

WHAT IS CINEMA?

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Theatre and Film (2)

In the disenchantment that follows watching a film a process is undoubtedly at work whereby the viewer is depersonalised. As M. Rozenkranz wrote in 1934, in a profoundly original article for its day, 'We naturally identify with characters on screen, while we are mentally dissociated from those on stage, because their real presence gives them an objective reality and because, in order to transpose them into the subjects of an imaginary world, we must actively intervene and disregard their physical reality. This disregard is the fruit of a process of the intellect which can only be asked of a fully conscious individual'. For Rozenkranz, film viewers tend to identify with the hero by means of a psychological process that results in turning the audience into a 'crowd' and in standardising our emotions: 'As in algebra, where two variables are equal to each other if each is the same as a third variable, we might say: if two individuals identify with a third, they identify with each other'. Take the example of showgirls on stage and on screen. On screen, their appearance satisfies unconscious sexual desire, and when the hero enters into contact with them he satisfies the viewer's desire, to the extent that the viewer identifies with the hero. On stage, showgirls arouse the viewer's senses in the same way they would in real life, such that no identification with the hero takes place. He instead becomes an object of jealousy and envy. In short, Tarzan is inconceivable anywhere but on

screen. Film appeases viewers and theatre excites them. Theatre, even when it appeals to our basest instincts, prevents, to a certain extent, a crowd mentality from taking shape. It hinders collective representation in a psychological sense because it demands of the viewer an active individual consciousness, while film asks only that we follow passively along.

Rozenkranz's views shine new light on the problem of acting, taking it from the level of ontology to that of psychology. Film is different from theatre in the way it encourages identification with the hero. Put this way, the problem is no longer radically insoluble, because it has been established that film has at its disposal techniques of *mise en scène* that encourage passivity or, on the contrary, arouse awareness to varying degrees. Conversely, theatre can attempt to attenuate the psychological dissociation between viewer and hero. Theatre and film are thus no longer separated by an unbreachable aesthetic gap; they simply tend to arouse two intellectual attitudes over which theatre directors and filmmakers alike exercise considerable control.