

## EXPRESSION

The artistic average of the film has depreciated alarmingly. The perfection attained by actors, cameramen and composers of musical comment still gives a certain value to cinematographic productions even today; but a good spectacle, fine pictures and pleasing sounds do not of themselves constitute a film.

The film, as an autonomous form of expression, is in a bad way. Little by little the very character of the cinematograph is being forgotten, not only by film producers but also by critics. When Nicola Chiaromonte (*Scenario*, Rome, November 1934) writes that «poetry, musicality and rhythm are general concepts whose application to the film can lead to nothing but empty rhetorical phrases», such an observation could be called just, as far as the silent film was concerned, only in a very deep sense, whereas applied to the talking film of today it is so obvious as to seem trivial.

### WHERE IS CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART TENDING?

Whence does the present decadence arise? The dialogues of the talking film and the increasing mechanization of the productive process are probably the chief causes. L. Moholy-Nagy, in his *Open Letter* (first number of the new Czecho-German review *Ekran*, Brno, Nov. 15, 1934) speaks of the disappearance of the vanguard, an undesired competitor that has been suffocated by the industry. «They wanted to kill art in order to make profits, and instead, the boomerang has flown back and hit the profits». A new power of attraction must therefore be found for the film through a new artistic impulse; is that the idea? But if so, what line is this new art to take?

The resuscitation of the cinema will come about through the documentary, is Joris Ivens's somewhat *pro domo suo dictum* (*Ekran*, No. 1), since «in the documentary the producer is bound to declare himself loyally and openly one with his subject, which fact will help him to find more genuine cinematographic forms. The documentary will point out with all its force a new line for the theatrical film of the future, and we shall thus arrive at an authentic cinematographic dramaturgy.» It is sincerity and truth and not superficial beauty which constitute the enchantment of the film. «The incredible mistake in which the cinema has obstinately persisted thus far», according to Corrado Pavolini (*Scenario*, Rome, Sept. 1934) «is that of pursuing *beauty*, a *beauty* that determined the breaking of every contact and relation of the image with the thing imaged; and this was

done by making up the actor, by tricks of focus, veiling, the play of light and shade and suggestions and *levellings* of every description. A means that seemed to have come into existence for the purpose of reproducing every wrinkle and imperfection in the universe, has practically brought about the enforced disappearance from the face of the earth of all the poor little defects that are dear to us, and with them, every sign of humanity, every idea of suffering and wasting, of the passage of time, of all that is spoilt or lost or becomes corrupt on its slow course to the rubbish heap of time...».

### TALKING FILM

All the same, a documentary fidelity is not enough, even if we take the expression in its most superficial sense. Marcel Pagnol shot interiors and exteriors in his film *Angèle* without once having recourse to actors or scenographer. He improvised his shots in town dwelling and country farms, and for the rest made use of the Provençal country. By this means he ran off — for the first time, as he declared — an uninterrupted succession of shots from an interior to the open air. To do this, however, he had to arrange for a compensation between the light of the sun and artificial light by means of filters (*Le Figaro*, Paris, Oct. 27, 1934).

In spite of all this, however, Marcel Pagnol does not seem to have produced a film that merits the name film. Like the Comédie Française, which tries to transport its repertory straight on to the screen, the French writer of comedies intends to cinematograph the pure theatre and produce a «film without movement». It is thus, with great disdain, that he expresses himself in his review *Cahiers du Film* on the class of people who are too eager to see: «On account of the fact that the film can show everything, the director, the public and the critic expect to see everything. Many dramatists, when they persuade themselves to prepare one of their works for the cinema, allow themselves to be greatly influenced by this ingenuous theory». Pagnol does not, however, but in compensation thinks that the public should *hear* everything. «For three hours by the clock and for a length of 4,500 metres of film, five persons are seated on a bed, a basket and a tree-stump, and talk and talk and talk...» he informs us in number 7 of the *Cinegiornale*, a new fortnightly review which some young Roman journalists are bringing out and which is edited with intelligence. Is it a fact that there really is an attempt to save the theatre by means of the cinematograph? Max Reinhardt will shortly, so we read, film *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Warner Bros., together with Wilhelm Dieterle.

## TRICKS

The film can give us documentary fidelity even in the representation of the impossible and the marvellous. By the aid of its tricks, it shows us, with complete exactitude, the aspect that would be assumed by the impossible, if it were possible.

In the American film, *The Invisible Man*, scenes have been produced by a work of refined precision which are worthy of a more intelligent scenario and a livelier theme. In the death scene, for instance, a skull is to appear on a pillow and little by little become transformed into the head of a living man. In order to do this, a series of plastic applications were made on a skull, making it gradually more and more like the head of the actor until we see his head lying there in flesh and blood, the fading from one stage to the next being made so perfectly that the spectator has the impression of following, as in the case of *Dr. Jekyll*, a single transformation process. The scenes in which the invisible man dresses and undresses, or in which the unwrapping of the bandages round his head discloses nothing but an empty space are even more complicated. In this case, the process of printing several negatives one over the other was used, while the travelling matte prevented the background of the scene from appearing through the actor's form. A matte is a negative of the foreground developed until it is quite black, and it is placed in front of the negative of the background while the latter is passing across the printing machine. The space on which the negative of the foreground will later be printed in is thus left bare. With the travelling matte therefore, it is possible to leave open a part of the picture, the outlines of which are modified from frame to frame. (*American Cinematographer*, Hollywood, Sept., 1934).

## ANIMATED CARTOONS

What an admirable instrument these magical tricks could become in the hands of an expert in his line such as Walt Disney in the animated cartoon field! Disney does not deceive his admirers. With increasingly greater force his lines and colours express a poetic feeling. The sinister phosphorescence of the Aurora Borealis in the penguin film, the spectral green of the dancing bats in the fable of the winged rat remind us of the symbolic chromatism of Hans Baldung. There is much more than tasteful colouring here, and this result is reached in spite of the incompleteness of a technique which does not yet allow of the reproduction of blue. The Technicolor process makes it possible to use three fundamental colours and their compositions, which are obtained by mixing yellow, red and blue-green. (Earl Theisen in *International*

*Photographer*, Hollywood, Oct., 1934). Oskar Fischinger has also made successful use of colour in his animated cartoons. He adopts the Gasparcolor process, the chief feature of which is not in the filming but in the printing process. Fischinger's multicoloured circles, triangles and squares, which seem to have an attraction that is so outside this world, have recently been well utilized in advertising films. (*Lichtbildbühne*, Berlin, Oct. 18, 1934). Among new attempts in animated cartoons, we may mention *Joie de vivre*, which was recently presented for the first time by Hector Hoppin and Anthony Gross at the « Ursulines » in Paris. The peculiarity of this film, according to Emile Vuillermoz (*Le Temps*, Paris, Oct. 27, 1934) is that certain forms of the machinery, telegraph wires, switches and trains are introduced in a production with a fanciful story. But, as we have seen, a child's aeroplane in Disney's new film forms a pretty spiral chain with its smoky stream around the fir tree which the servant Ruprecht has opened out shortly before like an umbrella, so it must be admitted that the world's living-picture champion has not been superseded even in this respect. Claire Parker and A. Alexieff have produced *A Night on the Bare Mountain* by a new technical process. According to a very indefinite account of it by its authors in the *Cinema Quarterly* (Edinburgh, Autumn, 1934) it is one single drawing, not unlike a pencil lithograph, in fact, which is retouched after the shooting of each frame to give the desired movement.

## COLOUR FILM

Whereas the use of colours in animated cartoons may be said to be soundly established by now, the use of natural colour in films is, as hitherto, very doubtful. This is especially the case in the process where single colour-scenes are grafted on to the black and white film — *ballons d'essai* of the industry — as, for instance, in *The House of Rothschild* film; they show but slight regard for the purity of means of expression. This defect of homogeneity of style is not eliminated, either, by using the method dealt with in *Ideal Kinema and Studio* (Nov. 8, 1934). Instead of a sudden change from monochrome to colour, we pass from the scene in black and white to pictures which are at first lightly coloured and then become stronger and stronger; or a scene in monochrome is followed by a lightly coloured one, and then by one in stronger colours and so on. As a question of good taste, the effect would be the same as an organ « solo » which gradually merges into complete orchestration of the same theme.

Those looking for first steps in the principal methods of colour film technique should read H. D.

Waley's article in the Autumn number of *Sight and Sound*, the excellent quarterly review of the British Film Institute; while those who follow the incandescent lamp may discover, in the October number of the *International Photographer*, that the great atrium in *The House of Rothschild* was illuminated exclusively by arc lights (which are particularly indicated for colour film making) to the number of 250, and that nevertheless the sound was registered at the same time as the image. In *Nana*, a new carbon arc spot lamp arc was used, placed at a distance of about two feet from the microphone, without any resulting disturbance from the hissing of the lamp. Apart from the technical question, cinema manufacturers are awaiting somewhat nervously the man who, with the courage of desperation, will give the starting signal for the colour film. Meanwhile, they are executing a kind of dance around their beautiful machines standing all ready, and chanting like the two little pigs « Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? ». As for us, we frankly confess that we are afraid.

#### MOUNTING

Those who could not understand how it happened that the Russians had reached the highest point in the cinematographic art may learn, to their amazement the why and wherefore, from Karl Freund, cameraman at Berlin during the splendid period of the Erich Pommer productions and at the present day director and cameraman at Hollywood. If the Russians succeeded, with so much art and skill, in making their pictures eloquent, it was due to the fact that 90% of the inhabitants of the Soviet Union are illiterate, and further, that they speak in a hundred different tongues. It was therefore necessary to avoid titles to the utmost limit possible. The famous mounting with short cuts was likewise due to a poverty of equipment, this time financial. As the Russians had not enough money to buy stock they were compelled to purchase, from Berlin, the short rejected lengths left in the machines of their much better equipped German colleagues after making a picture. The greater the difficulties the better the art! (*American Cinematographer*, Sept., 1934). On the other hand, Erik Charell, who has also left the UFA for America, appears to be suffering from too much film. He disdains cutting, when mounting, between distance and foreground, founding his aversion on the fact that, in reality, the eye cannot leap directly from one point to another but must pass over the whole intervening space.

In *Caravan*, therefore, he makes camera mobility take the place of cutting as often as possible. The tendency to use panoramic or travelling shots instead

of separate pictures has been seen everywhere since the introduction of the talking film, the course of the dialogue making it compulsory to have the scenes as uninterrupted as possible. But whether this means following the natural way of seeing or not is a matter of supreme indifference, because at the cinema we are observing pictures, not imitating the observation of reality. Further, a skip in mounting gives quite another effect of movement, another rhythm and therefore another artistic expression from that of the gradual passage from one picture to another.

In an article by Walter Bluemel, which is very prudent, although it is dedicated to amateurs of the cinema only and deals with the *Praxis of the composition of picture* (*International Photographer*, Aug., 1934) Charell might read the following: « There must certainly be movement in a film, but not movement without reason. Like everything else movement — whether of the object that is to be shot or of the camera itself — must have a purpose in the picture. » Bluemel also writes a good deal that is worth consideration on the damage caused to the composition of pictures by the panoramic process, on the expression value of the different trajectories along which the movement of the images takes place and on the influence that a good choice of the axis of the picture may have on the lines forming its composition. In the October number of the same review, Paul E. Bowles begins a cycle of articles on *The relation between continuity and mounting*. He says that the cutter assumes the function of the continuity man when the director has not already before his eyes, at the time of shooting, the succession of pictures as they are to appear in the completed film, but projects a series of picture of each scene in a relatively mechanical way. It is not altogether clear from this that even or perhaps especially in a well made film, the work of the continuity man, the director and the cutter is a united and homogeneous process. In this connection René Le Henaff (*Comœdia*, Oct. 30, 1934) writes very clearly: « It is generally considered that cutting is a secondary affair, but in reality there is nothing that comes so close to the writing of a scenario as the mounting of a film. » He recommends, in fact, that the cutter should collaborate in the subject to be shot from the very beginning. A further amplification of this conception of mounting is suggested by Karl Freund when, in the article mentioned above, he makes a distinction between montage sequences and montage shots, or establishes a relation between the sticking together of different scenes and multiple exhibitions, the combination of several shots with the optical printer, etc. In this way, he makes a similar distinction to our own between simultaneous mounting and successive

mounting, and also between mounting that can be perceived by the spectator and that which cannot. (See Rudolf Arnheim: *Film als Kunst*, 1932).

### HISTORY

For that matter, as far as making travelling skots is concerned, D. W. Griffith and his cameraman Billy Bitzer (see the article by the latter in *International Photographer*, Oct., 1934) when shooting a grand mass scene, in 1915-16, for the film *Intolerance*, constructed a moveable dolly 140 feet high, the cut-down top of which had a surface 6 feet square, the base being 60 feet square. This apparatus had 6 soles with four wheels each, and ran along tracks, being pushed by 25 men before the mass of supers gathered in the luxurious hall of King Baltazar. At the same time, the camera mounted slowly upwards on a lift inside the moveable tower, so that, at the end of the scene, the initial distant scene ended in a close up with the princes seated on a high throne and going through a charming love scene. The entire scene was shot by sunlight, with a single Pathé hand camera. Billy Bitzer mentions also many other important details. How useful it would be to see these old films again! When we read that, to do homage to their old director, Mack Sennett, whose work and life is to be presented in a film, Gloria Swanson, Wallace Beery, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and others have declared themselves ready to act their old parts over again, and what is more important, to do so gratuitously (*Internationale Film-schau*, Prague, Oct. 15, 1934) we are touched, but at the same time we cannot help thinking how much finer and more instructive it would be to see once more, on that occasion, the most characteristic pieces of the old original films. — R. A.

## D O C U M E N T

The new cinematograph season is beginning with a wealth of documentary films, doubtless as a consequence of the success obtained by this type of production. It is obvious and understandable that the cinematograph industry does not concern itself with the production of any particular type of film until it has made sure that it will be a financial success. We must conclude, therefore, that the experiments made with documentaries in recent years have shown that the public is interested in films from life and nature and is anxious for instruction; a fact that should lead producers to pay greater attention to the opinion of the spectators. Since, however, the cinema public

wants to be entertained and not bored, the documentary must be presented in an attractive form and, especially when it is a long one, must be grafted on to a more or less dramatic plot.

### THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HUMAN DOCUMENT

The producers of *Kayak*, which has been unreservedly praised by the press all over the world, kept this fact in mind, with excellent results. It is true that the scenario of the film was written by a man who knows the Esquimaux of Greenland better than anyone else, partly by affinity of blood, namely, the Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, whose death occurred before he had the satisfaction of witnessing the success of his film. The simple story on which the film is based is to some extent a faithful document of the mentality and passions of a people whose primitive life and customs have been thoroughly studied by Rasmussen. Civilized man's sole part in *Kayak* is that of observer aided by the surest of witnesses, the cinematographic machine.

*Kayak* recalls *Nanuk* and *Esquimaux* by associations of ideas, and brings us to the latest achievement of their author, Robert Flaherty, the magnificent production *Man of Aran*, presented by British Gaumont Gainsborough.

This is yet another aspect of man's struggle with inclement nature, which Flaherty shows us in pictures of extraordinary power. But his films are not merely fine pictures; they always present a lesson of energy and spiritual power, for, whether conquering or conquered, man is shown to be made greater by his struggles. They also give a lesson of humility, for the man before whom the artist compels us to bow is always a man of the people.

In other climes, we get *Malacca*, by Schenk, who collaborated in *Chang and Rango*. The journey across the Malay peninsula is one of the most impressive we have seen. It is almost too impressive in certain scenes, perhaps, which might have been deleted without injury to the documentary value of the film. They are scenes which certainly could not be recommended for unduly sensitive spectators, especially in view of the fact that the public is always inclined to suspect trickery in scenes of the kind and might be apt to doubt the authenticity of the whole film in consequence.

Even in the production of dramatic films, conscientious producers tend more and more to guarantee the authenticity of the documentary part, and this type of producer is fortunately becoming less rare than is generally supposed. Julien Duvivier, for instance, realized the absolute necessity of taking his actors to Canada to film the outside views in *Marie Chapdelaine* in the