Magical Suspension

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The Movies as a Fun Experience

By

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To James and Claire Trowbridge
For their many kindnesses

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about moving pictures. Our conviction in this inquiry is that this innovation in human experience, in its various forms, has had and will continue to have major consequences in the conduct of our lives. Although moving pictures, most notably the "movies", emerged from precedents and sources that shaped them, the appealing feature of apparently unimpeded and unaided motion communicated the distinct impression that people were seeing something quite new. Certainly, one can read this central theme in the main collections of essays and commentaries of various early observers, who saw and thought about what they were seeing. Their various responses included perplexities and puzzlements about what they had just seen, but they agreed that, as Galileo insisted to the Inquisition, it moves. It was clear from the start that moving pictures attracted popular attention and intellectual interest, but what was unique here was the source and nature of the motion observed. People had seen motion all their lives, and indeed were used to seeing contrived or arranged motion, such as church rituals, circuses and carnivals and stage productions; but somehow this was different from anything they had seen move before.

We will explore that difference here. From the very inception of moving pictures in the late nineteenth century, thoughtful and incisive observers, as well as a wide array of moviegoers, began to express their impression that whatever else you might say about the movies they were certainly novel, and distinct from anything else that had ever been seen before. But what was the critical difference? As we move on into the twenty-first century, it is well that we try to make sense of the widespread human experience of moving pictures by first returning to these initial impressions of the "movie difference", using those impressions as a point of departure in forming a grounded and useful perspective as to what is going on in the popular attraction, abiding interest, and tenacious appreciation exercised by large numbers of people almost everywhere.

These early-formulated attempts to make sense of the movies centered around three masterly concepts: magic, myth, and mnemonic. The initial impression that the moving pictures were a new form of modern magic was and is quite discerning, since it expresses our sense that a motion picture experience invokes a world in which the usual expectations of

time, space, and physical laws and human behavior do not obtain. Secondly, these early observers thought that moving pictures evoked the presence of myth, especially those popular myths inherited from venerable stories, fables, fairy tales, and folklore, now manifest in the narrative structure and cinematic imagery of the new medium of the "movies". Thirdly, as motion pictures developed in aesthetic skill and narrative capability, as well as organizational ability, they began to acquire mediated habits and innovations, enjoy popular diffusion and express criteria of evaluation, and over time accumulate a history and acquire a legacy that provoked mnemonic remembrance and perpetuation. Taken together, these initial observations contributed to a powerful and pragmatic formulation that still enhances our understanding of the movie experience.

We will also explore an implicit and key explicative idea that runs through this early literature, and cannot be stressed enough. Simply put, it was evident that people liked to go to the movies because they were fun. The magical world they conjured up was fun to see; the mythical stories they told were fun to watch; and the mnemonic recollections that persisted over time were fun to recall. The nexus of the movie experience was and is the playful appeal they have for the people who attend and enjoy them, both as they immediately see them and subsequently in pleasant memory. If the movie magic produces delight, and the movie tale sustains interest, it is for those attending a fun experience worth remembering and even seeing later. Even the most serious of films is nevertheless an object of play, even though it might be intellectual play; it is still 'play learning' about a subject of importance. Movie fun can range from the frivolous to the weighty, depending on what people in attendance consider ludenic fare. It was discerned early that moving pictures of all kinds belonged to the social order of play, characterized by a ludenic principle: no matter what the subject one is seeing unfold on the screen, it involves aesthetic funning with objects of interest. If our encounter with the order of nature enjoins realistic contention with physical being, and our engagement with the order of society requires associative contact with social beings, then our foray into the order of play suggests imaginative experience with ludenic being, enjoying ourselves in communion with a cinematic presentation which we desire to be fun. The principle of play enjoins that human desires include not only the desire to live and the desire to associate, but also the desire to imagine. The desires for survivability and for practicality are complemented and enhanced by the desire for creative possibility, including quite prominently the desire to have fun.

The Movies as a Fun Experience

Behavioral scientists have opined that we humans have a "ludic center" in our brains that activates and controls our desire to play, and have even been so bold as to suggest that the dynamic here is that play makes us happy. Understanding the "dynamic" aroused in the appeal of moving pictures points us to observe what people in fact did and are still doing: going to the movies. The emphasis here moves away from psychological states and even in some measure from historical conditions towards the key question of social ontology involving human decision-making: why do we attend to the things to which we attend? In this perspective, the "ludic center" is located in the experience of moviegoing, focusing on what happens in the transaction between the attending auditors and the moving images audited. When people "go to a movie", this involves physical motion both towards and into a movie site, either a movie theatre or a screening unit in some other venue which will play the movie. At this incipient stage, we are witnessing an act of attention, people attending to the thing they want to attend to. If our hypothesis is correct that this particular act is largely (although not universally) an act of fun-seeking, then moviegoing draws people toward looking at a screen on which some sort of moving picture show will unfold, giving them a pleasurable experience. It may be the case that people will define what they consider pleasurable in very different ways, and some attendees are incapable of enjoying pleasure. It may also happen that the movie fails to deliver pleasure to those seeking it. In all such cases, what might have been an experience of "communication-pleasure" in fact becomes one of "communication-pain" and thus unrewarding as playful entertainment. When a movie is appealing fun for large numbers of moviegoers, it ranks as one of the most pleasurable forms of play available in the modern world.

It should be stressed that attention is not only an act, it is also an art. We are all aware of the forces that inhibit our attention span and indeed our ability to play. When one goes to a movie, it is common to see (and endure) people who are distracted, preoccupied or bored, so much so that they can become a nuisance, interfering with everyone else's attention to the movie. But we are also aware that if a moving picture is compelling enough, those kinds of discrepancy become minimal and even disappear as the audience absorbs itself in the unfolding film presentation. It is here that the art of attention moves us from the stage of curious looking to that of sustained watching, silently communicating among the attendees the unspoken message, "Watch the movie". Careful scholarship has detailed

the historical antecedents that "conditioned" populaces for the act and habit of moviegoing, as well as the psychic and social dimensions of the emotive and fantastic pleasures of the film experience. The pragmatic complement to this important analysis is simply that moviegoers are active participants in movie making, in the sense that they are into the fun of it, arbitrating whether the film experience meets their expectations of fun. Moviemaking is a collaborative process, involving those professionals and organizations skilled in producing and distributing films, yet very dependent upon the choices and conversations of potential moviegoers. The structured play of the movies can offer fantastic magic tricks ("special effects"), realistically framed popular myths in story form, and the promise of sweet memories, only requiring receptive and attentive audiences to join in the fun.

The pragmatic dimension of movie experience moves away from the idea of passive subjectivity towards active objectivity, seeing moviegoing not as psychic "inwardness" but rather as ludenic "outwardness", based in the desire for learning how to engage in cinematic play. The very first audiences for movies learned quickly how to address what they were seeing on the screen, grasping the nature of the new medium unreeling before them, and realizing that what they were seeing for the first time had a surface reality easily seen and followed, but which was all the more fascinating because there were probably more profound or unfathomable things going on which they didn't immediately understand. Similarly, even today, someone not familiar with the movie experience is faced with the same problem and challenge; movies seem like a lot of fun, but how do I learn to make sense out of what's going on? That people then and now were able and willing to learn how to make cinematic sense is a matter of their capacity for pragmatic wit. The ancient term "wit" alerts us to the use of common-sense knowledge, and "pragmatic" to the everyday presence of problems or situations that invite addressing and solving. Those people who are experiencing their initial exposure to moving pictures share this question with those attending the Lumière Brothers' screenings in 1895 France: how do we use our wits to make sense out of something that seems so excitingly extraordinary yet so patently impossible? Given the enduring success of the movie industry, it is logical to conclude that then as now people liked what they saw, learned how to look and see, and watched what they liked. Further, they liked it so much they wanted to see more, and indeed made a habit of recurrently attending movies. And even though people told them that they should not watch movies, they continued to watch and learn from movies. People use their wits to learn cinematic

play. For those unafraid of play-learning from the movies, they seem to adhere to the proposition that levity is the soul of wit.

And the view from that cinematically levitated height is breathtaking. For all the differences, the experience of those who attended the screening of *La Sortie de usines Lumière* on March 22, 1895 is remarkably similar to those of us who go to the local cinemall to see a movie on the big screen. For what confronted and confounded those intrepid French attendants long ago is contiguous with the contemporary experience of a moviegoer who is unfamiliar with what to expect. Simply put, perhaps we go from asking ourselves "Is this fun?" to the tentative answer so many have concluded, "This is fun". In the transaction between moviegoer and moviemaker, the "division of play" is clear enough: the moviegoer has to figure out if what is being seen is worth continuing to watch, and the moviemaker has to figure out what to show that is worth watching. The onlooker is immediately aware that he or she is seeing moving pictures wherein the flood of images on the screen seems amazingly alive even though they are not here. But are they in any sense real? Lumière simply filmed workers leaving a factory after work (deemed an *actualitié*), a film shown to audiences in simple theaters called "cinemas". Even though there were no narrative or cinematic effects, audiences apparently found this compelling. It was new, if not entirely unique, but it certainly invited active expression on the part of the viewer. People looking at the factory workers going home were expressing an attitude, a propensity to act, by initiating prehensile wonder through choosing to keep on looking at the cinematic spectacle. Scholars have rightly rejected the long-standing perceptual concept of "persistence of vision" to characterize what was going on in the act of looking at moving pictures. Here we will emphasize the fact that human persistence in the act of moviegoing stimulates the exercise of pragmatic wit, wherein the use of the capacity for people to enjoy things through aesthetic expression comes into play.

In the initial act of choosing to look at moving pictures, the onlooker sees kinetic arrangements in motion which challenge our capacity for the apperception of imagery. This requires the persistence of attention. We keep looking to see what will happen next, and attend to the movement of factory workers or chariot racers or astronauts as they move about in cinematic space. The incredible novelty of this new medium was enough to sustain people in watching such generic social scenes as a train arriving at a station or people getting off of a boat. The Lumière brothers began to introduce novelties with a rudimentary plot, such as the gag of a boy holding the water in a garden hose until the gardener investigates and then gets a face full of water. It was quickly apparent that such short glimpses

of life would not be enough, and figures such as Méliès began to make films with simple plots and fantastic effects. Méliès produced *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), a delightful Jules Verne fantasy about scholars planning and debating a moon shot, an elaborate ceremony arranged at the take-off site (with lots of scantily clad young women as decorative ornaments), an encounter with moon creatures, the return to earth and then more celebration.

These "artificially arranged scenes" were obviously not based in actuality but rather in fantasy, and certainly held sustained interest. The great French director Godard said that Lumière showed the "extraordinary in the ordinary" and Méliès showed the "ordinary in the extraordinary", which in some measure is a distinction that still characterizes the movies. In any case, movie audiences learned watchful apprehension of the imaginative, quite possible if it adequately appealed to their apprehensive desire for storytelling, activating their sustained persistence of interest. The movies quickly became an international industry, and with the appearance of even more extended running time and sophisticated narratives, films such as Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (l903), with complicated cutting, change of scenes, and exciting movement and danger, displayed the familiar features of the narrative film and specifically a genre already well-known by audiences conversant with the popular literature and news features about the Wild West.

Social transactions of any sort, and certainly in a formative art form such as the movies, entail and require mutual responses from the complementary parties and forces in the relationship. Moviemakers are in an expressive relationship with potential moviegoers, responsible for conjuring the kinetic imagery and the dramatic exposition that constitute the imaginative presentation of a "movie" and not just moving pictures. Their charge is to keep moviegoers watching, appealing to their capacity for persistent interest, activating their ludenic practice of "convergent selectivity" by promoting and displaying new films which they hope will attract attention and attendance. The new studios grew apace, and some film historians have maintained that the structural features and generic formulas of narrative film and in some measure documentary were established by 1910 or so. Certainly the movies were the immediate beneficiaries both of narrative traditions (ranging from dime novels, sensational news stories, folklore and fairy tales, even comic strips) and of popular features of the new era of modernity (photography, advertising, consumer displays such as mail-order catalogues and department store windows), which enhanced their status as a new and spectacular medium

of storytelling. In that way, the movies came to be seen as both strange and novel as well as familiar and reliable.

Since we are used to hearing industry rhetoric and reading official histories of the heroic march to glory of the film industry, it is astonishing to note how doubtful many of the pioneers of moviemaking were about its future. Even the inventive Thomas Edison had misgivings, writing in 1893 that his contraption, the *Kinetoscope*, was one of those "zoetropic devices [which] are of too sentimental a value to get the public to invest in". The development of pictorial motion was, like so many other changes or innovations, one characterized by fits and starts, advancing from moving pictures (filming workers going home) and motion picture skits (such as staged trips to the moon) to the more familiar feature of the motion picture. Cinematic expression survived and flourished not only because enough moviemakers kept making "picture shows" but also because more than enough moviegoers sustained attention about and attendance at "the flicks", and thus kept alive widespread interest in watching movies and talking about and remembering them. The movies became not only an individual choice and a social act, but also a cultural habit of popular expression. As a valued form of play, the motion picture became ingrained in modern life through the persistence of memory. The visual novelty of moving pictures was soon complemented by dramatic rudiments and enhanced by cultural status, including the propagated interest disseminated and exploited for public consumption about the new industry and its glamorous features such as movie "stars". People talked about the movies, newspapers and magazines wrote about them, and virtually every town had a movie theater. The movie habit was so prevalent that a study of a mid-size and parochial American town in the 1920s found that on Sunday more people were going to the movies than to church. By this time, the now legitimated principle of play was superseding the traditional obligation of moral responsibility, and so on the Sabbath people exercised the choice of having fun at the movies rather than seeking spiritual edification in a church service.

John Updike begins his novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies* with a fictional but telling coincidence. In the spring of 1910 movie pioneer D.W. Griffith is shooting a movie on an outdoor set, and actor Mary Pickford (soon to become a famous star), both tired and hot, faints. At the very instant she faints, a Presbyterian minister "felt the last particle of his faith leave him. The sensation was distinct—a visceral surrender, a set of dark sparkling bubbles escaping upward". The descendants of this minister fallen from faith subsequently have various twentieth-century destinies, one of which concerns the daughter of an unambitious local postman, who

moves from being a star-struck young girl with ambitions to becoming a teenage model, then a glamorous movie star, and finally a mature television celebrity. In a sense, she is acting out the initial experience of her ministerial forebear, who lost his religious faith but found that the "sorcery" of the movies offered a quasi-spiritual substitute as respite from "the bleak facts of life, his life, gutted by God's withdrawal". By becoming a renowned figure in the romantic "secular scripture" of the movies, his descendant found in movie life all that religion no longer offered, including a blessed existence, a bigger form of living in "a realm beyond time and space", even a form of immortality. The movie star's son, however, grows up saturated in both movies and drugs, and returns to religion, now of the cultish and apocalyptic style. In this unholy blend, every memory is an "inner movie" and every action is predicated on the cinematic premises of movie-made criteria. The son finally acts out a violent reckoning with the cult leader during a massacre, but this too takes on an aura of unreality, since he appears to be guided by the generic clichés of action-hero movies in which the flawed hero recklessly sacrifices himself to rid the world of fanatics - less the redemptive act of a Jesus or Gandhi, more the easy and satisfying resolution that wraps up a "Hollywood ending". In that cultural way, we all can be influenced by and even act out "inner movies" learned and retained from popular experience, especially from the movies and their visual derivatives.

If this is the case, then fun at the movies has important cultural and behavioral consequences. The persistence of attention towards movie fun and the persistence of interest through funning at the movies are complemented by the persistence of memory, wherein the play learning accumulated through consistent movie exposure and experience becomes a vital aspect of our memory resource. Not only does a fun experience like a good movie linger and even mellow in our memory in playful retrospection, but also that very cinematic experience – movie moments (a scene, a line, a gesture, and so on), specific movies (the ones you want to see again), and the corpus of your movie "life" – constitutes the sorcery of our own "inner movie". There is a strong sense that our movie fun is both an immediate and cumulative transaction, a process of expressive learning - play-learning, beginning with our initial exposure to moviegoing and perpetuated for many people who continue their movie habitude and usage, with the learning ongoing over lifetimes. Such learning progresses from the initial invocative experience of learning to pay attention to the movies, through the evocative experience of learning how to sustain interest in movies to the provocative inclusion and utilization of movies in our repository of memories. Like all art, movie art is play with form, and

since our quotidian lives risk being shapeless and undirected, our ludenic experience with movie fun serves as a resource for pragmatic play, using the "make-believe" of movie expression as a referential guide relating cinematic imagination and imaginable courses of live action.

The persistence of movie memory signifies a recurrent expression of movie appreciation over time. Our play-learning at the movies involves not only an appreciation of our aesthetic experience with the cinema, but also more broadly our heightened understanding of the practicalities of living, in light of what the qualitative resource of this accessible art form tells us about what we are doing and might be able to do. Aesthetic play with motion pictures provides imaginative shape to our pragmatic wit, not merely with our memories of powerful images but also with what we recall of the imaginative actions in movie dramas; and, perhaps most importantly, it provides the lasting stimulus to our imaginations, moving us from prehensile wonder through apprehensive interest to appreciative understanding. Our mnemonic recollection of motion picture presentations is pragmatic, in the sense of "recollecting" and applying ludenic imagination in an expanded present wherein we are trying to "appreciate" new situations in imaginable ways. Movies help give shape and direction to our memories, using cinematic play learning acquired in movie recreation to "recreate" imaginative identities and scenarios deemed usable in an actual situation. As a tactile medium adept at the communicable expression of the outer world of experience occurring in the everlasting now of a virtual present, it becomes easy for people to exercise the transferability of expression between the virtual play-world and the valid everyday world. Human transactions prefigure aesthetic punctuation of activity in the processes of both living and playing, so the form and content of cinematic experience serve as referential criteria for the conduct of action. It takes us into the murky realm of subjectivity to speculate as to how this process operates, whether for instance popular experience such as motion picture immersion serves as an archetypical or prototypical "model" for attitude and action, but it is fair to say that such metaphorical or analogical sources offer us imaginative modes for recognizing and adapting to new situations. Perhaps the expanded present implicit in popular experience such as the movies includes qualitative illumination of the choices and the consequences we may draw upon as symmetric or rhythmic design for the activities we in fact undertake. In this way, fun at the movies may have import and impact beyond idle diversion or useless distraction.

It is most likely that such external and eventual considerations are not directly on the minds of moviegoers. They are mostly there to have a good

time. The process and procedure of moviegoing has not changed much from its rudimentary beginnings in 1895. The initial response, then and now, is seeing the moving pictures, looking at the composition of motion and, if new to the experience, wondering what is going on here? So given a modicum of ludenic receptivity, we learn how to play with the images that dance before us in kinetic animation. Perhaps this initial sensation is an outright delusion: the things we see on the screen are somehow alive, yet they live in a magical universe. Our subsequent response, as the movies began to tell stories, was when watching a movie: what will happen next? Our attention to images is complemented by our interest in narrative imaginatives, viewing the direction of screen actions as they unfold. Thus, movies have been fun to watch in apprehensive anticipation of suspense through the dramatic development of the movie's story (quickly also dubbed "photoplay"). And, as cinematic knowledge accumulated over lifetimes and generations, many found it fun to keep learning from the movies, experiencing a gradual expansion of imagination, and indeed enjoying an appreciation of the memorable recreation which such recollection offers. More than ever, we learned that we could imagine what always happens by reference to our cinematic education.

Not only is it likely to be true that movie learning never ceases, it is also evident that such learning is quite varied and uneven, and in some cases even amazingly unpredictable and bizarre. For some people, movie learning is marginal and unimportant, and for others crucial and prominent. It is a perennial puzzle for movie critics and film scholars as to why a particular film becomes a phenomenon, why certain cycles of films seem to sustain audience interest, and why strange interpretations among groups of movie cultists exist, circulate and persist. In the first instance, the perennial interest in films that attain "cult" status invites speculative interpretation, and a glance at the websites and books devoted to the reputation and celebration of cult films remains phenomenal. In the second, one strains to characterize adequately the appeal in the early twenty-first century of zombie movies, which at the time were seemingly endless but inspired much inquiry from students of popular culture, and purveyors of cultural subjectivity. In the last case, there is a notable film directed by the eminent Stanley Kubrick entitled *The Shining* (1980), which seemed at the time of release to be a straightforward creepy-old-hotel tale based on a popular novel, opening to mixed reviews and moderate success. Over the years, however, it has gathered about it a mix of people who share various obsessive interpretations of the film, which seem to most outside observers to go far beyond the objective facts about

directorial intention and mainstream evaluation of the movie. The documentary entitled *Room 237* identifies and interviews the enthusiasts who have their own unique and unorthodox appreciations of the film. Although there is no agreement among these "theorists" about the meaning and message of the film, their elaborate expositions of what is actually and often subliminally going on all share the conviction that there is much more there than meets the eye. These analyses include the notion that the movie is a tongue-in-cheek confession by the director that he was hired by NASA to fake the Apollo 11 moon landing; a thinly veiled overlay of a covert subtext about the genocide of American Indians; an oblique commentary on the Holocaust, evidenced by the presence of German typewriters and the significant number "U2"; and a plotted horror movie that serves as the context for hidden but discoverable erotic jokes. These enthusiasts have websites, produce papers and diagrams of the hotel set, even hold conventions of sorts, all certainly willing to share their keen perspective about what is hiding in plain sight on the screen. By contrast, the devoted fans of *The Big Lebowski* embrace a lighthearted attitude of playful affection for the comical and relaxed universe of the Dude and his friends, attending celebrations such as cast reunions to recall the fun scenes they enjoyed. Fun activities have accompanied the admiration of the film, including a pseudo-religion called "Dudeism", and annual festivals that feature much bowling and drink.

This sort of cinematic levity is aptly termed "carnivalesque", since the world of the Dude is in a sense a "world upside-down" in which for a brief interlude people enjoy a variation of the Feast of Fools through remembrance of the grotesque characters and subversive humor of the movie. Such ludenic affiliations are festive without serious import behind them, and are only on the minds of the participants during the festival celebration. For the many who turn out repeatedly for zombie movies, the undead are cinematic figures who inspire ritual participation in movies featuring them as a symbol of social dread. This cinematic ceremony involves watching with interest some things which are creatures of our imaginative interest in stories wherein death-in-life threatens to triumph. It requires speculative inference to guess why such horrible figures appeal, but our restricted point here is that this "cluster" of films is another instance of movie fun, in this case where the ghastly seems to beckon as a way to have fun at the movies. Those "taken" with *The Shining* appear to exercise cinematic immersion in just one film, but without the joyfulness that seems to characterize the fans of *Lebowski*. Much to the puzzlement of some and the dismay of others, ludenic interest in beings and stories that defy easy characterization has always been a recurrent peculiarity of

the medium and the moviegoer. The perennial lament among moviemakers is the uncertainty of predicting who and what attracts attention, concentrates interest, and sustains appreciation and analysis over time. What people consider cinematic fun injects a wondrous strain of unpredictability into moviemaking and moviegoing, since in a way it is the fun-seeking audience who are the true light in the magic lantern. The fun of moviegoing light may shine on a sportive carnival, a perplexing ritual, or an odd symposium of arcane exegesis of a film; but even though that light may seem to focus on unusual objects with different luster, when it comes to defining and expressing what is considered fun about the movies there are many different drummers.

The Attraction of Cinematic Expression

We have maintained that the human dynamic that drives movies is that they are so much fun. This assertion suggests the corollary question, what is it about the movies that is so much fun? What's in them that people like so much? Even if we grant the premise that people like to have fun, what is going on in the movies themselves that makes them so attractive? The larger question of why we attend to the things we attend invites the specific question of why did and do so many people attend the movies? It follows that the main objective of our inquiry here is to ascertain as much as it is possible to know about just what is going on, in the actual movies that people watch, which makes them so attractive. This question has agitated thoughtful observers of moving images and motion pictures since their inception. As we search for some powerful observational methods of inquiry, it has seemed wise to search for both old and new studies and commentaries on the movies, from a variety of voices, for clues on how we should proceed in our quest to make sense of the movies. From this search, we hope to forge an adequate and accessible set of observational criteria useful and understandable for inquirers into the movie process.

A good place to start is from the learned perspective of Erik Barnouw, long-time Chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, in his provocative book, *The Magician and the Cinema*. He reconstructs for us the extent to which the technical precursors of the motion picture, such as the magic lantern and the phantasmagoria, were not only a feature of magic shows presided over by a professional magician but also - more importantly - were regarded by their audiences as a form of magic. So, as the public display of moving images evolved into "picture shows", many people were already used to the notion that "the images themselves were the magic", including the

astounding ability for the "repudiation of all physical restrictions of human existence". Eventually, this magical quality turned into "media", retaining all of the attractive and entertaining features of magic, including "the flights into the future, nightmares of the past, hopes that maintain us, fears that threaten, and all the mythologies that tell us of our heritage and destiny". The conjuring acts of these enterprising magicians of old have led us to create a "magic industry", wherein the "apparitions" on moving picture screens flow before us as ephemeral images projected for us, as the audiences' descendants, like the "natural magic" of the magicians of old. People learned to enjoy this kind of magical power as entertainment without much reflection upon the larger social impact and cultural consequences of such a widespread innovation. Barnouw concludes by speculating on "the astonishing fact that media images are no longer seen by the public as optical illusions offered by magicians, but as something real". The proliferation of the movies was a key organized undertaking in the acceptance of this new kind of magic as a cultural activity, and continues as a major and imperfectly understood force in the contemporary world.

Previous generations of articulate and thoughtful observers and critics of this new medium were quick to note this magical quality of the movies. Readers of earlier anthologies of writing about the movies will see repeated reference to the concept of the movies as magic. Herman G. Scheffauer in *The Vivifying of Space* writes: "The human imagination is fructified and begins to react, willingly or unwillingly. A new magic ensues, a new mystery possesses us". The art historian Arnold Hauser saw cinematic affinity in "film magic" with the modern novels of Proust and Joyce, and philosopher Susanne Langer saw film occurring in the "dream mode" creating a "virtual present" of an "endless" Now freed from time and space. Art critic Parker Tyler discussed the hallucinatory "magic of effect" which characterizes the kinetic ordering of movie imagery. Tyler also pioneered the importance of both magic and myth in film, reminding moviegoers and critical observers that myth is an imaginative truth, and in the movies serves as "magic-lantern metamorphoses" displaying a "complex myth of sheer synecdoche". It was a common theme in these earlier treatments to agree with Andre Levinson that the cinema was different from other mediums of expression, in that it was freer from convention than, say, the theater and thus better able to express things stemming from our imaginations, as if in a dream in which animation of activity and association of imagery are intensified by the techniques of "the magic screen". Thus, "the cinema differs from every other intellectual activity in the magic which operates at each turn of the crank".

This conception of the movies as a kind of modern magic was soon complemented by the development of myth analysis among such circles as the Cambridge anthropologists, who studied the origins and development of early mythologies and the ritual enactments of myth in such forums as the ancient Greek theater. Scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell did intensive interpretations of mythic life and extensive comparisons of world mythologies. In literary criticism, figures such as Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke did major work in understanding the mythic groundings and "mythemes" imbedded in literature. The cinematic "magic naturalism" of which Hauser spoke convinced some observers to study the movies as a special manifestation of mythic experience. However, with the exception of Parker Tyler and a few others, the effort to understand movies as magic and myth fell into abeyance. So the dearth of such inquiry persists - in spite of the incisive contention that the movies are a latter-day manifestation of magical expression, a celebration of ritual drama in a public setting; in spite of the fact that such ritual drama, like similar archaic culturally symbolic events, survives in cultural memory through provocative recall of its magical evocations and its mythical invocations.

However, in recent years there have been signs that such promising analyses may be revived and pursued. Rachel O. Moore has explored "savage theory", refining and applying the insights of earlier cinematic observers in an effort to revive this view as a coherent and penetrating mode of inquiry into the process of movie appeal. Moore discusses such insightful ideas as the conception of "movie language" as being animistic, imbuing a semblance of life into the objects featured on screen, thus giving a "magical warm glow" to its imaginary but visible world. In this expansive perspective, the movies remind us and return us to the firelight of primordial images and folktales, re-enchanting us with an animated world, freed from temporal and physical constraints, a world characteristic of the "olden times" of mythical popularity. At the same time, we are invited into vicarious participation in a magical world of trickery that is dazzling and delightful, in the same ancient spirit as the old Trickster folklore. Even though we have every reason to know that movies conjure up an impossible world of animated abilities and activities, and that the world does not conform to the tricks of the movie camera, we "accept"—acquiesce in and enjoy—the trickery on screen. Moore cites various celebrated intellectuals and artists who were impressed by cinematic forms as simple as the cartoon, which they thought exemplified the motion picture's ability to express "animated metamorphoses" of universal human flights of fancy (such as instilling animals with human characteristics like

speaking and dancing) and "alogical order" (stopping a fall in mid-air). Such fun violations of common sense cue moviegoers for the sensuous and continuous flow of dynamic imagery, which defies both physics and logic but forms the basis of cinematic ordering and flowing. So the movies are not only a brightly lit and insubstantial reverie characterized by magnified scale and "pyrotechnical reproduction", a mere trifling kind of diversion. Rather, this "magical realm" also re-enchants our bounded little world through its "mnemonic bonfire" which rekindles and, in some varied ways, heals our sense of loss and void through our shared experience of a new sensibility, the cinematic "cosmology of modern magic". Moore concludes with the resounding idea that the "camera is our one magical tool flush with animistic power to possess, enchant, travel through time and space, and bewitch".

In recent years, various scholars have begun to emphasize that the movies are not only a magical but also a mythic experience. The tendency is to avoid comprehensive statements about movies and myth, but rather to prefer the studied examination of either individual films or types of films, or specific eras, or important mythemes. The great virtue of Susan Mackey-Kallis's volume in this vein is its concentration on and exploration of a major primal mytheme, the hero's quest and journey home. This allows pointed convergence on selected and important expressions of the perennial journey to some definition of "home". The "coming-of-age" myth ranges across various kinds of initiation, growth and separation, and quests for maturity or wisdom; but here she wisely limits analysis to a few films that illustrate the "sacred marriage" myth. In two movies overtly about baseball, the covert mythic drama is one where the lonely and questing male not only achieves sporting goals but also finds a female companion, who embodies the ancient role of goddess/mother, fulfilling her mission to be both perfect sexual partner and spiritual guide. The author complements the familiar male hero's quest with two female heroic journeys. In the first, a woman journeys to a foreign land to marry a man she has never met, but the union is marred by his callous treatment of her, so she embarks on a quest for individuation and maturation by uniting with someone else who does fulfill the role of appropriate god/husband. In the second, two female friends leave home for a questing "road trip" that confirms their dissatisfaction with male companions, to the extent that when one is almost raped by a repulsive drunk the other kills him. Now on the run, they finally bond with each other as mutual goddesses/great mothers for each other, and surrounded by police seek an immortal "home" by driving their car over a cliff into a deep canyon. Similarly, in her analysis of the "father quest", the return home takes various cinematic

shapes. In one film, the male hero's journey home is not only literally geographic (returning to the "homeland" of his origins) but also a quest for some kind of reconciliation with his deceased father. The heroic protagonist is called to adventure by voices and visions, takes on the crazy project of building a baseball field in his farmland cornfield, and soon begins to see a legendary and long dead baseball player. The questing hero's apparition is soon accompanied by other player-ghosts who seek redemption for past mistakes, and by others (a long dormant living novelist, a deceased doctor who played baseball briefly) seeking some kind of completion. This all climaxes when the son sees the father clad in baseball uniform, and the film ends with their metaphysical game of "catch". Both personal and cultural reconciliation having been achieved, the mythic quest is now complete. Mackey-Kallis goes on to analyse the quest for home in movies of the Great Depression and in science-fiction films. She concludes that "archetypical" analysis of films has merit through its grasp of the "narrative paradigm", which is more fundamental for understanding than the assumption of a rational world governed by ideology, examining as it does the mythic stories which underlie and give symbolic form to the structure and rhythm of important films. The author envisions quite a future for both myth and myth analysis if certain conditions are met, including audience awareness of the "living tradition" of mythic knowledge, especially the universal quest myth which still inspires the search for human identity.

Geoffrey Hill has posited "the wisdom of cinemyth", moving us from "cave shadows to the silver screen". We are "worshipers" who "congregate at the cinematic temple", pay our "votive offerings" to enter, and "hush in reverent anticipation" as the lights dim and "the celluloid magic begins". We don't fully realize that "our participation in these cinemyths helps alter the consciousness of society", since the movies "command as much spiritual devotion as any religion", so much so that the cinema has "become to the modern world the collective cathedral of primitive participation mystique" and thus "the tribal dream house of modern civilization". Since myth is "a collective cultural expression of the sacred mass consciousness", the movies are our contemporary forum of "tribal numinous" stories, often with "significant spiritual import". Like literature, movies are "a reconstructed mythology", and even at this late date participate in the depiction and perpetuation of mythic "archetypes", linking the sacred and the profane through the "numinous" characteristics of the cinematic experience. (He notes that in England the earliest viewing sites for movies were called the "bioscope", suggesting the viewing of life.) Hill even asserts, "the cinema is the theater of life, the screen of

human existence casting illuminating shadows onto the wall of tribal participation". This participation evoking "the magic of the cinema" is "actually a modern form of shamanism", our modern version of the rituals and spells cast now in the movie theater. The movie theatre is indeed reminiscent of the dark but ceremonially lit cave cathedrals of prehistory, which featured the animated paintings of apparently moving game animals as the illuminated moving pictures of the tribal theater. The protagonists of movie stories are "mythic pilgrims" dealing with "the realm of mythic time"; they offer us time- and space-bound mortals "vicarious victories", since they are "cosmic time travelers" who make for us an other-world that is in essence a "cinemasophia" linking us symbolically to the "eternal return" with its primeval and numinous qualities, allowing us to momentarily participate in the magic and myth of an imagined Golden Age.

This view is echoed by French film critic Jean Collet, envisioning the movie theater as a "sacred place" of ritual enactments, since "cinema is myth", including in its province "everything that evokes and magnifies the mystery of origins", abolishing "the frontier between the real and the imaginary" and drawing us into cinematic places wherein we "lose our identity". The narcissistic sacrifice is a metaphor for our fascination with cinematic doubles, but by our realization that the movie is a "reflection", we grasp the distinction between "the image and the real" and thus resist "the vertigo of Narcissus". These musings remind us that mimesis involves complex projections on the part of actors and audiences. And with the movies, there is the added feature of the projections of the movie, with projectors projecting the running film for the projective enjoyment of the people watching and identifying the action on screen. The pragmatic outcome of this process is objective projection, the mimetic presentation of a mythic object, the completed movie readied for mutual projection during the collaborative communication of creator and auditor.

These various characterizations remind us that moviemaking and moviegoing are mutually interdependent acts in the human realm of play. The animating dynamic that makes the movies go is the desire on the part of large numbers of people to enjoy themselves and to be with other people enjoying themselves in a place set aside for enjoyment. The key constant in understanding what is going on with people attending movies is that they want to have fun. If the movies had not been fun, they would have disappeared quickly long ago. If it is the case that the key human activity which helps explain the advent of and proliferation of the movies is the desire and hope that moviegoing will be fun, then the primal attraction of cinematic magic and the deeply rooted appeal of popular

myth adapted to the new and unique medium serve the purpose of ludenic pleasure. It was always fun in times past to see the magic used at fairs, carnivals, and magic shows; but with moving pictures the magical effects seemed to be limitless and increasingly clever. It is true that the new and ambitious motion picture industry "borrowed" many devices and tricks from other forms of play, but they made play all the more accessible and refined as an attraction. From the outset, moving pictures as a medium did impress audiences that they were seeing a form of magic which brought a world of relentless and gripping motion into whatever venue they were being shown in. That overwhelming kinetic presence and quality were soon complemented by the use of motion itself, to portray human action in a wide variety of ways: moving the cinematic presentation through space and time in new ways (editing, cross-cutting, parallel actions that converge, juxtaposition of shots, changing rhythms, and so on); arranging the presentation in some kind of accessible form (a story, a narration, an exploration of related images, and so on) that aroused enough visual and directional interest to get people to *watch* rather than just look. The ludenic transaction that perpetuated the movies obviously involved a good bit of persuasion, although it soon became clear that past experience with good movie fun made people quite receptive to the promise of yet more playtime at the theater. As a pleasant memory, movies were remembered and recalled and became items included and retained in individual and cultural memories, giving impetus to the desire to see more movies as they came out.

In order to grasp fully the movie transaction, we must then add awareness of movies as a form of magic expressed as the play of kinetic imagery, which presents a mythic "photoplay" showing symmetrical imaginatives aggregated into a sustained dramatic format. Subsequently, the immediate enjoyment of movie fun became a cultural accumulative, so that the motion picture as a virtual factuality was sustained over time through appreciation and aggregation of a film mnemonic among individuals, groups, and institutions. Individual memories of movie fun were accumulated in the commemoration and celebration of both recovered and anticipated cinematic play. People learned the art of looking at moving images, of grasping the kinetics of continuous unfolding motion, and soon embraced the enthralling artistry of mimetic conduct for an ensuing drama. Eventually, the movies became a cultural artifact, both as a major industry producing an unending tide of ludenic objects and consequently as a source of pleasurable memory. Indeed, movies cultivated the historical repertoire, which people recall and include in their activities as a kind of ludenical pragmatic, a source of learning from film

memory, and a cinematic aesthetic. As an important artifact of expression, we may regard motion pictures as a repository and source of widespread play-learning, even though such learning is polysemic and it is difficult to calculate its actual import. Throughout their history, the movies have aroused concern among social authorities and moral guardians about their influence on individual conduct and cultural mores. Parents could observe children playing at war or the violence they saw on screen, impressionable teenagers with swooning crushes on "matinee idols", the mimicking of fashionable movie star styles and speech, and so on. The question has always remained whether the influence of movies extended much beyond folkways such as kissing, dressing, and phrasing, since such influences are by nature subtle and disparate.

Paradoxically, we may be on much firmer ground when we venture the proposition that motion pictures as a communications movement and habit have affected the way we live through the widespread cultivation of aesthetic translucence. Although at first glance such an assertion might seem a speculative inference, the idea has long been recognized by observant historians and film scholars. It has just been stated in various ways: the movies have provided us with a common dream life, as the medium of mythic experience and transcendence, as the center of our popular imaginative life, and so on. Even when we say, as we do here, that the movies are a created and shared expression of fun, that does not lessen the power of the movie mnemonic - not only as a key process in changing the way we see things but also as a way of seeing new things and indeed of seeing things anew. This involves not only an innovation in visual intelligence and an intensification of cultural sensibilities, but also the expansive play learning of a vital cinematic aesthetic and even perhaps a significant cinematic perspective.

Aesthetic Play with the Bioscopic Medium

After over a century of human experience with the moving images and cinematic imaginings of the movies and their derivative mediums (television, cable and satellite, rental, Internet sites, and so on), a considered observation of the cinematic innovation is in order. Motion pictures in their various forms are all the more prolific and varied. They are also actually everywhere, since the human race seems to spend an enormous amount of time watching some form of moving pictures. At this historical and cultural point in consideration, it seems clear we have not fully understood the extent to which we have absorbed and adopted the cinematic aesthetic, nor calculated the conceivable bearings a cinematic

orientation has on the conduct of our lives and on the nature of our culture. For those who see the universe of moving images which surrounds us as merely play, in the trivial sense of diversion and distraction, the impact has been minimal. Those of us who see the play of moving images as probably the major form of ludenic expression in the modern age find its aesthetic potentialities much more decisive and important in the way people view things, and indeed in what kinds of lives they decide to follow. If that is the case, we may be living in an age in which the proliferation and appreciation of moving pictures is not only our dominant ludenic preference but also, more importantly, our prevalent way of understanding, at the least complementing but perhaps even superseding our more traditional and usual modes of communicating, oral speaking and literate reading. A cinematic orientation and aesthetic modifies the human way from speaking things and writing things towards seeing things. As modes of expression, speaking ability and writing ability remain important and valued; but the ability to see things becomes the central mode of aesthetic discernment and the defining premise of social communication.

This hypothesis has been anticipated by many observers, who tend to think and say that the cinematic imagination (including effects, experience, and education) constitutes an accessible and bioscopic process of beholding and comprehending, through the virtual energy of viewing things. In this conception, a cinematically-inspired aesthetic is a "sixth sense" which finds compelling ludenic expression in moving images, wherein we find ourselves not only seeing things playfully, but also expressing new things in ludenic terms, and indeed conceiving things anew in cinematic perspicacity. It is not only that play-learning is more fun than, say, oral church sermons or written term papers; but it is more that the cinematic aesthetic arranges our experience around the primary sensory ability of seeing, and indeed of seeing the vivid presence of things in motion and beings in action. When we view film, the world of "living pictures" seems to come alive, and we can envision the kinetic animation of things in motion. The moving picture makes it fun to look at what appears to be beauty moving for our enjoyment. Moreover, given the aesthetic and dramatic capacities of the moving pictures, we can also see new things placed in different settings, peopled by a variety of iconic figures, both human and otherwise, acting in an endless array of situations and stories. So not only can we view the beauty of motion, we can also see good action and even good in action. When we watch an entire motion picture, we can concentrate on the symmetries of action in film dramatization. In completion, our attention to animation and interest in symmetries is complemented by the pragmatics of appreciation, the play