Moving Pictures

Moving Pictures:

An Inquiry into the Cinematic Experience

By

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To my beloved wife Sara, who has made my life worth living

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BIG FEAST: THE CINEMATIC IMAGINATION AS CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND CELEBRATION

The following presentation is an exercise in, first of all, recapitulating what the author has tried to say that makes sense about the important subject of moving pictures. Secondly, it is a final effort to put into context what has been said and, more importantly, what needs to be explored now, so that future inquirers of greater learning and daring might find it to be fruitful in the project of cinematic enlightenment. We urge this expansive view of the subject based on our assertion of the astounding importance of motion pictures in the cultural life of humanity now and in the foreseeable future. As inquisitive agents of the agenda of cinematic enlightenment, we have an obligation and challenge to discover and express reliable and useful knowledge of this remarkable innovation in the lives of so many people around the planet. We go forth in the sure and certain hope that the present inquiries here will expand and express that body of knowledge, relating what is currently transpiring onscreen to what is transpiring with the many people who are exposed to the vast multiplicity of messages and images that now flow forth from the voluminous visual communicative outlets in endless variety and boundless quantity. This cultural phenomenon has come upon us in a relatively short period of time and with little thought about the potential and unforeseen consequences that such an intrusive and powerful means of communication might have on the ways we think, act, and feel. At our present juncture, we must try to grasp what is going on at and in the movies, for our posterity, in order to understand and control a major source of popular knowledge and the incalculable influence it has on our lives.

It is a true and sobering fact that when people in the 21st century reflect upon such large and encompassing subjects in the course of modern history, they can be forgiven for finding such processes of temporal events and innovations overwhelming. The worlds of 1500 and even 1900 may seem remote, but we can recognize and understand the consequences of the forces of change unleashed then that still affect us now. Many of the changes that arose in the early crucible of modernity are still with us: the Reformation; the Renaissance; literacy; nationalism; secular thought; the emergence of democratic forces and freedoms; the spread of market economies and capitalism; and the rise of powerful states which acquired empires for the purposes of exploitation. In particular, our predecessors had experienced the effects of various technological innovations in communication that have reached large populations. Every major innovation has been both a blessing and a curse: democratic values and desires made for the mobilization of large and often destabilizing political participation activated through the use of available forms of mass communication (newspapers, radio and television) that gave impetus to an accessible populace ripe for manipulation. As modernity loosened our ties to and respect for traditional habits and values, people were freed up in terms of social and economic mobility, with large populations gaining new educational and employment opportunities. Many of these were in the new cities that quickly grew and advanced, but the innovative forces of modern society were felt everywhere, and new leisure time was now available to great numbers of people, even in the most remote regions.

For many people living at the beginning of the new 20th century, these novel opportunities for fun gave credence to the rise in leisure-time industries designed to cater to the widespread and exciting potential for fun diversion. The histories of this period note the rise to prominence of cultural institutions and business organizations with popular purposes, catering to large populations who were very much aware of these opportunistic agencies willing to satisfy the a thirst for modern diversions and entertainment. The invention and distribution of the technology that created moving pictures soon attracted vast numbers of movie-goers, who quickly

demonstrated their abiding desire for more. This lasting popularity prompted early observers to wonder if this apparent omnipresence of motion pictures as a habit and institution was acquiring a permanent presence in human life and culture. This wonder and question persists today, since we still do not fully grasp the consequences of the universe of moving pictures, and still wonder what that cultural permanence has done for the conduct of human thought and life.

The author of this present work has attempted in previous volumes to grasp aspects of this vast human phenomenon, including exploring the rhythmic pacing and appearance of movies in time, evaluating what constitutes greatness in forms of cinematic expression, and the contribution that movies have made to the presentation of comedy. We also saw that the essential element of having fun explains and justifies much about the enduring appeal of motion pictures, and the ways and means through which moving pictures serve as an educative instrument of popular "schooling", noting that their patterns of composition and presentation underscore how such a popular experience has acquired an apparently authoritative and, in some ways, privileged status in human life and culture. Such varied expressions have their merits and uses in the accumulative literature on the subject, but one is left with the sense that, like the famous anecdote about the blind men trying to grasp the fullness of the elephant, they are feeling their way but are limited by each one highlighting the various parts of the animal they have concentrated on to the exclusion of all the others. The universe of the cinematic animal is of such a fullness, but the unwary or unsatisfied scholar keeps making stabs in the dark, clinging to the sure and certain hope of contributing to the knowledge of the beast. Yet this is the burden (but also the virtue) of persistent scholarly inquiry into difficult and complex terrains. We are emboldened by the proposition that such an enterprise is cumulative, and that the community of scholars now and in the future can benefit from the audacity of those who, in the past (such as myself!), have ventured into the deep woods and quicksand swamps of our limited but ambitious body of knowledge of what makes moving-pictures both popular and enduring.

To that end, here we will build on the author's own previous work and, even better, the impressive explorations of those whose findings are deemed worthy of repeated use and incorporation into a larger and deeper perspective. We term this effort cumulative but not necessarily valedictory or definitive, since the author is not ending his interest or quest but does want to address how he thinks future cinematic inquiry might benefit by keeping these inquisitive and exploratory channels open. Let us therefore begin by stating the conceptual inventory that we regard as essential background for analysis of the cinematic world. This also serves as an orienting idea that shapes our attitude of "festive inquiry", sharing our keen interest in understanding moving-pictures with our joy in watching them as a festive experience — a veritable "moviefest"!

We chose the neologism "moviefest" as a shorthand term that keys us in to the joy and wonder aroused by the fascinating and important world of moving pictures. Here we are going to "feast" on movies as a richly-graced human festivity! Let us recall that this crude and limited medium of showing pictures appeared to move for our enjoyment only a little over a century ago, although its appearance was not without technical precedent and human experiential desires. Inventions of the late nineteenth-century included devices used by stage magicians, who put on shows driven by trickery using apparatus such as the phantasmagoria, which conjured up on-stage apparitions. But the most astonishing gimmick was the moving picture, showing scenes of ordinary life (such as workers leaving a factory or a railroad train arriving) or staged incidents, like a garden hose stepped on as a prank and spewing backed-up water onto the gardener. The moving-picture quickly developed into an industry and popular diversion, to the extent that it attracted the attention of intellectuals, including philosophers such as Henri Bergson and C.S. Peirce. They and many other acute observers saw in these early "flickers" insights into the operation of the human mind. Peirce saw films as a reflection of the "moving picture of the action of the mind in thought". This may be regarded as an effort to utilize a contemporary technical innovation as a convenient metaphor for human thinking and acting, but nevertheless speaks to the insight into the parallel between cognitive and cinematic

processes of imaginative conceptualization. Many other early observers of this new marvel found it an intriguing modality to express what was happening off-screen, directing us to compress human conduct into a latter-day dramaturgical perspective. It is also the case that this analogical source has a long pedigree, going back to humans dealing with the shadows on the cave wall in Plato's *The Republic*, and plainly evident in such philosophical constructs as the *theatrum mundi*, with human life occurring and completing in the context of the grand metaphysical design of the world.

Even though this was an immediate and insightful metaphor in a new medium, Peirce and others likely saw the intellectual utility of a medium that could capture human life in its kinetic and dialogical activity, both in the ongoing process of thinking and in the dynamic and transactional world of everyday life as it unfolds in time and is dealt with in actual relationships. The visual and relational power of moving pictures shows us what we are thinking and doing in visible and dynamical "photoplays", in a ludenic world we can easily visit, and sense the perspicacity and understandability of what we see therein. So it is no wonder that the cinematic metaphor has persisted as a vital and insightful perspective, given that in the play of the magically-rich world of the "picture show", human life is seen as encountering an imaginatively interesting and exciting "more so" world of the horrors and joys of the human adventure. Over time, the presence of moving picture-shows has provided us with a wealth of images and a stock of "imaginatives" (movie genres, news coverage, television satires and critical commentary) which orient and supplement our knowledge base and emotional response-criteria as essential to "felt life".

It is this deeply felt aesthetic of feeling for experiential liveliness and the popular art of living that shapes the appeal of going to see and learning from moving pictures. This "lively art" has done much to influence and, in many ways, to enlarge and deepen human reconstruction and recounting of living. Those who lived through much of the 20th century can attest to how much their world view and ability to cope with and understand that world was affected by the presence of this medium and the messages it mediated. In his

invaluable book reflecting on this, Francesco Casetti maintains that "cinema has dominated human existence during the 20th century" as the "medium of Modernity," possessing the capacity "to provide a certain perspective of the world." But it is thought to have provided that perspective through the technical abilities inherent in cinema-photography, which trains the movie-goer to adopt and guide the "spectator's gaze." That gaze takes on a variety of forms so that the "cinematic eye" can perceive and attend to the "artificial dimension" recreated onscreen. We ostensibly learn to adapt and use a "network of gazes" to respond to the "seen object" in our "field of vision." This repertoire of gazes helps us orient ourselves as we are "in communion with a world that carries us away" experienced through "vision and gaze." That world is both an imaginary illusion and one delimited by its temporary nature. We can experience the cinematic other-world through a breathtaking array of gaze types, each one no doubt useable as appropriate to different movie situations, including the personal gaze, the composite gaze, the elicited gaze, and the immersive gaze, among others.

If we regard these gazes as pragmatic response-types, they are a useful heuristic model for viewer organization and understanding the fast-moving and dynamic cinematic fare. But we may doubt that they are built into our genetic structure, educational and experiential learning, or think that they are so common among movie-goers that they can be regarded as habitual. There is also the difficulty with the very term "gaze." This originated in an earlier book on feminist movie experience, entering the discourse as condemnatory towards the "male gaze" looking at movies, and male audience members "gazing" at women onscreen. In this type of gaze, the male reduces the onscreen image of the female into a sex object for men to gape at, lust for and, in a passive-aggressive stance, deny personhood to, seeing female characters as nothing more than lust-worthy screen images. As a term of male prejudice, "gazing" should likely have been "hazing"! As the term "gaze" became embedded in critical film rhetoric, it seemed to expand exponentially, so much so that everyone in attendance at a movie is featured with the vacantly mesmerized and passive-aggressive stare of the zombie.

It may be objected, then, that the explanatory power and reach of the precluded and fixated gaze at the screen is limited. Here we will prefer to focus on the metaphor of the game rather than the gaze, casting moviemakers and movie-goers in a ludenic game that is voluntary and elective, participatory and cooperative, contractual and negotiable in nature. People can enter and leave the negotiation whenever they choose and endure or ignore the presence of the film in question without commitment or enjoyment. But when movie-goers and moviemakers agree to cooperate, creation can move forward with its agenda of negotiated narrative, attracting the movie-goer into a ludenic relationship of suspended disbelief and magical suspension, omitting the negative doubts that inhibit full participation by transforming the auditor's non-committal "looking" into attentive watching. Attention is then transformed into a sustained interest in following the unfolding onscreen activity and afterwards remembering aspects of the cinematic experience deemed worth recalling. Moving pictures can acquire a nostalgic reputation that impels not only recall but also mnemonic value as an individually or culturally memorable experience worth seeing again and valuing in the hierarchies of cinematic honor. Mnemonic status helps not only with the preservation of significant films but also the sustained reputation of moving pictures, and the cultural remembrance of valuable and memorable items of experience. War memorials and holidays celebrate the patriotic work and conflictual pain that is deemed worth remembering and honoring; motion pictures honor the cultural play experiences that we recall because of the joy and happiness they created. Such honorifics help sustain the valuation accorded to moviemaking as a legitimate and worthwhile dimension of our common life and value-structure.

Observing the motion-picture process as something "more" and "other" than the fixation of a vacant and psychopathic gaze, lets us explore the common experience of movie-making and movie-going as collaborative play, resulting in the creation and consumption of narrative-gaming, wherein both actors in the cultural transaction learn how to play the game and bring to fruition a festive experience. This does not mean all movies are frivolous and shallow, but it does mean that even the most serious and deep subject for a

film exists as something subject to popular evaluation and acceptance. It requires critical analysis as an item of solemn festivity; the enjoyment of its higher and deeper message as something to be saluted and heeded. Seeing, for instance, a documentary about the Holocaust or the My Lai massacre calls for solemn attention, aided by the magical suspension of the medium and offering us a visually-rich treatment of a subject that demands imaginative attention and consideration, made more visible and horrifying by the power of mediated felicity.

We have to keep reminding ourselves that "festive" has a root meaning ("fest") which incorporates a wide variety of sites and occasions deemed to be significant cultural and religious observances. The "Feast of the Incarnation," for example, along with many other sacramental festivities, is a serious ritual celebration of solemn but nevertheless cheerful "devout feastings," which enjoins communal meaning and consecration. Since many of these occasions have historically included festive eating and drinking, the term came to connote communal suppers, but it persists even if many such observances today are restricted to the ritual consumption of symbolic meanings. Such occasions call for magical language, invoking meaning in the ceremonial fest itself and transforming the observer by the act of mimetic celebration. In such a cultural context, transfixed gazing is an inadequate attitude and response to the ritual requirements of active participation in the rite. In a lighter context, such as movie-going, the individual requirement is less severe but, in its own way, no less re-creative, for in virtually all cases the negotiation between persons and the ritual involves engaged gaming. In other words, the potential movie-goer participates in the composition of the film to the extent that it is made with an abiding idea of the attitudinal composition of the imagined audience. This affects the process of composing scripts, as well as the editing, revising, and marketing of a film, which is often tried out with preview audiences. So, in this way, "gaming the show" is a collaborative process that includes unknown and unseen movie-goers who will decide the ultimate fate of the movie — whether it is a "hit" or a "flop". The search for the right compositional grace in a cinematic narrative that plays well is the measure of negotiated

gaming and ordering in making a movie. Once the movie is being watched, observers can then judge the success of the unspoken "pleasure contract" between movie-makers and movie-goers. If the critical arbiter of the audience is pleased, then the pleasure is felt for the maker at the box office, in critical praise, and with the making of future movies. So, for movie-makers, the recreative element of their craft and art is to create on-screen new and appealing versions of some story, person or incident that is adapted to the imaginative abilities and technical wizardry of their medium. For the movie-goer, a film is recreative not only in the familiar way of diverting relaxation, but also in the sense of recreating the individual as a participant in the vital culture in which we can renew our binding ties to a collective cultural life. Both movie-makers and movie-goers are unwitting bearers of the way a vibrant culture recreates itself through the celebration of festive rituals.

In the larger realm of cultural evolution, one of the primal cultural rituals and popular habits is, indeed, the ongoing and — with the proliferation of cinematic outlets and channels — ubiquitous presence of available motion-pictures of all varieties. If one were of a mind to do so, it would be possible to watch some kind of telegenic programming all day and all night, on every day of the year, with no let-up in sight. We have become creatures of our moving imagery, making us over into beings who exist in our imaginative lives, which are then recreated through a visually-enhanced fund of popular cinematic "knowings," garnered through lifetimes of sustained experience with moving-pictures and legitimated by a surrounding culture that values and perpetuates the constant and accessible communication of presentational exhibition.

If we are, at base, conditioned to imagine our personal and social world as a moving picture in thought and action, then the world recreated for us is perceived as a structure and temporal entity of stereoscopic moving-pictures. We see others, especially significant others, in terms of iconicity — as beings understood by stereotyped characterization. Our stereotypes tend to explain individuals as examples of group behavior, acting the way they do because that is what group members tend to do. The emphasis here is on people as

if they identify with a group (such as a nation, ethnic or racial identity, gender, belief systems, and so on) and imitate behavior patterns as expressions of mimetic evocation. Yet such an identification is severely delimiting and often quite inadequate for life in a world of complex multiplicities that challenge and complicate mimetic self-definitions and traditional loyalties through the constant provocations that emerge from other sources of authoritative claims, including the ritual invocation of values from political and cultural quarters of general society. Mimetic assertions are also much troubled by the pace and scope of change, so stable identities and routine patterns of relating and doing in the "roaring loom" of time, are undermined and often left behind in the wake of the dynamics of kinesis.

In such a situation, learning what to do and how to be is difficult in the welter of competing claims and temporal instabilities. One major personal strategy seems to be an effort to search for and find stable sources of valuation and identification in popular experience. In our sense of the cultural terminology, the parochial identities of mimesis and the destabilizing temporal wake of kinesis make stable choices difficult, so people turn to sources of *aesthesis*, the tradition of imaginative activity and grounded valuation, drawing on the intrinsic values and poetic virtues found in philosophical and critical humanistic work. So, the consideration of how to live, as Montaigne long ago recommended, means that we should look at expressions of living by making-do and doing all we can. This is a humane task that we are not alone in proposing. That venture into the realms of human understanding will also include a knowledge of moving pictures, since it is here that worthwhile popular expression of the human condition is available and usable.

There are many good reasons one can cite as to why moving pictures are an important aspect of human expression, but the primary reason may well be that, among the varieties of aesthetic order, the cinematic is the dominant popular form in mature modernity, and perhaps the most extensive and influential popular medium of expression in the history of communication. The fact of its immense popularity should not obscure the its demonstrable

potential for quality. But since motion pictures exist at the center and the apex of popular mediation, it behooves us to delve into this elevated status, in order to grasp what we can learn from its omnipresent place in contemporary life. Our working hypothesis here stems from the idea that aesthetic order is a primal element of human cultural organization, since *aesthesis* is the center of expression and imagination and the mode of feeling and of storying culture, not only about core ideological beliefs but also more basic mythic and metaphoric expressions. From Homer and the great adventure tales of Ancient Greece comes what we might term "compositional grace," referring to the embodiment of primal myths featuring heroes, and the paradigmatic stories of founding. Such symbolic constructs help us define who we are and what we do so, when they disappear, they are eventually replaced by new myths and metaphors to redefine the boundaries and goals of new cultural composition and definitions of grace (by grace, we mean the extent and depth of personal commitment to the values we are supposed to embody in truth, goodness, and beauty). These symbolic constructs are not mystical but rather observable, since their intrinsic value is seen when they become an element of actual instantiation and articulation.

At the risk of over-confidence, it seems to this writer that cultural organization in many countries, especially but not exclusively in the West, have been slowly changing in the nature of their aesthetic order. Among the varieties of aesthetic order, we can identify three clearly distinct types of such symbolic arrangements. Although they are not mutually exclusive by any means, we can see the distinctive nature of what is deemed valuable in terms of their own definition of compositional grace. The first and oldest cultural form we can identify predates modernity but becomes recognizable to us in its modern dispensation with the creation of the modern state, and the accompanying republican legitimation of political life among a citizenry asserting power over the conduct of the polity. This is articulated in the myth of popular sovereignty, which resides in the rational person who participates in the conduct of his or her own life and, by extension, the life of the political community. Such a person can be characterized as "inner-directed," trustworthy in terms of

managing their own affairs, and through voting and similar mechanisms of the state. Power over oneself and the external world is thus co-terminate because of our sense of individual doing, through which we exercise self-control and social control. The "god-term" of this aesthetic order is *doing*, which is completed with the knowledge of representation, the "play-form" for the person who is, by nature, a citizen. As a player in a democratic polity, one's power over self and society is potentially an act of completion through fulfilling the promise of rational conduct. This aesthetic order features as its central figures political humankind, whose sufficiency is met through individual participation in the polity. So, festive celebrations in popular media (such as the movies) salutes democracy and its active citizenry as the fulfilment of being able to do the things one desires.

This orientation was eventually superseded by another composition of completion through *having*, moving the emphasis from political life to economic life. The human is changed from individualistic "inner-direction" to socially-oriented "other-direction." This sociality can result in many things, such as concern with the distribution of power and wealth, or efforts at amelioration of social injustices. But certainly the most striking aesthetic dimension of this order is the change from political being to social having. One of the great innovations of modernity is the increase in wealth, placing value on people producing wealth through work, and the accumulation of money and possessions. This change from political doing to economic acquisition puts people in competition to garner wealth and display it, since one's worth is manifest in what one has. The "play-form" (or platform) of social action thereby moves from a political role to an economic one, namely as a producer in the sense of doing work to obtain the products of that effort, which later evolves into the principle of social good moving from producer to consumer, wherein one's economic function is to buy and possess things far in excess of their functional utility. One's being is defined by the economy not of effort but, rather, of indulgence, abandoning the parsimony inherent in a work ethic that values the fruits of one's labor in a righteous self-discipline for a deserved good. This is abandoned in favor of constant festivity over ever-renewed acquisition for more "stuff" as a celebratory sign of individual

success. The bitter joke circulated in the wake of such wretched zealotry cracks that, among any group of people participating in such madness, the winner who comes out on top is the one in the end who has acquired the most "toys." Such goods are quite disposable since they are all temporary amusements, a principle that applies to people too. It has become a habit for very wealthy men to abandon their older wives, who have been with their husbands on the rise to the top, for the acquisition of younger women as "trophy wives" and "eye candy" — a perceived reward for success. The mythics of having inspired counter-compositions that challenge the virtue of having, by noting that one person having often actually means taking, and those that "have" resisting the advocates for those who "have-not," urges the "haves" to share through giving. The haves were self-defined as the doers of society and were thus under no obligation to share their bounty with the (less worthy and morally-suspect) takers.

An aesthetic order places value on some lines of action and goals, but the fulfilment of its promise becomes subjected to the realities of temporality, where eventually this orderly way of valuing and doing become obsolete, unfulfilling, or just plain boring. It may well be the case that every form of individual and social mimesis is eventually undermined in the kinetic force of time and circumstance. Mimetic role-play is supposed to result in festive celebration of its systemic rectitude and metaphoric power to persuade and grace. But the fullness of temporal existence seems to subject every human composition to a kind of social variation of the second law of thermodynamics, positing that all human life changes and vanishes, both in terms of individuals and their systems over time. This often unreadily recognized decline augurs the slow but sure loss of compositional grace. Thus the self-defined "haves" steadily became associated with unredeeming disgrace, and those self-defined "have-nots" as poor but virtuous members of society who deserve their fair share of social bounty, since it is selfish not to share that bounty for the benefit of all.

In any case, the rise of "economic humankind" eventually became insufficient for human striving, demonstrating to many the triumph of greed, crassness, and exploitation of humans and the

environment. In a larger sense, the creation of mass media and the rise of media power brought about a new human modality of behavior, based not in doing or having but rather in *showing*. The central motif of this aesthetic order moved heroic virtue from skill in exercising power or acquiring wealth, to the ability in achieving and retaining fame. Increasingly, those who became central figures in the political order were skilled in manipulation and mobilization; those who became important in the economic order were able to master acquisition and accumulation; and those who became leaders in the cultural order were masters in the arts of recognition and renown.

In this new cultural dispensation, then, those adept at using fame as a virtue and resource could do so because their public personas became well-known and notable, commanding respect and influence. These newly important figures exercised public "showing" as people who were "known for being well-known," and as beneficiaries of the process of cultural prefiguration and inhabitation. A typical celebrated individual is self-defined as a noteworthy creation of popular commonality, through the magical invocation of common expressions of sentiment, making the recipient into a ludenic apparition evoked through spontaneous play but subsequently expected to engage in evocative display for an interested public. If blessed with an ability to sustain status and repute over time, they are then accorded the provocative claim for mnemonic replay of an older but wiser persona that has endured. This process is perhaps most evident in the popular phenomenon of the "star," wherein a person who possesses some ability (e.g., to sing, dance, act in plays or movies, write novels or poetry, win beauty contests, and so on) or personal attribute (such as beauty, ugliness, muscularity, transgenderism, etc.) is promoted from the ordinary to the extraordinary, to be attracted to or repulsed by but, in any case, cast on-screen to be seen and scrutinized. A star is someone who people want to see for a variety of reasons, with the most familiar desire being to look at and maybe ogle a "sex object" on display for our delectation. All such figures are there to be shown to the crowd, who enjoy seeing them as exemplars of some attribute, be it female shapeliness, male assertiveness, misshapen freakiness, or whatever the human sight wants to see. The popular interest in stars is an

integral component of the festive rituals of cultural play-acting, invoking for our benefit urges which are often quite irrational and even fetishistic, but in any case letting us free up our spontaneous desires for such fantasies as sexual play with an attractive movie star, and opening up our evocative imaginings of ourselves projected into mimetic situations where we can display our mastery of worlds beyond our conscious reach. In this realm we can win important battles, triumph in sporting contests, become the idolized envy of everyone on campus, in the office, or at the beach because of irresistible appeal. In our fantasy lives, we often become paragons of display, exemplifying the attributes of various venues of mimetic heroism (and in dark moods, sometimes mimetics of villainy and foolery), freeing up our imaginative capacities for private carnivals of our senses. This subjective topicality is often learned from mediated sources such as the movies, but we may also surmise that the movies learned early on to depict the appeal of popular fantasies which could be translated and codified onscreen. The upshot and effect of this development is that we are looking for humans who become a "sight" to be "seen."

This popular ability made those who had the right combination of personal attributes and a histrionic gift to "play-act" into noteworthy ludenic figures who became outstanding in popular esteem and recognition. Such figures were readied for leadership in the new mediated world with the appropriate qualifications, not so much to exercise power or gain wealth, but rather to display "showmanship" (now amended to "showpersonship"). Rather than learning and leading the political "big state" or the economic "big market," the center of action is located in *The Big Show*. Most of us can participate in this remarkable development in something of the same way we did in the previous dispensation — as voters in the polity and investors in the economy and now, as viewers in the mediacy. Citizens in the polity saw the state as a forum for mythic representation — as participant-observers of the political process as it unfolds in all its glory or shame. Investors in the economy saw the market as the exchange where fortunes could be made or lost, but where those with luck or wise choices could come out ahead of the game. But in the era of the "show," both observation and participation

stems from and is directed towards "showing," so most of us are content with or limited to watched the unfolding ludenic showing of magical expectations. Here we encounter the first-order primal feeling of "as if," invoking the initial creative festivity of attributing magical properties and powers that will guide us in finding our way. This mythical invocation carries the festive attitude forward by applying creativity to future situations, setting the stage for the metaphoric evocation of mimetic sociability in gestating the relational criteria to go our way, with that defined way made available and doable through our access to and application of magical provocation.

The vast and diverse universe of motion pictures serves as a convenient evidential base for our extended inquiry into this hypothesized cultural process. We are trying here to establish the changes wrought by the supercession of aesthetic orders which articulate and, in some ways, dictate what kinds of actors, actions, and activities are regarded as legitimate and wise, since they must accord to the mythic rules and metaphoric standards of the greater cultural way of life. An aesthetic order is in constant interplay with the social and political order, yet even without the influences of social mores and folkways, nor the powers of the political system with its directive and ideological strictures, it still exercises its own influences and directives. The aesthetic domain is more subtle and even insidious, since it is here that the cultural ways and means of relevant and important expression are conceived and presented in mediated form for widespread distribution and inculcation. Even if political and social powers grant aesthetic order little autonomy, controlling expression is always incomplete and inadequate when it comes to turning everything into orthodox propaganda. In any case, understanding the form and content of the dominant aesthetic order includes both the environmental and situational mediums of communication, and the verbal and visual illustrations of the arts and sciences, which comprise the content of all expressive utterances entering the cultural stream of symbolic presentations with dialogic potential and illuminative response.

Aesthetic Domains of the Cinematic World

In popular media, such as moving pictures, we can readily envision the respective appeals of three major traditions among the range of aesthetic orders for which we have historical precedent, and which are much evident in movie stories and genres. Such aesthetic traditions help us explain what is going on in movies, including the kinds of characters portrayed, the features included in plots, and the generic storytelling presented for our viewing pleasure. It is the elective and ludenic experience of movies that attracts viewers in most cases, since people watch various forms of motion pictures because doing so is fun. The implicit "pleasure contract" between moviemakers and movie-goers is a game of mutual interest and, hopefully, satisfaction for all concerned. The play that exudes from the screen is both kinetic and subjective, in that we watch the unfolding of an enacted play that excites the attitude of playfulness, and encourages us to keep watching for the fun of the various "spills, thrills, and chills," promised in exchange for our voluntary participation. We are the auditors of the "photoplay" and we know full well that what we are watching is a composition, presented by moviemakers who expect (and rely upon) our implicit and habitual acquiescence to the cinematic rules of the game, as well as the specific utilization of those rules in the moving-pictures we choose to watch.

It is our contention here that we can identify three "master" popular aesthetic traditions and habitations that have shaped the expectations and requirements of movie-going populaces. They can be studied as an independent mode of aesthetic life, but also as entities that are related to the other modes. And they may also be seen as successive historical ways of living where it is possible to see how one form of aesthetic life becomes outmoded and is superseded by another way deemed more appropriate and insightful.

The mythics of doing. Here the focus is on the act of creating something new that is a figuration of beauty in some sense and definition. The actor (who is the author of this beautiful innovation), can be an individual or a group, but in all cases acts as the agent of

change. These actors are activated by the illuminative imagination of the mythic story that inspires them, but they operate as the pragmatic midwife that births the metaphoric realization of the tale told through the means of contrivance. They invent or conjure and, in so doing, bring the story to fruition. It is usual that an outstanding individual, either on his own or as the leader of a group, becomes the symbolic personification of the mythic aspiration. She or he is seen as the "one who does," the one who is somehow chosen to see the burning bush, to head and inspire the spiritual or political revolution, or to write the poetry or prose that becomes the defining work for a literary generation. Such key events are associated with the originator of the movement, imbuing the founder and the founding acts with the mystique of origins and thus the original magic of "doing." It is common for true believers to think that their acts are blessed with the magic dust of original grace and their foes or their unbelievers to be cursed for their evil or folly. This is not to say that a "doer" always has a happy or victorious ending, but their magnificent failure or incompletion may become vital to their legacy as "Fallen Leader," whose sacrifice is key to the legend of the unfinished task that awaits proper and eventual completion.

From our standpoint, the typical "doer" is someone who may be aptly described as "inner-directed" — someone who assumes a leadership role as the group's "personage" — the one who acts as the personification of ideals and goals. The leading citizen combines both mythic and pragmatic functions, acting as the foremost proponent of the mythology of the group's will and its enactor in down-to-earth negotiations. In that sense, a "doer" plays an important political role as someone whose success depends upon skill in gaming the systems of social power and playing that game in order to further group interests. The "doer" activates his or her "inner gyroscope" for guidance on how to proceed in playing whatever game is thrust upon the group. But that inner guide has to be adaptive to circumstances, subordinating dogmatic for pragmatic criteria in decision-making. In that way, in order to do things, the "doer" must ostensibly do what the group wants, and has to establish relations not only with the "powers that be" in the social order, but also in the mediated order.

The second and strongly-related kind of aesthetic order is one specifically interested in the "order of having." Here the economic order is one of vital interest, but "having" can involve a wider variety of wealth than the predominant accumulation of money and monetized riches, such as the varieties of property available for those with the aesthetic appreciation of good, with the good manifest in valuable goods. Having things does not necessarily imply greed or exhibitionism, but it does often follow that those goods of aesthetic value, such as art, are made exceedingly attractive by their economic valuation. They become more valuable by the rarity of their possession, thus risking the criticism that their value is actually debased by becoming objects of possession — the vulgar expression of owning a thing that is no different than owning mansions, yachts and "trophy wives." Having integrity and scruples excludes a type of ownership that cheapens everything that can be possessed, but true appreciation is a virtue worth having.

Both the aesthetic value of "doing" and "having" are capable of pitfalls, since both virtues involve vices that make doing and having ethically suspect and aesthetically worthless. Yet these problems are clear-cut when we turn to our third aesthetic value: "showing." If "doing" is a power value that can be misused, and "having" is a wealth value that can be abused, then "showing" is a fame value that can go awry in various ways. Being powerful and wealthy are not as important in this dispensation as being seen. If "doing" is beset by the quest to do the "deed," and "having" the quest to acquire the "object," then "showing" is the quest to "appear." Playing the game in politics and acquiring the "stuff" in the market is unimportant compared to "playing the palace," referring to the pinnacle sites of performative display to which a show-person might aspire. The aesthetics of "games-personship" and being market savvy misses the aesthetic opportunity of performance, being viewed and acquiring repute among the appreciative audiences and critics. Doing and having are here superseded by appearing.

The variety of aesthetic order is enriched by the participation of groups interested in doing things, such as furthering the exercise of popular choice and access to mediated forms of expression. The

aesthetic appreciation of and access to such mediated expressiveness as quality motion-pictures is one such interest, with some disinterested groups proclaiming their love for and recommending the watching of the great movies in their vista. But let us remind ourselves that we are positing a popular aesthetic, and in that case it must have appeal across a wide spectrum of movie-goers. So, some like to watch movies about "doers," be they great scientists or inventors who discover something important against all the odds (such as Alan Turing, breaking the German Enigma code), or great politicians (Churchill, inspiring British resistance to Nazi aggression). Others may prefer films about people exceptional at "having," including gangsters (like Vito Corleone in The Godfather) or confidence gamesters (The Sting) and, on the other hand, the police officials who foil mobsters, like Al Capone in The Untouchables. And, conversely, there are movies about "have-nots," including how they cope with deprivation. This is usually with a sense of the deprived being virtuous but, in the wake of change, became victims of circumstance. This theme goes back in movie history to before the Great Depression, but was given great impetus by that traumatic upheaval, as seen in movies such as The Grapes of Wrath and Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, wherein the economic losers became the winners, and the winners become the losers, through the losers being championed by sympathetic reformers espousing economic generosity.

By the end of the 20th century, the universe of modern mythic composition entertained an uneasy set of relations among the three master aesthetic orders, with this uneasiness quite apparent in moving pictures. This mediated ambivalence and uncertainty was complicated by the rise to prominence of the myth of "showing" as an aesthetic order of considerable popular interest and impressionable power. Thus the ability of movies to let us see what is (or could be) happening opened up for viewers a mythic sensibility of flow, including the human temporal flow of cycles of life, of change and continuity, and insight into the aesthetics of humane interplay. In so doing, motion pictures could display for us the aesthetics of "doing," with either sympathetic or critical examination of attainment, by individuals or groupings, for good or ill. Similarly, the aesthetics of "having" inspired movie treatments of the effect of