

Francesco Casetti

Back to the Motherland: The Film Theater in the Post-Media Age

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Anna and Nicole made arrangements to meet each other at the movies. Unexpectedly, they end up at different theaters: Anna to watch *Vivre sa vie* by Jean Luc Godard, and Nicole to watch *The Adjuster* by Atom Egoyan. The former contacts the latter with an SMS from her cell phone; and the latter receives the text and responds. In the Godard film that Anna is watching, the protagonist, Nana, has just entered a cinema where Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* is being shown. Another spectator sits next to Nana, more interested in her than in the movie. At the same moment, 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 replies; Nana is moved to tears. Anna, instead, who sees these same images within Godard's film, is struck by the beauty of Antonin Artaud: she records the scene with the camera on her cell phone and sends it to Nicole, who then finds herself following a second film, in addition to the one she paid to see. As the word "mort" is pronounced in the film that Nicole is watching on her cell, 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 fit construction of interlinking elements. There are two present-day spectators, Anna and Nicole, who are sitting in two separate theaters, but who participate in each others film-going experience. There are two films, *Vivre sa vie* and *The Adjuster*, quite different one from another, but which both make reference to what is happening in front of a screen. In *Vivre sa vie*, Nana, a 1960's spectator of *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, is touched by the story she is watching. Anna, a present-day spectator who sees the same film through Nana's eyes, reacts differently. Nevertheless, the events of each film reference and complete each other (the sexual aggression, the bonfire). Moreover, there is the cell phone screen which extends the cinematic screen by capturing and transmitting it. And there are the words, in the SMS text, which describe what the two friends are watching.² These

I would like to thank Sara Sampietro for her observations and suggestions.

¹ This is an episode in the film *Chacun son cinéma ou Ce petit coup au coeur quand la lumière s'éteint et que le film commence* (France, 2007). Produce by the Festival of Cannes, it is a film directed by thirty-six different directors, from Théo Anghelopoulos to Zhan Yimou.

² Beyond the fact that Egoyan is the author of *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.

interlinking elements – underlined by a set of explicitly related names, Anna, Nana, Jeanne³... – create a sensation of dizziness: the world seems to vacillate, and we risk getting lost in it. But from the series of situations that reflect each other reciprocally, there emerges some precise indications of what it might mean to see a film in a movie theater nowadays.

Let's 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 come about 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. First of all, 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, as well: 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 cell phone: she is both spectator 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); and she too sees 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 enjoy directly and on its own. For Anna and Nicole, however, film is a discourse that hosts other discourses, that collaborates with other discourses, and that generates other discourses. It is "this" film, as it could also be a different movie to encounter, perhaps thanks to someone else's mediation. It is a series of images that pushes one to write an SMS which reflects 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 (for instance, for Anna, the close-up 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, its links and its expansions. Better yet, what Anna and Nicole face is a *network of social discourses*,

³ I am indebted with Carol Jacobs, who has extensively worked on the "anagrams" in this film, not only on the side of the female characters (let's also notice that 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, starting from the "Ego" inscribed in his name (which eventually echoes the "Je" of Jean – "Je" and An"... – of Jean Luc Godard).

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

which aligns and embeds different occurrences, genres, 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 spectators' vision, but its modality. Nana directs her interest completely towards the film she is seeing: she is literally "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 cell phone, she displays her passion for the cinema, etc. In essence, while Nana centralizes her sight, Anna decentralizes it.

This *decentralization* has something in common with the distracted perception that Benjamin attributed 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 glances⁷, 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 cell 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 centers of attention; they pass from one source to another; and they modulate their gaze. In a word, 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, who rouses 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 lifeworld, an object to pick up now and put down later.

A 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

⁵ For more on the network of social discourses, see: Francesco Casetti, "Cinema, letteratura e circuito dei discorsi sociali," *Cinema e letteratura: percorsi di confine*, ed. I. Perniola (Venice: Marsilio, 2002) 21-31; and "Adaptations and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature, and Social discourses," *A Companion to Literature and Film*, eds. R. Stam, A. Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): 81-91.

⁶ For distracted perception, see: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Third Version," *Selected Writings 1938-1940*, vol. IV, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) 251-282. ("L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée." *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, I, 1936).

⁷ John Ellis formulated the gaze/glance opposition in: *Visible Fictions* (London, Routledge, 1982). For more on the debated surrounding it, see: Maria Grazia Fanchi, *Spettatore* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2005) 38 ff.

⁸ Stanley Cavell proposes the viewing/monitoring opposition in: "The Fact of Television," *Daedalus*, Fall 1982; reprinted in *Cavell on Film* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2005) 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 the "multicentered...attentive but at the same time divided watching." For more on the multicentered gaze see: Maria Grazie Fanchi, *Spettatori* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2005) 43 ff.

this is catharsis. We see it in the tears that streak down 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. In essence, instead of 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 Antonin Artaud. However, this is an epidermic reaction, in the sense that it causes a 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, using Roland Barthes expression, we can say that Anna is a spectator who does not succeed in "gluing" 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. Furthermore, the circumstances do not help her: her friend's absence is weighing on her mind, and the need to contact her is distracting. Anna, to continue using Barthes' terms, does not even manage to "take off," and therefore to profit from the situation in which she finds herself in order to add to the charm of the theater to the charm of the movie: 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 movie theater, which I have mentioned above. Nana seeks a kind of refuge in the cinema: she enters it 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 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, entered the theater in order to spend some time with her friend: cinema is not an alternative, 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: exactly because the movie theater 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: in fact, the close-up of Artaud, captured

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) 219ff. Pedullà takes up and develops further Stanley Cavell's important intuition in "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 267-353).

¹¹ Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater." *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 345-349 ("En sortant du cinéma," *Communications* 23, 1975, 104-7).

by Anna, ends up on Nicole's cell 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 revealed 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 movie theater is a heterotopic place in the classic sense of the word:¹² it is a fenced-in space, which offers a "catwalk" towards another world, from which we can draw resources for our world. The theater of Anna and Nicole, instead, plays out differently: it lacks a true fence, being a space that belongs to the everyday world; even though there are openings on universes different from that in which we live, we are never called upon to cross any true 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 theater 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 theater 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's summarize these initial findings. We are dealing with a text as opposed to a hypertext or to a network of social discourses; a centralized gaze as opposed to a decentralized glance; the possibility of immersing oneself in the story as opposed to remaining on the surface; experiencing catharsis as opposed to an activity more similar to bricolage; a closed space that circumscribes a public as opposed to a more open space, which functions like a junction of an ideal network; the representation of a world fully "other," which, however, speaks to the "real" world as opposed to the representation of a "possible" world, which can locate its realization anywhere. *Artaud Double Bill* delineates a precise field: triangulating Nana, Anna and Nicole, it reminds us what it was to watch a film in the past, and what it has become in the present. So what full lesson can we draw from the portrait offered to us by Egoyan?

Let us start by saying that Nana, Anna and Nicole are not dealing with what is usually called "reception." As much as this term has been consecrated in the field of Film Studies, it seems quite inappropriate. None of the three spectators "receives" the images and sounds: if anything, they "live" them, that is, they measure themselves against them, they react to them, they insert

¹² On heterotopy see the fundamental text by Michel Foucault: "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 22-7 ("Des espaces autres. Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967)," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (October 1984) 46-49).

them in their own frameworks, they seek to appropriate them, etc. Therefore, instead of *reception*, I would like to 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.

However, Nana, Anna and Nicole also tell us that the roles of the filmic experience have changed profoundly since the 1960s. We shall momentarily abandon Egoyan's film, and look more generally at the field of spectatorship. 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.¹³ Today, this model is no longer very relevant: watching a film involves ever more frequently a direct intervention by the spectators, who find themselves having to literally direct what they have in front of them, the environment in which they move, and 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, a mp3-player or a personal 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,¹⁴ or something to be manipulated or exchanged through file-sharing programs. The presence of options where once there was standard practice, the necessity of establishing the rules of the game where they were once implicit, the strong connection with one's own world where once there was a separation, and finally, the widening of perspective where once the field was bounded: these are all elements that testify to how much the framework has changed.¹⁵ If traditional spectators once modeled themselves on films, spectators now model films, or remodel them onto themselves, thanks to a combination of

¹³ Stanley Cavell sums up this condition when, for example, he observes that at the movie theater, "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. Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 101-2.

¹⁴ Concerning contemporary practices of collecting and of cult, see: Barbara Klinger, "The Contemporary Cinephile: Film Collecting in the Post Video Era," *Hollywood Spectatorship. Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds. (BFI: London, 2001) 131-51.

¹⁵ According to Mariagrazia Fanchi, an ample space of negotiation has opened up to the new spectators: they find themselves first having to draw themselves a mediatic cartography, then having to assign roles and functions to the various platforms, and finally having to perform a demiurgic 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," *E' tutto un altro film. Più coraggio e più idee per il cinema italiano*, Francesco Casetti & Severino Salvemini, eds. (Milan: Egea, 2007) 90.

precise practices which invest the object, the modalities and the conditions of vision. The effect is that the spectators become the protagonists of the game: active protagonists. 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*.¹⁶

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 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 movie is to enter into a sonorous environment); and also touch (in order to watch a movie on a DVD-player or a personal computer, one must intervene with one's own hand).¹⁷ Similarly, we continue to engage in a *cognitive doing*, which allows us to interpret that which we see; however, this decenters us, so to speak. More than "understanding" a film, spectators find themselves either "exploring" at 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, which used to be taken for granted, but which is now always more uncertain); or, afterward, 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 enjoyment in the viewer). The same goes for the *emotional doing*. Films have always touched their spectators.¹⁸ Today, however, affective components connected to the watching of a film seem to acquire an abnormal weight: on the one hand, one increasingly goes to the movies in order to be amazed by special effects; on the other hand, 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 is mediated by a device which the spectator must activate (such is the case with VHS, DVD, a home theater, etc.), or by a device through which the spectator chooses what to watch and how to watch it (video on demand, MySky, etc.). In either case, a specific competence is required in order to complete a series of operations on the device.¹⁹ There is also a relevant *relational doing*, which comes into play especially outside the movie theater, where spectators watch films by themselves, and are

¹⁶ The term "performance" is used by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls. Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Here, however, I attempt to give a different extension and different content to the term.

¹⁷ For more on the synesthetic involvement of the spectator, see: Alain J.J. Cohen, "Virtual Hollywood and the Genealogy of its Hyper-Spectator," *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*, Melvyn Stokes & Richard Maltby, eds. (BFI: London, 2001) 131-51.

¹⁸ For more on the emotional dimension, see: Carl Plantinga, Greg M. Smith, eds., *Passionate Views* (Baltimore Johns Hopkins University, 1999). And for a different perspective, see: M. Brütsch, et al., eds., *Kinogefühle. Emotionalität und Film* (Marburg: Schüren, 2005).

¹⁹ For more on this type of *doing*, see: Francesco Casetti & Maria Grazie Franchi, eds., *Terre incognite* (Florence: Carocci, 2006). On the spectators' capacity to free themselves from the logic of distribution and the logic of selection of content imposed by technological devices, see: Francesca Pasquali, *I nuovi media. Tecnologie e discorsi sociali* (Rome: Carocci, 2003) 108-114.

often motivated to construct a group with which to share their own experience. From this is born a system of contacts which accompanies movie watching, be it via a telephone call or a message on Twitter. There is also a relevant *expressive doing*: while the experience of watching certain cult films, such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* 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.²⁰ 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: for example, choosing to watch a film in high or low definition, etc.), but also in the sense of express intervention (as happens with the re-edited and dubbed film clips that populate *YouTube*).²¹

In this brief description of the new spectator, we have inevitably slid out of the movie theater and into other spaces, encountering other devices and leading us to surpass the very confines of vision. To see a film 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 theater and outside the strict confines of vision, especially closer to the three new screens which dominate the media landscape, respectively television, computer and cell 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 television with its many channels that we browse with our remote control, looking for what we want. Let's 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."²² Let us equally consider emotional doing, which revolves around a strong intensification of "feeling." Its background may be found in the presence of

²⁰ For more on self-construction on blogs, see: Guido Di Fraia, *Blog-grafie. Identità narrative in rete* (Milan: Guerini e assoc., 2007); and Jan Schmidt, "Blogging Practices: An Analytical Framework," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12.4, 2007: 1409-1407. Concerning the processes of identity construction on social networks, see: Dahnah Boyd, "L'invasione dei Social Network: Spazi pubblici, privati o altro?," *Link* 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 & Society* 10.3, 2008: 393-411; and Barbara Scifo, "Prácticas y rituales de consumo de la telefonía móvil multimedia entre jóvenes italianos," *Sociedad móvil. Tecnología, identidad y cultura*, Juan Miguel Aguado-Terrón and Inmaculada José Martínez-Martínez, eds. (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008) 239-263.

²¹ For more on the public's *textual doing*, see: Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences. A Sociological Theory of Performance 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: Bantam, 1980).

²² For more on fan activity—not limited to the accumulation of clips, but involving the actual reconstruction of the cult object—see Henry Jenkins classic study: *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992).

an enormous quantity of stimuli both in the world of media and in the urban environment. These are stimuli, which, on the one hand, ask us to refine our tuning, and on the other hand 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 of choosing 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.²³ 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 theater, 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 the 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 programs. In essence, today's filmic spectators find their gym and their school outside of the movie theater. 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 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 movie theater 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 watching 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 behavior, are actually watching movies in movie theaters. However, the picture can be enlarged. Just imagine the groups of spectators that meet up at the cinema after an intense exchange of emails or telephone calls, worthy of a social network; or the vibrating of numerous cell phones in silent-mode during the movie, which maintain contact with the outside world; or the increasingly frequent distribution upon

²³ See: John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (New York & London: Routledge, 2000); and Mimi Scheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," *Environment and Planning* 38.2 (2006). For an exhaustive treatment of the concept of mobility in the Italian context, see: Barbara Scifo, *Culture mobili. Ricerche sull'adozione giovanile della telefonia cellulare*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005); and Giovanna Mascheroni, *Le comunità viaggianti. Società reticolare e mobile dei viaggiatori indipendenti* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007).

entering the theater 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, while one eats a pizza together with others with whom one has just watched the film; 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 extra-filmic and extra-theater practices are emerging, it is also true that these new practices are promptly reinserted within the context of the theater, and thus renew 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 movie theater in search of new environments and devices (relocation); and the return to the theater enriched by a new patrimony accumulated in the meantime (re-relocation). I would also add that this double movement highlights the emergence of a complex game board. There are not just the new environments and devices toward which the cinema converges, enriching and transforming the vision experience. Neither is there just the movie theater to which the cinema returns, bringing with it new vision practices. There are also new environment and devices that attempt, as much as possible, to conserve the traits of traditional film watching (this is the case of the home theater, in which spectators watch a film seated on a couch, with the lights dimmed and silence enforced, essentially recreating punctiliously the most traditional viewing experience). And there is also the theater 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 toward new environments and devices), or conservative (in environments and devices that recreate the traditional experience). And beyond re-relocation (a return to the theater which renews the modes of vision), there is also a non-relocation (cinema in a movie theater which closes its doors to every possibly innovation).

Let’s focus on the case we were examining. Why return to the Motherland, with new acquisitions in tow? It seems to me that there are at least four 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 oneself (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 movie theater provides a more solid territory, better defined and protected. In particular, the theater 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 movie theater is that abode which cinema and its spectators continue to search out.

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 movie theater, 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, downloading files, etc. It also brings the film closer to other products hosted on the same screen: touristic documentaries, advertising, *YouTube* clips, re-dubbed and re-edited films in file sharing networks, etc. We inevitably slip away from the realm of cinema and onto the terrain of media in general, and from the field of film to the terrain of audio-visual products. This twofold passage is the consequence of *convergence*:²⁴ old apparatus (including the cinematic apparatus, tied to screen/projector/film) are disintegrated in favor of multifunctional platforms (among them the three new screens, television, computer and cell phone); and old products tied to a single medium (including the fictional feature film) are disintegrated in favor of a rich array of multiplatform and crossover products, etc. (the film that is seen in the theatre, the director’s cut that is collected, the clip that is downloaded onto a cell phone, etc.). 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

²⁴ On convergence, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York University Press, 2006. On “digital”, see Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*, Knopf: New York, 1995; Roger Fidler, *Mediamorphosis: Understanding New Media*, Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 1997; Tony Feldman, *An Introduction to Digital Media*, London: Routledge, 1997. On convergence and new products, see Simone Murray, “Brand Loyalties: Rethinking Content Within Global Corporate Media”, in «Media, Culture and Society», 27 (3), 2005, p. 415-35 e a Ivan D. Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium*, Thesis, Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007, (<http://cms.mit.edu/research/tese/IvanAswith2007>). On convergence and new strategies of consumption, see Will Brooker, Deborah Jermyn (eds), *The Audience Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 323-325.

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 toward 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 the device.²⁵ 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 as does the display of a cell 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 center 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 therefore may be tinged by indifference: for instance, the computer, which can offer up a film just as it could anything else. On the other hand, this *doing* absorbs the spectators to such a point 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 the 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 measured themselves against a world—on the screen and around the screen—capable of both interrogation and formulation of answers. From *attendance* result the sense of an unforeseen encounter, and simultaneously, the possibility of mastering that which is encountered. 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

²⁵ On contemporary media’s channeling of experience, see the perceptive analysis of Pietro Montani: *Bioestetica* (Florence: Carocci, 2007).

of watching, seems to reconstitute the conditions necessary for amazement and recognition to once again take effect. In the theater, 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 obligates one to take steps in order to meet it—leave the house, buy a ticket, mix with the crowd—which give importance to that which one is doing. 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.²⁶ In the theater, 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. The result is that, no matter how much one's vision is intertwined with a *doing*—and therefore is 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; and they, 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—we spoke before of gift and conquest—which fills the lacunae left by *performance*. To see a film risks neither becoming a narcissistic exercise nor an indifferent task.

Indeed, an event: the persistence of a surprise and of a recognition; the resistance against 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 cinema will survive as long as it is able to maintain it.

Translation by Daniel Leisawitz

²⁶ On this theme, it is interesting to note the parallel tendency of the television public to go physically to the place where tv footage is being shot, and to participate *on the ground* in big events involving single programs 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* 17.2 (1998): 94-107; and Matthew Hills, "Cult Geographies: Between the 'Textual' and the 'Spatial,'" *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also: Anna Sfondini, *Reality Tv: Pubblici, fan, protagonisti, performer* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009).