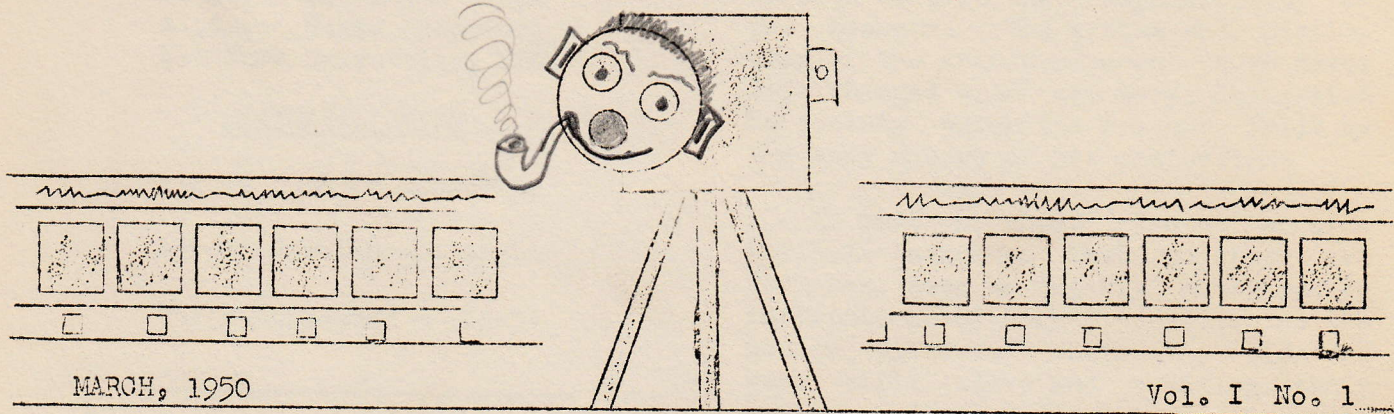


# GAMMA

## newsletter



MARCH, 1950

Vol. I No. 1

### TEACHING MOTION PICTURES AS A LIBERAL ART

by Professor Robert Gessner  
Chairman, Dept. of Motion Pictures  
Washington Square College, N. Y. U.

In an age characterized by the extremes of emotion and reason, when we are constantly astonished by the products of art and science, the motion picture remains an unique phenomena. It is curiously propitious that the Twentieth Century should give rise to a new art form capable of portraying the silence and the speed of our times as well as the sensitivity and subtleties of our lives. Art both follows and leads man in the recording and interpretation of his culture, and for this role in the contemporary spins of our planet the motion picture appears to be peculiarly suited.

That the mechanical invention and perfection, and the artistic adolescence and maturity should all occur within the incredibly short span of less than half a century is unprecedented in the history of any art form. If we can imagine a time clock of the arts it might conveniently illuminate the extraordinary infancy of the motion picture. On this imaginary calendar it is scarcely seven days old, an inert bawling lump, while drama is a year-old child who has learned to walk, and architecture, dance, poetry, painting, sculpture and music are five-year old greybeards. ---(continued on page 2)

### THE UTELIZATION OF MUSIC IN THE MOTION PICTURE

by Gerald H. Rosenfeld  
Member of S. M. P. E.  
Treasurer, Gamma Chapter, D. K. A.  
Washington Square College, N. Y. U.

The primary value of background music in the motion picture is its use for associative orientation. Therefore in order for the music to add to and not detract from the screenplay, there must be a complete fusion of it and the other story elements. If music is over used alone for the establishment of mood and atmosphere, characterization, or action, it betrays a serious weakness in some other component or components of the total production. It then becomes merely suggestion substituted for the real thing. If a scene takes place in old Vienna, viennese waltz rhythms would be characteristic of the locality. However, if the music is to remain in the background, and not in itself become a separate entity, a particular waltz selection cannot be played and repeated as many times as necessary. An almost certain result will be distraction of the audience as well as inadequate development and augmentation of the dramatic values inherent in the film. The background used should be a neutral one, constantly varied, but having all its thematic variations descending from a common progenitor.

- THE END -



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## --- EDITOR'S CORNER ---

----- In October, 1948, several enthusiastic Motion Picture students at Washington Square College, N. Y. U. began paving the way for the first chapter of Delta Kappa Alpha on the east coast. Those students were successful, for today Gamma chapter has developed from a sprawling child to robust maturity. New members were taken in, elaborate plans made for the future of Gamma, and in the spring term of 1950, publication of our first newsletter was begun. Our newsletter will be sent to our western chapters periodically, serving not only as a medium of disseminating information of interest to all concerned with the cinema, but also as a stronger tie within the organization.

...Albert Casutto

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----- Gamma Chapter's second installation dinner for the newly accepted members was held on January 13, 1950 at the famed Leone's restaurant in New York City. Among the guests present were Professor Robert Gessner, Chairman of the Department of Motion Pictures at N. Y. U., Professor Haig Manoogian, and the guest of honor, Jack Glenn, Senior Director of the March of Time films.\*

Gamma chapter thanks Jack Glenn.

The power of the screen entails a responsibility which educators, even more than film-makers, are cognizant of, and which is proper, for education through art is the responsibility of the teacher. The artist and particularly the art-entrepreneur have never felt charged with the moral obligation to society which the teacher feels by the very nature of his profession.

It must be noted also as an historical phenomena that no other art form has been so quickly accepted by institutions of higher education as the motion picture. While the pioneers were still alive and creating their medium, colleges and universities were admitting courses which studied the history, aesthetics and technique of that medium. This speedy recognition is in the tradition of formal education for ever since the development of universities in medieval Europe the arts have been an essential subject for study. The growth of universities have been in proportion to the extension of their curricula as our culture expanded and the arts developed. Music, literature, sculpture and painting have been accepted in universities for centuries. The art of the drama came within the scope of university study after some moral apprehension, undoubtedly due to the same prejudices of the flesh which prohibited female actors. Timothy Dwight, one-time president of Yale College from 1775-1817, said, "To indulge a taste for play-going means nothing more or less than the loss of that valuable treasure, the immortal soul." It is not clear to what degree the undergraduates of that day adhered to the stricture, but Yale today has one of the most devout departments of drama in the country.

In teaching the motion picture as an art the instructor does not begin his scratching on the surface of a tabula rasa. Aside from his personal background, which may be literary, or theatrical, or photographic, or educational pedagogy, the subject is not so virginal as the innocent might suppose.

(continued on page 3)



TEACHING MOTION PICTURES..(from page 2)

The motion picture is derived in part from older arts, synthesizes and extends their uses: painting and sculpture are the springboards of a fluid composition effecting line, space, and mass in motion; architecture is the basis for the scene designs which serve continuity, not permanence, the flow of action, not the static reservation of boundary lines; dance or choreography, is a freer influence in that the movements of action, characters, and camera are co-ordinated in a new aesthetic projection; music becomes supplementary as in opera that is independently dramatic, not tonal illustrations; drama escapes the boards, soars both inward when the balcony is brought to the apron, and outward when the orchestra seats are sailed through the wings into the fresh breathings of nature or an indoor scene of another time and place; and, finally, literature, probably the true affinitive half-brother, is given the eyes and ears to see and hear the story in addition to imagining it.

The challenge inherent in this coordination and exploration has taxed the neophyte teacher more perhaps than in the inauguration of any curriculum of an older or simpler art form. The derivative characteristic necessitates the development of an original pattern of aesthetics and technique at the same time demanding an account of the mechanical history and utilization of the camera, the sound-track, optics, photo-chemistry, and projection.

What emerges from this challenge is an undeniable realization, perhaps reluctant at first, of the unique historical progression of motion aesthetics. Aristotle demanded an orthodox unity of time, place and action, which Shakespearean drama violated in response to an expanding consciousness of new personal and national horizons. The early American motion pictures felt as suffocated as the pre-Elizabethan tableaux, and revolted most inevitably against the strictures of the theatre in response to a Twentieth Century of time and space. In a way, the nec-

essity of our times is the mother of the motion picture, the invention and development of which render it capable, more than any other art form, of capturing and portraying, interpreting and projecting the speed and subtleties of our age. The motion picture is a time-space art form.

Only through a study of the principles and practices of both camera and editing can a student learn and appreciate this unique characteristic of time and space. All other technical studies are supplementary, valuable as they may well be. A study of both drama and literature are essential as an appreciation of the narrative character of motion pictures, but only as that narrative is rendered cinematic by the new freedoms of time and space. If there be a key to the generic character of this new art I believe it lies in this area.

The cinematic approach not only combines craft with the theatre and literature but creates out of the whole and indigenous authority. This authority when buttressed by the academic tradition provides a curriculum form which permits the widest latitude for growth. Although my personal experience favors this combination of the cinematic and the academic, there is obviously no exclusive path to the motion picture classroom. Various teachers in a variety of institutions can enrich our meagre knowledge only through experimental teaching and, above all, experimental productions. can theory and practice lead to such exciting adventures, and at a time when the shore from which we embarked is still in view. -----(the preceding paragraphs were excerpts from Professor Gessner's paper.....the EDITOR)

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---NOTICE FOR NEW YORKERS---

S A V E W A T E R  
OBSERVE THURSTY THURSDAY

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TOWARD A MORE CINEMATICO  
USE OF SOUND

by Woodward Smith, D. K. A., S. M. P. E.

Film is essentially a visual flow, a three dimensional art whose third dimension is time, instead of depth. And it must be borne in mind that the visual material is recorded on the film by a camera. The importance of this lies in the consequent fact that the visual material may be consciously manipulated by the artist for his own purposes. The imaginative use of camera angle, special photographic effects, editing, etc. is always preferable to the use of methods derived from other art forms, such as the theater, in producing a given effect.

Considering the sound track from a cinematic point of view, almost all spoken dialogue seems undesirable on general principles, as being theatrical and forcing the film to become static. A film which relies to any appreciable extent on dialogue for the creation of its effects is cinematically poor, and would be preferable in the form of a stage play. Accordingly, a primary rule concerning the use of dialogue in films might be: Dialogue is legitimate only when it does not interfere with action. This should not be construed to forbid an economical use of dialogue in conjunction with appropriate visuals to create mood. It also does not rule out incidental dialogue natural to a given situation, when the characters are at the same time doing something to advance the film's action.

Music is potentially a powerful element in creating a motion picture's effect. Unfortunately, its importance does not seem to be adequately appreciated by the majority of film creators. And those who make the "musicals" are among the worst offenders. Music, judiciously used, can emphasize particular significant aspects of the accompanying visuals, or it can interpret them, sometimes to give an effect completely opposite to that produced by the visuals alone. The important point is that the combination of music and visuals should be employed to achieve

effects impossible with either of these two components by itself.

Music is improperly used when, as is the case with much "mood music," it is called upon to conceal the visual poverty of a film, to create effects should have been achieved visually. The theatrical and wholly uncinematic character of the conventional musical film, in which a succession of performers stand before the camera and sing their songs, is too evident to require comment. However, vocal music must not be forbidden. Like dialogue, it has its place; it does have uses that are entirely legitimate cinematically.

What has been said concerning dialogue and music is also applicable to the use of sound effects and, indeed, to the omission of sound altogether. Sound effects, and periods of silence, when properly used in conjunction with visuals, can convey nuances impossible to express by visual means alone. Such uses of the sound track are highly cinematic. Both the film artist and the critic must bear these considerations in mind. In reviewing a film, the critic should point out instances in which dialogue, music, and sound effects are used theatrically rather than cinematically, as well as instances in which use is made of one or more of these elements to perform a task proper to the film's visual components which, after all, are the most basic.

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D. K. A. JOINS S. M. E.

--- During the past three months twenty two students have become members of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers here at N. Y. U. The idea started when some of the members of D. K. A. announced that students were eligible to become members of the society. D. K. A. led the way with the entire chapter joining, including other students of the Motion Picture Department.

As student members of the society we receive the S. M. P. E. Journal and become acquainted with the Motion Picture Industry, engineering practices, and its leading authorities. - B. BODEN