A mild, rainy Sunday in Florence gave me the joy of recognizing a truth. I was lonely and filled with that certain kind of sadness and physical discomfort that comes from spending the night on a train. This sadness and discomfort were oddly softened by the spiritual atmosphere in which Florence envelops the spirit of those who have stayed far away for some time. I followed some crowds of people who were dressed in their Sunday best and who were moved by the slow desire to prolong their weekly stroll. It was in this way that I followed some groups into the hall of a movie theatre. There, I was struck by the rhythms of Parisian songs. I noted right away that in places like this in Paris, they prefer playing the sensual music of New York, but here, I heard smooth French harmonies. The orchestra was a poor one, to be sure, but not terrible. And I liked to observe these exchanges of popular rhythms—that is, the essence of a people—in identical places in such different cities.

Along with me, many people were waiting—and waiting with great patience. And while they waited, they played. They seemed very eager for the spectacle—the film spectacle—that we were about to watch. We were in the lobby of a theatre, of course, of a new theatre. But I was struck by the feeling of waiting in the space just outside a pronao (‘sacred temple’). This made me look at the faces of those around me to discover the spirit of the crowd. And this spirit was not religious, but in the facial features of the rough, and sometimes even proud and fierce common people, and in those of the satisfied lower-middle class, it seemed similar to that of artists and music lovers awaiting the opening of Sunday concert in Paris. It is understood that they were all new men who no longer have a temple, because they no longer have the faith that moved men in the old times, and that they are looking for a new and prophetic form of a spirit suited for the temple, a spirit seen in modern times at the Theatre and at the Museum. The spiritual desire that moves the artists of symphonic concerts seemed to me identical to that of this group of people on a Sunday afternoon. Some generations ago, they had all abandoned the Temple, and they were abandoning the Museum and the Theatre. I’m not analysing here the joy of aesthetic oblivion lavished upon those who are eager for sweeping orchestral expressions. I want, instead, to talk about what the cinema gives to modern men.

Among the marvels of modern invention, the Cinema immediately appears to be the greatest. It takes up and uses all of those marvels—either
symbolically or in real terms. We have created a new goddess for our Olympus. This goddess is Speed: completely worthy of the adoration that the ancients had for strength, and above all worthy of our greatest, most complex, and most refined sensibilities.

The deep, widespread mysticism, which can be recognized by a thousand different signs, even if it isn’t also focused on a desire for a Messiah or for messianic men, slowly creates the spiritual temple of the new goddess. We cannot foresee through any apocalyptic ecstasy what the future temple will be. We think that our Saints will be our Heroes of rhythm, our greatest creators of aesthetic harmony. We also think that the essentia (‘essence’) of a new religion will be music, which is the only art that is continuously and incessantly evolving (i.e. growing in complexity), and which is the art that has only developed in an extraordinarily recent time. Indeed, through music, man communicates with nature, with the Universal. In other words, through music, he communicates directly with the synthetic consciousness of the Universe, which is God. Music will determine the era of direct union with God, without the intervention of grace, the reign of the Holy Spirit. And the new religion will be essentially musical, just as pagan religion was sculptural and Christian religion was pictorial. This is what we think today and therefore know, and it is only what we can know and think. But what will be the new Temple? This new religious spirit—which will again reunite the Theatre and the Museum, the joy of the Spectacle and the joy of aesthetic contemplation, the mobile and the immobile representation of life—what form will it take? And what will be the forms of the new art which will rise up, as always, from a new myth?

In a hall in which movement is wondrously combined out of photographic images and light, life is represented at the height of action in a real, feverish convulsion of action: here is an indication of the new art. Indeed, it is peculiar that all the peoples of the earth—either because of universal fate or because of spiritual telepathy—have only conceived of identical modes of aesthetic expression. We can examine in every country—from the most ancient Orient to the populations most recently discovered by brave cartographers—the same ‘genres’ of art: from Music, with its complement, Poetry, to Architecture, with its two complements, Painting and Sculpture. Five expressions of art—no more—in which the aesthetic spirit of the world has always manifested itself and still manifests itself. A sixth expression of art would not only seem absurd but inconceivable. Indeed, for millennia, no people has ever conceived of one. But perhaps we are witnessing the rise of this sixth art—as much as every rational man will think it laughable to make such an affirmation in a twilight hour such as our own—the twilight
of the dawn!—in which every form is confused and barely recognizable, unless one’s eyes are made sharper by the will and the possibility of discovery. And this expression of art will be the conciliation between the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry).

Up until now, the theatre has achieved this conciliation, but it was ephemeral because the shape that Theatre takes depends heavily on the actors, and thus is always very variable.

The new art form should instead be precisely a Painting and a Sculpture unfolding in time; like Music and Poetry, which have life, they rhythmically mark the air during the time of their execution.

The Cinema—it’s useless to change its not pretty name—shows life. A genius—genius is always a miracle, just like beauty is always a surprise—could complete the work of conciliation which is only just conceivable today, to find the means of an art—which today is rather unlikely—that certainly seems fabulous and grotesque to most, and to create a new current of aesthetic emotion with a Plastic art in motion.

The Cinema is composed of significant elements that are ‘representative’ not in the theatrical sense, but in an Emersonian sense, which is necessary to now put in order.

I said that it [the Cinema] has two aspects: one that is symbolic and one that is real, both of which are very modern, which is to say that they are possible only in our times. The symbolic aspect is that of speed. Everything is offered to the speed that carries it out. The spectacle reaches the speed that brings it to fruition. The spectacle achieves itself only with an excess of movement of film in front of and inside light, and it lasts for a short time: the representation is quick. No theatre could ever carry out scene changes with such astonishing rapidity, no matter how many mechanical marvels it had.

But more than the movement of the images and this rapidity of representation, what is truly symbolic of modern speed are the gestures of the characters. The most tumultuous scenes, the ones that are eventful in a most unlikely way, unfold hastily with a rapidity that is impossible in real life, and with clock-like mathematical precision, which would satisfy the inborn eagerness of the most extreme long distance runner. Our entire age, through a thousand shortcomings of comprehensiveness, has destroyed the love for slowness that was symbolized by our patriarchal fathers with the familiar sign of the pipe next to the hearth. The Cinema satisfies all of the most relentless detesters of slowness. The driver who watches a cinematic spectacle after having just finished the craziest race through space will not have a sense of slowness. Indeed, the representations of life will seem to him to be as rapid as those he has just seen in the places he raced past.
And the Cinema will also let him see the most distant countries, the most unknown people, the most unfamiliar human expressions—moving, doing, throbbing before the eyes of the viewer who has been sucked in by the speed of the representation. And this is the second symbol of modern life—an instructive symbol—that the displays of ‘wonders’ at old fairs contained in a rather rough, embryonic form: the destruction of distances, now through the vibrant acquaintance of the most varied countries, just as man’s iron and steel creations have done more and more since the last century.

The real aspect of the cinema, then, is composed of elements that wondrously involve the psychology of the audience and the realisation of the modern Spectacle.

Tired of the unceasing theatre of adultery (the base and essence of bourgeois theatre) and waiting for a new theatre of Poets (the tragic rebirth towards which the establishment of open air spectacles tends—though still in an obscure and disorganized way), humanity is searching for its own spectacle—the representation of itself—through other means. Unexpectedly, and taking on all the values of an era that is still eminently scientific, that is open to calculations and not to Dreams, a new theatre that is scientific and made up of precise calculations and of mechanical expression has arisen and has spread. Humanity has welcomed it with joy. It has provided the new Feast, the one that was obscurely covertly awaited. It has done so, scientifically and not aesthetically; and the Cinema triumphs.

And there, humanity becomes a young maiden again, as at every feast. The spectacles unfold between two extremes: the deeply moving and the very comical.

The pathetic and the comic engage and excite the spirits simultaneously, just as life does. And the young maiden, Humanity, lifts herself up, forgets herself in the hot pursuit of these very rapid representations.

And the quick gesture, which establishes itself with the precision of a monstrous clock with moving figures, exalts the spirits of the modern spectators, who are already used to living with rapidity. ‘Real’ life is represented in the highest way and is, indeed, ‘stylized’ in rapidity. Art has always essentially been the stylization of life in immobility: an artist has always been as great as he was able to ‘express’ typical states of mind and of forms. The Cinema achieves instead the maximum of mobility in life, and therefore makes us dream of a new art, one that is different from every manifestation that already exists. Perhaps the unknown people who drew in prehistoric caves, who reproduced the convulsions of a galloping horse on reindeer bones, or the artists who sculpted the severe races of the friezes of the Parthenon had the desire to stylize some aspect of life in an extreme
movement. Let not the Cinema reproduce just one aspect, but rather all of life in action; and in one action—which even if it is slow in the chain of its typical aspects, it unfolds very quickly.

This agitates to an extreme level the fundamental nature of the life of the Western psyche, which manifests itself in action, just as the eastern psyche has manifested itself in contemplation. All the centuries of western life open up in the action which is characteristic of our times. And Humanity, which has become a young girl at a feast once again, is cheerful about it.

One could not conceive a more complex and more sure action. All the strength of her scientific thought—making good use of discoveries and inventions—has composed for her this supreme spectacle of herself. And the cinematographic phantasms pass before her with all the electric vibrations of the light and with all the exterior manifestations of her inner life.

The Cinema is, therefore, a theatre of new Pantomime. It is dedicated to painting in motion and contains the full expression of a rather unique creation that is achieved by men who are in themselves truly new: a new Pantomime, a new dance of expression.

Now we must ask ourselves if Cinema is art. I say that it isn't art yet, because it lacks the elements of a typical choice—of three-dimensional interpretation and not copying a subject—which also makes it so that photography will never be an art. Composing the form of a tree on a canvas, a painter truly composes (unconsciously to be sure), in a form that is evident and definite, his entire interpretation of the soul of a plant and all the spiritual elements suggested to him by the sight of all the trees that he has been able to see, as Poe would say, ‘with the eyes of a Dream.’ In one form he creates a synthesis of analogous souls. And his art, as I’ve already said, will be all the more profound to the degree that the artist will know how to capture thoughts of deep meaning in a form that is definite and evident.

A bad painter copies lines and imitates colours. The great artist carefully lays down a cosmic soul in a plastic form. And it is so for all of the arts, which are all greater to the degree that they are less imitative and more synthetically evocative. While the photographer does not have the faculty of choice and of composition (which form the basis of Aesthetics), except with regards to the forms that you want to have reproduced, which not even he himself reproduces, trusting it to the light mechanics of a lens and a chemical composition. Cinema, therefore, is not art today. But it is the first element of the new Art: of the one which will be and which we can barely imagine.

A desire for aesthetic organization, meanwhile, moves the makers of spectacles. In a time of exteriority and of documentation taken to extreme
limits, rather than of creation, the Cinema offers a feverish spectacle of exterior life, completely seen from outside in quick gestures, and through documentation. Here, the tales of the past are taken up again, mimed by actors *ad hoc*. And the realities of contemporary life are represented widely—from fishing for sardines in the Mediterranean to the supreme modern celebrations of steel and of indomitable human courage at the races at the course in Dieppe...

But the makers of spectacles are already striving towards something else: they are striving purely and simply towards the ever more potent affirmation of the new Gestures which are representative of ‘complete life’. The dream of a great artist—one who has the quality of being old-fashioned in his own Country and who has the ability to continually renew himself (in the sense of the aesthetic life of the world) while nevertheless always being younger than the throngs of young people who were born old—will soon be realized: Gabriele d'Annunzio has dreamed up a heroic and Italian tragic pantomime for the Cinema. And in Paris, two companies, which are led by two very noted playwrights, at least one of whom is an academic, have already sprung up and are organizing among the writers a trust of compositions for the Cinema. The group *Le Film d'Art* (*The Art Film*) is already spreading its products out into the world. Up until now, the Theatre, more than any other genre, offered immediate wealth. But the Cinema pays a good bit more, and hundreds of burning brows are already bending over the pallor of the pages dedicated to the creations that the new poets destine to the films and to their own very immediate success. *Charmed by mystical gold, hundreds of great minds concentrate their efforts on the creation of a modern Pantomime. And this will be given to the world, and it will be a new Art.*

On the other hand, the Cinema, beyond being the perfect product of the richness of modern science—which has been magnificently summed up—absolutely represents the most recent product of contemporary Theatre: not the exaggeration of a beginning but its most logical and extreme development. Middle-class dramaturges of plays dealing with daily life, *all of our dramaturges*, should have necessarily recognized in the Cinema their most direct representative and they should have, therefore, helped it along by using it themselves. *Because the drama of social psychology (etc.) is nothing else if not the degeneration of original comic theatre of Aristophanes and Plautus.* Vitruvius, who as an architect describes for us the divine sets that surrounded the actions of ancient plays, talks about the solemnity of the columns and the temples used for Tragedies, about the forests used in satires, about the Satyrs, and the houses used for comedies. The last of
these, the comedies, were a representation of daily life in its individual and collective aspects: today we would say psychological and social aspects of character and customs. Shakespeare, who employed a will and an effort like those of the greatest geniuses of English dramaturgy who had gone before him, was the precursor to our ‘psychological’ theatre and above all provided the greatest affirmation for theatre with no music. Theatre of this kind is absurd if it is tragic (and in that, the important and even ingenious art of Racine and that of Corneille, which is certainly more truly tragic in a collective, religious sense, are an art of degeneration); but theatre without music is no longer absurd if it reproduces the ephemeral life and pinpoints some aspects of it, without wanting to, or in any case not being able to pinpoint the ‘eternity’ or the profound soul of it. That is why comedy, from that of Aristophanes to the most recent French plays, to that of Becque, lives and gives pleasure, and gives pleasure also in its degenerate form of comedy with serious endings and aims and of ordinary drama. Now with the basis of such plays being the representation of contemporary life, this theatre is essentially realistic, or as they say in Italy, verist. It is necessary to represent life as accurately as possible, [effectively] copying it. All of the playwrights who write for indoor theatre (as opposed to those new writers who put together brief bundles of pages for the open-air theatre) do this. The Cinema does nothing if not exalt their principle, represent life in its full, completely exterior ‘truth.’ It is the glory of that artistic eye which one of the greatest forerunners of the aesthetics of tomorrow—the painter Cézanne—called with holy disdain the photographic eye.

But the Cinema adds the element of absolutely precise speed and reveals, however, a new joy which comes from the certainty that the spectator has about the extreme precision of the spectacle. Indeed, none of the actors who move about the illusory set will fail to play his part, or will even be absent for even a single moment of the playing of his part. Everything is regulated with clock-like precision.

All of life shows itself to be ruled by a clock-like rhythm: it is the triumph of modern scientific principles—of the dominion of Ahriman, who in Manichean thinking is the ruler of the world’s mechanics.

Moreover, the rapid coming together of life between the two basic extremes of the deeply moving and the very comical gives rest to the spectators’ spirits. Everything that is an obstacle in real life—the unavoidable slowness of events in time and of gestures in space—is done away with at the Cinema. And furthermore, the very comical gives rest to the spirit, taking from its shoulders the weight of its mantle of solemnity, which bears the marks of all social hierarchies, and shows it cloaked in easiness. Here, life is
simplified from the grotesque—which consists precisely of the deformation of established forms per excessum o per defectum (‘through either excess or defect’). The grotesque, at least when understood in this sense, destroys the horridness of existence and opens it up to laughter. And the caricature, beyond giving rest to the spirit, by basing itself on the exhibition and on the wise combination of the less important sides of the human soul—the weak sides from which stems all irony in life (which is itself entirely deeply ironic and crazy) and quickly turns into laughter—it develops in man a sense of irony, which is the beginning of all wisdom. The ancients recognized this truth, and, in Farce, they crowned the tragic spectacle with laughter. Modern people, instead, who have lost the sense of the necessities discovered by the ancients, now make the lever de rideau come first, but the desire remains the same. And Aeschylus’ farce of the Tetrology of Orestes, which is now lost, must have been immensely rich with potential laughter intended to lift the spirits of the elegant Athenians who has been overtaken by Cassandrian terror. Today, I don’t know of anything more superbly grotesque than the very comical spectacles of the Cinema. Because [in the cinema] there are extravagant apparitions, the likes of which no magician could ever create, and sudden transformations of movement and figurations, which would be impossible to be achieved by men right before the eyes of other men without the incredibly clever help of mechanics and chemistry. Therefore, the complexity of this new spectacle seems marvellous. All the centuries of human activity have contributed to its complexity. At the point, when clever artists develop it into vast rhythms and into true rhythms of art, then the new Aesthetic will be affirmed. The movie theatre is the first new theatre. And when, as it is already happening in some way, it is enriched by Aesthetics and completed by music that is highly understood and that is excellently performed—even if it’s just the absolute representation of real life with the help of a phonograph—one will be able to feel in it the Templar throbbing, the religious shiver of the religion that is to come. And the Movie Theatre of today will evoke for future historians the vision of the early, crude wooden theatres in which they would slit the goat’s throat and dance ‘L’Ode del becco’ (‘The Goat Song’): the ancient tragedy.

The modern audience is an admirable abstractor because it takes joy in the most absolute abstractions of life. At the Olympia, in Paris, I saw the spectators frenziedly applauding a phonograph that in the scene was covered in flowers and whose horn issued forth a duet from La Favorita (‘The Favourite’). The machine was triumphant. The audience was applauding the phantom sounds of distant or dead actors. And with a similar spirit, the crowds rush to the Movie Theatres, which are all the rage everywhere,
and they bring with them a desire for new Feasts. Every now and then, one can see plaques on walls that commemorate the men and the dates that mark the most recent stages of this colossal invention, from about 1830 to our present time. Among the most recent are Regnault, Edison, Lumière, and the Pathé Brothers. But what is more impressive, more distinctive, and more significant than the spectacle is the desire of the audience, which, we know, is made up of every social and intellectual rank, and, I will say absolutely: of every rank.

It is the desire for a new feast, of a new, joyous unanimity in a spectacle, a celebration in a meeting place where the oblivion of one's own isolated individuality is given out in smallest or largest doses. One day this oblivion will be aesthetic; it will one day be religious. And the Theatre that has the hope creating that which men of no other time have ever created—the sixth art (a plastic art in motion) and that is already creating modern Pantomime (though still crude and rudimentary)—I'm talking about the Cinematographic theatre—which also gives us, and strongly, the vision (though still only crepuscular) of a Temple.


Note

1. [Editors’ note. An opera by Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti.]