

Back to the Motherland: the film theatre in the postmedia age

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Anna and Nicole make arrangements to meet each other at the movies. Unexpectedly, they end up at different cinemas: Anna to watch *Vivre sa vie* (1962) by Jean-Luc Godard and Nicole to watch *The Adjuster* (1991) by Atom Egoyan. Anna contacts Nicole with an SMS from her mobile phone; Nicole receives the text and responds. In the Godard film that Anna is watching, the protagonist, Nana, has just entered a cinema where Carl Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) is being shown. Another spectator sits next to Nana, more interested in her than in the movie. At the same time, in the film that Nicole is watching, the protagonist Hera is in a film theatre and is approached by a man. Nana continues to watch *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. A monk played by Antonin Artaud aggressively interrogates Jeanne, who answers him; Nana is moved to tears. Anna, who sees these same images within Godard's film, is instead struck by the beauty of Artaud. She records the scene with the camera on her mobile phone and sends it to Nicole, who then finds herself following a second film in addition to the one she paid to see (figure 1). As the word *mort* is pronounced in the film that Nicole watches on her mobile, the scene of a great bonfire from *The Adjuster* flashes across the screen.

Artaud Double Bill,¹ by Atom Egoyan, is a film which in three minutes creates a neat construction of interlinking elements. There are two present-day spectators, Anna and Nicole, who are sitting in two separate cinemas but who participate in each other's filmgoing experience. They watch two films, *Vivre sa vie* and *The Adjuster*, which belong to two different phases of cinema history but which both make reference to what is happening in front of a screen. The clip of *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* included in *Vivre*

1 This is an episode in the omnibus film *Chacun son cin?ma ou Ce petit coup au coeur quand la lumi?re s'?teint et que le film commence* (France, 2007). Produced by the Cannes Film Festival, it is a film directed by thirty-six different directors, from Th?o Anghelopoulos to Zhan Yimou.

Fig. 1. Nicole finds herself watching a second film on her mobile phone.



- 2 Beyond the fact that Egoyan is the author of both *Artaud Double Bill* and one of the two films that the two spectators go to see, *The Adjuster*, and the fact that Nicole, the spectator of Egoyan's film, also acts in that film.
- 3 Carol Jacobs suggests that the anagrams in this film work not only on the side of the female characters (Anna, the spectator of Godard's film, shares the name of the film's actress, Anna Karina), but also on the side of the film director. Egoyan echoes Je-an of Jean-Luc Godard, putting a 'first-person – Ego, Je – before the character's name – An, Anna.

sa vie is seen by two spectators at different times, Nana in the 1960s and Anna in the early 2000s, with different reactions. In the films that Anna and Nicole watch separately, there are events, such as the sexual aggression or the bonfire, which transit from one to the other. Moreover, we see a mobile phone screen which extends the cinematic screen by capturing and transmitting it. And there are the words, in the text message, which describe what the two friends are watching.² These interlinking elements – underlined by a set of explicitly related names, Anna, Nana, Jeanne, each one echoing the other as in an anagram or in a portmanteau word³ – create a sensation of dizziness: the world seems to vacillate, and we risk becoming lost in it. But from the series of situations that reflect each other reciprocally, there emerge some precise indications of what it might mean to see a film in a cinema nowadays.

Let us follow the triangle composed of Anna, Nana and Nicole, attentive to the divergences that seem to establish themselves between Anna and Nana, spectators of the same film though on different levels and in different epochs, and to the convergences that seem to occur between Anna and Nicole, spectators of different films but anxious to establish common ground.

The first trait that strikes us is that if Nana, in Godard's film, watches Dreyer's film only, Anna, in Egoyan's film, finds herself in front of a more complex object. She sees Godard's film, and inside of that Dreyer's: she is the spectator of a double set of images. She sees *La passion de Jean d'Arc* by Dreyer, but she also sees Nana who is watching the same images: she is the spectator of an act of vision. Furthermore, she sees something in Godard's film – Nana approached by another spectator – which also takes place in the film being watched by her friend, and is perhaps experienced by her friend too: she is the spectator of a story that has an ulterior development. Finally, Anna watches a movie and simultaneously sends

and reads messages on her mobile phone: she is spectator as well as writer and reader. Nicole, her alter ego, finds herself in an analogous position: she too sees her film and the clip of Dreyer's that Anna sends to her; she too sees things seen by others and things that complete others (the bonfire that overlaps Jeanne's death sentence); she too sees, writes and reads.

The fact is that Nana, on the one hand, and Anna and Nicole, on the other, measure themselves by two different objects. The word 'film' does not mean the same thing to them. For Nana it is a single and well-defined work: it is this film, and not another, to be enjoyed directly and on its own. For Anna and Nicole film is a discourse that hosts other discourses, that collaborates with other discourses, and that generates other discourses. It is this film, but it could also be a different one, which is to be encountered, perhaps thanks to someone else's mediation. It is a series of images that pushes one to write a text message reflecting what one is watching. It is also a set of events that is taken up again or is completed in other films, or perhaps in life. And it is a catalogue of generic situations (the orgy, the bonfire) easily made into a completely personal album of images (in Anna's case the closeup of Artaud). In essence, if Nana, the traditional spectator, still confronts a *text*, then the two modern spectators confront a *hypertext*,⁴ with its various components, links and expansions. Better still, what Anna and Nicole face is a *network of social discourses*, which aligns and embeds different occurrences, genres and regimes, and within which the film, in the strict sense of the word, can play a relevant but certainly not exclusive role.⁵

The second trait involves not the object of the spectator's vision but its modality. Nana directs her interest completely towards the film she is seeing: she is all eyes. Anna, instead, displays a more articulated attitude: she follows the film, but in the meantime she concerns herself with finding out where her friend ended up; she writes what she feels as she watches *Vivre sa vie*; she isolates a detail of the film; she captures it on her mobile phone; she displays her passion for the cinema, and so on. In essence, while Nana centralizes her sight, Anna decentralizes it.

This *decentralization* has something in common with the distracted perception that Benjamin attributes to the cinema and which, after Benjamin, was attributed to television.⁶ Here we are at the opposite extreme from that contemplation which the old work of art seemed to demand, and we are closer to a more casual, less involved engagement, which contemporary media ask us to develop. In this sense, using the respective terms of John Ellis and Stanley Cavell, we can say that Anna and Nicole do not reserve for the cinema a gaze in the strict sense, but rather glances;⁷ and they do not commit themselves to a viewing, but rather to a kind of monitoring.⁸ In doing so, however, the two women do not withhold their attention, rather they direct it towards a plurality of objects and practices. They follow the story but they abandon some of the details; they pay attention to the film but also to their mobile phones; they react to the images but also to that which is around them. Therefore, truth be told, they are not distracted, they simply multiply their centres of

4 For discussion on hypertexts, see the classic works by George Landow, in particular *Hypertext 2.0* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), and *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

5 For more on the network of social discourses, see Francesco Casetti, 'Adaptations and mis-adaptations: film, literature, and social discourses', in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds), *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 81–91.

6 For distracted perception, see Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility: third version', in *Selected Writings 1938–1940*, Volume IV, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 251–82.

7 John Ellis formulated the gaze/glance opposition in *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982). For more on the debates surrounding this, see Mariagrazia Fanchi, *Spettatore* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2005) pp. 38ff.

8 Stanley Cavell proposes the viewing/monitoring opposition in 'The fact of television', *Daedalus*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1982); reprinted in *Cavell on Film* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 59–85.

9 In this sense we may say that between the gaze and the glance, Anna and Nicole activate a third viewing style, that of multicentred watching, at once attentive and divided. For more on the multicentred gaze, see Fanchi, *Spettatori*, pp. 43ff.

10 On cinematic catharsis and on its capitulation, see the perceptive observations of Gabriele Pedullà, *In piena luce. I nuovi spettatori e il sistema delle arti* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), pp. 219ff. Pedullà takes up and develops Stanley Cavell's important intuition in 'The avoidance of love: a reading of *King Lear*', in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 267–353.

11 Roland Barthes, 'Leaving the movie theater', in *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 345–49; originally published as 'En sortant du cinéma', *Communications*, no. 23 (1975), pp. 104–7.

attention. They pass from one source to another and they modulate their gaze. Put simply, they activate a multitasking form of attention.⁹ In doing so, they stop short of re-sacralizing the film in front of them (which is what Nana does, rousing herself to contemplate that world which opens up before her eyes). They look at it just as they would look at any one of many objects they come across in their lives, something to pick up now and put down later.

As for the third trait, Nana not only concentrates on the film she is watching, she immerses herself in it. Through an explicit play of identifications and projections, the protagonist of *Vivre sa vie* penetrates the story recounted by Dreyer to the point of feeling a part of it. The consequence of this is catharsis. We see it in the tears that streak her face as she reads the intertitle *mort*. Nana sees her own destiny in that of Joan of Arc; she cries for herself as she cries for *la pucelle*. Anna, instead, remains on the surface of what she sees. She grasps the details that interest her, isolating the rest, and she sends them to her friend. Far from immersing herself in the film she slides over it, wave after wave, accomplishing a kind of surfing. Any kind of catharsis is therefore avoided. Anna neither identifies with nor projects herself onto Jeanne or Nana; she remains herself, distant and distinct from the characters in front of her.¹⁰ If anything, she experiences an aesthetic realization: she is struck by the beauty of Artaud. However, this is an epidermic reaction in the sense that it causes sensation, not meaning. Therefore it keeps at a distance a true identification with that which is shown. In essence, Anna watches, but that which she sees does not pertain to her.

In this regard, following Roland Barthes, we can say that Anna is a spectator who does not succeed in glueing herself to the screen.¹¹ She does not enter into the diegetic world of the film; at most, she crosses it. She does not take part in the story; at most she takes a part of it. The circumstances do not help her: her friend's absence is weighing on her mind, and the need to contact her is distracting. This concern also alienates Anna from the ambient. To continue using Barthes's terms, Anna neither 'glues' to the represented world nor 'takes off' from it in order to add the charm of the theatre to the charm of the film: she remains unstuck from both. The consequence is a loss of the rituality of vision, the lack of which is evidence of the occasional, provisional and irregular nature of vision. To watch a film becomes an adventure without a firm foundation.

The fourth trait concerns the film theatre. Nana seeks a kind of refuge in the cinema, which she enters in order to isolate herself from the external world, to escape from her daily routine. In doing so, she falls into a trap. By watching Dreyer's film, she discovers that she too is destined to die. However, this illumination is allowed her exactly because she has momentarily distanced herself from her universe. Only a completely other character, such as Jeanne, can make her understand what awaits her. Anna, on the other hand, enters the theatre in order to spend some time with her friend: cinema is not an alternative to, but a continuation of, her daily world. Therefore, when she realizes that her friend has not joined her she

immediately puts herself in contact with Nicole. Precisely because the film theatre is a prolongation of the outside world, it is also a locale from which one can get in touch with others. It is not surprising, then, that that which appears on the screen can migrate elsewhere: the closeup of Artaud, captured by Anna, ends up on Nicole's mobile phone; the sexual aggression alluded to in *Vivre sa vie* takes place also in *The Adjuster*; and the fire to which Jeanne is condemned spreads in the film seen by Nicole. However, none of these correspondences turns out to be decisive. While Jeanne's death sentence reveals to Nana the meaning of her life, these echoes appear to Anna and Nicole as mere cues to consider. They are splinters of an imaginary at everyone's disposal, linked to one another by a chain which is more random than mysterious.

In other words, Nana's film theatre is a heterotopic place in the classic sense of the word:¹² it is a fenced-in space, offering a catwalk towards another world from which we can draw resources for *our* world. The theatre of Anna and Nicole, instead, plays out differently: it lacks a true boundary, being a space that belongs to the everyday world; even though there are openings onto universes different from that in which we live, we are never called upon to cross any real thresholds beyond which we could discover ourselves; the elements with which we confront ourselves represent possible events, not interpretations of our condition; and finally these elements are accessible to many other spectators, no matter the film they are watching. In essence, Nana's theatre circumscribes an audience that rediscovers on the screen the essence of its own life, thanks to a representation which seems far removed from reality. Anna's and Nicole's theatre holds together a dispersed audience, more similar to a television audience or to the participants in a social network – an audience that engages with images which do not necessarily function as revelations but which can be accessed even at a distance, and the significance of which may be gathered at any point along the network of spectators.

Let me summarize these initial findings. If we focus on Nana, on the one hand, and on Anna and Nicole, on the other, we discover two different ideas of filmgoing – and two different ideas of cinema. What was a text gives way to a hypertext or to a network of social discourses; a centralized gaze switches to a decentralized glance; the possibility of immersing oneself in the story is replaced by the necessity of remaining on the surface; catharsis moves to an activity more similar to *bricolage*; a closed space that circumscribes a public becomes a more open space, which functions like a junction of an ideal network; the representation of a world fully other, however, which speaks to the real world, is supplanted by the representation of a possible world which can locate its realization anywhere. *Artaud Double Bill*, triangulating Nana, Anna and Nicole, reminds us what it was to watch a film in the past, and what it has become in the present. So what lesson can we draw from the portrait offered to us by Egoyan?

What is really at stake is a new idea of filmic experience. I use this word, *experience*, instead of reception. As much as the last term has been

12 On heterotopy, see the fundamental text by Michel Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, no. 16 (1986), pp. 22–27; originally published as 'Des espaces autres. Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (1984), pp. 46–49.

consecrated in the field of film studies, it seems quite inappropriate here. Neither Nana nor Anna and Nicole *receive* any images or sounds. If anything, they live them: that is, they measure themselves against them, they react to them, they insert them in their own frameworks, they seek to appropriate them, and so on. This is why I speak about *filmic experience*: the people in front of the screen are surprised and taken by that which is presented to their eyes (and ears), and at the same time, reflexively, they try to recognize these stimuli and their effects to the point of assuming the role of spectator.¹³

However, as Nana, Anna and Nicole tell us, the filmic experience has changed profoundly since the 1960s. Looking at what is happening in cinema – and *to* cinema – if anything is clear, it is that we have reached the end of a model which has been dominant for a long time: the model which thought of the spectator as attending a film. To attend means to place ourselves in front of something which does not necessarily depend on us, but of which we find ourselves to be the witnesses. What is important is to be present at an event, and to open our eyes to it, both in order to be able to accept it, as with a gift, and to be able to acquire it, as with a conquest.¹⁴ Today, this model is no longer very relevant. Watching a film increasingly involves intervention by the spectators, who find themselves literally having to direct what they have in front of them, the environment in which they move, even their very selves.

Spectators intervene, for example, by choosing the instrument on which to watch the film: this can be a traditional apparatus – film, projector, screen – but it can also be a DVD player, MP3 player or computer. Also, spectators may modulate the times and places of viewing: a movie may be watched in its entirety, but also in fragments; we may delay its conclusion, or choose the main scenes. Spectators can also intervene by taking into account the situation in which they find themselves: a film can serve to satisfy a desire for spectacle, but it can also simply kill time during a trip or capture the curiosity of a web surfer. Above all, interventions can redefine the film: it can be an object of vision, but also a collectable, a cult object,¹⁵ or something to be manipulated or exchanged through file-sharing programmes. The presence of options where once there was standard practice, the necessity of establishing the rules of the game where once they were implicit, the strong connection with one's own world where once there was a separation, the widening of perspective where once the field was bounded – these are all elements that testify to how much the framework has changed.¹⁶ If traditional spectators once modeled themselves on films, spectators now model films, or remodel them onto themselves, thanks to a combination of precise practices which invest the object, the modalities and the conditions of vision. The effect is that the spectators become the active protagonists of the game. They are no longer asked to be present at a projection with eyes wide open; instead, they act. *Attendance* has ceded the field to *performance*.¹⁷

Among the practices involved in watching a film, some may seem traditional if they were not also angled in a new direction. For example, we

13 See Francesco Casetti, 'Filmic experience', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 56–66.

14 Stanley Cavell sums up this condition when, for example, he observes that at the film theatre, 'we wish to see... the world itself', and at the same time, 'we are wishing for the condition of seeing as such'. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections of the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 101–02.

15 Concerning contemporary practices of collecting and cult, see Barbara Klinger, 'The contemporary cinephile: film collecting in the post video era', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds), *Hollywood Spectatorship. Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp. 131–51.

16 An ample space of negotiation has opened up to the new spectators, who find themselves first having to draw a mediatic cartography, then having to assign roles and functions to the various platforms, and finally having to perform an action on the device, defining its times, modes and the situation in which it is to be used. See Mariagrazia Fanchi, 'L'esperienza della visione', in Francesco Casetti and Severino Salvemini (eds), *E' tutto un altro film. Più coraggio e più idee per il cinema italiano*. (Milan: Egea, 2007) p. 90.

17 The term performance is used by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Here, however, I attempt to give a different extension and different content to the term.

- 18 For more on the synaesthetic involvement of the spectator, see Alain J. J. Cohen, 'Virtual Hollywood and the genealogy of its hyper-spectator', in Stokes and Maltby, (eds), *Hollywood Spectatorship*, pp. 131–51.
- 19 For more on the emotional dimension, see Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1999). For a different perspective, see M. Brüttsch, et al. (eds), *Kinogefühle: Emotionalität und Film* (Marburg: Schüren, 2005).
- 20 For more on this type of *doing*, see Francesco Casetti and Mariagrazia Franchi (eds), *Terre incognite* (Florence: Carocci, 2006). On the spectators' capacity to free themselves from the logic of distribution and the logic of selection imposed by technological devices, see Francesca Pasquali, *I nuovi media. Tecnologie e discorsi sociali* (Rome: Carocci, 2003), pp. 108–14.
- 21 For more on self-construction on blogs, see Guido Di Fraia, *Blografie. Identità narrative in rete* (Milan: Guerini, 2007), and Jan Schmidt, 'Blogging practices: an analytical framework', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2007), pp. 1409–07. Concerning the processes of identity construction on social networks, see Dahnah Boyd, 'L'invasione dei Social Network: Spazi pubblici, privati o altro?', *Link*, no. 7 (2008), and Sonia Livingstone, 'Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression', *New Media and Society*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2008), pp. 393–411, and Barbara Scifo, 'Prácticas y rituales de consumo de la telefonía móvil multimedia entre jóvenes italianos', in Juan Miguel Aguado-Terrón and Inmaculada José Martínez-Martínez (eds), *Sociedad móvil. Tecnología, identidad y cultura* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), pp. 239–63.
- 22 For more on the public's *textual doing*, see Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: a Sociological Theory of Performance*

continue to engage in a *sensory doing*, but the boundaries of this *doing* have been appreciably expanded. In addition to sight, we increasingly find ourselves involving our other senses: hearing (to see a film is to enter into a sonorous environment) and touch (in order to watch a film on a DVD player or a computer one must intervene with one's own hand).¹⁸ Similarly, we continue to engage in a *cognitive doing*, which allows us to interpret that which we see; however, this decentres us. More than understanding a film, spectators find themselves either exploring the source of that which they find in front of them in order to best orient themselves (I am thinking, for instance, of the need to determine the genre of the film that one is watching, something that used to be taken for granted but is often now uncertain), or afterwards storing up elements for future film viewing, perhaps more selective in nature (as, for instance, when one extracts from a DVD the mother scenes which produced the most viewer enjoyment). The same goes for the *emotional doing*. Films have always touched their spectators.¹⁹ Today, however, affective components connected to the watching of a film seem to acquire an abnormal weight. One increasingly goes to the cinema in order to be amazed by special effects, yet the presence of particularly intense scenes can interrupt the plot and form film blocks or fragments.

However, the performance also and most importantly involves new levels of *doing*. For example, there is a *technological doing*, where access to the film is not direct but mediated by a device which the spectator must activate (such is the case with VHS, DVD or home theatre), or by a device through which the spectator chooses what to watch and how to watch it (video on demand, MySky, and so on). In either case, a specific competence is required in order to complete a series of operations on the device.²⁰ There is also a relevant *relational doing*, which comes into play especially outside the film theatre, where spectators watch films by themselves and are often motivated to construct a group with which to share their own experience. From this is born a system of contacts which accompanies film watching, be it via a phone call or a message on Twitter. There is also a relevant *expressive doing*: while the experience of watching certain cult films such as *Rocky Horror* or *Star Wars* has often been accompanied by dressing in costume, today self-display is also celebrated via a spectator's blog post or a message on a social network, in which one recounts one's personal reactions to what one is seeing or has seen.²¹ Finally there is a *textual doing*, determined by the fact that spectators increasingly enjoy the possibility of manipulating a film, not only in the sense of adjusting it to one's own vision (as when one maintains or changes the video format of a display, choosing to watch a film in high or low definition, for example) but also in the sense of express intervention (as happens with the reedited and dubbed film clips that populate *YouTube*).²²

In this brief description of the new spectator, we have inevitably slid away from the film theatre and into other spaces, encountering other devices and leading us to surpass the very confines of vision. To see a film

and *Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998). Concerning the manipulative action of the public, Alvin Toffler's description of the *prosumer* may still be of interest. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1980).

23 For more on fan activity – not limited to the accumulation of clips, but involving the actual reconstruction of the cult object – see Henry Jenkins's classic study, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).

24 See John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); and Mimi Scheller and John Urry, 'The new mobilities paradigm', *Environment and Planning*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2006).

is no longer a localized activity, and it is no longer just a scopic activity. It is a *doing* that leaps beyond the presence of a big screen, and that goes beyond the mere opening of one's eyes. It is now interesting to note how the most innovative aspects of the new spectatorship seem to arise from practices developed outside the theatre and outside the strict confines of vision, especially closer to the three new screens which dominate the media landscape – television, computer and mobile phone. Let us take, for example, the act of exploration, which responds to a need for orientation more than for comprehension. There is no doubt that this rises from contact with multichannel television that we browse with our remote control, searching for what we want. Let us also consider the act of storing, which leads us to put in reserve particularly interesting portions of films. Its origin is undoubtedly to be found in certain fan practices: thanks to image-capturing devices, such as the video recorder, fans can construct and exchange highly personalized image albums.²³ Let us equally consider emotional doing, which revolves around a strong intensification of feeling. Its background may be found in the presence of an enormous quantity of stimuli both in the world of media and in the urban environment. These are stimuli which ask us to refine our tuning, and yet also force us into a kind of isolation from the world, with the effect in both cases of definitively forcing us out of the traditional dimension of the sublime. As for the ability to choose what one wants to see, this takes us back, for example, to the public's growing capacity to move strategically online in search of more salient content and information, while the diffusion of mobile platforms, which allow for watching anywhere and anytime, strengthens the public's ability to liberate itself from the obligations imposed by programming.²⁴ The act of manipulation, which allows spectators to intervene in the means of their own vision, is born from the use of devices like the home theatre, which require continuous regulation and maintenance. Relational doing, which involves spectators' construction of their own groups, is born, instead, of the progressive growth of social networks. These social networks also feed into the act of expression, which leads to the construction and exposition of oneself: it is on *YouTube* that social subjects have experienced in depth the pleasure of self-narration and the possibility of marketing themselves. Finally, textual doing is undoubtedly nourished by the possibility of capturing what one sees and relocating it to one's own computer thanks to low-cost applications. In essence, today's filmic spectators find their gym and their school outside of the film theatre. These new spectators now seem to be formed far from the cinema and its canonical spaces.

And yet ... if it is true that we now become film spectators by searching for the cinema in places where it has never before been, it is also true that spectators find themselves on the deepest level exactly where cinema has longest dwelled. The practices we have discussed above, whose birthplace is to be found in other environments and in proximity to other media, are quick to flow into the film theatre and to redraw the traditional forms of the filmic experience. They are the signs of a spectatorship which has now

migrated elsewhere, and which returns to the place where the film viewing had assumed its constituent traits. Back to the Motherland: partially on a wave of nostalgia, but more importantly in order to offer a lesson learned in the meantime.

This is exactly what *Artaud Double Bill* tells us with great precision by showing us two modern-day spectators, who, despite their apparently anomalous behaviour, are actually watching films in film theatres. However, the picture can be enlarged. Just imagine the groups of spectators that meet up at the cinema after an intense exchange of e-mails or telephone calls, worthy of a social network; or the vibrating of numerous mobile phones in silent mode during the movie, maintaining contact with the outside world; or the increasingly frequent distribution upon entering the theatre of reviews and commentaries, almost as part of an effort to create a multimedia product. Or consider the continuation of the movie in the form of post-film discussions, as one eats pizza with fellow filmgoers; or the purchase of a DVD of a movie that one has just seen, to be watched repeatedly at home. Although it is true that extrafilmic and extratheatrical practices are emerging, it is also true that these new practices are promptly reinserted within the context of the theatre, thus renewing the traits of the filmic experience. Consequently, watching a film becomes a performance even within the temple of *attendance*.

I will use the term *re-relocation* for this return to the Motherland, in order to signify a double movement: the departure from the film theatre in search of new environments and devices (relocation); and the return to the theatre enriched by a new patrimony accumulated in the meantime (the 're-' added to the relocation). I would also say that this double movement highlights the emergence of a complex game board. There are not just the new environments and devices towards which the cinema converges, enriching and transforming the vision experience. Neither is there just the film theatre to which the cinema returns, bringing with it new vision practices. There are also new environments and devices that attempt, as much as possible, to conserve the traits of traditional film watching (this is the case with home theatre, in which spectators watch a film seated on a couch, lights dimmed and silence enforced, punctiliously recreating the most traditional viewing experience). And there is also the theatre that refuses new modes of vision in order to conserve, as much as possible, the traditional film watching environment (as happens particularly during ceremonial situations, such as a festival, a debut or a film series aimed at true cinephiles, during which the spectator is invited to see a film and nothing else). Relocation may be innovative (aimed at new environments and devices), or conservative (in environments and devices that recreate the traditional experience). And beyond re-relocation (a return to the theatre which renews the modes of vision), there is also a non-relocation (cinema in a film theatre which closes its doors to every possible innovation).²⁵

To focus on the case examined earlier: why return to the Motherland with new acquisitions in tow? It seems to me that there are at least four

25 On the re-articulation of filmgoing, see Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); for a historical account, see Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures: Production, Distribution and Consumption* (London: Sage, 2002).

good reasons at the heart of re-relocation, which respond to some profound exigencies.

The first reason concerns a *need for territoriality*. To see a film has always involved – and continues to involve – a question of place: a where to see, in addition to a what to see. Now these new modes of vision only offer the spectator an existential bubble in which to burrow (I am thinking of the train passengers who watch films on a portable device, isolating themselves from their immediate context by putting on headphones and ignoring all that is going on around them). It is a fragile and precarious bubble, easily broken by the least disturbance (a conductor who asks for the ticket or the arrival of the train at a station). Instead, the film theatre provides a more solid territory, better defined and protected. In particular, the theatre continues to be associated with the idea of a living space: a space in which to dwell together with others (a roof for the community); a space in which one finds oneself immersed in a communal imaginary (in Heidegger's terms, the language that hosts us). A place both physical and symbolic, the film theatre is that abode which cinema and its spectators continue to search out.²⁶

The second reason highlights a *need for domestication*. Relocation undoubtedly introduces a change: minimal in the case of conservative relocation, greater in the case of innovative relocation. In both cases a challenge is created to traditional modes, which risk not so much extinction as loss of recognition as integral elements of filmic vision. Re-relocation, the return to the film theatre, serves to ensure that such novelties are literally incorporated into an experience that explicitly maintains its roots. Flowing back into a typical space, these novelties appear both acceptable and familiar, practicable and customary. Thus, vision as performance – as distant as it may seem from tradition – receives full recognition, in both senses of the word: it is accepted as an appropriate mode to watch a film (recognition as legitimization); and it is held up as an example that anyone can follow (recognition as identification).

Thirdly, the return to the Motherland highlights a *need for institution*. Watching a film on new devices like the computer and in new environments like an urban space brings our vision closer to other activities hosted by the same apparatus, such as listening to the radio, surfing the internet or downloading files. It also brings the film closer to other products hosted on the same screen: touristic documentaries, advertising, *YouTube* clips, redubbed and reedited films in file-sharing networks, and so on. We inevitably slip away from the realm of cinema to the terrain of media in general, and from the field of film to the terrain of audiovisual products. This twofold passage is the consequence of *convergence*:²⁷ old apparatus (including the cinematic apparatus, tied to screen/projector/film) is disintegrated in favour of multifunctional platforms (among them the three new screens of television, computer and mobile phone); and old products tied to a single medium (including the fictional feature film) are disintegrated in favour of a rich array of multiplatform and crossover products (the film that is seen in the theatre,

26 The relevance of a territorialization' in media studies has been highlighted by David Morley in *Media, Modernity and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 197–272.

27 On convergence, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006). On convergence and new products, see Simone Murray, 'Brand loyalties: rethinking content within global corporate media', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2005), pp. 415–35; Ivan D. Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium* (MSc thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), <<http://cms.mit.edu/research/theses/IvanAskwith2007.pdf>> accessed 22 November 2010. On convergence and new strategies of consumption, see Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds), *The Audience Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 323–25.

the director's cut that is collected, the clip that is downloaded onto a mobile phone). Now, in the age of *convergence*, it can seem like a desperate enterprise to hold in place the confines of the cinema and the profile of a film. Re-relocation assures us that the medium we have long enjoyed with affection continues to possess its place and identity. It tells us that whatever may happen, the cinema will continue to exist, and exist as cinema.

Finally, the return to the Motherland highlights a *need for experience*. This is the most delicate of the four points but also the most decisive. Migration towards new environments and devices presents a double risk: on the one hand, as mentioned above, this migration dissolves the filmic experience into a more general media experience; on the other hand, it forces this experience onto mandatory tracks, which impose themselves especially in the case of strongly predetermined technologies, either because of the way in which a certain device functions or because of the way in which the user utilizes it.²⁸ In the first case, film watching loses its uniqueness, and with it its strength; in the second, it loses its unpredictability, and therefore its freedom. Re-relocation supplies a remedy to this situation. It offers environmental conditions which strengthen vision: the big screen, which dominates the spectators, interrogates them instead of docilely obeying their commands like the display on a mobile phone or computer. It requires an attitude that restores freedom to vision: the need to change place in order to see a film, instead of receiving it on a display (this is *re-relocation*), allows spectators to make more precise and exacting choices. The cinematic experience thus recovers a precise and personal sense.

We can think even more radically. A bit of *attendance* can substantiate an experience that *performance* often promises but cannot deliver. When the watching of a film is intertwined with a *doing*, it seems to place spectators at the centre of the game, but this centrality – and this game – risk appearing illusory. On the one hand, this *doing* takes spectators back to everyday practices, and may therefore be tinged by indifference: for instance, the computer, which can offer up a film just as it can anything else. On the other hand, this *doing* absorbs the spectators to such an extent that they no longer have space to face that which they find in front of them, and therefore to see what they are confronting: for example, file sharing, the end of which sometimes seems to be limited to the mere exchange of material; or remixing, which often serves only to demonstrate one's virtuosity. In these situations, what can really surprise or grab hold of spectators? And how do they reacquire consciousness of themselves and of what they find in front of them? In essence, do they really live an experience – an experience which in order to be worthy of the name requires amazement and recognition? With *attendance*, spectators still measure themselves against a world, on the screen and around the screen, capable of both interrogation and formulation of answers. From *attendance* results the sense of an unforeseen encounter and, simultaneously, the possibility of mastering that which is encountered.

²⁸ On contemporary media's channelling of experience, see the perceptive analysis of Pietro Montani, *Bioestetica* (Florence: Carocci, 2007).

29 On this theme, it is interesting to note the parallel tendency of the television public to go physically to the place where television footage is being shot, and to participate *on the ground* in big events involving single programmes on channels (for example, the 'MTV Day' event). For more on this, see Nick Couldry, 'The view from inside the simulacrum: visitors' tales from the set of *Coronation Street*', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1998), pp. 94–107, and Matthew Hills, 'Cult geographies: between the "textual" and the "spatial"', in *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Anna Sfondini, *Reality TV: Pubblici, Fan, Protagonisti, Performer* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009).

On the new devices, however, amazement is replaced by self-satisfaction and recognition of skill. There is no surprise, rather there is self-congratulation; there is no awareness, rather there is virtuosity. Spectators *do*, but their *doing* often appears to be an end in itself. The return to the Motherland, as much as it brings with it new ways of watching, seems to reconstitute the conditions necessary for amazement and recognition to once again take effect. In the theatre, a film continues to seem like an *event* against which one can measure oneself, and from which one can rediscover one's surroundings. Think of how there, more than elsewhere, a film is not reduced to something ordinary or habitual – it conserves a certain noteworthiness with respect to the everyday. Or think of how it obliges one to take steps in order to meet it – leave the house, buy a ticket, mix with the crowd – which give importance to the activity. Or how it makes one share it with others, as a sort of small privilege. Or how it both imposes a rhythm and lets us take part in a rite.²⁹ In the theatre, more than elsewhere, a film is an event, and in this sense it becomes a small enigma that provokes the spectators, as it reconstitutes a consciousness of self and of one's surroundings. Consequently, no matter how much one's vision is intertwined with a *doing*, and is therefore now far from a simple confrontation with an object, it can recuperate the sense of an experience. Something returns to surprise and take hold of the spectators, who in turn make space for an awareness.

In this sense, we may well say that, thanks to re-relocation, *attendance* has left us a legacy – I spoke before of gift and conquest – which fills the lacunae left by *performance*. There is little risk that watching a film will become either a narcissistic exercise or an indifferent task. Indeed, it is still an event with the persistence of a surprise and of a recognition; the resistance of narcissism and indifference. Re-relocation – overlapping *attendance* and *performance*, intertwining tradition and innovation – opens itself better than any other gesture to an experiential dimension. This dimension of experience is really what is at stake, and as long as cinema is able to maintain this, it will survive.

Translation by Daniel Leisawitz.

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