

## FANTASTIC MOTION

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During the 1980s 'early cinema' was rediscovered in the archives. The re-examination and restoration of films made between the turn of the century and the First World War triggered a parallel response in the film-theoretical debate: the renewed confrontation with a forgotten cinematography provoked a rethinking of cinematic narration and reception, of the organisation of movie perception. In this process fundamental positions of feminist theory were also shaken.

During the 1970s we reviewed Anglo-American film theory and criticism in the journal *Frauen und Film* and debated its merits. These theoretical approaches revolved around the dominance of the male gaze and the denial, the exclusion of the female one. They allowed our discomfort with Hollywood movies and even more so with German movies of the Nazi period and the 1950s to be explained, but they failed to provide an explanation of the abundance of deep pleasure associated with the movies and the expectations we have of them.

During the 1970s there were also attempts to formulate a feminist film history which strove to rescue the cinematic contributions of women from obscurity, in particular the work of female directors. This film history represented an attempt to give our film expectations a legitimate basis in the past, present and future work of women. Already in this connection the role of early cinema made itself felt: for example in the sociological writing of Emilie Altenloh or in the films of the actress Asta Nielsen. However, on balance this attempt to give the love of women for cinema a legitimate object, supported as it was by the women's movement, exposed a lack.

This changed with the discovery of early cinema, a popular cinema with an enormous output – not a cinema of rare examples of female film work and yet still a cinema for women too, in fact especially for women. This was the first impression, which has not evaporated even after more intensive scrutiny. The confrontation with early cinema was a liberation – it emancipated desire from frustration and self-effacement and confirmed that there was a cinema for everyone which did not exclude women.

This impression was reinforced by many different facts. The female audience played a central role during the early years of the cinema, ac-

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tresses won autonomy in cinematic performance, everyday life of women became the subject of a realism that was still barely distorted by censorship. Used to studying the structures of activity and passivity in terms of the power and object of the gaze, we were attracted by female figures who appeared armed with telescopes and rifles, who peered through keyholes, who occupied space in acting as adventuresses and female detectives.

The first attempts to understand what we saw applied the categories of the feminist theory of the gaze to early films, in order to show that gender-specific associations could not be unambiguously identified using this framework. Instead, one frequently found instances of the reversal of the dominant roles of classical cinema. But in fact the psychoanalytic theory of the gaze was completely inadequate for understanding the other cinema. Early films demanded new thinking about the role of women in cinema and the gender relationships associated with it.

### **Something for every man and woman: short film programs**

A movie evening around 1910 consisted of a program of short films selected from a whole range of genres. But not only was the bill mixed, so was the viewing public in terms of class, gender and age. Cinemas were frequented by housewives, white-collar workers and adolescents of both sexes, but also high-society women and prostitutes, representatives of the business classes – but only rarely those of the cultured bourgeoisie. One could say that there was something for every man and woman. For the working man a movie about distant countries or manual vocations, perhaps a slapstick, for white collar workers and boys an adventure or crime story, for women of all ages and classes a love story. This is more or less the picture of preferences Emilie Altenloh has handed down to us based on her questionnaire study of 1912/13. But not only could everyone satisfy his or her own desires, they were also confronted with those of others, and this double: in the film on the screen and in the reactions of one's male and female neighbours. Thus the short film program of early cinema created connections between different social and cultural worlds of experience. And from these connections arose – after the initial period of existing alongside each other – thematic and stylistic syntheses in individual films as they now began to grow in length.

Thus, for example, the claim that the division between a dominant male film producer and passive female recipients defines the stylistic form, does not hold for early cinema. For one thing men and women compete in the audience for their share of the program and thereby exchange views. For another the audience is an active force or force field to

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whose magnetism the producers are subject. Regardless of whether the filmmakers have recourse to literary genres like the woman's novel or to stage genres like the melodrama, the differentiation which actually characterises the film is ultimately due to socio-cultural factors represented by the audience. Cinema plays such an important role in modern mass society because it is able to convey a variety of stories and levels of societies. In this respect it was important for a country with a large proportion of immigrants like the USA, but it was just as important for the 'immigration' of women and workers into European bourgeois society around 1900, and could be just as important in the age of 'globalisation'.

In light of early cinema and its diverse program it could be asked what was the specific historical influence of women, first of all and especially as an audience, on this program and on the formation of cinema in general. Many contemporary reports testify that the social dramas and melodramas which centred around love and passion owe their existence to the women who demanded them. But with these genres the female audience only conquered a place, albeit a significant one, in the program of non-fiction films, cartoons and slapsticks. At this point I would like to outline some ideas on the relationship between early cinema and women in the triangle of non-fiction film, comedies and romantic movies.

### **The trivialisation of aesthetics: the non-fiction film**

Non-fiction films are an inheritance of classical aesthetics, particularly that of natural beauty, but also of art. They take their place at the inception of cinema, which emerged from scientific studies of motion and from chronophotography. Science was concerned with analysis when it developed motion pictures for the 'self-recording' of organisms. But quite soon, in a reversal of the photographic recording device, 'synthesis' was also demonstrated. Marey and Muybridge's motion studies were shown in the Paris artistic salons. There they were looked at out of artistic interest: how does one reproduce the gait of a horse, the flight of a bird. André Bazin returned to this theme over fifty years later when he said that photography and cinema replaced painting in its ontological task of creating an image of living reality to endure beyond death.

All that was needed to create non-fiction films was the cameraman to take the pictures and project them – possibly using the same equipment. Film recording soon took place in other contexts than scientific ones, and projection sessions moved out of the salons to public places of amusement. Cinema does not lose its aesthetic significance in this process, but the aesthetic aspect undergoes a trivialisation. It is no longer viewed by

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artists and connoisseurs, by the 'cultivated', but rather is exposed to quite different interests removed from the artistic. Seen more closely, the trivialisation of aesthetics in cinema is a complex process. On the one hand, aesthetics separates from art only to (re)approach classical natural beauty. This is a moment which, despite his critique of the 'culture industry', Theodor W. Adorno could appreciate: 'Cinema is deeply related to the beauty of nature.' On the other hand, by means of technical reproduction, the beauty of nature finds its way from the bourgeoisie to mass society: the experience of beauty is democratised and conveyed to workers and women. In this respect cinema accords with the popular movements of the nineteenth century, especially the strivings of art education, but also physical education and the efforts of lovers of nature. Despite the polemics of the bourgeoisie against cinema, 'nature films' were above reproach.

During the eighteenth century a walk outside the gates of the city – poetically celebrated in Goethe's *Faust* – meant physical, mental and spiritual relief for the city dweller from his socially determined existence: from marking time in the counting-house, from the pressure of work, from isolation in a competitive society, from playing a role in representing the interests of capital, and from the abstraction of moneymaking. Urbanisation and industrialisation in the nineteenth century caused a mass crisis of existence, a break with traditional social relations, a loss of elementary experience of nature, of everyday observation of nature, and subjugation to the process of rapid technological change. Non-fiction films provided a response to these problems. They conveyed the experience of nature, they brought the expanse of a landscape, the pounding of the surf, the quiet flow of a river, the smell of roses, the setting sun and the shining day into the cities, into the darkness and crush and crowdedness of the cafes, the places of amusement, and the small stores. It is still possible to imagine how enlivening the showing of such early movies of landscapes, people, water, light and flowers was. Documentary films today report, but then they conveyed a perception which allowed people to gather and enhance their strength, to remind them of the potential of their senses.

Thus the non-fiction film is not only a genre reproducing reality – a media variant of the realism of visual art and literature – but a basic cinematic form by means of which cinema transcends the restriction of aesthetics to the needs of the bourgeois male and the separation of perception as an aspect of the cognition of reality from its role in aesthetic enjoyment. In this way cinema enables everyone in the theatre, regardless of their gender or class, to reaffirm their sensory powers. Kant's aesthetics, which represents an aesthetics of reception, since it comprehends the aes-

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thetic object from the perspective of the reception of the subject, regarded natural beauty in a similar way. However, in Kant's case the sensuality being reaffirmed has to pass through the eyelet of reason or rationality, and his concept of a 'transcendental' subject situated above general and empirical reality only hypothesised the importance of the beautiful and sublime for everyone, while cinema realised the promise of the Kantian reception aesthetics in the concrete diversity of its audience. This implies in particular that the spectrum of aesthetics expands beyond nature, without thereby crossing over into the domain of art.

At this point it would be desirable to view a movie from 1912: *A CAR RIDE IN THE PYRENÉES* (the English distribution title of a Pathé production). A car drives in winding curves through a wide, mountainous landscape. At the entrance to a tunnel the car stops and a group of men and women get out. They start walking. It accords with the classical scheme of beauty that the camera focuses on the two women within the group. However, against tradition, they do not blend into the landscape as beautiful objects par excellence. These are two vigorous women shod in boots, warmly dressed in coats and with shawls wrapped around their heads to protect them from the weather. They climb around the sloping meadows, look at flowers from up close, and from a suitable vantage point regard distant cliffs and waterfalls. They do not have to content themselves with viewing with the naked eye, since they have taken binoculars along, which they use extensively. In this respect they more resemble a cameraman looking through his lens than an object of natural beauty, and yet their appearance is still a charming one in some ways. This gives a female audience the opportunity to affirm their sensory curiosity and receptivity: just like the ladies on the screen – and even closer to them, since the camera emphasises the view through the binoculars – this audience can enjoy the sensuous appreciation of a natural experience with the aid of a technologically augmented means of perception.

We could spend more time considering what is missing in the cinematic experience of nature compared to the 'original'. Certainly this would raise such questions as the missing interaction of muscular activity and sensory perception during the walk. However, such criticism would again only highlight in turn how important for the cinematic experience the act of going to the movie theatre is: leaving the home, plunging into city traffic, only to finally arrive at the movie theatre just like a hiker at a beautiful vantage point or at a shady meadow where he lays down to rest. Going to the movies and traversing the city at night was already an emancipatory act, especially for women, and provided the basis for the reaffirmation of the senses. However, I do not want to devote more time to these comparisons. Instead, I want to emphasise once again that cinema

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has one advantage over classical natural beauty: it contains the 'impartial' perception of technology. The movies allowed one to admire breakneck train trips over high bridges, the extreme mobility of automobiles and the soft landings of airplanes. Factories, telephones and streetcars could be seen. But most of all its own genre emerged, the animated cartoon, to convey a playful relationship with technology – the technology of the cinema. Walter Benjamin emphasised at the beginning of the 1930s how movies provide playful training in a modern reality permeated by technology.

### **The subversion of the apparatus: the film comedy**

Early non-fiction films were shown in public spaces that had been created by bourgeois society for its own amusement and recreation but also for that of the masses. This corresponds to the trivialisation and democratisation of aesthetics in these movies. Their production and reception during the first decade were not yet associated with their own facility. Thus a mobility prevailed in the beginning which is responsible for the fact that cinema did not remain the province of the bourgeoisie and its industry and pedagogy, but attracted an audience of non-bourgeoisie to the public places of entertainment of the new invention: that of the amusement parks and fairgrounds. Aesthetics had already found entrance there with the *laterna magica*, and cinema follows this path. But the genuine social and cultural tradition of the fair is not that of aesthetics but rather what Michail Bachtin called the 'culture of the laugh.' The culture of the laugh is a culture of the marketplace, where the subversion of the dominant culture takes place – at the close of the middle ages the reversal and mixing up of the hierarchical order of church and state. Thus it can be assumed that natural beauty is not only subject to trivialisation by the cinema but also – in the form imposed by fairgrounds performances – its subversion.

If classical natural beauty culminated in the sublime, then cinematic natural beauty was transformed into the comic on its way through the fairgrounds. In the one as in the other phenomenon the object disappears in the self-perception of the subject. It is only the pretext for the actualisation of the subject. However, in one case moral freedom gives an answer to the overwhelming predominance of the object. In the other, the bodily aliveness replies to the denuded, degraded and deadened natural reality: the appearance of life which has been robbed of its aura by cinema and captured in individual frames as mere corporeality. For the sake of a laugh footage is made of natural reality – of the face of a woman who re-



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sists having her personality pinned down by a police mug shot by making faces (PHOTOGRAPHING A FEMALE CROOK, Biograph, 1904). And images are manipulated – such as those of a pedestrian whose limbs and torso whirl through the air after being hit by a car, only to finally reassemble themselves and return to ‘life’ (EXPLOSION OF A MOTOR CAR, Hepworth, 1910).

The audience’s interest in laughter not only leads to the production of slapsticks and comedies, it also takes possession of the aesthetics of the non-fiction film. It emancipates aesthetics from the cult of nature – or of technology – by shifting the focus of spontaneous attention from the object to the subject, from the appearance of a reality outside of us to the in-coming of a reality in us, which expresses itself in a bodily reaction. The enjoyment of the filmed reality of a brilliantly illuminated landscape first of all lies in the excitation of sensory perception, but this enjoyment changes. For the perception runs up against the absence of reality behind the cinematic appearance and the apparatus in its very nature. But while this collision undermines the beauty and illusion of a reality impinging on us, nevertheless pleasure is retained because the viewing subject’s physical-instinctive reality is no longer held back and thrusts forward into the very forms of perception in which the world is no longer present.

That such a break-in of physical reality, of a material subject into the forms of viewing takes place and makes these forms into a play thing of a bodily dynamic, this is something the culture of laughter opened the way for. It represents a training in the upsetting and subverting of hierarchies and systems of order. It permits us to experience in cinema right from the start the distinction between an objective corporeal world and a spiritual subject as a hierarchical one, and the abstract forms of space and linear time – the forms of the camera and film strip – as a system of order belonging to this hierarchy. The culture of laughter constituted a way of dealing with power which put it out of operation at specific times and places. The forms of representation of power did not disappear but rather became the repeated objects of ridicule and play.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory has shown a remarkable insensitivity to the comic. The possibility of subversion inherent in laughter was related once again using Freud’s theory of the joke to the double standard of male society, and thus to an analysis of the male sexualisation of the gaze.

This lack of humour had something to do with the serious political hopes for a radical change in cinema, for a new generation of female – and male – filmmakers. With the acceptance of feminist film theory in the academic establishment, this pressure of practice lost something of its impetus, and theory became more aware of the possibility of subtle

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changes instead of the complete elimination of the old patriarchal cinema and its replacement by a new one. Teresa de Lauretis' article 'Ödipus interruptus' has become the 'classic' example of such a perspective, which does not eliminate patriarchal structures in cinema but instead interrupts, shifts, and inverts them. These changes appear to be an arduous and tiring task: the long march through the institutions of cinema. But a glance at early cinema shows us that subversion – and in particular that of patriarchy – is an original article of its bill of rights.

The film *VERGEBENS* ('In vain'), a German production from 1911, is a comedy, but below the level of its laughter-inducing dramaturgy it is also a charming representation of a piece of reality, namely the life of a coquette. It presumably had charm for the bourgeois man because it reminded him of those desires and their possible satisfaction that were otherwise hidden from the public and the family. Moreover, it presented him for over twenty minutes with an attractive woman going through the gestures of seduction. The film was undoubtedly attractive to white- and blue-collar workers and teenage boys because it provided them with an insight into the private customs of the upper classes. It is clearly in this reception that the turning point from the representation of reality to its comic presentation is grounded. For the bourgeois citizen appears for once not in his powerful social role but with his bodily needs, which he shares with men of other classes.

Right from the start the patriarchal role is broken by the corporeal presence. At the beginning of the film a statue of a naked youth decorates the background of a room which is obviously a place of amusement. While a group of women – and men – are standing around or moving, another group of gentlemen is at a table playing cards. A fat gentleman among the card players suddenly becomes agitated. He has lost sight of his 'possession,' his girlfriend. Already in this opening sequence he becomes an object of our mirth with his sexual possessiveness, while at the same time it is also possible to feel complicity with the woman. The more so as we are kept informed in the following sequences about her wishes, strategies and fate.

The film offers a view of the milieu of lady killers and fast women for an audience of men and women. Yet it does more: it allows women who would otherwise have to avert their eyes in shock to prove their moral superiority – to give in to their pleasure through laughter. In this way they can relax and follow the actions of the men and enjoy the fates of kept women. They witness the attempt of a woman to take control of her own body and desire and to reconcile this with her role as a bourgeois individual. The film basically tells a story which could happen to the female cinema viewer, but unconsciously. The attempt fails, but not in a tragic way,



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which would confirm the immutability of bourgeois morality. Instead it fails in a comical way and thereby reveals precisely the rigidity of the patriarchal social order in the face of life and its manifold needs and desires. For a second, when the marriage falls through, the female viewer's laughter may lodge in her throat, but in the end she laughs once again with the movie's female protagonist, who gets up and drains a glass of champagne to the last drop and then resolutely and vigorously smashes it on the floor.

### **The effectiveness of fantasy: the romantic drama**

American film studies has coined the term 'cinema of attractions' for the aesthetics of early cinema. The concept combines the rediscovery of the fairgrounds picture show – preceding the establishment of permanent movie houses – with older ideas of the Russian avant-garde. This concept has become an integral part of the new historical film studies. Yet it has been overlooked that this concept still subscribes to the structure of traditional film historiography, which was supposed to have been overcome: the pattern of the gaze, which has been projected retroactively from later film productions to earlier ones and conceives of the latter in terms of the former – whether Hollywood movies or those of the avant-garde. If only Tom Gunning had used the concept of cinema of attractions to critically understand Eisenstein based on experiences with early cinema, this trap would have been avoided. The concept of cinema of attractions was intended to break through the film-theoretical discussion oriented around the narrative, voyeuristic Hollywood film, in order to open a window on the different cinema of the early years. Derived from the theory and practice of Eisenstein, the concept actually brought about its own levelling of the autonomy of aesthetics, the filming of reality, which is so unmistakably evident in the early cinema of non-fiction film. It thereby particularly displaced a historical dynamic in which various audiences had been involved: the moment in cinema history in which a democratisation of classical aesthetics and its subversion by a non-bourgeois cultural practice of laughter adopted from the aesthetics of the fairgrounds cinema, took place.

Theory inspired by the idea of a 'cinema of attractions' misses the historical dialectic of the fairgrounds cinema, and by the same token it fails to offer us a way of understanding this cinema's future as narrative feature film. At first, scholarship on early cinema was not even interested in this question. It rigidly differentiated between spectacles, the short films before 1907, and the beginnings of narrative cinema around 1910, which it disparagingly regarded as predecessors of Hollywood. This blindness led

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Eric de Kuyper to place a 'cinema de la seconde époque' alongside of the 'cinéma du premier temps.' He thereby opened up a place for the romantic women's dramas in the discussion of early cinema.

In both respects – the democratisation of aesthetics in film projection and its subversion in the context of the fairground – the cinematograph met women halfway. As we have seen, this becomes explicit in movies as soon as women begin to constitute a significant section of the audience in permanent movie houses. However, the development of the non-fiction film and comedy is itself a process that may bridge the class distinction between bourgeois and non-bourgeois women, in which however the female audience does not yet exert a significant influence derived from gender difference on the choice of form. The breakthrough to this effectiveness comes about with the establishment of specialised facilities for show films. The store cinema, the nickelodeon, marks the beginning of a new audience. Not one, like the salons, in which the classical bourgeois public maintains itself, nor one which, like the fairground, allows the preclassical market audience of the masses to survive. The new audience reflects the fact that with the entrance of women into modern democratic society the bourgeois separation between private and public loses its basis in the patriarchally structured relationship of the sexes. Cinema is intrinsically characterised by a strange conjunction of the public and the private.

Well known are the – generally negative – associations of the masses and mass culture with femininity. At the least these associations testify to the fact that cinema allows something of the private, intimate sphere to penetrate the male public sphere. However, this is marked by anxiety and defensiveness and accompanied by the denial of women as a constituent subject of the public sphere. Defensiveness leads to the denigration of cinema as a place of mere amusement and consumption. German theoreticians of the public sphere from Habermas to Kluge have time and again re-established in theory the purity of the public sphere – free of the influence of the feminine and private. In contrast, the French film critic Jean Louis Baudry tried in the 1970s to focus precisely on the repressed. He finds in cinema that which Western thought has always turned its back on, the Platonic cave, and understood it psychoanalytically as the space of denied regressive male desire. Baudry identifies the movie theatre with the womb and the screen with the breast. The subject of the public sphere is not raised in his work. Thus it is no surprise that woman as subject is missing in these reflections – something Annette Brauerhoch has critically commented upon.<sup>3</sup>

Only with the (re)discovery of early cinema in the 1980s does feminist film history place cinema into context as a serious public sphere for women, for example in Miriam Hansen's essay 'Early German cinema:

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who's public sphere? which draws on Habermas and Negt/Kluge for its concept of public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Hansen has made especially clear how film production took women as an audience seriously and addressed them directly, in violation of the bourgeois public convention. The fact that cinema is not only a public sphere for women but also one constituted by women, however, is still not explained. The early narrative films often have stories revolving around woman as their main plot and are addressed to a female audience. But these developments in film production were preceded by the fact that women regarded the nickelodeon around the corner for the first time as a place which gave them a reason to take the unfeminine plunge into the nightly streets, something which had been denied them until then. A tabu is broken. What kind of film is showing is in the beginning irrelevant. The visit to the cinema takes on an emancipatory meaning. It is a step out of dependence.

The cinematograph on the fairgrounds or vaudeville theatre could not have led to the success of women's drive for autonomy. For this an entirely new and special place was required which was not yet occupied by the male need for entertainment. The nickelodeon also represented the arrival of the cinematograph in spaces with which women were already familiar. In these places female viewers in the course of time experienced the negotiation of the changes in their conditions, of social realities and their wishes and possibilities, which completely paralleled those of the theatre and its erstwhile significance for the creation of a male public sphere. Women made up for what they had missed in the classical public sphere in the social dramas of the cinema.

On the other hand, the public sphere of the cinema cannot be comprehended with the previously existing concepts. Cinema is no longer a public sphere of discursive communication. This aspect still adheres to it from the history of the cinematograph in the salons and places of bourgeois public education, but was already apparent in the structure of the public sphere of the fairgrounds before the cinema received a permanent domicile. In the fairgrounds the classical forms of communication acquired their subversive form and became vehicles of presentation and affirmation of intimate corporeality. In other words, in the transition from fairgrounds to movie house a subversion of the classical public sphere occurs. There the political constitution of a society was discussed by the propertied classes, but cinema deals precisely with what is left out of this discussion, yet what but determines their existence behind their backs. In the market public sphere of the cinema, in opposition to the bourgeois public sphere, it is a question of the bodily constitution of private individuals – and in democratic mass society everyone becomes a private individual, propertied or not.

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Modernity creates a mass of private individuals, individuals who have to compete on the labour market in a battle of each against the other. In this democratisation of the private person matrimony and family are elevated to fundamental principles of power in society. Evidently a long neglected and suppressed social and cultural development becomes relevant for the communication of the rules for private life with private interests: the history of love. It has its origins in the late mediaeval court as a practice of the emancipation of a woman from her patriarchal master with the involvement of a socially inferior individual. In this practice the phallic power of the husband is reduced to mere form from which the woman escapes by sensuously turning to the lover in order to embark on a new relationship with him. Fantasy rules in this relationship based on love, in contrast to the reality principle of obedience to the law. Love was prevented from diffusing socially in the transition to the early modern period by the full force of the church and state. With the beginning of the twentieth century, however, it is precisely these powers which, as Marie O. Métral describes, have recourse to love as a means of saving, promoting and securing the matrimonial unit.<sup>5</sup> This changes the position of women in society in a very ambivalent way. Their liberation as socially recognised subjects of love is embedded in the process of the functionalisation of love in the interests of social power.

In the classical bourgeois marriage the husband was the subject who let the loving wife participate in his status as bourgeois subject. Love was for her, the creature of nature, the only means of participating in the status of the male subject. And conversely, for the sake of his own role as subject, the husband had to recognise the wife in the private relationship as a person. This changes with the advent of modern mass society. It is not or not only the male bourgeois individual who needs love, but also bourgeois society, in order to produce private individuals en masse. This places woman for the first time in demand as a social person, as subject of love. At the same time she becomes entangled in a contradiction, namely to be able to accept love as an emancipation from patriarchal matrimony while obligated to use it to defend the marriage. Cinema rescues her again and again, for a brief period, from this dilemma.

For women, cinema is a public place to which they now have a formal right in a democracy, and to which they go out of a sense of curiosity and boredom. Movies offer them a concrete idea of themselves as subjects on the same footing as men, and even more, offer them an experience of themselves as bodies on the same footing as men, looking for pleasure. They find themselves unexpectedly in the dark interior of the cinema, a room which removes them from the constraints of the paternal or marital home. At the movies they can release the sensuous and fantastic powers of

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love without the need to integrate them into marriage. This basic experience is enhanced by the confrontation with romantic movies, social dramas, and melodramas, in which the contradiction between love and patriarchal society is made obvious, so that the female viewer can now reflect on what was hitherto only blindly experienced.

In the end it is not only the female viewer who is affected by this contradiction, but also the male one, who should be free, but in fact only is within the prescribed boundaries of the private, in his spare time. Cinema also offers him the chance to indulge his fantasies of freedom in adventure and crime movies, which stand in contradiction to the social realms available to him. He enters the dark interior of the cinema although his fantasies propel him into the outside world. His movie dreams are thus a renunciation and already contain their own negation. These dreams even increase in imaginative power during and after the First World War. On the other hand, in women's movie dramas he can discover a subversive power meeting him in the private realm, i.e., love, which contradicts the constraints from the inside.

In the first scene of the short American narrative film dealing with love and male friendship, *A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP* (1911, Mervin Banister), we are shown a woman engaged in lively conversation with two men in a public place, a café. She is a widow, and the two men are friends and colleagues from work. In the next scene we briefly see that they are working at the construction site of a modern high-rise. The woman lives at home with her little daughter. One of the men is visiting her; he plays with the child while courting the woman. Then the doorbell rings and the other friend arrives. While the woman goes to meet the new guest, the first guest watches them in the mirror – and misinterprets the scene. He believes he has seen signs of happiness in his rival to the woman's love. But the woman has a mind of her own which the man cannot penetrate. Yet we observe it when, alone again, she sits down to start writing her decision.

The film itself only conveys two things about happiness: it presupposes compassion with living things, and the suspension of social competition among men. After the letter has been written and we see the woman give it to her daughter to deliver, a small scene follows on the street. A coachman is abusing an exhausted horse by senselessly whipping it. One of the friends comes along and intervenes out of a sense of indignation, grabbing the whip from the hands of the coachman. This leads to a fight which the coachman loses.

The following sequence takes place at the construction site of the high-rise building. The workers are taking their lunch break, and from a

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vertical camera angle we observe the flowing downward motion of the crane, which instead of construction material is transporting the workers to the ground. Only one person stays on top, about whom we know two things: that he defended the abused animal, and that a letter is on its way that will decide about his longed-for love. We are equally in the dark about the issue, but while in our minds love is very much at stake, without warning the life of the hopeful man is clearly placed in danger. For the insulted owner of the horse has followed the worker, attacks him and suspends him from a hook in the air. In the meantime, in a parallel sequence, the film places the fate of the endangered man in the hands of his friend and 'now also rival' – as the intertitle states. The woman's daughter appears among the group of eating workers to deliver the letter, but only meets the friend of the addressee. He misinterprets once again what he sees and thinks his friend is the beneficiary. Nevertheless he sets out as a courier of happiness. He appears at the dizzy height – just in time to save the other's life. And now it finally dawns on him – the saved man shows him the opened letter in which he reads about his luck.

After these trials and tribulations of public life – in the words of Negt/Kluge, a male 'public sphere of production' has been passed before our critical eye – the man returns to the woman's home with a sense of liberation, there to consummate the joy of the loving embrace. Compassion with living things and the suspension of competition between men are still only a fantasy. But the fantasy which cinema creates a space for is more relevant to the realisation of love than the laws of matrimony.

(Translated by Gerald Silverberg)

## Noten

- 1 T. W. Adorno, 'Filmtransparente', in: Idem, *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica*, Frankfurt 1967, p. 82.
- 2 E. de Kuyper, 'Le cinéma de la seconde époque. Le muet des années dix', in: *Cinémathèque*, 1992, nr. 1 and 2.
- 3 Cf. A. Brauerhoch, *Die gute und die böse Mutter. Kino zwischen Melodrama und Horror*, Marburg 1996, and therein especially 'Jean-Louis Baudry's "The apparatus. Metapsychological approaches to the impression of reality" (1975)', p. 32-60.
- 4 Which first appeared in *New German Critique*, Spring/Summer 1983, nr. 29, p. 147-184.
- 5 Cf. M. O. Métral, *Le mariage*, Paris 1977.