

lutely false. However, all that was only necessary [behind the scenes] in order to provide the public with the complete illusion of reality.⁴

VICTORIN JASSET (1862–1913) was a prodigious stage manager (particularly at the Hippodrome), set designer, costumer, and writer who worked for Gaumont between 1905 and 1907 and then was hired as head producer-director at Eclair, where he became best known for his detective and criminal *séries* films—for example, *Nick Carter*, *Zigomar*, and *Protéa*.

¹ Sometime between 1908 and 1911, *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* became *La Mort du Duc de Guise*. When Pathé re-released the film before and then again during the war, it carried the latter title.

² Within a year after the release of *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, Film d'Art was in trouble financially, and dramatist Paul Gavault took control of its film production. By late 1911, Film d'Art was still heavily in debt and was taken over by Charles Delac, the owner of Monofilm, a small film distribution company. See Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, vol. 3 (Paris: Denoël, 1951), 33–34.

³ This was the Société cinématographique des auteurs et gens de lettres (SCAGL), founded by the popular novelist, Pierre Decourcelle (1856–1926), and his financial collaborator, Eugène Gugenheim. SCAGL operated as a subsidiary of Pathé-Frères, and Albert Capellani was its artistic director and chief filmmaker.

⁴ Jasset was one of the first French writers to give some attention to a specifically filmic system of representation and narrative continuity. That he focused on an American system then in vogue acknowledged a dominance that would be well established by the end of the decade.

RICCIOTTO CANUDO, "The Birth of a Sixth Art" •

Translated by Ben Gibson, Don Ranvaud, Sergio Sokota, and Deborah Young from "Naissance d'un sixième art," *Les Entretiens idéalistes* (25 October 1911), reprinted as "L'Esthétique du septième art," in Canudo, *L'Usine aux images* (Paris: Etienne Chiron, 1926), 13–26. The translation first appeared in *Framework* 13 (Autumn 1980), 3–7. Reprinted, with minor changes, by permission of the publisher.

I.

IT IS SURPRISING to find how everyone has, either by fate or some universal telepathy, the same aesthetic conception of the natural environment. From the most ancient people of the east to those more recently discovered by our geographical heroes, we can find in all peoples the same manifestations of the aesthetic sense; Music, with its complimentary [*sic*] art, Poetry; and Agriculture, with its own two compliments [*sic*], Sculpture and Painting. The whole aesthetic life of the world developed itself in these five expressions of Art. Assuredly, a sixth artistic manifestation seems to us now absurd and even unthinkable; for thousands of years, in fact, no people have been capable of conceiving it. But we are witnessing the birth of such a sixth art. This statement, made in a twilight hour such as this, still ill-defined and uncertain like all eras of transition, is repugnant to our scientific mentality. We are living between two twilights: the eve of one world, and the dawn of another. Twilight is vague, all outlines are con-

fused; only eyes sharpened by a will to discover the primal and invisible signs of things and beings can find a bearing through the misty vision of the *anima mundi*. However, the sixth art imposes itself on the unquiet and scrutinous spirit. It will be a superb conciliation of the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry).

II.

The theater has so far best realized such a conciliation, but in an ephemeral manner because the plastic characteristics of the theater are identified with those of the actors, and consequently are always different. The new manifestation of Art should really be more precisely *a Painting and a Sculpture developing in Time*, as in music and poetry, which realise themselves by transforming air into rhythm for the duration of their execution.

The cinematograph, so vulgar in name, points the way. A man of genius, who by definition is a miracle just as beauty is an unexpected surprise, will perform this task of mediation which at present seems to us barely imaginable. He will find the ways, hitherto inconceivable, of an art which will appear for yet a long time marvelous and grotesque. He is the unknown individual who tomorrow will induce the powerful current of a new aesthetic function, whence, in a most astonishing apotheosis, the *Plastic Art in Motion* will arise.

III.

The cinematograph is composed of significant elements "representative" in the sense used by Emerson rather than the theatrical sense of the term, which are already classifiable.

There are two aspects of it: the *symbolic* and the *real*, both absolutely modern; that is to say only possible in our era, composed of certain essential elements of modern spirit and energy.

The *symbolic aspect* is that of velocity. Velocity possesses the potential for a great series of combinations, of interlocking activities, combining to create a spectacle that is a series of visions and images tied together in a vibrant agglomeration, similar to a living organism. This spectacle is produced exactly by the excess of movement to be found in film, those mysterious reels impressed by life itself. The reels of the engraved celluloid unroll in front of and within the beam of light so rapidly that the presentation lasts for the shortest possible time. No theater could offer half the changes of set and location provided by the cinematograph with such vertiginous rapidity, even if equipped with the most extraordinarily modern machinery.

Yet more than the motion of images and the speed of representation, what is truly symbolic in relation to velocity are the actions of the characters. We see the most tumultuous, the most inverisimilitudinous scenes

unfolding with a speed that appears impossible in real life. This precipitation of movement is regulated with such mathematical and mechanical precision that it would satisfy the most fanatical runner. Our age has destroyed most earnestly, with a thousand extremely complex means, the love of restfulness, symbolized by the smoking of a patriarchal pipe at the domestic hearth. Who is still able to enjoy a pipe by the fire in peace these days, without listening to the jarring noise of cars, animating outside, day and night, in every way, an irresistible desire for spaces to conquer? The cinematograph can satisfy the most impatient racer. The motorist who has just finished the craziest of races and becomes a spectator at one of these shows will certainly not feel a sense of slowness; images of life will flicker in front of him with the speed of the distances covered. The cinematograph, moreover, will present to him the farthest countries, the most unknown people, the least known of human customs, moving, shaking, throbbing before the spectator transported by the extreme rapidity of the representation. Here is the second symbol of modern life constituted by the cinematograph, an "instructive" symbol found in its rudimentary state in the display of "freaks" at the old fairgrounds. It is the symbolic destruction of distances by the immediate connaissance of the most diverse countries, similar to the real destruction of distances performed for a hundred years now by monsters of steel.

The *real aspect* of the cinematograph is made up of elements which arouse the interest and wonder of the modern audience. It is increasingly evident that present day humanity actively seeks its own show, the most meaningful representation of its self. The theater of perennial adultery, the sole theme of the bourgeois stage, is at last being disdained, and there is a movement towards a theater of new, profoundly modern Poets; the rebirth of Tragedy is heralded in numerous confused open-air spectacles representing disordered, incoherent, but intensely willed effort. Suddenly, the cinematograph has become popular, summing up at once all the values of a still eminently scientific age, entrusted to Calculus rather than to the operations of Fantasy (*Fantasia*), and has imposed itself in a peculiar way as a new kind of theater, a scientific theater built with precise calculations, a mechanical mode of expression. Restless humanity has welcomed it with joy. It is precisely this theater of plastic Art in motion which seems to have brought us the rich promise of the *Festival* which has been longed for unconsciously, the ultimate evolution of the ancient *Festival* taking place in the temples, the theaters, the fairgrounds of each generation.¹ The thesis of a plastic Art in motion has recreated the *Festival*. It has created it scientifically rather than *aesthetically*, and for this reason it is succeeding in this age, although fatally and irresistibly moving towards the attainment of Aesthetics. . . .

v.

I move on now to a great aesthetic problem, which must be emphasized.

Art has always been essentially a stylization of life into stillness; the better an artist has been able to express the greater number of "typical" conditions, that is, the synthetic and immutable states of souls and forms, the greater the recognition he has attained. The cinematograph, on the contrary, achieves the greatest mobility in the representation of life. The thought that it might open the unsuspected horizon of a new art different from all pre-existing manifestations cannot fail to appeal to an emancipated mind, free from all traditions and constraints. The ancient painters and engravers of prehistoric caves who reproduced on reindeer bones the contracted movements of a galloping horse, of the artists who sculpted cavalades on the Parthenon friezes, also developed the device of stylizing certain aspects of life in clear, incisive movements. But the cinematograph does not merely reproduce one aspect; it represents the whole of life in action, and in such action that, even when the succession of its characteristic events unravel slowly, in life, it is developed with as much speed as possible.

In this way cinematography heightens the basic psychic condition of western life which manifests itself in action, just as eastern life manifests itself in contemplation. The whole history of western life reaches to people in the dynamism characteristic of our age, while the whole of humanity rejoices, having found again its childhood in this new *Festival*. We could not imagine a more complex or more precise movement. Scientific thought with all its energy, synthesizing a thousand discoveries and inventions, has created out of and for itself this sublime spectacle. The cinematographic visions pass before its eyes with all the electrical vibrations of light, and in all the external manifestations of its inner life.

The cinematograph is thus the theater of a new Pantomime, consecrated *Painting in motion*. It constitutes the complete manifestation of a unique creation by modern man. As the modern Pantomime, it is the new *dance of manifestations*.

Now, it is necessary to ask of the cinematograph, is it to be accepted within the confines of the arts?

It is not yet an art, because it lacks the freedom of choice peculiar to plastic *interpretation*, conditioned as it is to being the *copy* of a subject, the condition that prevents photography from becoming an art. In executing the design of a tree on a canvas, the painter expresses without any doubt, unconsciously and in a particular and clear configuration, his global interpretation of the vegetative soul, that is of all the conceptual elements deposited deep in his creative spirit by an examination of all the trees he has seen in his life; as Poe said, with the "eyes of dream." With that particular form

he synthesizes corresponding souls and his art, I repeat, will gain in intensity in proportion to the artist's skill in *immobilizing* the essence of things and their universal meanings in a particular and clear configuration. Whoever contented himself with copying the outlines, with imitating the colors of a subject, would be a poor painter; the great artist extends a fragment of his cosmic soul in the representation of a plastic form.

Arts are the greater the less they *imitate* and the more they *evoke* by means of a synthesis. A photographer, on the other hand, does not have the faculty of choice and elaboration fundamental to Aesthetics; he can only put together the forms he wishes to reproduce, which he really is not reproducing, limiting himself to cutting out images with the aid of the luminous mechanism of a lens and a chemical composition. The cinematograph, therefore, cannot today be an art. But for several reasons, the cinematographic theater is the first abode of the new art—an art which we can just barely conceive. Can this abode become a “temple” for aesthetics?

A desire for an aesthetic organization drives entrepreneurs towards certain kinds of research. In an age lacking in imagination, such as ours, when an excess of documentation is everywhere, weakening artistic creativity, and patience games are triumphing over expressions of creative talent, the cinematograph offers the paroxysm of the spectacle: objective life represented in a wholly exterior manner, on the one hand with rapid miming, on the other with documentaries. The great fables of the past are retold, mimed by ad hoc actors chosen from the most important stars. What is shown above all is the appearance rather than the essence of contemporary life, from sardine fishing in the Mediterranean to the marvel of flying steel and the indomitable human courage of the races at Dieppe or the aviation week at Rheims.

But the entertainment makers are already experimenting with other things. It is their aim that this new mimetic representation of “total life” take ever deeper root, and Gabrielle D'Annunzio has dreamed up a great Italian heroic pantomime for the cinematograph.² It is well known that there exist in Paris societies which organize a kind of “trust” for cinematographic spectacles among writers. Hitherto the theater has offered writers the best chance of becoming rich quickly; but the cinematograph requires less work and offers better returns. At this moment hundreds of talented people, attracted by the promise of immediate and universal success, are concentrating their energies towards the creation of the modern Pantomime. And it will come out of their strenuous efforts and from the probable genius of one of them. The day such work is given to the world will mark the birthday of a wholly new art.

VI.

The cinematograph is not only the perfect outcome of the achievements of modern science, which it summarizes wonderfully. It also represents, in a disconcerting but important way, the most recent product of contemporary theater. It is not the exaggeration of a principle, but its most logical and ultimate development. The "bourgeois" dramatics, like all of our playwrights, should spontaneously acknowledge the cinematograph as their most discreet representative, and should in consequence ready themselves for its support by making use of it, because the so-called psychological, social drama, etc., is nothing but a degeneration of the original comic theater, counterposed with the tragic theater of fantasy and spiritual ennoblement, the theater of Aristophanes and Plautus. Vitruvius, describing as an architect the many different sets used in ancient performances, talks about the solemnity of columns and temples of the tragic theater, about the wood of the satyric theater, and about sylvan adventures and the houses of the middle classes where the *comedias* took place. The latter were but the representation of daily life in its psychological and social aspects, that is, of customs and characteristics. . . .

VII.

The cinematograph, on the other hand, adds to this type of theater the element of *absolutely accurate* speed, in this way inducing a new kind of pleasure that the spectator discovers in the extreme precision of the spectacle. In fact, none of the actors moving on the illusory stage will betray his part, nor would the mathematical development of the action lag for a fraction of a second. All movement is regulated with clockwork precision. The scenic illusion is therefore less engaging, in a sense less physical, but terribly absorbing. And this life, regulated as if by clockwork, makes one think of the triumph of modern scientific principle as a new Alvimán, master of the mechanics of the world in Manichean doctrine.

The rapid communion of vital energies between the two opposite poles of the *very touching* and the *very comical* produces in the spectator a sense of relaxation. Everything which in real life presents itself as an obstacle, the inevitable slowness of movements and actions in space, is as if suppressed in the cinematograph. Moreover, the *very comical* soothes the mind, lightning existence of the weight of the somber social cape, imposed by the thousand conventions of the community and representing all kinds of hierarchies. The comic can suppress hierarchies, it can join together the most different beings, give an extraordinary impression of the mixture of the most separate universes, which in real life are irreducibly distinct from one another. Since the comic is essentially irreverent, it gives a deep sense of

relief to individuals oppressed in every moment of their real lives by social discriminations, so emphatically present. This sense of relief is one of the factors of that nervous motion of contraction and expansion called laughter. Life is *simplified* by the grotesque which is nothing other than a deformation *per excessum* or *per defectum* of the established forms. The grotesque, at least in this sense, relieves life of its inescapable grimness and releases it into laughter.

Caricature is based on the display and masterful combination of the most minimal facets of the human soul, its weak spots, which gush forth from the irony of social life, which is itself, after all, somewhat ironical and insane. With irony, in the convulsive motion of laughter, caricature provokes in man this feeling of extreme lightness, because irony throws over its raised shoulders Zarathustra's "dancing and laughing" cape of many colors.³

The ancients were able to perceive in irony the roots of Tragedy. They crowned their tragic spectacles in laughter, in the farce. Conversely, we precede rather than follow the dramatic spectacle with Farce, immediately upon the raising of the curtain, because we have forgotten the significance of some of the truths discovered by our forebears. Yet the need for an *ironic spectacle* persists. And the Farce of the Orestes Tetralogy of Aeschylus, the Farce which could not be found, must have been originally immensely rich in humor to have been able to lighten the spirit of the elegant Athenian women oppressed by the sacred terror of Cassandra. Now I do not know of anything more superbly grotesque than the antics of film comics. People appear in such an extravagant manner that no magician could pull anything like them out of a hat; movements and vision change so rapidly that no man of flesh and blood could present so many to his fellows, without the help of that stunning mixture of chemistry and mechanics, that extraordinary creator of emotions that is the cinematograph. A new comic type is thus created. He is the man of blunders and metamorphoses who can be squashed under a wardrobe of mirrors, or fall head-first breaking through all four floors of a four-story building, only to climb up out of the chimney to reappear on the roof in the guise of a genuine snake.

The complexity of this new kind of spectacle is surprising. The whole of human activity throughout the centuries had contributed to its composition. When artists of genius bestow rhythms of Thought and Art on this spectacle, the new Aesthetics will show the cinematographic theater some of its most significant aspects.

In fact the cinematographic theater *is the first new theater*, the first authentic and fundamental theater of our time. When it becomes truly aesthetic, complemented with a worthy musical score played by a good orchestra, even if only representing life, real life, momentarily fixed by the

photographic lens, we shall be able to feel then our first *sacred* emotion, we shall have a glimpse of the spirits, moving towards a vision of the temple, where Theater and Museum will once more be restored for a new religious communion of the spectacle and Aesthetics. The cinematograph as it is today will evoke for the historians of the future the image of the first extremely rudimentary wooden theaters, where goats have their throats slashed and the primitive "goat song" and "tragedy" were danced, before the stone apotheosis consecrated by Lycurgus, even before Aeschylus' birth, to the Dionysian theater.

The modern public possess an admirable power of "abstraction" since it can enjoy some of the most absolute abstractions in life. In the Olympia, for instance, it was possible to see the spectators fanatically applauding a phonograph placed on the stage and adorned with flowers whose shining copper trumpet had just finished playing a love duet. . . . The machine was triumphant, the public applauded the ghostly sound of far away or even dead actors. It is with such an attitude that the public go to the cinematographic theater. Moreover, the cinematograph brings, in the midst of even the smallest human settlement, the spectacle of distant, enjoyable, moving or instructive things: it spreads culture and stimulates everywhere the eternal desire for the representation of life in its totality.

On the walls of the cinematographic theater at times one can see inscriptions commemorating the latest achievements of this prodigious invention which accelerates our knowledge of universal events and reproduces everywhere life and the experience of life since 1830 to the present day. Among the latest heroes are Renault, Edison, Lumière, the Pathé brothers. . . . But what is striking, characteristic, and significant, even more than the spectacle itself, is the uniform will of the spectators, who belong to all social classes, from the lowest and least educated to the most intellectual.

It is desire for a new *Festival*, for a new joyous *unanimity*, realized at a show, in a place where together, all men can forget in greater or lesser measure, their isolated individuality. This forgetting, soul of any religion and spirit of any aesthetic, will one day be superbly triumphant. And the Theater, which still holds the vague promise of something never dreamt of in previous ages: *the creation of a sixth art, the plastic Art in motion*, having already achieved the rudimentary form of the modern pantomime.

Present day life lends itself to such victory. . . .

RICCIOTTO CANUDO (1879–1923) was an Italian expatriate who settled in Paris in 1902 as a scholar, writer, and literary entrepreneur. A friend of Apollinaire and D'Annunzio, he established a movement called Cérébrism, edited a "French imperialist" art journal called *Montjoie!* (1913–1914), and hosted a circle of intellectuals and artists interested in the cinema who met regularly at the Café Napolitain.

¹ Canudo's concept of the *Festival* seems to come out of ancient Greek culture rather than

out of the European Medieval period or Renaissance. It is a mark of Canudo's contradictory interests or his ambition to synthesize widely divergent ways of thinking that, on the same page, he can bring together ancient Greek theater and Italian Futurism or a classical literary tradition and a potential new art form, the cinema.

² Gabriel D'Annunzio (1863–1938) never wrote any scenarios for the cinema during this period. Some of his works were adapted by others, including his son, Gabriellino D'Annunzio, before the war; and his name was attached to Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1913), but only for publicity reasons.

³ The reference to Zarathustra as well as the "birth of tragedy" suggests how fashionable Nietzsche had become in France after the first translations of his work in 1900.

ABEL GANCE, "A Sixth Art"

From "Un sixième art," *Ciné-Journal* 185 (9 March 1912), 10.

THE CINEMA? No, as my friend Canudo says, it is a sixth art that has yet to advance beyond its first stammerings.

A sixth art which, at this moment, just like French tragedy in the time of [Alexandre] Hardy [1540–1632], awaits its Corneille, its classic in a word, in order to lay down its true foundations.

A sixth art, glittering with movement, diverse objects, and peaceful landscapes. Here we can take each of the tableaux of the best theaters, make the characters descend from their frames, live as their creators imagined them, then return them to their immortal poses—now known to everyone.

A sixth art where the wings of the Victory of Samothrace actually quiver and the huntress Diana can escape through the thicket imagined by [Jean] Goujon [1514–1569]. . . .

A sixth art where we can evoke in minutes all the great disasters of history and extract from them an immediate objective lesson.

A sixth art which, with one and the same sadness, will bring tears to the eyes of the Arab and the Eskimo, simultaneously, and which, at the same time, will offer them the same lesson in courage and health.

A sixth art which, one day when some inspired artist will consider it more than a simple amusement, will spread its faith throughout the world more fully than the theater or the book.

At the cinema, the knitted brow, the tears, the laughter are so close to the spectator that it is impossible not to be moved; on the face of Juliet dying can we not read there several of great Will's lines, and in Dante's dream several stanzas from *The Divine Comedy*?

Let the cinema be naturally grandiose and human instead of what the popular novels of the past fifty years have been to literature. Let it be innovative instead of following either a maudlin sentimentality or the mechanical comic film which seems in fashion, because the true way has yet to be mapped out. Let it not be theatrical especially, but allegorical, sym-