

new left review

Professor G. Lukacs
Belgrad Rakpart 2
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19-11-1970

Felher volens ?

Dear Professor Lukacs,

I am compiling an anthology of works on the cinema, to be published next year by Secker & Warburg in London, and I very much wanted to include your 1913 text Gedanken zu einer Aesthetik des Kinos, which I found highly interesting, and excitingly prescient. I have cleared the permission with Luchterhand, and so I hope it is all right with you? I would like to assure you that I will carefully set the piece in the context of its time - and I have noted that in your introduction to Guido Aristarco's book (Il dissolvimento della ragione, Milano, 1965) you have called your Gedanken "unilaterale e d'occasione"; however, it is also - and more importantly, "testimonianza di un vitale interesse alla nascita di un nuovo genere d'arte" - and this I would like to get across.

In order to be able better to set the text, I wanted to ask you a few questions, which I would be most grateful if you have the time to answer. First: how did you come to write it and why? Had you seen something which had set you off - or were you asked for it (I notice it is credited to the Frankfurter Zeitung)? And what had you seen then which stimulated you? For example, had you seen Reinhardt's 1912 film (called Il miracolo in Italian and, I think, L'île des bienheureux in French)? Or Der Student von Prag by Wegener?

Second, you rightly point out in your introduction to Aristarco that almost no-one at the time was prepared to take the cinema seriously. But had you, for example, read anything by Ricciotto Canudo, the Italian musicologist (or psycho-musicologist) at the time? And what about Jenő Török - who I must admit is only a name to me, since nothing of his is translated? Did you already have contact with Balasz at the time - and were you more or less in agreement then? (By the way, did you ever ask him how he came to work on Das blaue Licht in 1932?).

There ~~is one~~ specific, though small, point~~x~~ in the text itself: ~~Why~~ Why have you put "Kino" in "..."? Is it because of the status of the cinema at the time - and therefore is it all right by you if I remove the "K", indicating in a note that they were there in the original?

~~2x~~ I wanted also to try to give a list of your writings on and about film, and enclose on a separate piece of paper those which are known to me. I am still pondering whether to reprint some of these in their entirety, or try to give a résumé of them - and I would be grateful if you could provide me with more information on them.

In your comment on Messaros's synopsis of his project on Cinema Aesthetics (1958, in Cinema Nuovo 135), you refer to a Moulin Rouge of British origin:

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Editor Perry Anderson

is this the 1934 version (by Sidney Lanfield) rather than the 1953 version (by John Huston)? And in point 6 (p.136) there is a word which in Italian is translated 'epica': is there any ambiguity in Hungarian about the concept 'epic' - I mean of the kind in French, which has both 'épique' and 'épopée'?

I was amazed by Barbaro's attack on you, and wondered if you had any idea why it was so bitter - and so wild? On the whole, he has a rather good record (if somewhat influenced by Croce, admittedly) - and this assault on you seemed rather out of character. This raises a further question I would very much like to know about: do you think he was simply following the line already put forward on you in Italy by Galvano Della Volpe, who was a much more prominent and esteemed theoretician? Are you acquainted with Della Volpe's criticism of you ('Contraddizioni dell'estetica di Lukacs' in Il verosimile filmico, Roma, 1954 - which is concerned with your Introduzione agli Scritti di Estetica di Marx e Engels in the volume Il marxismo e la critica letteraria, Einaudi, 1953)? And did you ever reply to Della Volpe on this? (So far as I can see Barbaro is in fact saying much the same thing as Della Volpe, although of course this does not mean he necessarily is merely following him). There is an article in Cinema Nuovo 191 by Ugo Finetti concerning your new introduction to History and Class Consciousness suggesting that the source of Della Volpe's attack is Zinoviev.

I found your 1968 interview to Film Kultura immensely interesting: I am not sure that I could use it all in the volume I am doing, but could I, in principle, have your permission to use part of it - with the proviso that I submit to you what I am using, and how (what I take to be a complete version is available in Italian in Cinema Nuovo 196 and 197): I would not use the shortened version which appeared in French (in Cinéma 69, n.140), which does not extract the sections I would most like.

Lastly, I would, of course, want to make reference to the long section on cinema in Der Eigenart des Aesthetischen: I believe this will be appearing in English in the fairly near future in any case. Have you seen (and approved) the précis done of the section by René Micha in Cinéma 70, n.149 - which I found very good?

I hope it is all right to write you with this long list of queries. I would like you to know how much I esteem your work, and my concern is to try to present your thinking on the cinema in a coherent and detailed way, so as to make it available to Anglo-Saxons whom, as you know, are a strange and rather backward cultural group in many matters. If you do have the time to help, I would be most grateful - although I shall readily understand if you can not.

Lastly, could you answer me to my home address: 50 Earls Court Square
London SW 5.

I have written to you on NLR paper merely to give you some idea of who I am, and a guarantee that your work will not be misused in any way.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

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PS. If you can answer, could you indicate if I may use your replies verbatim or paraphrased in the book?

Jon Halliday
Jon Halliday

G.Lukacs: Writings on cinema

1. Gedanken zu einer Ästhetik des Kinos (1913)
2. Comments on synopsis of projected work on Cinema Aesthetics
(in Cinema Nuovo, 135 = 1958)
3. Answer to Umberto Barbaro (on 2), Cinema Nuovo 154 (1961)
4. Section on cinema in Der Eigenart des Ästhetischen (1963)
5. Introduction to Guido Aristarco, Il dissolvimento della ragione,
Milan, 1965
6. Interview in Film Kultura May 1968 - reprinted in Cinema Nuovo
196, 197.

Is this complete?

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