suggest, modern man has to learn to treat his own ideals, his art, his political doctrines a little bit less seriously. He needs to become aware of the artificiality of all Great Ideas, especially when they compel one to Great Deeds. Only in this way can he transform himself from someone who has Form into someone who creates Form. In 1954, he wrote in his *Diary*:

> To be a concrete man. To be an individual. Not to strive to transform the whole world. To live in the world, changing it only as much as possible from within the reach of my nature. To become real in harmony with my needs, my individual needs.
>
> I do not want to say that collective and abstract thought, that Humanity as such, are not important. Yet a certain balance must be restored. The most modern direction of thought is one that will rediscover the individual man.

Gombrowicz's message of radical skepticism and individualism, combined with his iconoclasm, made him an anathema among emigré Poles, but—as we learn from an informative introduction by Stanislaw Baranczak—it met with a surprisingly positive response among the young, postwar intelligentsia in Poland, where some of his works started to be available after the thaw of 1956. A writer who sneered at the role of a "committed" intellectual as "too pretentious and too frivolous" became, paradoxically, one of the mentors of the dissenting intelligentsia of the '60s and '70s. Gombrowicz was a perfect antidote to the nationalist pieties that were practically the only available language of anti-Communist opposition. He cautioned against the dangers of excessive loyalty to the East European heritage of doom. He demonstrated that repeated historical disasters have hampered the spiritual development of the region and made the intellectual classes too self-conscious to be really creative, and to achieve the spiritual freedom necessary to oppose collectivist doctrines.

This attitude, together with Gombrowicz's famous egotism and his disdain for literary idols (he considered Borges "unintelligent" and Proust "full of faults," and even tried to show that Dante's tercets could have been better written), made him delightfully subversive and liberating, especially in the stifling years of decaying communism. In retrospect, however, this iconoclast and intellectual rogue appears almost an apostle of normalcy and moderation. The rediscovery of the individual, the counsel of restraint in national self-adulation, the priority of concrete tasks over abstract ideals: all this sounds like a rather reasonable program for today's Eastern Europe.

In one of his notes Gombrowicz expressed hope that Eastern and Central Europeans would one day assimilate the terrible experiences of the war and the postwar decades and turn them into their intellectual and spiritual capital. Those experiences would not make them any better than the rest of us (Gombrowicz derided the idea that suffering ennobles the spirit), but they would put them in touch with reality, and would allow them to crawl from under their historical myths and build their future according to their ordinary human needs.

Sadly, in many quarters of the post-Communist world, something akin to a new "formal mobilization" seems to be taking place. It is hard not to see the Yugoslav tragedy, at least psychologically, as the product of an absurd "artificial state" of mind that managed to inflate minor variations of custom and dialect into full-scale "national conflict," and allowed otherwise normal people to kill and to rape their neighbors and co-workers with a clear conscience. Even in less afflicted parts of the region, there are political and intellectual leaders who seem to resemble the hero of *Trans-Atlantyk*, lost in alien territory, tormented by a sense of vacuity and pursued by the "chimeras, illusions, phraseology" of the past. If Gombrowicz were alive to witness this spectacle, he would probably conclude that the problem of a new identity for his native realm has not yet been resolved. As early as 1957, he wrote that only when his compatriots manage to "get at least one foot out of history" will their future finally come to life.

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Sounds of Silence

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film by James Card

(Knopf, 319 pp., $35)

James Card thinks of himself as a precious vessel, and he's right, for those who prize living memory. He is a walking archive, a human repository of cinematic experience; and his book is the personal account of a passion for movies that began in 1918 when he was a child, a decade or so before sound. Card's youthful obsession was eventually channeled into fifty years of relentless collecting and a perpetual championship of the movies from what he calls the pre-dialogue period. It is there, during the first forty-five years of moving pictures—he dates cinema from Muybridge's Zoopraxiscope in 1880—that Card finds all the life and health of the medium during its subsequent history. He is not alone, of course, in holding this view, but he can claim to be among the few with personal experience to support it. He eventually helped found the George Eastman House of Photography in Rochester, New York, where the film archive began with his own collection of silents.

Card tells how he became an avid collector of movies when he was in high school, cleverly rigging his hand-cranked Keystone Moviegraph (bought in a Cleveland department store in 1921) to take 1,000-foot reels of 35mm film, so he could show full-length features at home, instead of the short excerpts that were quite enough fun for most people. And so he began a kid's collection, buying and swapping movies with fellow enthusiasts; but he never grew out of it. The advent of sound dialogue seems only to have confirmed his passion for silent film and his belief in its superiority, at the same time confirming the limits of his cinematic perspective and—consequently—of his aesthetic judgment. Card's wish to keep faith with his adolescence has resulted in a wonderful celebration of early movies and their makers and stars, marred by somewhat thick-headed objections both to later movies and to all later critical treatment of the cinematic enterprise.

Card becomes lyrical describing the opulent movie palaces of his childhood, during the brief epoch when dressed-up audiences were politely ushered to their seats, before popcorn and soda vendors desecrated the grand lobbies and noisy, untidy throngs crowded the house. Before sound, Card suggests, movies really were believed to be a new art,

and they were treated with a respect that the dream-factory productions of later decades rightly lost. In the big theaters, musical accompaniments were played by a full live orchestra or an organist; and it is clear, although Card does not talk about this, since his book is not a critical study, that early cinema had a certain similarity to opera as it used to be.

Early movie audiences, as Card describes them, seem like those for the repertory opera companies that existed in small cities all over Europe, when opera was meant to be generally entertaining and was not yet an expensive urban luxury with weighty social pretensions. Opera, too, provided beloved and magical stars, recurrent themes of passion and deception or comedy and tragedy, and the exercise of an intense suspension of disbelief during an evening of acutely unreal reality, swept onward by overwhelming music and unintelligible dialogue. Despite the obvious differences, there are suggestive connections, including the international character of both media. Without spoken dialogue, movie titles could be translated into any language; and now the opera, reclaimed for the general public, has supertitles offered in an arrangement rather similar to the one used for silent film.

Card doesn't tell us what he used for music when he first showed his own reels at home, and the specifics of background sound seem not to have interested him much, then or since, although he is careful to remind us of Lillian Gish's remark that "silent films were never silent." The details of the underscoring for all those early movies need another book—there may already be more than one. Card instead concentrates on explaining the visual effects used in the branch of early cinema first devoted to creative fictions, for which the invention of the close-up was the crowning achievement.

This artistic breakthrough he attributes to James Williamson in 1901, ten years before Griffith claimed to invent it, and he tells us that:

> Thanks to the pioneering of Muybridge, Méliès, the Lumières and Williamson, the motion picture entered the twentieth century equipped with all its basic properties: editing, close-up, multiple exposures, speed alterations, sound and dialogue, moving camera, large screens, even surrounding screens. The essentials were all there. The next fifty years would be devoted only to refinements.

These refinements, Card seems to believe, were fairly well-perfected by 1930, even including color and, alas, speech. After that, American film ceased to be an art and became a business, popcorn invaded the lobby, Card lost interest, and aesthetic and social respectability deserted the movies—except perhaps in Europe, Russia and Japan. But all the real groundwork had been done; and if movies have lately regained their status as important cultural expressions and are taken very seriously, they owe their elevated rank only to the original accomplishments of the pre-dialogue pioneers.

Modern movie-lovers, including lovers of the silents and the earliest sound dramas, may well be unaware of how many films were made in those very early days, how many hundreds and hundreds of movies of different kinds and qualities existed before 1930 that are now utterly gone. Before their conservation was even considered, and methods for it discovered, movies were born and died with prodigal rapidity, with the result that we are now dependent for our entire awareness of old cinema on a pitiful remnant. Card, his head still filled with the hundred thousand movies of his youth, is indignant at the modern reverence accorded to certain celebrated antiques, the landmark favorites that he often finds wretched compared to certain others lost or more obscure—especially when they are now screened at the wrong speed from horrible prints, with inadequate music or none.

He is particularly scathing about the universal worship of Griffith, whose *Intolerance* is still being called the greatest movie ever made. Card is at pains to describe the ways in which that film was a hopeless abortion and Griffith himself a vulgar sensibility, especially when compared to his European contemporaries. "Griffith's notion that he could stir bits and pieces ... together with shots of Protestants being slaughtered by Catholics, and Jesus Christ being crucified, all under a blanket indictment of 'intolerance,' was an error in both philosophy and aesthetics," Card writes.

Card is also chronically indignant at the presumption of anyone under 70 who teaches film courses dealing with the silent movies, and especially of those daring to formulate theories of film. He has no respect whatever for opinions about the silents put forward by persons who didn't see them when they came out, with their tinted stock or hand-tinted frames, their hand-cranked variable speeds, their organ or orchestra accompaniments. He claims a fresh effectiveness for those movies almost impossible to reproduce now, and espe-

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cially difficult to appreciate after the intervening decades of internalized response to latter-day movie-making. In his own person, Card demonstrates the battle between opposing aesthetic camps—the engaged testimony of a contemporary eye-witness versus the detached judgment created by historical distance. How, Card might inquire, can we presume to teach courses in Michelangelo's frescoes, and to form theories about them, since we didn't see them in the sixteenth century?

But we do presume, and we should; and I believe Card really knows this about movies, too, despite his indignation. Still, his book is about love, that celebrated nexus of the ephemeral and the eternal that likes to defy augury, and theory too. So his emphasis is always on those acute responses that have produced his own love, on the specific forms of cinematic beauty, brilliance and pathos that called those responses up, and the persons and techniques that made them possible. He writes about actors, directors, producers, designers and cinematographers whom he has actually known and whose work he knew from its first appearance; and he offers himself as a surviving ideal spectator, still entranced and, as his title suggests, forever seduced.

And perhaps, after all, in the best position to judge, since nothing—not even the putting away of childish things—has ever dissipated the movies' pristine effect on him. Without such impact, films are nothing. They must have audiences, people caught in the dark who are thrilled and irreversibly changed, or perhaps uneasy and impatient—you have to feel the movie's force directly before you are allowed to be objectively intelligent about any of its components. Moreover, movies deteriorate especially if they are badly stored or many times reproduced.

Still, if later audiences don't get what was originally intended, they certainly get something. Their later judgments must perforce be based on what they do get; and their belated passion, too. One could say the same thing about Michelangelo. His frescoes were so materially changed over centuries that their optical impact itself gradually became a different thing, even apart from the issue of different eyes and shifting expectations. And yet we know that they could still strike home. We all bear witness to feeling the power of things we have only in ghostly versions that reach us across time's gulf. Painstaking restorations, like those in the Sistine Chapel or those lately made possible for old films by the devotion of Card and others, are wonderful acts of faith for which gratitude is due; but even without them, we get it. It may be tarnished, but it's a true thing.

Card possesses something, however, that nobody born later can ever have, and it is the experience of innovation, the revelatory newness of original screen marvels as they first appeared to eager eyes. He seems to have guarded this possession, and to have stayed away from anything produced more recently that might compromise its worth and his fidelity. Card describes some early movies that he says have more power than recent ones, and which were the very first to use the effects now doing the same work: flash-forward, for example, was used in 1914 in T. H. Ince's *The Gangsters and the Girl*, where two imagined future outcomes of a situation are filmed as if real, though neither is the one that eventually happens. He points out that this was used much later in Alf Sjøberg's *Miss Julie* of 1950; and I remember it in the form of false flashback in *Stage Fright*, also from the '50s, where lying testimony is enacted as if real, so we think it's true until we learn better. The same 1914 film first used other elements very familiar on modern screens: shoot-outs on rooftops, car chases, tension raised by clever camera angles, taut pacing achieved by masterly editing and naturalistic, unmelodramatic acting. Obviously, any modern moviegoer would love this film; but he could never see it as new, and Card still can.

Card's book serves as a reminder that the unique art of movies has its own unique art history, with a founding set of origins that has passed through its own unique developmental stages. The great early filmmakers had neither established academies nor private ateliers in which to transmit the secrets of their work to new film artists. Everybody learned by seeing and conceiving, trying and doing, hunting support and success; nobody taught and studied. Throughout early movie history, the influence of one filmmaker on another seems to have been haphazardly and unconsciously created rather than deliberately sought and acknowledged; and this situation is something that Card clearly likes. It makes his personal researches and collecting, and his later work of conservation and display, into one great creative endeavor. The early practitioners worked unselfconsciously; it is only the devoted, attentive lover of their films who can create their true history, and show and tell it to the world.

In this book, the movie-makers and the stars tell Card their stories, display their compelling qualities and gifts; but they have no sense of continuity and history, only a sense of themselves. Card loves them all (though he has his favorites), and he expounds his own ideas, not theirs, about their work and its relation to other movies. He's the one who can do it, after his faithful years of seeing and searching and comparing—the great surviving personalities are really of no help, other than for their continuing presence and glitter. But

The Other Mother

Because she is my mother, every night
she turns into Cinderella. In the wings
I watch. A dove balances on each shoulder.
Her hair tied with a scarf, she sweeps across
the stage, her broom, a branch, a courtly partner;
I smell the rosin and commit Prokofiev's
score to heart. It is Hamburg, 1965.
From the window of our hotel (once a palace),
Die Vier Jahreszeiten, a Christmas tree,
set in the white lake's heart, glistens.

We change hotels. Because, my mother says,
someone forgets to send the checks.
Our room becomes smaller, our hotels, motels,
rooming houses. A dancer helps me make
my father's gift (a box for cigarettes).
Cutting out three velvet hearts, I glue them
beneath the lid. My mother reaches home
at midnight. On a table I've arranged
her supper: dark bread, *hünchen*, peppermints.
She drapes a scarf across the lamp, reads mysteries.

Christmas morning. Evergreen in the air.
A small fir tree stands on the bedside table
alive with leopards, skunks, zebras, and bears.
Is this the way my mother feels as she
enters the room atop the crystal stairway,
the Court Ball at her feet like some rare gift,
a gift her mother had carefully placed
beside her bed, a tree in miniature
inhabited now by llamas, giraffes,
tigers, gazelles: a new kingdom to rule?

ELISE PASCHEN

those things, of course, are the core of movie magic? Just as he wished to deflate the overblown reputation of Griffith, so Card wants to record his appreciation for the spellbinding cinematic excellence of works by Cecil B. DeMille, whose name is forever being taken in vain as a synonym for nothing but ridiculous excess.

Card is wonderfully eloquent about *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, made in 1919, of which he finally rented a print in 1933. This movie is still a touchstone, the one about which more has been written than any other. It was foremost among the first movies exhibited by the Modern Museum Film Library in 1935, and the first to be collected by Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française. Card himself only managed to buy it by going to Germany late in the '30s, on an express pilgrimage—never mind politics, apparently—to find an original print of *Caligari*, see and buy as many movies as possible and only operationally be a student at the University of Heidelberg. He was there, he tells us, in August 1939, when both he and his movie collection were "collected" by the Gestapo; but he got home safely. No details.

About *Caligari*, Card says it has all sorts of flaws and shortcomings, but was the first movie to "serve dramatic notice that film was a *graphic* art rather than a theatrical form or a branch of photography." This brings up, though again Card doesn't really discuss it, the positive value of soundless dialogue in originally creating the art of film. If people actually speak, we might as well be at a play; but if they only seem to speak, we are in a sort of fluid picture gallery, dependent for everything on our eyes, especially for the subjective interpretation of faces and bodies in all their minute incalculable motion. The close-up was a necessary element specifically in film without dialogue. It gave scope to that distinctively subtle form of acting known only in the movies, or maybe in paintings like the *Mona Lisa*. The face must do the speaking, and under close scrutiny. Card praises, as everyone does, the great silent actors who first understood how to stop their theatrical mugging and posturing and trust to the delicate intuitions of the moving camera—Gloria Swanson, Greta Garbo, Louise Brooks, Emil Jannings.

Brilliant color, too, would clearly have served as a distraction from the refinements of this new camera art, although Card points out that different tints of film made a great difference to the flavor of scenes, and frames were sometimes even hand-painted one-by-one, like Victorian fashion plates. *Caligari*, however, in its ground-breaking graphic message, would certainly have been compromised by any chromatic interference. Color photography and color cinematography altogether complicate the direct effects of camera work, since their results depend on printing processes that are themselves difficult and often questionable. "Naturalism" is made far more abstract with color film, and abstraction far more arbitrary. To establish the aesthetic credentials of the movie camera, the work of directly capturing and then printing the emotive effects of light and shadow in action had first to be controlled. Such work had to be made into supreme dramatic art by itself, before color and speech could safely be brought in. Spoken film acting certainly could not have flowered without its roots in magnificent silent-movie achievements; color cinematography could have no force without its foundation in pure chiaroscuro.

It is only lately, however, that movie-makers have become self-conscious and started to quote the past works of their art with evident deliberation. Sometimes they have even been scorned for this, as if it were not one of the great established modes in which all art is continued. To amplify Card's view that the art of movies has acquired nothing new in its later days, we would have to insist that it has acquired a sense of its own multiform past as a generative source. This means not just having past masters and past failures, but having discernible lines of tradition and filiation in all elements—cinematography, direction, acting, design, editing—which have been laid down and can be specifically followed, altered or challenged.

Since so much junk has always been made along with good things and real masterpieces, a critical faculty has also had to develop and to refine itself. Much of this has been done by the third and fourth generations of movie-lovers and movie-creators who have had to make do with whatever of the past has taken possession of them—and, of course, to deal with sound and color in all their registers. Wonderful childhood memories, just like Card's, have inspired Spielberg and many others, only from a later date. They are still inspiring the movie critics born since 1960 whose love can match Card's any time, even if it is not only for the silents, but also for what has never ceased to keep appearing and seducing us all ever since.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author most recently of *Sex and Suits* (Knopf).

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