



MOST POPULAR OF THE ARTS

"The Things Which Really Make A Good Film"

THE cinema has become so much a part of our daily lives that we are apt to ignore the fact that it can be an art at all. But it is—the most popular of all arts. That is the aspect of the cinema discussed by Dr. Roger Manvell in this talk for the BBC (in the series "Art for Everyone"), which was rebroadcast recently by 2YA.

eyes. So that's why good films are made visually interesting all the time, whatever added value they may get from the dialogue and music and natural sounds.

A "Team" Art

For instance, in John Baxter's British film *Loye on the Dole*, as soon as the young apprentice has finished his training and wants to earn a man's wage, he finds his search for a job hopeless. Now this situation is represented by the hopeless moving figure of the lad superimposed on an industrialised background. The refusal of work is shown by the shaking heads of the foremen.

A talkie camera and the sound film projector represent together one of the greatest inventions of the last 50 years. A good cameraman is both a technician and an artist. He has to be a technician to know how to use this highly-complicated instrument. He has to be an artist to realise what the effect of his endeavour will be in the finished photograph. To make a successful picture is, therefore, no small job—it demands planning and organisation. It demands a team of technicians which varies from make-up men to electricians, property men to script writers, carpenters to cameramen.

So the film is a "team" art, but a good director must also be a good leader. Yet even good technique is useless unless it is guided by vision. And by vision I mean vision—film vision. The eye sees the story in terms of significant, vital, moving pictures, made all the more significant and vital by the voices and the sounds and the music which go with them.

How It Works

Now let's make up a section of a film story and observe some of these qualities for ourselves. The story concerns the adventures of a young man called Jim on the way to meet his girl. He's reached the top of the street where she lives. It's an ordinary back street of an industrial city, with shops and houses which open flush on to the pavement. The screen shows us an almost still picture of the street: ordinary enough, but with certain key points of interest, to which our attention is drawn. It's dusk, it's been raining, and the pavement is wet. A solitary street lamp is prominent, lighting the pavement in the front of the house. A sheet of newspaper blows up the street, floating through the lamplight. Now this simple thing moving in an otherwise still setting somehow emphasises the loneliness of the place. The camera moves up to concentrate, first on the house, and then on a curtained window. The window is grimed, it's got a cracked pane. A close-up follows to show the broken pane in detail, and a hand sliding down the edge of the curtain. Suddenly the hand disappears and the curtain falls back to the window,

and sinister music, specially composed to time with the movement of the pictures, and the emphasis of the camera. Well, let's get back to the story. The camera introduces the young man, Jim. We see his feet striding along the pavement, from one patch of lamplight to the next, the camera "tracking back" as he advances. His stride is eager and happy; it's all in pointed contrast to what we've already seen. The sinister music has stopped. All we hear now is his happy whistling of a dance tune.

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★ DR. ROGER MANVELL, who gave this talk for the BBC, is the film critic of "The Times" Literary Supplement, author of an excellent Pelican book entitled "Film," and a member of the British Film Institute. He was born in 1909, and says that his interest in the cinema began at the age of five with film serials and slapstick, and was matured when he became a student of John Grierson, the documentary producer, 20 years later. He is a Ph.D. of London University.

WHEN anyone asks me whether the film is an art like the drama or the novel I always reply, "Of course it is. It's as capable as either of showing how human beings feel and think and behave." A film can't, like a novel, describe thoughts and feelings. No more can the drama, but it can show them. The film offers to its makers just as much power of choice as the other arts as to what to put in, what to leave out, what to emphasise, what to throw away. And this is where the director comes in, if he's an artist.

The cinema, which began as a flickering sideshow on the fair ground level, has developed during the last 30 years into a necessary part of the entertainment needs of most townspeople throughout the world. It soon revealed that it had certain powers over its audiences, once they had been induced to come in. And so immense sums were spent, especially in America, in the earlier days of the cinema, to establish and increase the cinema habit.

Film-going is one of the easiest habits to acquire. There is a hypnotic element in the power of the film. It is almost impossible, unless you deliberately dose or sleep, to keep your eyes off the brightly-lit screen. A wise and skilful film director will guide, compel, and maintain that attention which you so willingly offer him. Probably about ten times as many people prefer to see their stories acted as to read them on paper. This is true partly because it is much less trouble. All you have to do is to drop into a cinema and sit in comfort while the story is shown to you. But it's also true because our sight is our most vivid and our most impressionable sense. We find out more about our surroundings, and find it out more quickly, through our



LAURENCE OLIVIER as Henry V. at the Battle of Agincourt. This British film of Shakespeare's play, and the battle sequence in particular, is discussed here.