The Lasting Picture Show

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In loving memory of Mackerel, our brawny, affectionate tabby, for his stalwart and reliable companionship for so many years of striving. His steadiness was always inspiring and comforting and I can only hope to enjoy his company forever.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE AMAZING CAREER OF MOVING PICTURES: THE RISE TO CULTURAL PROMINENCE OF THE LASTING PICTURE SHOW

For over a century since the introduction of the technology that made feasible the viewing and showing of moving pictures, observers have pondered the remarkable appeal of this new way of seeing things and have wondered how much longer this charm can last. At various junctures in the career of movies, doomsayers have predicted the imminent demise or at least supersession of the medium. Yet the popular attention towards and interest in motion pictures persists despite (and even because of) changes in the cultural environment. Television, for example, was thought to augur the end of the movie industry but, as it turned out, the proliferation of televised broadcasting only augmented the omnipresence of moving pictures into venues outside the movie theater or, more precisely, brought movies into domestic patterns of opportunity such as home viewing or other personal means. This is obvious in much of the world now with the appearance of hand-held communication devices that sport a miniscule screen featuring movement, sound and access to movie shows of almost infinite variety, including news, sports, advertising, and fictional features. It strikes many movie enthusiasts as frightfully incongruent that one can watch a film of great panoramic vistas (such as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*) on such a miniscule screen, but such a development does signal the extent of personal choice and opportunity. The point here is that everyone almost everywhere is still watching something moving on a screen of some sort — rude demonstration of the astounding appeal of moving pictures for a significant portion of the human race regardless of human culture. Travelers to remote and poor regions of the world are struck by the fact that such places and populaces are "wired"; moving pictures must be the one truly universal cultural experience available to the human species. In that sense, movies have

superseded religion and sports as well as other leisure pursuits in the modern realms of popular play.

This is not to say that these distinct modes of cultural ludenics are antithetical, only that "movies" are more universal in participation and enduring in widespread interest. This informs our characterization of moving pictures as the "lasting picture show" — an omnipresence in our lives that is potentially unequaled and thoroughly absorbing for large populations. A simple thought experiment will illustrate what we are asserting: imagine a world in which there are no moving pictures that can be accessed or utilized by populaces. Both sporting events and religious services would continue but would be severely hampered and constricted in accessibility and influence by the disappearance of moving picture communication outlets. In a more fundamental and personal disposition, our very conscious thought-processes and expressive abilities would suffer in consequence because of the absence of accessible mediated experience as a guide to and influence in how we think and what we do. Moving picture media have contributed mightily to our imaginative and behavioral lives, although whether for good or ill is a much debated question.

In this regard, there now exists a literature that addresses the question of this new and ascendant mode of communication for its remarkable durability and far-reaching status as the dominant medium of popular choice in much of the world. This "one-world" is increasingly and irrevocably "wired", even in those places and among people that are often remote from centers of communication, serving as the most important source of information and entertainment. These folks have in common with most of the human race an irresistible interest in accessing and enjoying the cultural products of media organizations, both cosmopolitan (such as movie studios, news networks, and church organizations) and local (radio stations, town newspapers, and evangelical revivalists). By the end of the twentieth century, one of these media products — variously manifested as "moving pictures" — had become the most predominant and ubiquitous form of visually-based entertainment in the world, encompassing its primary configuration of what came to be dubbed "the movies", along with the eventual array of media outlets of moving-pictures, enabling us to see and watch things move on a screen.

It is likely that this immediate and quickly expanding phenomenon of "the flicks" can be traced to the human fascination for looking at something so elemental — simply the depiction on a viewing screen of what appears to be motion. So, the first thing that new viewers of movies

notice, then and now, is the onrush of kinetic energy; the excitation of things and persons existing in a bestirred world of dynamic space and "spatialized" time; the moving art occurring in a facsimile of the "space-time continuum" that paradoxically seems to exist in an eternal present or "endless now". Movie-makers sensed this from the start, naming the "peep-show" machines that preceded the use of projectors "kinetoscopes", while the first movie theaters in England were called "kinemas", eventually evolving into the general term "cinema". The study of motion is still termed "kinematics"; the study of motion pictures is the nascent science of "cinematics".

There was something else of importance that was inspired by the advent of moving pictures. This new cultural innovation and social habit was unique enough to invite attempts to characterize just what it was, often by comparing or likening movies to something else. It was alternatively comparable to dreams and theatrical productions and, as a new and original art form, was the art of "space-time", linking a new modern identity for human life, the art of the new physics as awareness of the moment in social time, a pleasurable and instructive democratic art form for the mass public, and the language of ordinary experience, and so on. So perhaps at this juncture, as a century or more has passed, we should just accept the unique and peculiar nature of the movies as *sui generis* — something that is just what it is — even though it is also a part of all that it has met. Film as a form has become distinctive, with its own cultural identity and historical entity as a unique and separate cultural composition.

There is one historical influence on the origins of moving pictures that should be singled out not only for its role in the development of movies but also because it communicated something important that became a component of cinematic identity. In the transitional period of the late nineteenth century in which the movies were essentially invented, many of the key figures who were involved in this process were professional magicians. In their magic acts, these figures utilized various gimmicks which were the precursors to moving pictures, such as magic lanterns, phantasmagoria, ghostly illusions, optical theatrics, and so on. The illusion of apparently inexplicable movements, such as a head becoming disembodied and then moving about and still speaking before being "miraculously" reunited with its body, entertained and mystified popular audiences. These kinds of magical acts impressed audiences with the "power" of the guiding force commanded by the magician that seemed to defy the laws of nature and normal human powers; things became possible that would usually be restricted to an enchanted world ruled by magical

powers exercised by those in possession of mystical abilities. It seemed to be the stuff of fantasies and nightmares beyond the scope of everyday understanding.

Careful scholarship has traced the fascinating story of that early period and the innovations at work that led to the invention and proliferation of cinema, including the pivotal role of magicians who included visual projections and simulated movement in their acts. Ironically, they created a new medium that made their stage shows obsolete by incorporating their magical skills of "theatricality, narrativity, and trickality" into the technical resources of moving picture shows. One of the senior academicians who have studied this remarkable history speculated on the larger implications of the rise of cinema for our world: "Magic turned into 'media' ", creating a new "magic industry", wherein the "elements of magic are all there — 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." Themoving picture magic industry, like its predecessors of stage magic, "still summon up ghosts of yesteryear and use them for present purposes" and their instrumental "electron apparitions as ephemeral as images projected on smoke" making us follow where magicians led. Now we no longer see media such as the movies as simply optical illusions, "but have come to accept them as reality", combining our desire to have fun through entertainment with our awed acceptance of science as a center of authority.

Yet the magician was always a figure of power. Even the modern mind is susceptible to the belief that this new magic industry has a claim to exercise power over us, with the shared illusion that those who rule through mass media are using benevolent "natural" magic. But we were warned that this new media power may, in effect, be a kind of "black magic" that is a form of deceit and, for us, a sustained exercise in self-deception. These new magicians who rule through mediated means are descendants of the shamanic conjurers appealing to our desire to be told that everything will be all right if we watch them perform magical miracles and come to believe that our obedience — deferring our power to them in exchange for reassurance — is necessary and proper.

Indeed, there is much historical evidence that the technology that makes cinematic presentations feasible occurred in a new cultural milieu, making such an experiential feature desirable. Both ordinary people and astute observers sensed that the world of modernity brought with it many kinds of change, some worthwhile (such as sanitation and education) and

others puzzling (such as reactionary fanatical religious cults and post-Einsteinian physics), although in retrospect understandable. Rapid and widespread change characterized the onrush of modern life, including urbanization, social mobility, and cultural dislocation. People were faced with new circumstances and the attendant fears and confusions these brought so, accordingly, they looked for lively and timely divergences which offered them festive and illuminating experiences, helping them to cope by lightening their serious concerns for at least a brief time, and perhaps even offering them enlightening grounding for their new and potentially disorienting lives in this skittish new world. This widespread rebuke of the routines and rationalities of modernity inspired people to seek ludenic times and places of pleasant divergence from ordinary life. For increasing numbers of people in the new twentieth century, the movies pleased the sight as a medium of popular diversion and education, filling the voids brought about by rapid change and personal fluidities. Astute observers sensed this need by noting that people were seeking peak experiences for momentary respite, so that once they were "off the clock" and away from work time, they could enjoy momentary exaltation in the brief interval of play-time offered by creative, recreational contexts. Some observed that the ludenic moment being sought was a primal and premodern desire for the "experience of vision", wherein one could see enjoyable scenes and temporarily inhabit a photogenic world best captured in the cinematic visibilities of luminous kinetics, not of this world of mundane experience yet about this world in terms of aesthetic presentation, and addressing in oblique ways ascertainable contemporary sensibilities of extant temporal circumstances.

The new medium and industry of moving pictures attained a high degree of cultural centrality and legitimacy; a focal and pivotal status that became so ubiquitous and influential that social observers began to sense this cultural construct was astoundingly integral to modern life. A recurrent journalistic and social-critical literature began to appear that sensed a metaphorical relationship between movie art and social life. Some saw it as limited to selected dimensions such as politics or celebrity but others more ambitiously saw a homology between movie art and the full course of social life, from the most mundane to the highly visible. The dominant and accessible form of cultural entertainment was more mythic than metaphoric, positing an identity between screen life and ordinary life in works about "life: the movie", arguing that our life is our own movie. The common thrust of such a perspective centers on the mythic status of motion pictures, according it with the legitimacy to act not only as a mere diversion but rather more actively as an unbounded resource of personal

learning. For many viewers, film experience offers not only ludenic explanation of how people act in the world but more personally how "I" as an individual can act with pragmatic skill if there is a desire to "do something" and, concomitantly, what to expect from others in the course of a given line of action. There is a posited identity here between the form and content of a popular art and our own popular conduct, so understanding and emulating the mythic depictions of the movies becomes the standard reference, as a guide and bellwether of mundane social transactions. With the movies, humans can "play life" in the make-believe rehearsal of cinematic learning

If we may accord the institution of motion pictures this exalted and important cultural position, then we may assert that movies are something of a *numinous presence* at the epicenter of things; a kind of popular grounding that imbues forms of action and belief with a modicum of credence underscoring the ways and means of our chosen lives with an aura of vindictive legitimacy. Like all ultimate things, moving pictures are credited with being and accepted as a trusted and reliable source of popular truths and habits. We therefore posit here the proposition that the emerging basis of popular awareness is through the cognizant prism of *cinematic knowing* — the prevalent referential convention drawn at will from our taken-for-granted acquaintance with and cognizance of the moving-picture knowledge base of cultural tradition and communication. Such familiar habituation is, in part, an exercise in public memory: the ongoing process of how cultural remembrance (and forgetting!) becomes central to mnemonic knowing and is often elevated to "knowns" — mythic axioms and exemplars codified and expressed in paradigmatic stories of cultural importance to which identities and experience in a present may be referred. This particular cultural practice can be related to William Blake's strong argument that to visualize is to realize, since this visual imagination creates our reality and so orders life in the visible radiance of cinematic imagination. In the same vein, the philosopher John Dewey quoted the painter Delacroix who stated that, as a painting takes shape, the artist is seized by its "magical accord", or what Dewey called its "harmonious ensemble". Dewey's pragmatic predecessor, Charles Sanders Peirce, asserted — in light of the new motion pictures being shown in his mature life — that human thought consists of "thinking in stereoscopic moving pictures".

Not only do we think visually, we place and use those pictures in the stories we tell ourselves or let others tell us, including the vast world of stories available for our utilization and enjoyment in mass-media

communication outlets. We see at the center of world cultural story-formation, story-telling, and story-dissemination, the vast moving-picture industries, including both fictional and non-fictional formats. The latter consists of news, propaganda in advertising and other instrumentalities of persuasion, as well as education-industry products that include not only books and educational materials but also films produced for classroom use (schools virtually everywhere are increasingly supplied by a plentiful array of cinematic materials, mute evidence that we live in a visually-oriented world to which students respond out of habitual preference). Since visually-based story-telling is the dominant communicative modality, moving-picture art is the prime means of telling whatever tale needs to be told. Whenever someone says, "Let me tell you a story…", we instinctively look for a screen on which the story will be told (but, as we were warned above, that may not be the whole story).

We also introduced the now quite widely considered proposition (since McLuhan and others articulated it) that we are all increasingly enjoying our new-found status and allegiance of common citizenship in the magical domain of "Movieland". Most of us began with the playful habit of vicarious inhabitation, wherein we traveled there to watch a movie and then came home, but more and more of us are now, in some subtle way or another, participants in identifiable habitation, defining our identities through this convivial and re-creative world of "Neverlands" while also aspiring to it, in contrast to the routine dreariness of mundane existence. If this process of adopting — and in some sense living in — this alternative identification becomes a widespread phenomenon, then we may have to consider what this new world will be like when more and more of us are at least honorary citizens of the new realm of "Cinetopia".

We say this with the realization that such an historical development may strike the reader as outrageous and far-fetched, but we bring this to our attention as an important possibility with unfathomable potential for a major change in human life. There is the chance that the "play world" of cinematic living will become an incremental alternative to or augmentation in our lives as the ludenic place where we live, or more precisely, "come alive". We may now be a bit like the early Christians who had to live in the social and political order of Roman, Hebrew, Byzantine, or other extant authority structures, to which they paid obligatory obedience, but they "lived" in the otherworldly domain of a preferred and lifelike "Otherworld", to which they were quietly devoted. Over time, this "play world" of faith, as expressed in scriptures, shared ritual performances, and expressions of group unity and legitimacy, helped

to sustain their alienation and eventual vindication as a major historical movement. As determined festive celebrants who adhered to and enjoyed the fictive art of religious belief and its attendant personal requirements, they were beneficiaries of parallel manifestations of culture, and were inspired by the aesthetic expressions of art that defined the development of their underlying configuration of life that was to supersede the dominant order, which translated festive experience into the drama of a new social order based in their vivified myths and expressive manifestations of a clarified world-view.

Perhaps in some ways, the movement towards living in the play world of Cinetopia is as fanciful and inviting as more serious commitments long ago, sharing an appreciation of the aesthetic expression that bestows radiant beauty to an "art of the impossible context", showing those who wish to see the evidence of their chosen frame of reference the inherent quality of their imagined firmament. Perhaps in this latter day we are witnessing a cultural movement that, in an equally slow and unrecognized way, is also ardently sought. So, like other preceding collective transformations, many of us are now living in parallel universes where, in one of them, we are vivified and motivated by our participation in and allegiance to the "Magical Domain of Cinema". There we find the cinematic play world to be preferable and desirable, not only because it is more fun but also because it is less harmful that the other extant life of contemporary society in all its resolute seriousness and routine "busy-ness". Like the heavens of religious movements, the dreamland of Cinetopia remains a shimmering mirage in the bleak desert of ordinary and unsatisfactory living, but over time may transform more and more into an art of the possible context.

Any movement that persists and grows over time tends to become self-conscious and reflective, usually meaning that articulate members who identify with the social formation try to express what the group believes and wants. In the early twenty-first century, cinematic participation and interest was astoundingly widespread, but it had not reached the stage of organizational identity. However, there was a felt contrast between the "disenchanted world" we are used to (but may well regard as so excessively binding and restricting that our humane potentiality suffers from the loss of social enchantment) and the "enchanted realm" which seems more distant in the context of an alienated response to our disenchantment. It becomes all too easy to experience the restraints of an imposed "bounded self" requiring living without any hope of a more

enchanting world in which one can activate the joys and wonders of becoming an "enchanted self".

The enchanted worlds conceived in the human past usually included a popular metaphysic that imagined in earthly life the existence of numinous spirits such as the godly and the demonic with powers to bless or damn, as well as providential forces (such as the Holy Spirit, guardian angel, or the *spiritus mundi*), to which we might hopefully appeal for magical intervention on our behalf (for help with illness, bad luck, love matches, curses on enemies, and so on). The movies thus became a broadly appealing cultural entity as a major repository of enchantment in such an over-rationalized and over-organized milieu. This popular appeal helps us understand the now venerable credence and longevity of the moving picture, since it has consistently portrayed and perpetuated illuminating visions of worlds beyond our immediate and palpable life-patterns. The movies are often characterized as an "art that moves in time", usually referring to the temporal patterns of natural and social calendar rhythms that accord the on-screen action with understandable and visible human structures. At the simplest level, events are highlighted by the visual presentation of certain events by using familiar settings for important occurrences: funerals are always in the rain; weddings are on sunny afternoons; aristocratic murders take place during weekend gatherings in gloomy country houses with many guests having secret motives exposed only by disinterested unattached guests, and so on. The cinematic event requires differing but vital presences of enchanting elements which relate it to movie storytelling traditions. Such definitive experiences are translated by movie-makers as items they have incorporated into popular stories and their accompanying features, such as generic roles to play, situations to encounter, larger forces to understand and master, outcomes and denouements to seek, and alliances and homes to perpetuate. Movies have developed something of a shared perspective and frame of reference through long experience and shared knowledge, using their predecessors in moviemaking as inspiration and guidance. The long-practiced habit of film-makers in one country studying and using the work of film-makers from other countries in order to learn is not often frowned upon but rather welcomed as a kind of courteous plagiarism. The great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa learned much in his early career from the work of foreign films, but later filmmakers returned the compliment by using his cinematic themes and characters elsewhere: his *Seven Samurai* (1954) becomes an American Western, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960); *Yojimbo* (1961) is translated in an Italian-made Western as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964); and

The Hidden Fortress (1958) becomes an inspiration for *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977).

The history of cinematics as an unintended and unorganized movement demonstrates that the various ludenic components associated with it (radio and television, film industries, Internet outlets, and so on) did develop a loose sense of identity as "communicators". They became vaguely self-aware as the purveyors of a common code defining their cultural status and role as communicators of important and influential bodies of popular knowledge. We may term this the "cinematic code", denoting norms and themes of communicable subject-matter expressed in the light of rhetorical and ludenic rules utilized to address practicable cinematic productions. This code thus includes some guidelines as to what mediums such as the movies can legitimately present and make gracefully presentable. This cinematic code is amended and reinterpreted over time but never forgotten as the essential symbolic criteria of "taken-for-granted" cultural groundings, important compositions, and even institutions of modern civilized cultivation in the expanding area of play experience. Much of this code is drawn from the vast resources of popular codes in long-standing rhetorical practices and venerable story forms. Such a grounded code thusly implies that moving pictures, in their rich variety, are not only an art that moves in rhythmic time but also in patterns of space. These flexible and dynamic features of movies are therefore not carved in stone but rather written in sand. Moving pictures are blessed with what in practice is an operational code that helps rather than hinders responses to changing times and negotiated space. This has been happily expressed as the "dynamization of space" and the "spatialization of time" which allows for and even invites multitudinous inquiries and approaches to virtually the entire range of subjects deemed worthy and suitable for cinematic treatment. As the techniques of movie-making spread and the demands for cinematic entertainments of all kinds were expressed, movie fare developed for a wide variety of interests and tastes, including salacious and vulgar subjects deemed to be pornographic in what they depicted. Indeed, there seems to be no diminishment in this now easily available (if not particularly edifying) movie fare.

With the technical means of production and distribution at the disposal of potential film-makers everywhere, the demand for all forms of cinematic fare has expanded exponentially, ranging from an immense variety of educational films (including propaganda films with their own persuasive educational value), to all forms of academic subjects and, most importantly for our discussion here, the vast and endless initial appearance

and subsequent revisiting of fictional movies that are at the apex of the world's entertainment industry and popular leisure activity. With this remarkable background in mind, let us venture some hypotheses about groundings that might orient us in an exploration of this major form of cultural learning, so we can gather its potential significance in our shared futurity.

Cinematic Groundings

When we try to state our grounds for asserting any proposition, we usually point to some proof or precedent to verify or confirm what we are arguing, so that it seems to be standing on "solid ground". Often, that ground is more shaky than firm, so there is potential doubt about the actual premise of a position being on a firm foundation at all. Appeals to authority often enlist something deemed indisputable, such as religious doctrines and scriptures or secular variations on firm belief such as political ideologies (Marx as holy writ, Lenin or Mao as operational code, dialectical materialism as the Holy Spirit providentially moving history forward to the apocalypse, for example). However, here our groundings are in the nature of inferences drawn from calculated observations of the historical developments and cultural standing of a major form of popular communication. Nevertheless, we can proceed with some degree of certainty, if not axiology, by relying on good sense reasonably proposed and explored.

1. *Grounding in Kinetic Magic*: Cinematic Mastery of Cultural Time. In the study of moving pictures, we must begin by grappling with the paradoxical proposition asserted by composer Benjamin Boretz: "In music, as in everything, the disappearing moment of experience is the firmest reality." In applying this to movies, we can contrast the conduct of plays on the live stage with the conduct of movie life on-screen, the latter offering us a new kind of ludenic excitation and ecstasy. Like other art forms that move in time, moving pictures are sanctioned through a ritual invocation of playing, but specifically playing to the cinematic rhythms of fleeting images which are captured and organized in coherent cinematic imagery that we can follow and enjoy. Our initial and primal contact with the mediums of kinetic picturing is overwhelmingly visual, since we humans seem to intuitively respond to "bathing" in the magnified scope and accelerated velocity of moving-pictures flowing before our eyes. As noted above, the first audiences for the

movies interpreted what they were seeing as magical, since the "meta-world" that was conjured up seemed to be the stuff of magic shows and the mysterious power of magicians to materialize a marvelous array of visible imagery of numinous presences that moved swiftly in cinematic time and place for our aesthetic sensibilities. This new way of seeing such fleeting images in motion aroused in us a sense that we were seeing ourselves refracted in the crazy mirrors and projected apparitions observed in the "phantom empire" of movies.

2. *Grounding in Human Temporality.* This dynamic and transient view of the world not only enjoined us to look at the picture show as a kinetic treat that invited our mesmerized and ensorcelled rapture, but also let us see human life in society as a journey. Since what we were watching was an art unfolding in time, great impetus was given to the use of successive imagery in creating a visually-based story form that moved the action on-screen as a human journey of some sort: "growing up" from childhood to adulthood; courtship and marriage; movement towards a new place, such as settling to start a new life; surviving a disaster (war, revolution, famine, disease, and so on) and starting anew; maturing and dying gracefully. The range of human journeys is vast and interesting, since we are all on our own individual human journey towards the completion of our destiny or choices. In a sense, all of our human journey stories are a search for identity: however we define our quest or search for whatever psychic or social location, we are moved to go toward. The human journeys we can relate to are those which take us towards a better life somewhere else, ranging from a new self-identity as a singular person to shared absorption in a new cultural identity playing a social role.

3. *Grounding in Mythic Questing.* The "cinemagic" here is the ability of moving pictures to demonstrate their mastery of cultural time through kinetic imagery acting as a ritual invocation of the rectitude of the quest. We may vicariously identify with the on-screen pursuit of human goals, and we may also vicariously turn against them if we deem them to be unworthy. In all cases, watching the recurrent spectacle of quests reminds us that the "quest-myth" is a central and guiding feature of many mythological and folklore type tales, since dramatic arts descended from ritual stories, and performances have been adapted into screenplays in a wide array of settings and situations. But these movies retain the

> primary feature of an ancient story, retelling the tale of motivation undertaken for a purpose, focusing on the actor and action that brings to the fruition a desired (or undesirable) consequence. A straightforward hero may undertake action in a setting that requires conquest, such as pioneering a venturesome settlement in a raw wilderness, leading his unit to victory in battle, or overcoming political opposition to sponsor much-needed reform. Or, he or she may be more cunning and self-regarding in the selfish acquisition of power, wealth, or fame. And at the other end of the active typology, the actor may be a downright villain quite willing to do evil things and create evil outcomes, but usually in the traditions of storytelling is subjected to eventual ruin or death.

In all cases, cinematic adaptation of such venerable and reliable tales is the occasion for movie-makers to complicate or update traditional fare. But audiences still respond favorably to stories which utilize magical thinking and magical solutions. In order to assure the desired efforts and endings, magical interventions are introduced to help things along. The hero may find that the right thing to do at just the right time is hidden in plain sight, so that at the moment of crisis he magically discovers how to ensure triumph. Apparent chance elements may occur at the time they are most needed, (such as a rainstorm during a battle that mires the enemy in the mud) and are thus deemed not accidental but rather providential. The villain may find "incommodities" (as Moriarty said to Sherlock Holmes) in a way that impedes ("foils") nefarious plans. As moving pictures have become more sophisticated and worldly-wise, the lines between different role-types have become blurred and overlapping (e.g. the gunfighter-killer who saves a virtuous community from evil; the whore with a golden heart who nurses a respectable woman through childbirth).

The movies began and prospered through what, in retrospect, was termed "action cinema". This was almost by necessity because the primary communication was visual: people were watching and were often enthralled by the on-screen flow and flux of kinematic activity that moved with no spoken dialogue and had simple plots that were fun to watch anyway because of the dazzling and swift-moving action. The memorable dimensions of the pre-sound movies were the comedic antics of the "silent clowns" and the thrilling dash of the swashbuckler adventurer in both swordfights and amorous courtship. To this day, despite the organizational and technological advances of movie production, a common complaint among movie-goers and critics is that often movies are too slow-paced and have flat-lined, which invites boredom and diverts attention away from the

hoped-for rhythmic pulsation that has stalled in the movie presentation. What is missing is the kinetic magic that differentiates moving pictures from any other kind of popular play. As a great film director once intoned, a movie is supposed to *move*!

4. *Movies as Festive Center*. What movie-makers and critical observers began to grasp was that motion pictures were becoming the *festive center* of modern ludenic activity, and that ascendant cultural status cast the guiding elite of movie-makers (producers, directors, screenwriters, and so on) in the roles of latter-day shamans, conjuring up things of the imagination and putting them on-screen for our perusal and enjoyment, in the process of ludenic clarification that translated the festive creation of the medium into a popular art form of dramatic presentation. This recruits the movie-goer in the role of *festive celebrant*, perhaps unwittingly participating in the imaginative "holiday magic" of cinematic art, enjoying and learning from relaxed movie-play something of the surface social figurations and underlying cultural fabrications of the common life we lead. Our long-standing sense is that the movies are something of a magic act and, as such, we readily accept the ritual pattern of theatricality given aesthetic actuality in compelling cinematic rhythms that we behold as coming to a playful semblance of life observed and considered on-screen.

Our cinematic knowledge of the presence and power of magic in the movies (our "magic industry" descended from the "magic lantern") is both appealing and perplexing. We have noted that some of the appeal of moving pictures stems from their inherent magical features — something notably missing from all-too-real life. This awareness arouses our perplexity over our amazement about how magic habituates screen life yet doesn't seem to be in our "real-life" world, although we may devoutly wish it, especially when it intervenes for good in film plots by rewarding heroism and punishing villainy. These "magical" interventions help make up the process that pursues a neat and happy ending. That wish is mitigated when bad things happen in movies, making us hope that such evils never touch our actual lives. So, most of the time, our temporary inhabitation of cinematic screen life satisfies our wish for magical conjuring and intervention in life, although this experience makes us aware of the absence of that providential force in our reality. Thus we entertain the hope that magical things will happen to make our own lives better, wishing for an extension of movie magic, appearing and intervening for the sake of our own desired "happy outcomes". In some

ways, this playful fantasy about movie magic is in the same vein of hoping that prayers are answered, faith in salvation is justified, and good prevails against evil. In the onrush of kinetic energy in real life as well as screen life, it is an irresistible human trait to hope against hopelessness that magic is real and true, and that we may assure ourselves the make-believe of movie magicality is not a vain and silly fantasy restricted to the cinematic world wherein make-believe comes true.

We recurrently and habitually go to see motion pictures to renew and whet our appetite for emotive and festive celebration of magical presences in human life — something that releases and clarifies our interest in and hope for the triumph of magical thinking and magical power as a hidden and potential force in the drama of real-life, as it is evident and salient in film-life. We wish to equate the magical presence conjured up as figments of imagination in vivid play-time in the movies, with the manifest figurations of graphic actualities in social life. The underlying belief in the reciprocal extension and salient presence of active and fictive worlds accords credence to the festive celebration of parallel manifestations of cultural veracity, and the ritual patterns that refract the normative equation of life and art, seen in the animated movement of human beings and the moving pictures of their dramatic simulations. As we watch movies of the ludenic engagements of human figures on-screen simulating the rhythms of existence in all their simplicity and complexity, our sensibility of human power and destiny becomes an overwhelming concern. As dramatic plots entangle people, it becomes tempting to introduce imaginative intermediations which include magical powers beyond the ordinary natural forces which are outside of our control. This dramatic element, which uses metaphysical potency, has a long history: Greek tragedies made use of a *deus ex machina* — literally "the god in the machine" — to materialize at a critical moment and save the day. The ritual plays that were the origin of dramatic arts and continued their humane journey into motion pictures are lasting contributions to popular arts (such as the movies) through their adroit presentation of magical powers, satisfying our shared yearnings for outcomes that we find both appropriate and believable.

5. *Movies as Imago Mundi.* Cinematic experience at this initiatory level concentrates popular attention on the imagery of self-dramatization by directing the individual eye onto elementary prehensions of human activity as personal choice and chance. The moving pictures in this context portray these questions of personal identity in visions of self and other in primary relations. This aesthetic actuality of individual experience is an "image of life" —

> *imago mundi* — that draws our attention to such familiar features as the cycle of life from infancy through youth, adulthood, maturity, old age, and death. Since this universal rhythm and fate includes us all, festive celebrations in this cinematic context are delimited to the interplay of a person in relation to self and others. Since we are here interested in individual lives, cinematic depictions look intently at what people are saying and doing at this microcosmic level, using visual imagery to highlight and signify the images of human life they choose to present to us for our ludenic consideration. The magic show of the human "life-world" facilitates our ritualized responses to the fellow humans on-screen, as if we were participating in their activities ourselves through our capacity for vicarious inhabitation of what we are seeing. The moving pictures of individual kinetics allow us to envision the physical and social movements of humans in motion, as the aesthetic frames of those pictured human transactions that make a difference in the lives we are watching, potentially resonating with us to the extent that we learn, from that movie experience, what we do and do not want to do. Our shared natures of physical sociality allow us to relate to and even use what we see in the context of what we might do.

The cinematic *imago mundi* is, then, a "first order" view of human life transformed into the visual medium's aesthetic activities of individuals singled out for us to appreciate. This level of mediated composition of human living is mindful of our capacity to see things such as movie screenings of human apparitions and to make sense of admittedly fictitious but aesthetically interesting beings that we find it possible to relate to and enjoy. Traditionally, the motif of *imago mundi* served as a kind of potential or proper microcosm of the world as it should be when it blossoms on an ordained humane scale. At this level, it brought order out of entropic chaos, recreating a miniature cosmos in accord with larger metaphysical designs. Something of this tradition survives in the ritual invocations of movies concerning selected individuals, conjuring up the widespread popular wish and plea for imagery of hope and promise, and for the creation of some kind of "sacred space" through the ritualized magic of cinematic designs that show us idealized images of happy endings in good places. Yet many movies may also show us human endings that are not idealized, situated in bad places, reminding us of the horrible possibility of human failure and the persistent absence of beauty and good in human life.

The cinematic *imago mundi* gives kinetic veracity to this vision of human activity and destiny by concentrating on individual lives whose actions imbue our profane world with inferential purpose and putative significance. The ancient traditions of the celebration of such a fictional time and place often envisioned it as an *axis mundi* — a symbolic center of the world — including its placement close to an *omphalos*, an imagined navel of the earth. The earthly imagery here sees such visualizations as a kind of "umbilical" physical connectivity that links our mundane lives and societies to "ultimate things" — the numinous chords that unite our physical groundings with the metaphysical ground of all being, however we may define and seek such enchanted connectivity. We are here in the exalted magical realm of qualitative possibility; the urgent and primal sensate united with the self-centering iconography of the imagination.

This translucent emotion originates in personal tactility: the bodily feeling of affective experience termed *pathos*. At this fundamental level, our total sensorial experience of the world involves knowing through the body. The feeling of tactility centers in the eye's cornea, informing us about the world around us and arousing in us our pathetic knowledge, learning through our feelings as imagined and expressed in what we behold. Our expansive cinematic beholding grounds us in this modality of experiential knowing, in the present and presented excitations of fleeting images carrying kinetic power. We feel our way by learning to "see" things present and absent, past and future, here today and gone tomorrow. The grounding message here is in our learned awareness of the temporal potentialities and impediments that humans have to address over time. Our lives are as fleeting as those we see on-screen in the movies, so this cumulative cinematic experience can offer us well-advised "knowing" from the popular medium, to which we look for enjoyment of a lively art and knowledge about the art of lively living. We may here recall Benjamin Boretz's dictum about how "in everything, the disappearing moment of experience is the firmest reality". Our attention to and regard for moving pictures is perhaps a relationship only possible in a technological order which comprises popular mediums that communicate a kind of familiar unreality we are used to and which, indeed, rely upon as essential for our cultivation of visual learning in general and specifically cinematic knowing at our cultural center. In a culture which values and practices kinetic movement in both work and play, it has made sense for large populaces to associate the conduct of life as lived with the strident velocity and episodic habitation commonly portrayed on-screen. Now such a dependence is increasingly taken for granted, although thoughtful people everywhere have wondered if there has been something amiss and even

paradoxical about such a strained equation between a contrived play-world and the all too veritable actual world of uncontrived messiness. But perhaps that conclusion is overdrawn, since that dominant unreality of motion pictures portrays for us a conception of definitive experience in time that is a cinematic analogue of considerable consonance with important implications for human conduct. Movies are an expression of *ut pictura poiesis* — "speaking pictures" that demonstrate for us human actions that make a difference, at best bringing forth the beautiful and at worst the ugly. This suggests that moving pictures communicate visions of the ontology of human beings — kinetic energy that shows through pictures that speak of our capacity to compose and enact "poetry in motion".

As a popular aesthetic mode of understanding, movies excel as an expressive medium of magical excitation, through the presentation of vivified and identifiable envisagement, allowing both imaginative and contemplative elements to be activated. The evident magical properties are visibly inherent in the elimination of the normal constraints of time and space, according magical qualities to both natural and human elements by displaying cinematic animism, exploring the kinetic fun that makes moving picture shows so delightful and absorbing. A century and more of cinematic experience has let us overcome the cinematic paradox of including both believably realistic and unbelievably illusory dimensions in what is produced and distributed for our benefit. Like the Orphic tales of Ancient Greece, the realistic ideal of Apollonian ritual *catharsis* is joined to the enthusiastic Dionysian mode of celebratory *ecstasy* in the creative moviemaking process of cinematic *poiesis*, uniting these dimensions of existence in a coherent union that invites transformation into art, binding a presentation such as a movie into a watchable story that fuses real bodies with vital spirits in poetic expressions to capture human beings in their full diversity and commonality.

The movies have a long and rich history of exploring individual lives, devoting on-screen focus to people engaged in a wide array of livelihoods, projects, and searches. Even if they don't physically move much, they all share with everyone else who is in motion for some reason or purpose the singular fact that they (and we) are engaged one way or another in an enterprise we have termed *the human journey*. A familiar and often generic story of ancient vintage and widespread versions is the tale of an individual, often associated with others in coalition, who sets out to undertake an exploratory trip in which he, she, or they encounter many challenges and meet a variety of people, some helpful but others harmful.

Some of our most celebrated and enduring narratives tell of someone who leaves their home and their normal life in favor of an adventure, mission, or quest that takes them somewhere else, involving risk, inspiring learning, and quite often completing the circle by returning to the place from which they started, but with the traveler now wiser, more experienced, and grateful to be home. Indeed, one of the key motifs in such stories is precisely the return to, or establishment of, a home. Two gigantic figures of ancient mythology help illustrate this. Homer's sequel to his war story (*The Iliad*) tells the story of Odysseus leaving hearth and home to embark on the long fight against Troy, followed by his adventurous trek, eventually returning home to Ithaca and his wife Penelope, who is beset by suitors wishing to marry her on the premise that Odysseus is dead (though very much alive and driving the interlopers away). His return to wife, child, and household is then complete and the soldier is home from war and restored normal domestic life at peace. Odysseus is forever enshrined as the warrior come home from the war, the adventurer who ventured out to fight and then wandered home, experiencing misadventures (including a torrid tryst with Dido) but finally returning from whence he began, thus completing the circle. Throughout, the figure of the heroic and smart Odysseus is the predominant concern of the story, with the war and its aftermath providing the background for his long trip away from and his return to home.

Another figure of note is Moses — one of the first of a long line of heroic stories about a low-born figure who somehow becomes a prominent member of a ruling class who, at a crucial moment, discovers his true identity, disavows his exalted and comfortable status and assumes leadership of his identified people, leading them to their shared true destiny as a people chosen to flourish. In many instances, this involves the physical movement of the leader and those who follow to a "promised land" that is theirs by right. In the case of Moses, this requires not only renunciation of his Egyptian status, but also long wanderings in the wilderness wherein he speaks with a burning bush that informs him of his personal destiny, and a return to lead his dispossessed people in an exodus out of bondage and towards freedom, in what was to become Israel. For these two mythical figures, life lived out is a full circle, uniting beginning with ending.

At this point in historical and mythological time, the individualistic *imago mundi* transcends the point of view of a person in favor of a cinematic analogue concentrated on a group of people seeking not only the imagined feeling of *pathos,* but rather more the shared sociability of *ethos,*

awakening the felt good of communal identity and practical transactivity. The distinction is often expressed as the former perspective concerned with the individual standing out from and leading the group, and the latter with the group defining what goes on with individuals and requiring their attention to the needs of the group. The difference is one of emphasis: the one stresses the individual in society; the other society in the individual. This social perspective converges on a *scena vita*, the important centralizing and ruling necessities that strongly suggest leaders who are not only grounded in the group *ethos* but also versed in the Machiavellian realities of making do, not only for the good of the ruler but also (perhaps more so) for the ruled. This process is so often seen as "the theater of politics" that it urges the adoption of the metaphor of *theatrum mundi*, the great world stage of social life and public space.

THEATRUM MUNDI: The Great World Stage

In this dispensation of appropriate cinematic perspectives, the whole world of human life is, as Milton said, "under Heaven's Eye", encompassing the glory of creation of which we are merely spectators in the passing panorama of history or, if we choose, actual participants in the uneasy and difficult march of time. Shakespeare's Globe Theater featured the motto, *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (from Petronius, "All the World is a Playground, or Stage"). The metaphor of society as a stage for dramatic play-acting and public displays of theatricality is a now familiar one in social and cultural inquiry, with social actors playing roles in the various dramatic scenarios, from microcosmic theatrics in such familiar plays as informal courtship and macrocosmic formal settings such as courtroom dramas or the conduct of warfare in elections, movements, and violent armed struggle. It is more inclusive to translate Petronius as conceiving human living as a playground, with dramatic metaphors as only one mode of social playing. The movie *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) captures the extent and variety of human playing going on as the production of the play at the Globe proceeds — the ways in which love-play is not confined to the roles of Romeo and Juliet, but extends to the actors cast in the roles who are having a torrid if impossible romance, and also widening to the competing interests of various parties to the complexities of transactivity at hand in the moment and place. Therein the outcomes remain uncertain and are still uneven at the end. Unlike many strictly dramatic metaphors, here the endings are ambiguous and uncontrived. The model of "life-plays" does not dictate the necessity of happy endings, the just rewarded and the unjust punished, and so on. The