

## The Actor Watches His Film

His film still exists. The faces have lost some of their clarity, the voices are muffled and squeaky, the background is dimmed, the pictures blurred. Everything is worn and indistinct, yet still the film exists. What does it mean to him now, in his old age, this actor, far removed from his youth, this film, into which once he poured his best efforts? For film-lovers, what takes place on the screen is always the present. Even when they know that the film's heroes are long dead actors, the film-lovers see in it a living presence, while being aware that they are watching an old film merely serves to justify the idea of the lasting quality of true values. The film-goer sees the film as just a film. But what does its creator and he who took a direct part in it see? Can the actor be his own audience, his own neutral, even indifferent observer? Can anyone who is 'involved' be a reliable witness? For the work, to its creator, can never entirely be something distinct from himself: even in those circumstances when, from creative or biographical reasons, someone negates a work, its author, by this negative attitude, places himself in an intimate relationship to his creation. He may not care for the work's fate, he may be indifferent to the quirks of censure and praise, yet the work for ever reminds him of himself. The creation of every work is an event. The creation of a film, by its very nature, is an intense living adventure. As a completed work, the film, for those who take part, is a thing of the past. As a work, whenever seen, it is always present. And while, as a creation, it is transformed into the past, yet, as a work, it may still transform the past into the present. On a film strip the past is fixed as an immutable present. Others may remember, the actor beholds his memories. Yet again, before his eyes, there unwinds a series of moving pictures, more complete and living than any album. What the film-goer sees in the film is illusion, what the actor sees is life. The film-goer looks into the heart of the picture, the actor sees what was beyond. The picture awakens memories in the actor: forgotten events are resurrected, before him past partners live again, vanished sets and forgotten scenes arise, a life that is no more is repeated. The actor's emotional state now completely resembles the bewildered amazement of the workers, when the brothers Lumière showed them, for the first time, a film of them leaving the

factory: that which amazes is the fact that what once was, still and for ever, is. This looking back to a present past is a return to the world of yesterday in which the actor's personality is the centre of the entire action. Has something in the film changed - one wonders - has the phantom of time played some malicious joke, or has he endowed it with an unheard-of radiance? But this uneasiness, which grips the artist on encountering once again his early work, lasts but a moment. The actor no longer questions the skill which he put into the film, no longer questions the film as a work of art, but rather the **event** which is recognisable in it.

The actor has long ago realised that his film is finished once and for all. Every other craftsman has, at least, the theoretical possibility to make changes in his work. For the actor such a possibility is refused. The film is definitively removed from him. He has felt this already in the first projections, when it is finally determined that nothing more may be corrected, when he becomes his own benumbed spectator, a body whose soul has 'departed', when he becomes the witness of an action in which there is no recall. This awareness our actor has long possessed. Now, when for ever separated from his once unskilled, yet undoubted powers, when, once more, he is faced with a body that no longer belongs to him, yet is his, now, once again, may be revived all those buried feelings and vanish all those mislaid memories: his repeated involvement awakens in the spectator the young man who is only disguised as an ageing man. Just for this reason, many actors do not watch their own films, for watching them is something tortuous, almost masochistic, something that cannot be borne. Indeed, emotion is not necessarily what accompanies a repeated watching of such films. The change of time equally allows the upsurge of a sense of contempt and cynicism, of irony and derision, of scorn and superiority: youth is not necessarily a sign of advantage. But this clear narcissism (did not Narcissus die when he saw his own reflection?) and necessary exhibitionism, these two frequent characteristics of the actor, which the nature of his art mercilessly arouses, drive him frequently to look back on his past: the most reliable witness of his artistic biography - such is his conviction - is he himself. And this is one of the reasons why he sees in a film, above all, himself, but, through himself, he sees also what, for the spectator, is non-existent, but which, for him, is living memory. The actor sees a memory that is, but as he quickly realises that it is no

longer a question of a spiritual but of a physical presence which is now absent, he gradually perceives that, on the screen, he can no longer see the being, neither his own nor that of others, but only the shade of that self to whom he no longer belongs, which allows him, once more, to renew in himself what has been forgotten: every memory is a trace that accompanies the fantasy. Although, in fact, the film contains merely an unwinding event, although it has no need of additional imagination and reconstruction, although the film is for ever a real, concrete and obvious picture, although the actor is present (but only as the erstwhile actor), his true being continues only in memory. So it is with every artist, and with every man, regardless of what works they have bequeathed to us. The memory within us preserves their living form, but the works have long ago departed and exist for others. The work, then, is not and never is identical with its creator. In it the artist never sees his own clear reflection: if the work be a mirror, then in it every countenance, even that of the author, is disguised, transformed or distorted. Hence, for the artist, the mirror does not exist: what exists is the work, which is other to its creator.

The completed picture is the past, a picture of the past. It is for ever complete, for ever gone. It may awaken sleeping memory, it may renew a representation of the past, but it cannot resurrect it as the present. Thus the film definitively proclaims the ephemerality of the actor, affirms that he belongs to a time, a forgotten, outdated, theatrical or even comic style, to a past manner that is past, as is the world to which it belonged. All pictures are memory. Hence all old films are moving: they open to the actor the tragedy of the awareness of the passing of time, and to some spectators, through the faded copy, the general fragility of things. The film is a portrayal of the passing nature of all that is of the senses. And so, an old film, that still exists, is but a shadow of what once was. 'The original' no longer exists: the mist of time has changed what were clear images into what are merely vague contours. That which once was, for the actor, now becomes something else, becomes his own memory. The film has shown him that he himself is no more than his own shadow. "Was that really you?" asks the chance spectator - "Who'd have thought it ..." Truly, no one would think so.