Meditations in the Dark

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The audience in the shadows is repose; the eye still possesses a streak of light, left outside, in the late afternoon, when the gold of the sun becomes a purple red and one recovers little by little the dazzling phosphorus of the screen. Rest: and as with insomnia, your gaze wanders over the darkness of the ceiling, finding slices of light projected from the street, and so you grab on to those two strips of light that spring from the projectionist’s cabin and like two bridles guide the action on that short and immense phantom canvas sheet that does not betray, like the Shroud of Turin, the marks of sweaty passion, agony, and death. You wander, because the film is not good; its action, casting masks of distress on the shadowy faces of people sitting in the underground chamber, with such solemn attention that it is as if they are glimpsing the final moments of a man condemned to death, doesn’t make your heart leap. And then, in the silence, the drumming of the little motor that automatically produces the narrow and long arch of vision is like that aery signal, which reaches us uninterruptedly on the sea beaches like the shafts of torpedoes at night, in a still sea, and which seems like the message of millions of cicadas that have just finished chirping and dying, and you are on the bench waiting for the wind to close all its banners up there, far away in the calmed sea.

Insensitively, around that continuous click that ties together and gathers vague and slow images, thoughts are gathered about the primordial essence of Cinema, that consists entirely in those lightning fast passages of moments that are and then are no longer and that oscillate around the immanence of gestures that continually annul themselves, like patterns on water that tend with every click towards a form that is always in a state of deformation and that lives on successive developments, the one coming out of the other like waves, like veils, like everything that tends toward repose. Is this not the principle of Cinema?

And is not to return to its origin to interpret its essence, to grasp the reason for its appearance in the world, to insert an artistic spirit in its agile scientific organism that is generated by that organism and is not in contrast with its essential nature? Have you noticed how those insensitive erosions or corrosions of images appear in their primitive cinematographic element when the one is born of the other leaving residues of wandering smokiness, scattered by the light that vibrates, settles, consumes itself to
generate other, ever-changing and ungraspable images? Yet, one can calmly state that everything made out of such material is beyond the scientific reason of Cinema and any artistic application is beyond the current that gave birth to that invention. The deepest emotions that the cinematograph has given us are not found in the actions, types, scenes, or in any of the schemes that come from theatre. Rather, they come in the form of pure luminous impressions, those in which the fixity of the image is abolished and we can glimpse at the dissolution of the image, the sense of the unreal, the fleeting moment in the luminous element. I do not say it is only this: because cinema is able to give is certain works of light and shade, of black and white that no Rembrandt would be able to dispense because in those broad expanses of white and in those enormous blocks of black there is a feverish, teeming, pulsating life, seemingly of material that knows no settled state, in continual transformative activity. You experience the shudder when the naked walls, the desolate deserted spaces are in the process of becoming fantastic apparitions; when a brilliant white table cloth levitates with abandoned in a room in which no one expects it, when you perceive certain very sharp sutures of sheets of light and shade, when all of life is tangential, made of edges, powerful shapes; when everything is black and a sharp hiss of excruciating light comes from afar and enters, expands, spreads, and occupies the entire visual field. Then you feel it is there that drama exists, but it is the drama created by the light, not by people, not by the subject; then you feel that the restlessness of the human soul is the continuous action of luminous matter that can no longer be borne by the forms on the screen but tends to vanish and that the accents of light are much more powerful than those of the human throat and the term teatro muto (‘silent theatre’) is the proof that cinema is no longer in tune with and we believe has never been in tune with the artistic element that was inherent in its scientific principle. Is there a human drama that is in tune with the drama of light? We don’t believe so: nevertheless, one could attempt to bring the figurations back in such a way that they take into consideration the most genuine characteristics of the Cinematograph and not create or seek literary transpositions or equivalents of elements that belong to the pure field of vision and light. One can hardly imagine what the Cinematograph would become; and to embark on such a fantasy would be like trusting Rimbaud’s poem, the ‘Bateau ivre’ (‘Drunken Boat’), to navigate on unknown waters. What does this matter? Once you have decided that the future of cinema does not lie in the development of literary drama, but in the ever deeper extraction of luminous characteristics from the cinematographic principle’s womb, one has stated a truth on which reality will never smile.
But, leaving meditation behind us, we must go back to contemplating the Divas!!