

MAXIMILIAN MAULBECKER
The Trick in Film

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The question of art and aesthetics gained increasing prominence in German writing on film from the 1910s (e.g. *Bild und Film*) onward, and it is striking how central animation was to this discussion. Theorists such as Bernhard Diebold saw a close affinity between Richter and Ruttmann's experiments in absolute film and American cartoons such as Mickey Mouse, which Diebold proclaimed to represent the "the highest artistic form" of cinema (see text no. 277). In this text, Maximilian Maulbecker praises the "trick film" in terms reminiscent of Georg Lukács's "Thoughts Toward an Aesthetic of the Cinema" (no. 174).

If we ask how many genres of film exist, we can give a very general answer: at least as many as in actual theater, namely tragedy, comedy, and farce. But film art could not be considered progress if it had to maintain the representation of its material within these limits. Film can accomplish everything that is—for purely technical reasons—impossible or very difficult in theater with playful ease. We only have to recall the spectacle film's imposing mass scenes, or the representation of battles that can only be communicated to live theater audiences by way of a messenger's report.

Film has also requisitioned novels by famous authors for its realm of representation. However, in these cases there is often so much text that the film itself only functions as an illustration. It is a failure to recognize the particular uniqueness of cinema, if we grant pride of place to text, to the replacement of spoken words, at the expense of images, whose continuous progression constitutes film as we know it and as it is supposed to be. Psychological subtleties, the unmistakable advantage of a good novel, cannot be reproduced on the screen nearly as accurately or as convincingly.

The detective film is already better. Even if novelistic diagnoses and analyses, which are the primary charms of a detective novel, are still only partially available to cinematic representation, on the plus side we have the moment of an exciting, breathtaking plot, whose value cannot be overstated.

But only trick films open the realm of unlimited possibility to us. The trick is a peculiarity that can only be presented to such great extent through cinematography. The trick takes us into the realm beyond the real, into a world of unreality.

In a finished film, events are presented in a spatial environment and chronological order that do not correspond to the conditions present during shooting. We had hardly realized the possibility of operating in this way when we also recognized that we could now arbitrarily turn everything on its head, visually and in reality. The gate to dreamland had sprung open; fairy tales had become reality.