

FRAMING FILM

THE HISTORY & ART OF CINEMA

19

# The World Screened

Stanley Kauffmann  
on the Cinema

EDITED BY  
BERT CARDULLO

*The World Screened* is a collection of previously uncollected film criticisms by the late Stanley Kauffmann. Starting in 1958 and continuing until the end of his life, Kauffmann was the film critic for *The New Republic*. Along with Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, and John Simon, he was one of the most potent, influential critics of the New York School of twentieth-century American criticism.

With style and erudition Kauffmann discusses films here by such noted directors as Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean Renoir, Carlos Saura, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Zhang Yimou, Wim Wenders, Ousmane Sembène, Alexander Sokurov, and Martin Scorsese. Among the motion pictures reviewed are *Variety Lights*, *The World of Apu*, *North by Northwest*, *The Battle of Algiers*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. These movie reviews were selected from the period 1958–2007 of Kauffmann’s career on the basis of international representativeness, and with the idea in mind of creating a balance between prominent film directors and those less prominent or relatively early in their careers.

Aimed at moviegoers and students with an interest in film criticism, *The World Screened* is an ideal read for the educated reader with a general interest in the arts. The precision, wit, and wisdom of Stanley Kauffmann’s writing will chime once again for all readers of *The World Screened*, as he reveals his sense of cultural mission by applying to film the same high standards he applied during his long career to fiction, poetry, music, and drama—standards that are fast disappearing in the age of the Internet.

“Why does Stanley Kauffmann’s film criticism stand out so brilliantly, as so readable and rewarding a critical effort? Easy. How many film critics devote such a capable equipment, so much discerning care, to merely reviewing films? Extremely few. A film, with Mr. Kauffmann in front of it, is sure of wonderfully informed watching.”—PARKER TYLER

“Stanley Kauffmann will be remembered for his intellectually rigorous, neatly manicured film reviews—the meditative yin to Pauline Kael’s ecstatic yang.”—CHARLES McNULTY

A graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Bert Cardullo has had his work appear in such journals as the *Yale Review*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Cinema Journal*. For twenty years (1987–2007), he was the regular film critic for *The Hudson Review* in New York. Cardullo is the author or editor of a number of books, including *Soundings on Cinema: Speaking to Film and Film Artists* (2008) and *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art* (2004). He is also the chief American translator of the film criticism of the Frenchman André Bazin.

## *On the Criticism of* **STANLEY KAUFFMANN**

“Stanley Kauffmann’s sense of values stems from his panoramic awareness of the modern scene. We do more than go to the movies with him; he makes us think about the myths and realities of a culture.”—STANLEY KUNITZ

“There is an imperturbable grace about Stanley Kauffmann’s writing, a plainspoken clarity in the face of the onslaught that is the movies. He had come of age when George Bernard Shaw was considered a playwright comparable with Shakespeare, he had flourished when Bergman, Antonioni, and Fellini were the new news from Europe, and a generation and more later he was still at his post, eager to comment on whatever appeared next. His longevity was inextricably tied to his optimism—a quietly impassioned optimism about our culture that informed everything he ever wrote. That optimism is his legacy.”—JED PERL

“I can’t think of any other film critic in the world whose criticism I find more thrilling, provocative, and thought provoking. I enthusiastically recommend Stanley Kauffmann’s writing to anyone who loves to go to the movies.”—ANDRÉ GREGORY

“In his writings Stanley Kauffmann gives us a substantial aesthetic perspective, a new way to care and think about films.”—JERZY KOSINSKI

“Stanley Kauffmann’s film criticism confirms his place among the most sensitive and humane men writing about the American cultural scene.”—ROBERT BRUSTEIN

“Stanley Kauffmann was passionately engaged with film’s highest aspirations as an art form and was at his most eloquent when films were most complex. He educated generations of film-watchers and filmmakers about how and what to watch.”—NELL MINOW

“Stanley Kauffmann’s film criticism is altogether more balanced and sanguine than the work of most younger journalists.”—PHILIP FRENCH

“Stanley Kauffmann’s subtle and enthusiastic reviews could contribute to the return of cinephilia. He composes acute analyses which highlight some details that only a true movie lover can notice and appreciate.”—NICOLAS MAGENHAM

“For decades Stanley Kauffmann has brought sobriety and affectionate restraint to his reviews of films. Kauffmann has quietly gone about his work, refusing to find broad cultural significance where there is none yet willing to treat pop culture with the thoughtful dignity and calm it often deserves.”—GEORGE FETHERLING

“Kauffmann’s is a civilized, easygoing style. He is also a good judge of acting. Knowledgeableness is quietly integrated in his work, not flashily displayed. There is humane wisdom in this man’s film criticism.”—JOHN SIMON

“Stanley Kauffmann began reviewing movies for *The New Republic* decades ago and was one of the few critics remaining from the ‘Film Generation’ of the 1960s—cinephiles who believed passionately in film’s paramount status among the arts. That conviction and his informed erudition distinguish his reviews. These pieces published since 1999 are also distinctive in that most of them tackle independent and foreign films, ranging from Martin Scorsese’s, Oliver Stone’s, and Woody Allen’s at home to those of China’s Zhang Yimou and Iran’s Abbas Kiarostami abroad. This focus on the best that the medium has to offer rather than mainstream Hollywood schlock typifies Kauffmann’s respect for the art form and enhances the volume’s appeal for cineastes. At his best when dealing with a movie that rewards his devotion, Kauffmann reminds us how culturally important film once was. Now that commerce and gossip have become the preeminent content of writing about movies, Kauffmann’s quiet passion and steadfast dedication are more valuable than ever.”—GORDON FLAGG

“I never stopped reading Stanley Kauffmann, growingly appreciating his unflagging dedication, steady morale, and unclouded acuteness of perception. I kept learning from him up to the last. His very longevity carried a Shavian salutation: he had traveled down a long hallway of film and stage history and yet here he was, still fully engaged with the latest item on the docket. None of us wins immortality, but Stanley Kauffmann came nearest.”—JAMES WOLCOTT

“That Stanley Kauffmann is a first-rate movie critic is the least of it. He is unique. He is a writer of stature, and a valued presence in our culture. He has such a memory and such a mind.”—ERIC BENTLEY

“I know of no film critic who combines as many strengths as Stanley Kauffmann.”—MARTIN DUBERMAN

“Stanley Kauffmann cares, valiantly, ardently, about movies. He is—doesn’t everyone know this?—one of our national treasures.”—SUSAN SONTAG

“Any collection of Stanley Kauffmann’s film criticism shimmers in a thousand spoken and unspoken ways with his persistent, open-eyed, open-hearted, intelligent, even majestic presence. Most of what I know about integrity, excellence, and grace in the critical act was learned from Stanley Kauffmann. I am hardly alone. Any discerning reader of serious journalistic criticism of a certain age knows Kauffmann’s name and to some extent shares my admiration.”—JONATHAN KALB

“It is not a secret, but readers of Stanley Kauffmann’s reviews of film may have taken for granted, in their rush to take in the useful and profound knowledge he provides, that he is a master of the English sentence. The question is, how does this writer, Stanley Kauffmann, in his many years of devotion to criticism, ‘his art concurrent with art,’ manage to reveal so much to us about the world? He does this while being reticent or silent about matters others might display.”—STANLEY MOSS

“Stanley Kauffmann did not found a theory or make a cult out of his opinions. He had a steady and firm belief that amid so much commercial fodder the cinema could produce works of art and imaginative reach to live beside the best of the other arts. Over the years, he became a famous seeker-out of lesser known pictures, often in foreign languages, and unafraid of small, local subjects. He knew that the educated and creative eye is never impressed by size or locality. It saw aspects of the human spirit whether delivered by Nicholas Ray or Satyajit Ray, by Ingmar Bergman or Ingrid Bergman. This is not the easiest or most glamorous path for a film critic to take, especially in a culture that knows far too little about India, Eastern Europe, Iran, Cuba, or what lies beyond the Hudson River. Kauffmann was a New Yorker through and through: you could hear it in his reasonable, dry, yet edgy writing. But he was a citizen of a wider world that was opened up in his lifetime by cameras and screens. Kauffmann was born in the year in which Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) was a daring and naïve flight of American show business. By the time he died it was clearly a condition of the world from which there was no hiding. Stanley Kauffmann was one of a great generation that urged us to look and see; to watch and try to understand.”—DAVID THOMSON

“There were noisier film critics in Stanley Kauffmann’s time, and film critics who assisted in the creation of cults around their big ideas or their big persons. Kauffmann was different. His work was strong but it was egoless. He promulgated no theory and founded no school. He revered film but he did not worship in the church of ‘cinema.’ He believed undocrinally in ‘the cinematic and the literary and theatrical and psychological and social and political,’ as befitted his diverse and welcoming temperament.

His prose infused subtlety with vitality, and all the techniques of critical devastation were at his disposal, but he never raised his voice: in his millions of words you will not find a vulgar or hectoring one. In his withering reviews there was always a tincture of melancholy that a work had fallen short. He wanted so much to admire. A work of art was innocent before proven guilty, because he was on the side of art.

His erudition was massive; all the traditions of all the theatrical arts were at his fingertips, and worn lightly and cunningly. His independence of mind through all the decades was an astonishment. He was sovereignly indifferent to the commercial promptings of the movie business, and was never content to serve as the last step in a movie’s promotion. He stayed out of the system. Even when he adored a film, he contrived to express his adoration in a way that made it useless for advertisements. He reviewed the films that he thought were important, not the films that Hollywood thought were important. He was unmoved by money and celebrity; he was a true meritocrat. His movie writing is blissfully free of knowingness, or the Manhattan disease, and free also of the high-spirited relativizing irony into which certain critics descend when they do not much like a work but do not wish to be disinvented from the party.

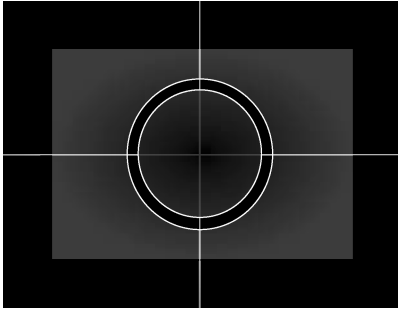
And long before globalization, he was a film globalist. He regarded the international nature of film as one of the medium’s greatest excitements. He simply wanted to see, and if possible to support, every movie in existence. He championed obscure films from obscure places, and sometimes he was mocked for his esoteric interests; but esotericism is a provincial’s pejorative, and he was perhaps the most cosmopolitan man who ever wrote about the movies.”—LEON WIESELTIER

“We are left with gratitude for Stanley Kauffmann and his career, and for his persistent—and what must have been, in his mid-nineties, heroic—fealty to the twin muses of movies and movie criticism. The extremes of other critics made his moderation seem salutary. Kauffmann stoutly resisted the declamatory; he kept his voice in the key of murmur. His role was that of the arbiter who would see a film, gauge the convulsive reactions of others, and rule ...”  
—RICHARD CORLISS

“When I read Stanley Kauffmann, who became a regular weekly destination for me five years before I wrote my own first reviews, much is at stake; on important films, if we agree, I am gratified, and if we disagree, I am likely to go back to my own review and have another uneasy look at it. It’s not that I assume he is right and I am wrong; it’s that after Kauffmann disagrees, I wonder if he was perhaps more right. Simply put, Stanley Kauffmann is the most valuable film critic in America.”—ROGER EBERT

“Stanley Kauffmann knew that film could be an art form—‘Film to me is another art,’ he declared in 1962. He was the critic who wrote the best criticism about film acting: that was his special gift. Kauffmann—like all great critics—was also an educator. He guided his readers down potentially fruitful paths. But he knew they had to be responsible for their own comprehension. He could only shine light; they had to see for themselves.”—TONY MACKLIN

# The World Screened



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The History & Art of Cinema

Frank Beaver, *General Editor*

Vol. 19

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Edited by Bert Cardullo



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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916–2013, author. | Cardullo, Bert, editor.

Title: The world screened: Stanley Kauffmann on the cinema /  
edited by Bert Cardullo.

Description: New York: Peter Lang, [2016]

Series: Framing film: the history and art of cinema; v. 19 | ISSN 1524-7821

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016014982 | ISBN 978-1-4331-3449-4 (paperback: alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-4539-1873-9 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Reviews.

Classification: LCC PN1995 .K298 2016 | DDC 791.43/75—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016014982>

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

**Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

© 2016 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York  
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006  
[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

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All of the material in *The World Screened: Stanley Kauffmann on the Cinema* originally appeared in *The New Republic*, except where noted. My thanks to the editors of this publication for their cooperation in this project; permission to reprint came from Stanley Kauffmann himself, who during his long career always copyrighted his articles, reviews, and essays in his own name rather than the name of the publication in which they first appeared.

My deep gratitude goes out to the late Mr. Kauffmann and his wife, Laura, for their valuable support of and assistance on this project during the final years of their lives.





# Biography of Stanley Kauffmann

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Stanley Kauffmann was born in New York City on April 24, 1916, and was graduated from the College of Fine Arts of New York University in 1935. He spent ten years, from 1931 to 1941, as an actor and stage manager with the Washington Square Players and published a large number of short as well as long plays. He was also the author of nine novels, published in the United States and abroad, and two collections of memoirs; for Bantam, Ballantine, and Knopf, he worked as a book publisher's editor from 1949 to 1960. From 1967 to 1986, Kauffmann taught drama and film at Yale University; between the years 1973 and 2006, he also taught at the City University of New York, Hunter College, and Adelphi University.

Starting in 1958, Kauffmann became active in criticism. At that time he was appointed the film critic of *The New Republic*, with which magazine he was associated ever since, except for an eight-month period in 1966 when he was exclusively the theater critic of *The New York Times*. In addition to his film reviews, he wrote a large number of book reviews for *The New Republic*; from 1969 to 1979 he served as both film and theater critic for this magazine; and earlier, from 1963 to 1965, Kauffmann also served as the drama critic for the Public Broadcasting television station in New York, WNET. He continued as film critic for *The New Republic* but wrote theater criticism for the *Saturday Review* for five years, from 1979 to 1985. He contributed reviews and articles to many other journals, as well—among them

*Horizon, Commentary, Salmagundi, Yale Review, Kenyon Review, Theater, and The American Scholar.*

Kauffmann published eight collections of film criticism in his lifetime: *A World on Film* (1966), *Figures of Light* (1971), *Living Images* (1975), *Before My Eyes* (1980), *Field of View* (1986), *Distinguishing Features* (1994), *Regarding Film* (2001), and *Ten Great Films* (2012). He was the editor of the anthology *American Film Criticism: From the Beginnings to "Citizen Kane"* (1972). He also published three collections of theater criticism, *Persons of the Drama* (1976), *Theater Criticisms* (1983), and *About the Theater* (2010), together with two collections of interviews: *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann* (2003) and *Film Critic Talks: Interviews with Stanley Kauffmann, 1972–2012* (2013).

In 1974 Kauffmann was given the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism; from 1972 to 1976 he was a member of the Theater-and-Film Advisory Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts; in 1969 and 1975 he was a juror for the National Book Awards; and in 1982 he received the George Polk Award for Film Criticism as well as the Edwin Booth Award in 1986, in addition to the 1986 Birmingham Film Festival Prize for Lifetime Achievement and the 1999 Telluride Film Festival Award for Criticism. A former Ford Foundation (1964, 1971), Rockefeller (1978), Guggenheim (1979–80), Japan Foundation (1986), and New York Institute for the Humanities (1995) fellow, Kauffmann received an Emmy Award for the first-ever television series about film, which he conducted for five years in the 1960s on WNET-TV, the New York PBS station. He also received, in 1995, the Outstanding Teacher Award from the Association for Theater in Higher Education.

Pre-deceased in 2012 by his wife since 1943, Laura Cohen Kauffmann, Stanley Kauffmann died in New York City on October 9, 2013, at the age of ninety-seven.



# Introduction

## Man of the Movies: The Film Criticism of Stanley Kauffmann

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Wolcott Gibbs, late of *The New Yorker*, once wrote the following of his experience as a film critic: “It is my indignant opinion that ninety percent of the moving pictures exhibited in America are so vulgar, witless, and dull that it is preposterous to write about them in any publication not intended to be read while chewing gum.”<sup>1</sup> Gibbs vowed that he would never review another movie, and he kept his promise.

As it happens, he quit movie reviewing just before the discovery that there was a market for European films in the United States. It was the 1946 box-office triumph in New York of Rossellini’s *Rome, Open City* that opened the way for many low-budget Italian and French pictures. Even better ones began coming to America, from Asia as well as Europe, after the 1950 success of Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*. These foreign films increasingly exposed the tinsel and cardboard of the indigenous product, but—more to the present point—they made the reviewing of movies a rewarding activity.

Stanley Kauffmann’s career as a film critic for *The New Republic* began not long afterward, in February of 1958—decades before the advent of simplified thumbs-up, thumbs-down reviewing popularized by television commentators like Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel. Significantly, this was also the year in which *Agee on Film* was published (and reviewed by Kauffmann in *The New Republic*, as well as reprinted in this volume), and thus a year that marks the beginning of a change in general attitudes toward serious film criticism in the United States. Indeed, the

1960s and early 1970s were heady times for such criticism. Films, then, were being talked about in terms of art, and the central document of the time describing the general conversation was written in 1966 by Stanley Kauffmann and published in his very first collection of film criticism, *A World on Film* (also from 1966): it was titled “The Film Generation.” “There exists a Film Generation,” Kauffmann opined, “the first generation that has matured in a culture in which the film has been of accepted serious relevance, however that seriousness is defined.”<sup>2</sup> Kauffmann’s directly stated and cleanly structured essay was written in his characteristically precise, quietly professional style. Looking optimistically toward the future, “The Film Generation” supplied historical context and reasonable definition for the burgeoning American film culture.

In colleges and universities, in cafés, bars, theater lobbies, and their surrounding sidewalks, movies were then becoming the subject of heated debates. Neither moviegoing nor movie reviewing was new, as Kauffmann’s own *American Film Criticism: From the Beginnings to “Citizen Kane”* (1972) proved. But youthful hordes, uncomfortable with literature and not yet enslaved by television, now found something to get excited about in the cinema. More than ever before and perhaps ever since, they looked to critics to stimulate, shape, or confirm their opinions, and they gravitated toward the critics who best satisfied their individual bents.

The word “critics” refers to journalistic ones (as opposed to newspaper reviewers), not academics or scholars. It was the former group that led the fight to give film stature as art, and by the first few years of the 1970s this battle had been won. Virtually every college and university in America by then was offering film courses, and many had degree programs or were in the process of developing them. Yet with every new course, program, and treatise, ironically, the less relevant the writing of the pioneering journalistic critics became to the professors. Was this a case of film education outdistancing the journalists, whose establishment had advanced middle age or beyond, and who had therefore ceased to grow intellectually? Or had the demand to achieve academic respectability killed off the love of movies in those film scholars, who, once drawn to motion pictures out of passion, were now burying them in mounds of hopelessly “scientific,” theoretical verbiage?

The split between the academics or scholars and the journalistic critics can best be understood in terms of classical and romantic temperaments: one deductive, starting with general principles and moving to specific examples, the other inductive, relying on each “text” to stimulate insights appropriate to it. And because of the strong French influence on academic thinking about film, it was unlikely then, in the mid-1970s, just as it is now, that American journalistic critics would adopt any of the academy’s viewpoints. For those viewpoints go against a longstanding American tradition. Leslie Fiedler put this issue best when he said something to

the effect that no matter what they try to do, the French keep reinventing neoclassicism while the Americans keep reinventing romanticism.

Stanley Kauffmann himself once said something similar in a 1992 interview in *South Atlantic Quarterly*: “The academic critics think of me as an impressionist, because I . . . deal experientially with film, deal with it analytically in terms of a highly personal set of ineffable standards. That is, I could not possibly codify for you what my beliefs are about film; it’s a matter of instances rather than precepts.”<sup>3</sup> For Kauffmann, the most fundamental quality of film criticism was not the code or theory behind it, but its moral rigor—its commitment to the art of film, passion to see it improve and be taken as seriously as any fine art, and disregard for any kind of popularity. It seems, then, that for the foreseeable future (and that future may be brief given the surfeit of Internet “chat” about the cinema) journalistic criticism of this kind will be at odds with academic film study. But the journalists still need to be read, especially in universities, if only to keep alive the romantic enthusiasm that brought professors to the cinema in the first place.

Where does Stanley Kauffmann stand among the journalistic critics? Though precise terminology is elusive, there were, at the time he became prominent, two kinds of critics: the “eggheads,” who preferred what were loosely called art films, and the populists, who “grooved” on Hollywood movies and their foreign counterparts where they could find them. The eggheads were Stanley Kauffmann, Dwight Macdonald, Vernon Young, and John Simon, with relatively few adherents. The populists were Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, and Manny Farber, with their legions of followers. In between, and antecedent to both groups, were good souls like James Agee, Robert Warshaw, and Otis Ferguson (all three of whom died prematurely, perhaps to the enhancement of their already deserved reputations).

Of the egghead critics, Kauffmann was the least dogmatic and the least elitist, though he was accused by his detractors of being too “distant,” “professorial,” or “dispassionate”—too impersonal in his reviews, according to the crusading Kael, to make others want to see the movies he liked. (Would an “impersonal” critic have forgiven many sins in otherwise negligible films, as Kauffmann often did, as long as they had a progressive social message?) Nonetheless, for over fifty years, Stanley Kauffmann wrote about film in *The New Republic* and elsewhere. And since 1967, he had also been teaching film as well as theater and critical writing at the Yale School of Drama, Hunter College, the City University of New York Graduate Center, and beyond. Kauffmann’s own critical style is civilized and easygoing, not chattily egocentric like Kael’s, coltishly soul-baring like Sarris’s, or Olympianly ironic like Macdonald’s. He was a man at home in film history, conversant with culture and the arts generally, informative without being preachy, using his writing to think about his subject and pleased to take us into his confidence.

The internal consistency of Kauffmann's evaluations makes clear that he says what he thinks, though his insights are neither gratuitously shocking nor necessarily innovative, and he does not make a show of himself or battle insistently on behalf of his own reputation. Here, then, was a critic who took films more seriously than he took himself. His stance was anything but a commonplace one among his fellow critics. Indeed, much film criticism still seems to be written by persons who love nothing more than their own persona, or know no other art form. As Kauffmann himself put the matter in a 1965 essay (reprinted in *The World Screened*) on Pauline Kael in *Harper's Magazine*, he pledged allegiance to "a view of the film as a descendant of the theater and literature, certainly *sui generis* but not without ancestors or cousins, to be judged by its own unique standards, which are yet analogous to those of other arts: a view that is pluralistic, aesthetic but not anti-science, contemporary but not unhistorical, and humanistic."<sup>4</sup> Stanley Kauffmann, then, was a man of large interests, great knowledge, and supreme responsibility.

A particular value of his work was his willingness to go against critical consensus. Kauffmann was never intimidated, for example, by precious, arty analyses and endorsements of films that included the French cachet (from *Cahiers du cinéma*) among their number. Nor was he ever overawed by films that won their fame because of their "difficulty," or because they claimed to be "advanced." Just because a film was labeled *nouvelle vague*, or New Wave, and was made by Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Philippe de Broca, Agnès Varda, even Jean Cocteau or Robert Bresson, Kauffmann did not cast aside his obligations as a critic to take on the mantle of a cineaste. No matter how big or idolized the director, Kauffmann always strove to separate brouhaha from artistry.

Witness his disliking of *The Serpent's Egg* (1978) despite the fact that he was an Ingmar Bergman fan; his not hesitating to explain why *Perceval* (1978) fails even though he was otherwise an admirer of Eric Rohmer; or, in a *Salmagundi* interview from 1991 (included in *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*), his extended critique of the urbane realism of an otherwise overrated Woody Allen. Witness also the following comeuppances Kauffmann delivered to Luis Buñuel in *A World on Film* in a review of *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (1955): "He is a master technician with the outlook of a collegiate idealist who has just discovered venality and lust." ... "Buñuel, the swami of sadism, has now reached the point of self-parody." ... "Buñuel remains, for me, a highly resourceful technician and a highly neurotic adolescent."<sup>5</sup> Buñuel may have been too old and too far-gone for change by this time (1966), but these harsh words surely gave some "Buñuel-can-do-no-wrong" devotees a prod toward reevaluating their master.

All the pieces on Buñuel in *A World on Film* are grouped together, which is not as trivial an editorial choice as it may sound. Rather, it is symptomatic of

Kauffmann's longtime concern with continuity—one that continued up to his last book, *Ten Great Films* (2012). When, in *Before My Eyes* (1980), you read his review of *Family Plot* (1976), you also register the important point that, for all the encomia about Alfred Hitchcock's style, a Hitchcock film has always stood or stumbled by virtue of its script. An extended essay in the same volume on *8½* (1963) discusses not just that film but also its relation to Federico Fellini's life and its place in the cinematic pantheon as well as the artistic pantheon generally. Writing on the much-awarded *Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978), Kauffmann once again swims against the critical tide by asserting that it is far from top-drawer Ermanno Olmi, and proceeds to explain why by citing much earlier, better films by this director like *Il Posto* (1961) and *The Fiancés* (1963).

No qualifications of such value judgments on Stanley Kauffmann's part are necessary because, in unabashedly, rigorously, thoughtfully, and humanely deploying those principles of value and judgment, he always reached conclusions that were conditional. Responding, for instance, to Susan Sontag's contention, in her famous essay on Godard (from the 1969 book *Styles of Radical Will*), that "just as no absolute, immanent standards can be discovered for determining the composition, duration, and placement of a shot, there can be no truly sound reason for excluding anything from a film,"<sup>6</sup> Kauffmann wrote the following in *Figures of Light* (1971):

This seemingly staggering statement is only the extreme extension of a thesis that any enlightened person would support: there are no absolutes in art. The Godardians take this to mean (like Ivan Karamazov) that therefore everything is permissible. Others of us take it to mean that therefore standards have to be empirically searched out and continually readjusted, to distinguish art from autism; that, just as responsive morals have to be found without a divine authority if humanity is to survive, so responsive aesthetics have to be found without canonical standards if art is to survive.<sup>7</sup>

Some, in reading Kauffmann's conflation of aesthetic and moral standards above, may choose to see the finger-wagging or millennial doomsaying of a self-appointed cultural gatekeeper. Yet such a conflation is not just an essential tenet for anyone engaged in criticism: it is in addition a sign of the genuine ardor, and the true seriousness (shorn of any sweater-vest insinuations), that Stanley Kauffmann brought to bear in his own writing.

As should anyone who is deeply serious about art, Kauffmann took failings in it as they should be taken: that is, personally. "Fine artists make us feel proprietary about them," he wrote in *Before My Eyes*, apropos of Antonioni's 1975 film *The Passenger*: "They invade us so strongly, become so much a part of the way we look outward and inward, that we can't approach new works of theirs without a sense

that we are intimately involved.”<sup>8</sup> Kauffmann’s aesthetic high-mindedness was of the healthiest variety imaginable, born neither of easy cynicism nor of unthinking adherence to traditional (i.e., fabricated) canonical standards—whose existence, in any salutarily tangible sense, he dismissed as casually as the Almighty’s. Such high-minded thinking was premised on a profound disdain of glibness, of posturing, of pretense and laziness and arbitrariness, qualities that are disagreeable enough in other spheres of existence but positively despicable in (what should be) the heightened and heightening realm of art. (The divination of artistic purpose, purpose both worthy and realized, was another of Kauffmann’s perennially unfashionable dedications.)

Already during his first full decade as a film critic, Kauffmann had become one of the profession’s most admired writers for the directness of his spare prose. He wasted little time in getting to the point. For this reason, *A World on Film* remains one of the best of collections of his movie reviews, even if it was the first. Writing about an Irvin Kershner picture, for example, Kauffmann opened with the following sentence: “*The Luck of Ginger Coffey* [1964] ... is the sort of work that is vastly overpraised simply because it is not phony.”<sup>9</sup> The first sentence of Kauffmann’s review of *L’Avventura* (1960) is itself short, simple, and resoundingly dramatic: “At last.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, compare the heart- and loin-throbbing double-entendre titles of Pauline Kael’s collections of film criticism (*I Lost It at the Movies*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, *Going Steady*, *Deeper into Movies*, *When the Lights Go Down*, *Taking It All In*) with the sober, scrutinizing, ocular-based metaphors of Kauffmann’s: *Figures of Light*, *Living Images*, *Before My Eyes*, *Field of View*, *Distinguishing Features*, and finally, simply, *Regarding Film*.)

Apart from the economy of his writing style, breadth of range is another Kauffmann virtue, abundantly on display in *Before My Eyes*. What other critic would begin a review of Robert Altman’s *A Wedding* (1978), as Kauffmann does in this book, by relating the film to latter-day European naturalism; in another piece, compare Bergman to Eugene O’Neill; or, in another review, detail the ways in which young German filmmakers of the 1970s utilized American popular culture? Who other than Kauffmann would lay out Lina Wertmüller’s options for portraying the Holocaust in *Seven Beauties* (1976) ... and then explain why she decided on comedy; or indicate his perceptiveness of the pleasures, and occasional profundities, of pop by calling *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) not simply the best science-fiction movie ever made but “an event in the history of faith”?<sup>11</sup> Who else among the critics would notice—as Kauffmann does in *Regarding Film*—in Warren Beatty’s *Bulworth* (1998) an unacknowledged debt not only to Frank Capra’s *Meet John Doe* (1941) but also to a Finnish film and a Ukrainian one; reveal his astute appreciation of the old Hollywood masters by arguing that to place John Ford “among the great

directors of the world, as we must, is to see that the ‘pure force of genius’ is relatively stronger in Ford than in Dickens because Ford had much less freedom of choice and much less control over the finished form of his work”;<sup>12</sup> or discuss, during a single conversation (with Studs Terkel in 1985, included in *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*) about the theater, the subjects of Harold Pinter and acting, Samuel Beckett and Bert Lahr, and Bertolt Brecht and Berlin?

From the perspective of his more than five decades as a critic, nearly four decades as a teacher, and a number of years in-between as an editor, playwright, and novelist, Stanley Kauffmann clearly continued to see films in a broad cultural and historical context that eludes the tunnel-vision reviewers whose only reference points are Hollywood, old movies, and the box office. He was particularly sensitive to the parasitic relationship that middlebrow movies too often have with genuine art. “He’s the film equivalent of the advertising-agency art director who haunts the galleries to keep his eye fresh,” Kauffmann wrote of Robert Altman in *Before My Eyes*. “The future may judge our age culturally by its high estimate of Altman. Indeed, the nonsense about him is already coming undone.”<sup>13</sup>

Reviewing Kauffmann’s *Living Images* (1975) a number of years ago, one reviewer suggested that his most salient quality as a critic was that of “raffish dignity.”<sup>14</sup> His raffishness was more wry than pronounced, however, as in the following humorous comment about George Stevens’ *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), from *A World on Film*: “Sometimes I am more relieved than at other times that I am not a Christian; these occasions include the experience of most films about Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> Kauffmann’s raffishness remained as lively as ever, as in the following understatedly but effectively witty comment about *Fargo* (1996), from *Regarding Film* (2001): “The hot news about Joel and Ethan Coen is that they have made a tolerable film.”<sup>16</sup> Or, from the same collection, these slicing words about *Touch of Evil*: “[Charlton] Heston’s attempts to be a dashing young man were painful even when he was young.<sup>17</sup> Often Kauffmann’s opening lines are as amusingly provocative as Pauline Kael’s. Witness the following three from *Before My Eyes*: “When François Truffaut has an idea, he makes a film. And sometimes when he doesn’t have an idea, he makes a film anyway.”<sup>18</sup> ... “Paddy Chayefsky is the kind of writer who is not an obvious escape-monger or fabricator but a venturer who takes his audience on an interesting tour of anguish and then delivers everyone safely right back to his front door.”<sup>19</sup> ... “One way to pass the time while watching a turkey with big people in it is to wonder why they agreed to do it.”<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes, however, Kauffmann’s amusing provocativeness or dignified raffishness turns to harsh dismissal. This may be the result of an impatience with stars or directors who keep flourishing despite his low opinion of them, but, from the mid-1970s on, Kauffmann seemed less willing to be gentlemanly. Thus, in *Before*

*My Eyes*, he saw his bugbear Robert Altman as “a walking death sentence on the prospects of American film” and a “public embarrassment,” the director’s *Quintet* (1979) “paralyzingly stupid.”<sup>21</sup> *Shampoo* (1975) struck Kauffmann in the same volume as “disgusting,”<sup>22</sup> while Liza Minnelli in *New York, New York* (1977) resembled a “giant rodent en route to a costume ball.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps for a critic so concerned with film’s relationship to larger culture, the many opportunities lost, bungled, or cheapened had come to seem unbearable after years of reviewing.

Even so, as early as 1959, Kauffmann was able to toss off this line in dismissal of Gregory Peck: “He embodies Gordon Craig’s ideal of an actor: an *Übermarionette*, wooden to the core.”<sup>24</sup> Only two years later—in the same collection of criticism—he had this to say about the performance of Jackie Gleason in *The Hustler*: “It is the best use of a manikin by a director since Elia Kazan photographed Burl Ives as Big Daddy”<sup>25</sup> in 1958’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. And, in 1963, in an interview published by the magazine *Seventh Art*, Kauffmann dismissed *la politique des auteurs*, or the *auteur* theory of film (which holds that the director is the primary “author” of any motion picture), with the following words: “I think it is utterly boring . . . it’s for irresponsible children. It bores me even to say as much as I’ve said.”<sup>26</sup>

Whether harsh or generous, Stanley Kauffmann was most certainly a master of the felicitous phrase and memorable characterization. So, in *Regarding Film*, he describes Emma Thompson as the “first film actress since Katharine Hepburn to make intelligence sexy”;<sup>27</sup> he finds in *Amistad* (1997) a sense of “presence in the past”<sup>28</sup> he has not experienced since Bergman’s *Virgin Spring* (1960); and he notes that Oliver Stone “in appalling measure”<sup>29</sup> succeeds in *Natural Born Killers* (1994). Kauffmann is acute about a lesser but related film, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which “nourishes, abets, cultural slumming [with] calculated grunginess.”<sup>30</sup> And, ever sensitive to cinematography, he writes of *Stalingrad* (1993) that “the colors don’t glamorize, they confirm,”<sup>31</sup> while in the camerawork of *Sister, My Sister* (1994) he finds “the everyday put before us as evidence of strangeness.”<sup>32</sup> In *Carrington* (1995), for its part, “appurtenances of class and of conscious bohemianism are integral to the characters themselves, not imposed as décor. Settings and story are unified.”<sup>33</sup>

As they were not, for instance, in *Barry Lyndon* (1975). At a time—the last quarter of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first—when gorgeous cinematography had all but overwhelmed intelligent screenwriting, Kauffmann’s senses never overpowered his sensibility. Of *Barry Lyndon*, whose visual splendor blinded many critics to its intellectual emptiness, he wrote in *Before My Eyes*: “Stanley Kubrick began professional life as a photographer and has lately been reverting to his first career. His new film very nearly accommodates Zeno’s paradox of motion: it seems to remain in one place while actually it is moving ahead. Kubrick has produced three hours and four minutes of pictures.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike

*auteurists* and other aesthetes, then, Kauffmann understood that films begin where most reviews don't: the screenplay. And he reiterated his belief when he wrote the following in praise of *Charley Varrick* (1973) in *Living Images*: "It was directed by Don Siegel, a great favorite of the *auteur* critics, and it proves yet again that there's nothing wrong with an *auteur* director that a good script [by Howard Rodman and Dean Riesner, as adapted from John Reese's novel *The Looters*] can't cure."<sup>35</sup>

None of the above is to say that Stanley Kauffmann was the kind of film critic who could easily be dismissed as "literary." For example, Kauffmann's ability to engage with non-narrative work that, in his eyes, thoroughly justifies its breaking of conventional cinematic modes through the validity of its artistic purpose, as well as the breadth of its intellectual and technical resources, is evidenced by his piece on Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Our Hitler* (1977), included in *Field of View* (1986). Moreover, Kauffmann reserves his greatest scorn for conventional screenwriters whose own prose never equals their literary aspirations, deftly puncturing the pretensions of, among others, James Toback (*The Gambler*, 1974) and Thomas McGuane (*The Missouri Breaks*, 1976). Kauffmann is also mercilessly attentive to the sort of detail that is usually overlooked in hyperbolic reviews. Reviewing *The Godfather, Part II* in 1975, for example, he patiently noted four gigantic plot holes before adding casually, "And, by the way, the ship on which young Vito is said to be arriving in New York from Sicily is actually leaving New York, sailing south past the Statue of Liberty."<sup>36</sup>

One of the subconscious advantages of being a critic on a "little" magazine like *The New Republic* may be that one feels sufficiently free to tout small films, or neglected art, in addition to covering major releases like the first part of *The Godfather* (1972). Kauffmann always showed this predilection for unheralded work, perhaps never more strongly than in *Before My Eyes*. There Elaine May's barely acknowledged *Mikey and Nicky* (1976) is praised as "an implicitly large film" and "an odd, biting, grinning, sideways-scuttling rodent of a picture"<sup>37</sup> that is the best film by an American woman to date. *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), to Kauffmann's eyes, is the finest film about Vietnam, far above *Coming Home* (released in the same year)—a point that he expands upon during his 1992 interview in *South Atlantic Quarterly*<sup>38</sup> with reference to *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The flaws in *Go Tell the Spartans* are pointed out, to be sure, but so are the wider accomplishments. And so is the acting.

Among Kauffmann's major distinctions from other film critics was a preoccupation with actors. Having been a stage actor himself, he was sensitive to performers while other film critics treated them tangentially, if at all—even if they were icons on the order of Cary Grant or Marilyn Monroe, who had the screen power to shape the force and nature of their films. Kauffmann was the antithesis

of those critics who believed that “serious” film criticism had everything to do with theory, genre, politics, *auteurism*, or other theme-couching considerations, and very little to do with the acting leads whom they parenthetically deigned to cite. To word-shoveling spiritual rhapsodists like Pauline Kael and Parker Tyler, then, Burt Lancaster up there on the screen might as well have been Arnold Stang. Even someone normally as judicious as Vernon Young could mindlessly argue that “film criticism can usually afford to disregard actors in a film’s total effect, unless they are grossly bad or overwhelmingly good.”<sup>39</sup>

As evidence of Stanley Kauffmann’s keen interest in screen acting, let’s have a look at this critic on the acting of Jane Fonda—someone whose career he had watched from the beginning. He keenly locates the mediocrity of *Coming Home* as the source of Fonda’s “crimped” performance: “Her performance seems crimped by the role’s careful sterilization. There’s nothing much more than Jane Wyman pertness at the start, to which is later added some Elissa Landi soul. I choose ’30s references because, under the ’68 trappings, a perennial movie-movie is what *Coming Home* is.”<sup>40</sup> Such a comment is typical of Kauffmann’s criticism and serves as evidence, together with the following nuggets, that he was the only American film critic who had a thorough, incisive appreciation of the performance side of cinema.

From *A World on Film*, sample these remarks comparing Frank Sinatra with Marlon Brando: “The emotion displayed by Sinatra, one feels, is always Sinatra’s emotion, not the character’s. . . . If it were possible to see Sinatra in Brando’s role in *On the Waterfront* [1954], that would clarify the difference between mere simulation and creative acting.”<sup>41</sup> In praise of Brenda de Banzie’s performance in *The Entertainer* (1960), Kauffmann acerbically wrote, in the same volume, “Her drunk scene is one to which all Studio actors should be taken and held fast by the nape the neck until they have seen it a dozen times.”<sup>42</sup> And about Ralph Richardson’s performance as the faded matinee idol James Tyrone in Sidney Lumet’s film of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1962), Kauffmann was not afraid to be stingy, even to a time-honored great, when he wrote in *A World on Film* that the actor “provides a sound performance, instead of the affected distortion that he often palms off as originality. One cannot quite believe that his face ever set feminine hearts aflutter or that he is more than occasionally Irish (when he remembers the brogue); but he drives hard and honestly for the center of this warped, grandiloquent man.”<sup>43</sup>

Nor was Kauffmann afraid to praise a performance that other reviewers had damned. In his critique of John Frankenheimer’s film version of O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* (1973), from *Living Images*, he lauded the acting of Lee Marvin, whose portrayal of Hickey, many other critics felt, had let the production down—especially in comparison to Jason Robards’ legendary stage rendition of

this major character. “And to crown the work there is Lee Marvin, as Hickey, the salesman-apostle,” Kauffmann wrote:

To put it simply: Marvin was born to play Hickey. He has the perfect understanding of the man and perfect equipment to deal with it. . . . Marvin understands the bumps and sags, and he lifts it all adroitly with gesture, with vaudevillian’s esprit, to present both the man who was and who is. Then comes the payoff, the great last act. Marvin is wonderful. I have seen James Barton, the first Hickey, and Jason Robards (along with others), and though they were both unforgettably good, Marvin goes past them—so powerfully that he makes the crux of the play clearer than I have ever found it before, on stage or page.<sup>44</sup>

Let us now consider Stanley Kauffmann on the creative acting of Paul Newman—a performer who appeared alongside Lee Marvin in *Pocket Money* (1972), and whose work Kauffmann had early celebrated, in *A World on Film*, in a dual review of Robert Rossen’s *The Hustler* (1961) and Martin Ritt’s *Paris Blues* (1961). The following passage comes from an interview with Kauffmann that appeared in *Film Heritage* in the fall of 1972:

Paul Newman is much more subtle than he’s given credit for being. . . . If I could take clips from *Sometimes a Great Notion* [1971] and *Pocket Money* and show them to you side by side, figuratively, I think I could demonstrate what I mean about subtlety of imagination working its way out through vocal inflection, physical attitudes, personality aura, and all the other factors that go towards subtle delineation. Newman . . . *thinks* differently in his pictures. It’s not a question of a stock company actor putting on hook nose and beard and becoming “somebody else,” a man of a thousand faces or anything like that—that’s easy. Newman works from a core outward, differently. And you would find, I believe, that his whole system of timing was different in *Pocket Money* from what it was in the logging picture, *Sometimes a Great Notion*.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly in the acting department, consider this analysis, from *Regarding Film*, of the two stars who have played Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1962, 1997): “James Mason is the ideal Humbert. He gives us a doomed man, conscious of it, accepting it. . . . [Jeremy] Irons in the role [gives] it his customary vestments of intelligence and sensitive reticence, but at his deepest he is no more than melancholy. Mason suggested a tragic fall.”<sup>46</sup> As for the difference between a comic performer and a comic actor, Kauffmann replies in *A World on Film*: “A performer is a person who does things to make you laugh; an actor creates a character at whose actions and utterances you laugh.”<sup>47</sup> To Kauffmann, Peter Ustinov and Peter Sellers were comic performers; Alec Guinness and Jack Lemmon were comic actors. Of the “comic” Lemmon, Kauffmann went on presciently to say the following—also from

*A World on Film*—about his performance in Billy Wilder’s *The Apartment* (1960): “Jack Lemmon is the kind of problem American films need. He is a vigorous, highly talented, and technically equipped actor with a wide emotional range. Can Hollywood supply him with material that is good enough for him?”<sup>48</sup>

Probably most important in any consideration of Stanley Kauffmann’s critical virtues is that, while many of his fellow reviewers were carried away on their own waves of rhetorical bluster, or blurby hyperbole, during the last few decades of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first—particularly in their indiscriminating remarks about film acting—he did not forget the real duty or responsibility of a critic. Which is to exercise his judgment in the service of art, not to try desperately to substitute rhetorical fireworks for the experience of art, or to attempt to create masterpieces by fiat rather than discover them by careful observation. To be sure, Kauffmann was not afraid to generalize from his detailed observations, though he was always careful to avoid the thesis-mongering that too often passes these days for cultural criticism.

For his part, he avoided such axe-grinding. Letting his aesthetics flow into his morality, without dichotomy, Kauffmann thus explored movies in order to search out the universality of their subject matter, the artistry of their technique, and the ethical force that makes some art objects greater than others. He wonderfully does all three in a review of that difficult yet impressive film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), where, neither blinded by its technique nor alienated by its innovation, he could lucidly and sympathetically locate its artistic impulse at the same time as he had to conclude, “After *Marienbad*, I knew more about Alain Resnais and Resnais’s search for reality; but after Antonioni’s *La Notte* [1961] and *L’Avventura* I knew more about myself.”<sup>49</sup>

Kauffmann’s description of Harry Alan Potamkin, in a thoughtful appreciation of the late Marxist critic, could equally apply to himself: “He judged film by its own criteria, certainly ... but criteria no more lax or unbuttoned than those that any good critic would apply to any other art.” Unfortunately, as Kauffmann noted in this piece from *Before My Eyes*, “The assumption, then and now, is that such an approach precludes appreciation of good popular film. Or that such an approach marks the ‘literary’ film critic.”<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this was too sour a view of the cinematic landscape in the late 1970s. But it is none too sour a view from the vantage point of 2016. If anyone is beleaguered these days, it is critics with taste and intelligence—like the late Stanley Kauffmann—who bring to their work a *littérateur’s* perspective on narrative structure and character development, who use their cultural appetite to make thematic connections between movies (the most populist art form) and literature, and who, pedagogically speaking, focus less on the sociological or political implications of a film than on the quality of its artistic expression.

Still, Kauffmann felt considerably less beleaguered than most of his fellow film critics; and, as he pointed out in his interview in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, “The serious critic ... who can’t enjoy what to him is an entertainment film, is lacking in full capacity for enjoying the best film, I think.”<sup>51</sup> As Kauffmann himself would have agreed, the fact that a Japanese film by Yasujiro Ozu does not run very long in America’s biggest city doesn’t prove any more about the status of the art and its audience than the fact that Athol Fugard’s drama *Boesman and Lena* (1969) didn’t break the attendance record set by *Hello, Dolly!* (1964), or that John Berryman’s *Dream Songs* (1964) did not outsell the pop poetry of Rod McKuen. It is not so much that Kauffmann was sanguine about the state of the cinema at any particular time; rather, he knew that masterpieces in any form in any age are few and far between, and that a responsible critic must exercise the same judgment in the valleys as on the peaks. In the meantime, he was hardly waiting around for the next great work of art to appear, or for an old master miraculously to regain his powers.

Indeed, Kauffmann’s powers of discernment are perhaps most evident in his writing about films that were far from being total successes; he is capable of simultaneously appreciating their virtues (often limited) and deploring their shortcomings (often considerable). “*Julia* is irresistible,” he confessed in 1977. “Tears must flow. Mine certainly did. But this is not to say that it’s really good. In fact, if it were *really* good, tears might flow less, perhaps not at all. *Julia* is first-class middlebrow beautified filmmaking.”<sup>52</sup> Or consider, from 1978, this vintage-Kauffmann criticism of Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven*:

He brought over Nestor Almendros for this film and has proved, by doing this, the last thing he wanted to prove: there is no such thing as an artist-cinematographer; there are only good cinematographers who sometimes work for artists. And when the director is weak, as Malick is here, he tends to lean more and more on the good cinematographer’s ability, and so swamps the film in pretty pictures.<sup>53</sup>

In the end, Stanley Kauffmann’s film writing creates the kind of evocative and sensitive critical world that recharges a work of art while searching out and probing its parts. He does not merely mediate between his readers and the artwork; he allows the play of his intelligence to respond to the force of that work, using language to capture the thrust of a film and test it against its own possibilities. At his best, Kauffmann responds to the cinema, in Henry James’s phrase, with “perception at the pitch of passion.”<sup>54</sup> Agreement with him matters less than recognition of his ability to summon up the memory of films enjoyed; to evoke the pleasure of, and build up appetite for, films unseen; and, on privileged occasions, to change our long-held but nonetheless obsolete critical estimates, or to make us reflect for the first time on the magic of being born at a time when the arrival of film could

transform one's life. Without the movies, writes Kauffmann in *Regarding Film*, "Josef von Sternberg might have spent his life in the lace business; Howard Hawks might have remained an engineer ... [David] Lean might have browned out his life as a London accountant."<sup>55</sup> So too did Stanley Kauffmann discover film criticism, and apply himself to it, at precisely the right time.

The right time, the late 1950s and early 1960s, was also when Kauffmann became one of the first film critics to use television as a means of consistently investigating film culture, as he brought an erudite brand of criticism to the public airwaves. Stanley Kauffmann was the host of "The Art of Film" on the old WNDT-TV, based in Newark, New Jersey, from 1963 to 1967. (WNDT merged with the National Educational Television [NET] in 1970, when the Public Broadcasting Service was formed, and became PBS's New York affiliate, WNET-TV, Channel 13.) On this program—which in 1964 won a local New York-area Emmy Award for general excellence—he conducted serious discussions regarding the techniques and artistry of filmmaking with guests who included directors and screenwriters like Michelangelo Antonioni and Harold Pinter, as well as producers and actors. Film clips were interspersed to illustrate points in a documentary-like manner, rather than being used as they mostly were in later years: as free advertising by studios trying to plug their newest releases. As much as his reviews in *The New Republic* and the books that anthologized them, "The Art of Film" thus helped to establish Kauffmann's reputation as a critic of perception and power.

As if his television commentary and print reviewing of film were not enough, Stanley Kauffmann was even a frontline drama critic for a time, starting in the 1960s, for *The New York Times* and *Saturday Review* among other publications. (Indeed, from 1963 to 1965, he served as both the drama and film critic for the public television station in Newark, WNDT.) He stopped writing regular theater criticism in 1985 but continued to write film criticism until his death in 2013. And the present volume, *The World Screened: Stanley Kauffmann on the Cinema*, contains a selection of that film criticism—arranged chronologically, by section, from the earliest piece to the latest—written during five decades of his journalistic career. These articles and reviews were selected from the period 1958–2007 on the basis of their international as well as national (American) representativeness, and with the idea in mind of creating a balance between prominent film directors and directors less prominent or relatively early in their careers.

Included in *The World Screened*, then, are reviews of such notable fiction features (at the time of their initial American release) as Federico Fellini's *Variety Lights*, Satyajit Ray's *The World of Apu*, Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil*, Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*,

and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*; reconsiderations of such classic films as Charles Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*, Luis Buñuel's *L'Âge d'Or*, Fritz Lang's *M*, and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*; evaluative records of important documentaries like Frédéric Rossif's *To Die in Madrid*, Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds*, and Michael Moore's *Roger & Me*; remembrances of late, distinguished film artists such as Jean Renoir and Federico Fellini; reviews of books by Pauline Kael, Ingmar Bergman, and Michael Caine; and ruminations on such important subjects as screenwriting, film preservation, film criticism, and the *auteur* theory.

In *The World Screened*, as in his previous collections, Kauffmann regularly comments on the nature, as well as what can be called (with the advent of the Internet) the crisis, of film criticism, as he does on such subjects as the function of criticism, the qualifications of a critic, the influence or power of critics, newspaper reviewing versus magazine criticism versus academic scholarship, and critical theory as opposed to critical practice. Other topics routinely touched on in Kauffmann's work include the relationship between theater and film, particularly the difference between stage and screen acting; children and the cinema and the phenomenon of child actors; the relationship between novels and the movies made from them; Shakespeare and the cinema; sex and sexuality as well as realism, taste, and violence in film; the pleasures, and treasures, of documentary film; various national cinemas (among them those of Argentina, Burkina Faso, and Finland); the extent to which cinema seems embedded in French culture more than in any other; the phenomenon of film festivals; the persistence of American independent filmmakers in the face of the commercial behemoth of Hollywood; the ostensible "death of film" in the age of digital cinema; and the issue of government subsidy for the cinema in particular and for the arts in general.

Let me conclude by mentioning a long, lovely piece that Stanley Kauffmann wrote in tribute to (the still-living) John Gielgud in 1977 (and included in *Before My Eyes*), in which he took issue with Brecht's admonition in his play *Life of Galileo* (1938–47) that "Unhappy is the land that needs a hero."<sup>56</sup> "Unknown is the land that needs no hero. Unknown is the interior land that needs no hero," Kauffmann retorts:

Brecht's line becomes even more doubtful when we see that what we have chiefly left to cheer us, in the whirl and disorder of our days, are some heroes, heroines: not mouthers of ideals but practitioners of excellence, men and women who have made personal worlds in which the centers hold. They help us. And excellence that gives us a model, however distantly analogous to our lives, is a testament of possibility. Art is still one locus of such excellence, whichever art it is that speaks to you most directly.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond the exquisite, carefully chosen phrasing whose ease belies its exceedingly precise construction, beyond the unerring sense of rhythm and cadence that

punctuates a luxuriously unspooling flow of words, concepts, and imagery with short, sharp, functional little phrases (“They help us”), there is also in the above passage something fundamental to Kauffmann’s writing as a whole—and something that went largely unremarked upon in the many respectful tributes to the longtime *New Republic* critic upon his death in October 2013 at the age of ninety-seven. That something, simply put, is drama: in the sweeping sense of scale that cannot be concealed behind the cool judiciousness of the prose, and in the utterly serious conviction that art, in its many and variegated forms, is playing for the highest stakes imaginable. Hence Kauffmann’s critical writing is not only evaluation (though it is that, incisively), not only enthusiasm (though it is that, fervently); it is engagement, of a rare (not rarefied) variety: of a writer who has refined his craft, sharpened his perceptions, and through them broadened his range of response and feeling in celebrating an artist, Gielgud, whose work validates what he knows the medium to be capable of but so seldom achieves.

“Thus my account of debt, or a sketch of it,” Kauffmann ends his encomium to John Gielgud. “There a vision of a theater, of a film, better than has been available to him most of his career, thus a vision of is rigor in his life (says his acting), there is—consciously or not—the world better than the one he lives in. And thus, implicitly, he performs the fundamental function of art: to criticize life.”<sup>58</sup> If the role of art is to criticize life, then Stanley Kauffmann ceaselessly demonstrated that criticism can be a way, for those to whom it speaks most directly, to live a life in art.

## Notes

1. Wolcott Gibbs, *More in Sorrow* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 268.
2. Stanley Kauffmann, *A World on Film: Film Criticism and Comment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 415.
3. Bert Cardullo, ed., *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 168.
4. Stanley Kauffmann, “Focus on Film Criticism: *I Lost It at the Movies*, by Pauline Kael,” *Harper’s Magazine* 230 (June 1965): 114.
5. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 352.
6. Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Dell, 1969), 176.
7. Stanley Kauffmann, *Figures of Light: Film Criticism and Comment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 110–111.
8. Stanley Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes: Film Criticism and Comment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 121.
9. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 128.
10. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 299.
11. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 155.

12. Stanley Kauffmann, *Distinguishing Features: Film Criticism and Comment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 224.
13. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 47.
14. Stephen R. Lawson, "Book Review of *Living Images*," *Theater* 6.3 (Spring 1975): 73.
15. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 28.
16. Stanley Kauffmann, *Regarding Film: Film Criticism and Comment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 83.
17. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 172.
18. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 189.
19. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 101.
20. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 207.
21. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 47.
22. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 116.
23. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 203.
24. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 11.
25. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 58.
26. Cardullo, *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*, 3.
27. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 11.
28. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 31.
29. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 48.
30. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 61.
31. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 73.
32. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 75.
33. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 78.
34. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 180.
35. Stanley Kauffmann, *Living Images: Film Criticism and Comment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 241.
36. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 106.
37. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 272.
38. Cardullo, *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*, 182–183.
39. Edward Murray, *Nine American Film Critics* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975), 199.
40. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 120.
41. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 48.
42. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 185.
43. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 75–76.
44. Kauffmann, *Living Images*, 240.
45. Cardullo, *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*, 42–43.
46. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 124.
47. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 51.
48. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 149.
49. Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 249.
50. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 376–377.
51. Cardullo, *Conversations with Stanley Kauffmann*, 163.
52. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 294.

53. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 322.
54. Henry James, "Criticism," in his *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 264.
55. Kauffmann, *Regarding Film*, 226.
56. Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, trans. Charles Laughton (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 115.
57. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 406.
58. Kauffmann, *Before My Eyes*, 412.

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# Reviews of Features

(at the time of their American release)

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## ***The Devil's Wanton* (a.k.a. *Prison*), Ingmar Bergman, 1949** (*The New Republic*, 28 May 1962)

An early Ingmar Bergman film, made in 1948 and now released in the United States as *The Devil's Wanton* (a.k.a. *Prison*), is worth seeing as an example of the truth that many serious artists have only a few themes, which they re-use all their lives. This is a kind of rough-draft film dealing with those questions of the purpose and loneliness of existence that are still Bergman's subjects.

A young writer interviews a prostitute and, after a quarrel with his wife, goes to live with the girl; when he returns to his wife, the girl commits suicide. This proves to a film director, who knows the writer, that he must not make a picture suggested by an old teacher of his: on the theme that hell is here and the devil rules. The theme is too true and the film would fail.

The picture is a bit tedious, except for the character of the pimp played by Stig Olin, but it is smoothly made and shows both fluency with the medium and an understanding of actors. It also forecasts the power of introspection that Bergman later developed so beautifully. If his sense of organic statement had developed equally with his power to probe, his best films would be masterpieces.