

## THE MECHANICAL BALLET AND THE NEW ENCHANTMENT

THE girl on the swing is a pendulum oscillating perpendicularly to the audience. Her swinging strikes the key rhythm of something totally new in the art of the motion picture. So do whirling pots and pans, shuffling feet, dynamos in action, merry-go-rounds, casts of legs with pretty garters strung beneath the kneejoint, eyes, pie plates, straw hats, breasts, shoes, bottles, spinning disks and a triangle and circle who do an eccentric dance admirably. The percussion of a lonely drum and the wailing of a saxophone furnish a crude jazz and gamin accompaniment.

The film is the Ballet Mechanique, created by Dudley Murphy, a young American director, and Fernand Leger, founder of abstractionism with Picasso, Braque, Gleizes and Metzinger, whose recent paintings were exhibited at the Anderson Galleries this season under the auspices of the Societe Anonyme.

There is no story. The actors can be found on most of Mr. Woolworth's counters, or in our stately pleasure parks, or in power houses, factories and city streets. There was not even a WORLD PREMIERE and the Swanson girl remained unglorified. The occasion was the first exhibition of experimental films under the auspices of a new organization, the Film Associates.

What we saw was the motion picture conceived as a separate and distinct art, an attempt to present a "pure" movie, whose drama should be the thrill of dynamics and which should at every moment acknowledge the mechanical nature of its origins. It is anomalous that the art of the motion picture, born of the cold logic of the machine and operating under its inhuman laws, should strive so desperately and absurdly to be human, to be illogical. For that, we have literature, we have the drama. Seeking to tell a story, to depict a drama, the art of the motion picture can but usurp poorly the provinces of other arts. Ideally considered, at any rate, it can have nothing to do with these provinces. It can develop only under the laws of mechanics which give it life.

There is the human drama of the ten thousand and one individuals who crowd the white way each night in quest of diverse annihilations. But there is also the mechanical drama of the white way itself, in which these ten thousand and one are but a single unit, whirling with the traffic, the dancing electric lights, the mounting skyscrapers within the swirl of the all embracing night.

Something of this was inferred in the Murphy-Leger film. It was not a work of art; it was a laboratory experiment, unintegrated, casual, suggestive of the vast and exciting future of the motion picture. It was—risking a broad parallel—a primitive *comedia del arte* of the motion picture. Seen, of course, without sentiment which cannot be an attribute of the mechanical. As when the female torso, revolving under double exposure, showed now the beautiful and proper breast, now—

presto changeo—the improper and disconcerting carbuncle on the shoulder, though it was the same human breast all the time, merely pure of the glow of sentiment.

But my dear, the good lady protested, are we still living in healthy old United States? We are, sweet chuck, and I think there is no fear of the mechanical ballet causing Adolph Zukor grave consternation or the Paramount Corporation to crash on Wall Street. At the best, we shall have compromise, which is the way of art with a public.

This compromise was offered on the same bill in *The New Enchantment*. It was proposed as "a striking example of what a synthesis of the arts can accomplish in the service of the modern cinema. The vision of an indigenous cinematographic art calling upon the efforts of France's modern artists has been realized for the first time. A modern musician, Darius Milhaud; a modern scene painter, Fernand Leger; a modern architect, Mallet-Stevens; a celebrated actress, Georgette LeBlanc-Maeterlinck; and the world-famous Paul Poiret have united to make a moving picture holiday for those who are weary of Hollywood."

But there was no synthesis and the holiday was incomplete. The story was the sorriest claptrap. If Darius Milhaud scored the music, does James Joyce read copy for the *Ladies' Home Journal*? What remained and what was after all of importance was some remarkable photography of a speeding automobile and some equally remarkable and dynamic sets by Leger. The new enchantment is science. It was, certainly, in the interior of the laboratory under the spell of Leger's imagination. But that was all. As a synthesis, the French film was at no point the equal of *The Last Laugh*. The holiday was afforded by the English translation of the French captions, which must have been done by an innocent Frenchman under the spell of a French-English dictionary.

If we are to have valid compromises, there must be no single counterfeit coin.

Edwin Seaver

### NEW MASSES SUSTAINING FUND

The launching of the NEW MASSES was delayed until sufficient funds were in hand to assure the publication of the magazine for at least a year. Our budget, however, is so small that both our business and our editorial staffs are unduly handicapped. We want to "prospect" actively for first-rate articles. This takes time and money. We want to staff adequately our circulation promotion department so that as soon as possible we may make the magazine self-sustaining. This takes more capital than we now have at our disposal. We are therefore undertaking to raise an additional sustaining fund of \$5,000 during the current year. Will you contribute to this small quota? Will you endeavor to interest your friends? Make checks payable to the NEW MASSES, 39 West 8th Street, New York City.



DRAWING BY HANS STENDEL

GO-GETTER'S HOLIDAY

## RAILROAD YARDS

(Long Island City)

They stand side by side in the cut,  
In the deep, grassy-sloped cut,—  
The electric-engines with their power shut.  
The sun pours down: no shadows jut  
Across the man-scooped hillside: no stones abut,  
And we see that none abut.

Stand side by side on the tracks,  
Like whales with black, water-gleamy backs,  
Waiting hands to touch off the leaping starts, the power-impacts.

The drivers lean in each door,  
In the front of each engine, and seem to store  
The autumnal wind; each a drawer-  
In of the wind as it laps each pore;—  
Breathing the wind to feed the central heat, his vital and consuming  
core.

One sprawls in the grass,  
His buttocks grass-buried; pressed on the grass  
With his arms and the small of his back; one thigh high, one laid  
along the grass;

Waiting for time to pass  
Around him and past him and over and thru the grass;—

Waiting to race  
Over the dark-gathering space,  
Thru diminishing space.  
Motion and space that abet  
Each one's power to forfeit all things met  
And known and left. Leaving life a pure jet  
Of power, an onset  
And swing of motion thru the darkness without stay or let:  
With only the delicate human hands set  
Motionless above the controls, as a threat.

Whittaker Chambers