-like agitation, which slowly transforms into a bright and cheerful calm. At this point one could introduce a dark and menacing crawling movement like a snake, which swells and drives back the brightness, provoking a heated battle between light and dark. White forms moving like galloping horses hurl themselves against the advancing dark masses—there arises a raging and splintering confusion of light and dark elements, until somehow, through the triumphant intensification of light, a balance is reached and the image fades away. This is an example of the infinite possibilities for using light and darkness, stillness and movement, straight and curved forms, delicate and massive shapes, and their countless gradations and combinations.

Naturally, the new art will not appeal to the audiences of today's film theaters. Nonetheless, we can certainly count on a wider audience than the one currently enjoyed by painting, since the activity of this art is much greater than that of painting on account of the fact that something transpires here. In painting, of course, the spectator must do the hard work of reconstructing the intended movement of the depicted object, which itself remains static.

For nearly ten years I have been convinced of the necessity of this art. Only now have I mastered the technical obstacles to its execution, and today I know that this new art will exist and thrive—for it is a life form with firm roots and not a construction.

### Note

1. In *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), Lessing posited that sculpture and painting could represent motion only by depicting “pregnant” or privileged moments. In his *Cinema* books, Gilles Deleuze argued that chronophotography and cinematography transformed the aesthetic paradigm of privileged moments with their introduction of random cuts into time or “any-moments-whatever.”