



You ask for an explanation of my observations about the dangers of the cinematograph from the standpoint of a doctor and a psychologist. Recently, I have worked intensely on this question and carried out an in-depth study of the "cinema," which has become the people's theater of our time. Like every invention, the cinematograph has its own history of development, from its primitive form to its technical perfection. The bodily harms that the cinema still causes us today are in large part connected with technological deficiencies. The blinding and overexertion of the eyes, as well as the strain on the ear from the uncomfortable rattling noise of the projector, have already become far less noticeable in the modern, elegant cinemas of the metropolis, and one hopes that technology will soon solve this problem entirely. The dangers of the cinematographic theater exist, above all, on an *intellectual* level. Many of these dangers are linked to the cinematograph *as such*, inextricable from the representation of more complex forms of movement through living photography; others lie in the content of the presentation and can be avoided with good intentions. Long cinematographic programs cause fatigue and weariness, because the hectic succession of constantly changing images and the stimulation of the eye alone exert an enormous strain on one's attention. Added to this is that pleasurable excitement frequently produced by the content of the films. Exhaustion manifests itself most clearly in children, who have a much slower rate of comprehension than that of adults, who are able to connect what they see in movies to what they already know. Most educational films are boring to children, because children are incapable of the effort necessary to make sharp observations and to mentally process the quickly changing images on the fly. There are physiological reasons for the fact that humorous films and crass situational comedy appeal above all to young people. For these are totally comprehensible, without causing an undue strain on one's attention; they do not require an active grasping of all the details, because they represent incidents that already lie close to the child's circle of thoughts and activities. Mischief is much easier to understand than the presentation of a tobacco harvest or of an iron factory. Owners of cinematographic theaters have long known that crude comic scenes and horror films are the big sellers, not educational films. A glance at film programs bears this out. All "dramas" attempt to bring human thoughts, feelings, and actions into view by means of living pictures. In every higher culture, however, the possibilities for the more sophisticated intellectual expressions are tied to language; psychological characterization without language is only possible in the most limited sense. When the cinematograph wishes to depict intellectual life, it must limit itself, in order to be understood, to the most elemental forms for expressing thoughts: gestures, movements, and facial expressions; it must coarsen and exaggerate. That is one reason why the trivial, the crude, the grotesque, the sentimental, and the horrifying dominate cinematographic "dramas." Another reason is that the large amount of capital concentrated in the cinematographic industry produces entertaining films in only a few places yet distributes them throughout the entire world; these films have to please Australians as well as Americans, southerners as well as people from the North. In order that all types of people from various cultures enjoy these films, they can only employ relatively feeble means of expression to depict equally elementary and uncomplicated aspects of human life. This concession to the taste of the international public finds support in the psychological fact that in the theater, primitives and children alike love strong emotions, sharp contrasts, touching or terrifying moments, silly burlesque scenes, wild eroticism, and fascinating crimes. The drama in cinema shares all of these things with the trash

novel and the detective novel. But the cinematograph, with its temporal concentration of events, has more damaging and nerve-shattering effects. When reading, we can stop as we like, critique the trash novel, and free ourselves from its hold through reflection. With the cinema, it is another story. The rapid succession of images intensifies the pleasurable tension to an unbearable level; there is no time for contemplation and thus no time to compensate psychologically. For children and sensitive people alike, the horrific subject matter severely shakes the nervous system without giving us the means by which to defend our psyches against these attacks. When reading, very few people have a vivid enough imagination to perceive a three-dimensional version of the story, but cinema places everything before our eyes in physical form, and the milieu proves favorable to a deep suggestive power: the dark space, the monotone humming noise, and the power of the images all put the critical faculties to sleep. In this way, the drama's content turns into a fateful suggestion, which has its way with the powerless, capitulated psyche of the common man. Comic films lack true humor; they merely offer crude situation comedies. Beatings, marital disputes, images of helpless and idiotic drunkards, and divorce scenes mocking the betrayed spouse tantalize the audience. Trick scenes, whereby technical artistry lends an apparent reality to fantastic events, are generally creepy and stupid, and seldom tasteful. Athletic demonstrations on film are rarely vivid enough to awaken real interest. The cinema offers horrifying examples of historical and political events from earlier times: the terrors of St. Bartholomew's Eve, the tortures of the Inquisition, and the horrors of Russian justice. Realistic dramas occupy the midpoint of the program: *Die weiße Sklavin* [The White Slave Trade], *Die Vampyr tänzerin* [The Vampire Dancer], *Die Rache des Indianers* [Justice of the Redskin],¹ and so forth. The shameless practice of venturing on people's pleasure with baseness, horror, sentimentality, and sexual excitement is spreading.

Distorted images of suffering, poverty, and sickness foster torturous thoughts about the injustice of the world; they rob us of our attention to the law and to state authority. In Germany the police generally stays out of sexual scandals, but lusty eroticism occupies an increasingly prominent place in society, and the cinema, in which children and adolescents find themselves more and more at home, represents a serious threat in this sense as well. Still more dangerous, in my opinion, are the atrocious, real-life representations of *criminal life*. Even if these crime dramas typically close with a moral ending in which the criminal atones for his crime, it is still a mistake to believe that such performances are therefore harmless. The heroic acts of the bold criminal exert a major influence upon young viewers, one that far outweighs the force of deterrence contained in the moral ending. One cannot judge harshly enough the lack of moral conscience and emotional savagery informing the production and exhibition of these wretched films with their "famous criminals." Indeed, the experiences of the juvenile courts show that the cinema is ruining our youth in ever-greater numbers. With all thinkable horror, the cinema even places images of *suicide* before spectators' eyes. Finally, the danger exists that vivid presentations of horrible stories lead to *sexual aberrations* in people who are especially susceptible to illness.

The idea that the cinematographic presentations are too tasteless to have a deeper effect cannot console us. Nothing would be more mistaken than such an assumption. What appears as insipid and unpleasant to the aesthetically sophisticated taste of educated people, what repulses them as grotesque, can exercise a nerve-shaking influence on children and the uneducated. We neurologists know how often an intense affective experience threatens the nervous health of young people. There can be no doubt that the psychic constitution of an imaginative child, when the latter sits in the dark space of the cinema and follows all the horrors of a film with feverish pulses, is susceptible to a deep and

lasting suggestion. The newspapers notify us of terrifying incidents in which young persons want to imitate in reality the crimes that they see in the cinema.

Let me add a word about *religious* films. Whoever has not experienced them has no idea with what unspeakable abomination cinemas present the passion of Christ. Those divine figures created by Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael, and Dürer, which today can be copied and made available to the public for a reasonable price, are being replaced by the figures of the cinema!

Thus the danger exists that the Lumières' wonderful invention, which enabled us to render the movements and actions of a living being truly and objectively and to record them for those who come after, will be exploited by profit-hungry capitalists for purposes that do serious damage to our people. If the cinematograph itself represents a major technological advance, cinematographic theaters represent a serious danger to taste and propriety. Undeniably, the most reprehensible films have the greatest appeal to the lowest classes of society. But if we share the conviction that the cinema in its current form not only corrupts taste and blurs one's sense of reality but also endangers the healthy thought and feeling of our people, harming the body and soul of the youth, then we must seek out help wherever we can find it. We will not be able to do so without the help of the state. Whoever trades on raw mass instincts always gets his money's worth. With our efforts to enlighten the public through speeches and publications, we will but seldom get hold of those in need of enlightenment. Only the *state* will be able to effect real change. Fortunately, it is increasingly apparent that the state intends to fulfill its responsibility.

Note

1. *The White Slave Trade* (Den hvide Slavehandel) was the title of two different Danish films from 1910, one directed by Alfred Cohn (for Fotorama) and the other by August Blom (for Nordisk), the latter of whom plagiarized the former. Blom also directed the Danish film *The Vampire Dancer* (Vampyrdanserinden, 1912) for Nordisk. Finally, *Justice of the Redskin* (La Justice du peau-rouge, 1908) was a French film distributed by Pathé Frères.