

# CLOSE UP

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## AS IS

BY THE EDITOR

To the retrospective mind, the end of a year that gave us Stuttgart, La Sarraz, as banners to the avant garde—that strange platoon forever marking time—that saw the dawn of montage consciousness, not altogether unlike the angry weal of an insect sting, and sent or promised a thousand and one mixed blessings, talkies *überall*; needs some recapitulation, some winnowing thoughts to shape its varying developments for future benefit.

Perhaps the wide screen is upon us, and all our theories to date will go before the new, strange shape that cinema will assume. If we are like children now, soon we will be infants again, all of us together, starting again, none cleverer than the rest, all equally unsure, and, without any doubt, all equally determined to be first to see the new path, and to point it out tirelessly to the still bewildered sucklings, perhaps not (to be candid) in the hope that they will follow, so much as acclaim. We are all very tribal really, and self is the

first animal law, really, and all the conflict of the world might cease or become rational in the recognition of the first physical law of the jungle, the veldt, the steppe, the forest, the prairie, the ice world—I am. I am, I am—or I am not. If I am not, then you darn well won't be either. Or some such formula.

But this, perhaps, carries us a little (only a little, if we look closely) from our subject. The more one dabbles in theory, the more mythical, evanescent and intangible does theory become. Not in the sense of unattainable divinity, but in the sense of sheer invalidity. Theory, made too precise, can only impoverish. Perhaps because each of us is a theoretician to himself alone, and the assimilation of theory from an outside source chokes up original perception with induced perception, which can have no richness or native element in us. If I see things this way and am told I must see them that way, it spoils my chance of seeing them any way at all. I become self-conscious about my reaction. That is the primitive definition. And what has been removed is psycho-surgical. I have been deprived of the initial purity of visual experience. And in being deprived of spontaneous visual experience I am being deprived of something much deeper—the psychic balance of wish fulfilment. To-day it is commonly known that what we see is not necessarily what is in front of us, but only that part of it to which we react visually-mentally-emotionally. Unless I assume that my mental-emotional-visionary experience is identical with that of others, in making deductions and constructing a summarised and at best fragmentary postulation, I am seeking to impose something which must instantly refute

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itself, something which becomes a lie. Yet man is never satisfied until his text-books de-educate an assimilative world.

The future is going to bring new and always greater problems. Let us understand at least what we have been working at until now before we attempt to cope with them. We are fortunate, says Pabst, to have had the silent film first, for without it our eye would not have been trained to see. As it is, there exists a tradition of fluidity to which the talking film is trying to work back. If sound had come first there would have been none of it, no philosophy of visual exploration. The link with stage would have been too suggestively apparent to have been swept aside for tentative and dubious experiment.

We are fortunate to have had the silent film first *if* we are going to understand it and make use of its essential references for the new technique of sound-sight. But few people, directors included, have grasped the fundamentals of film building. The whole theory of it (individual theory, don't forget) has been left too unarranged, unguessed or overlooked. The arrival of arbitrations from the USSR, instead of clearing away some of the muddle, seemed only to puff away the last remnants of simplicity and craft on a wind of superstition—an uninvestigated obeisance that seems to have permanently damaged the style of many who had been able at least to tell their story with modesty and reserve. The dread word montage ran like a plague. Few could cope with it, most succumbed. Then talking films, we learnt in the press, *dated* it. Certainly montage was no more, except whipped to and fro, a storm in a teacup, up and down the ranks of the avant garde and among ambitious damnateurs.

Those who had seen the good Russian films were right in acclaiming their richness. But none too many recognised the difference between admiring them and understanding them, between exploration of their inferences and imitation of their method without any inferences at all.

The Russian method was taken to mean montage and nothing more, and montage was taken to mean nothing more than tilting the camera and snipping away much needed footage. The fact that the montage of the films that so fired inspiration had been adopted primarily to convey the necessary implications of the stories they were telling, was not taken into account, and, indeed, the startling anachronism arose that montage, which is continuity, was emphatically *not* continuity. Only the more spectacular manifestations of this particular craft were taken into account, those surcharged passages that swept the films to climax; and these were seized upon as a clue to entire reconstitution of technique, although it would have seemed obvious, even from the start, that tremendous speed must achieve power mainly through its relation to quietness and the pause. Quietness and the pause, however, were out of favour. The result was a garrulous and snobistic falsity. Simple subjects became fussy abominations. Witness Czinner's Pola Negri film, witness *L'Argent*—intolerably bumptious frauds. The most rudimentary inferences of the methods that excited them had been utterly unsuspected. Cameras sloped, tottered, tilted, rushed, fell and toppled, all for no reason. And Czinner and L'Herbier are not the weakest of their kind.

If only they would get down to source, source, source. The source for which H. A. Potamkin asks continually. If

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they would only forget the half-baked theories, and think what they want to express, what they want to reveal, they themselves as life-witnesses, seeing life with their own eyes, in their own way. You would think that we hardly need to be told that the only expression for the implied is the physical. But have even Czinner and L'Herbier recognised this? Movement is not enough, we must know what movement itself implies. We must go to psycho-analysis to understand that action is the modified outgiving of interacting conscious and unconscious adjustment. I repeat that in cinema it is by action we are to judge primarily. With the advent of sound will come in time sound imagery too. I pointed out in an article on *Blackmail* that in one instance at least, Hitchcock made use of the associative symbolism of sound. To an overwrought girl, guilty of murder, the sound of the shop bell becomes a clanging crescendo ending in a kind of scream. You might call that inferential. But it is physical, too. The sound has come through her ears and has been translated to her but (equally to us, who are accredited with the super-power of being able to *see and hear* her unconscious) as the warning blare of danger. "Through that door may come the police". It is because of us, because we have to be enlightened, that film can never be purely expressive. What we are seeing is what has been turned to us, not unlike, in primary intention, the theatre method of setting the stage and everybody on it to face the audience. We are not watching something happening to somebody else, we are experiencing our own reaction to something which has been dissected and spread out for the precise purpose of our comprehension, and unconscious participation. Film is, in

other words, a process of explanation—the simplest form of which is action. The film of riding, racing, flying, and so on. The highest form is not the film of inference and suggestion, though that, evidently, is far above the film of simple movement, but the film of imagery and action—psychology and physiology, or, better still, psychology *through* physiology. But here we are getting into deep water, though I shall hope to be able to navigate it in some forthcoming issues.

Come with me to the rudimentary principle of expression. Eyes opening wide will explain that the person we see is in terror. But terror means nothing to us, it is not dramatic, nor melodramatic, until we have looked for and discovered the cause. It is then a matter of our decision as to whether the cause would (and therefore by simple displacement *does*) terrify us too, or move us to contempt or laughter—whether we are induced to associate or identify ourselves with the terror we are witnessing, or whether we scorn it, and associate ourselves in a friendly (if sadistic) alliance with the cause of it.

In Dreyer's film of terror, Joan's terror is not our terror because the cause of it is too blatantly (to be unkind) *Comédie Française*, too traditionally and elaborately theatre. We have to reject the cause of it—the posturing, grimacing militant ecclesiasts, as Joan herself would have rejected them, knowing well enough from the armoury of her visionary over-world experience (or unconscious divination) how to deal with them. If Dreyer had indicated, as I have said before, that Joan was a victim of law and order and justice as impersonal as you can reasonably expect from an arbitration of formularised tentatives, the collapse of her consummate

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diplomatic, economic and political resources (apart from the consideration of which particular plane of consciousness they derived from) would have brought home to us a real sense of doom and pity. The sensational collapse of Joan remains throughout history a contemporaneous idea for every age, our own included. Dreyer's film of Joan bore no hint of the illuminating references it might have contained. This, however, is a little apart from the point. Our deduction for now is that this intensive film of physiological onslaught failed as a tragedy through lack of associative self-surrender in us—for lack of the physiology of psychology.

*Mother* remains as one of the most immediately recognisable examples of physiology and inferential psychology well balanced. From the obvious imagery of the rising mists to the final impact of bloody violence, from the stormy blowing of the mother's flag (inferential imagery of intensely spiritual insistence) to the drunken death of the father, we can deduce a finality of concentric and indivisible connections.

Metronome montage is to vision what squad drill is to movement. Making multiplication tables of your frames should be considered valid only for scenes that are ruled, so to speak, by the company sergeant major. Robot rhythms. Purer movement can so much more accurately be felt with the brain, with the eye, with the finger tips, with the measuring rod and the metronome of psychic experience. If you have the gift of vision. *If* you have the gift of vision. Purer movement can be felt more purely. A simple, elementary rhythm can well, and even to advantage, be controlled by the measuring rod. Free movement must be free,

controlled movement should be checked mechanically—left, right, left, right, left, right.

Theory, theory. There is the theory that builds theory. And the theory that explodes theory. Remember, *your* theory is more valid, more valuable to you than any you can borrow. Remember, action came first, theory afterwards. There was more unity to *Mother* than there was to *The End of St. Petersburg*, and more unity to *The End of St. Petersburg* than to *Storm Over Asia*. Theory had evolved a surer mechanism, but something had been lost. Even understanding had to some extent been lost. The tendency pointed toward watchfulness, towards preciousness. The bigger sweep was finally mindful of some convention, keeping approved pattern. Atrophy was not altogether absent.

I do not say do not have theory, I say have your own theory. Mr. Potamkin is right to insist on source. Know where your source is, realise the uses of your experience. Remember the only real kino-eye is your own eye. What it sees is your cinema. Build cinema as vision, your own vision, and you will build something worth while.

KENNETH MACPHERSON.