

economy might provide this vivid discussion with the missing link between modes of production and broadcasting and cultural processes. Though, thanks to this unprecedented and welcomed effort, the reader can take such a step, and further carry on the research.

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Miriam Bratu Hansen,
*Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer,
Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*,
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A genuine testament of Hansen, who died prematurely after the publication of the book, *Cinema and Experience* appears as the summation of her long research work. It is also, at the same time, a masterly confrontation with that longstanding theoretical tradition (born in the twenties in Germany mostly around the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt), which was the first to reflect, in an often contradictory and antinomic way, upon modernity and the transformations it had brought about, and upon the crisis for a way of knowing based on memory and tradition. Technological modernity is defined above all by a crisis of experience, a fragmentation of sensory life, which is disintegrated into its different parts in a sort of “apocalypse of the sensible.”

It is “that great overhaul of the perceptual inventory that will modify again and in an unpredictable way our image of the world,” as Benjamin wrote in 1928 trying to define the contours of a new scopic regime and its huge epistemological and social impact. As the subtitle of her book points out, Kracauer, Benjamin and Adorno are Hansen’s direct interlocutors, but Habermas, Negt and Kluge – the last exponents of Critical Theory – are fundamental in

1 Colin MacCabe, *Defining Popular Culture*, in *High Theory/Low Culture*, edited by Colin MacCabe, St. Martin’s Press, New York 1986; now in Id., *The Eloquence of the Vulgar. Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture*, British Film Institute, London 1999, p. 76.

her analysis of the developments of technological modernity, and of the new forms of experience, sharing and spreading knowledge. When she thinks of cinema as the new public sphere of modernity, the scholar refers to the well-known notion, elaborated by Negt and Kluge¹, of the ‘public sphere’ “as a ‘social horizon of experience’ grounded in the subjects’ ‘context of living’, that is, the lived relationality of social and material, affective and imaginative re/production.” The social and political role of cinema is defined precisely by this ability to create a collective horizon of experience, in which an ever more fragmented and alienated existence can be recomposed. Hansen finds this emancipatory power above all in the work of Kluge, which has been for many years a recurring point of reference for her own research.

In the preface, among various other autobiographical remarks, Hansen admits that the direction of her research has overlapped with that of Film Theory: her studies at Frankfurt University, from 1967 to 1976, are contemporary with the rise of the debate on cinema and media in Germany, a debate which started much later than in France or the United States, but which has been fundamental in identifying the categories and the thinkers that would dominate the theoretical scene in the following decades. As a student of Theodor W. Adorno and Karsten Witte, who edited the writings of Benjamin and Kracauer respectively, Hansen began in those years that careful reading of these au-

thors that would enable her – at various times and with admirable accuracy and meticulousness – to understand their postulates avoiding those oversimplifications, keywords and slogans, through which these scholars (Benjamin in particular) have very often been read. The essays Hansen published over nearly twenty years in «Critical Inquiry», «New German Critique» and «October», have been fundamental not only in introducing in the United States a ‘philological interpretation’ of the thought of Benjamin and of other German theorists of the twenties and the thirties, but also in defining a new model of interpretation inspired by those thinkers. Also in *Cinema and Experience* Hansen defines a method of re-reading that can be considered a theoretical model: theory itself allows a continuous revision of its own premises, a correction and a reformulation of its own hypothesis, which are adjusted and adapted to an everchanging context or situation. In the same way, Benjamin’s re-writings – the different drafts of his essays, the continuous reversal of his decisions, which has often been read as the antinomic character of Benjamin’s philosophy – are forms of thinking that take account of ongoing transformations: revision is ‘memory directed at the future,’ an ability to measure up to his times. It’s the same effort to be contemporary that can be found in the work of Hansen, who was never satisfied by the “simple” philological reconstruction, but is able to see the anticipatory qualities of those theories and the resurgence of old issues in new forms.

The book is divided into four parts, each dedicated to a single author and a particular phase of his production, which also corresponds to the progressive definition of problems, categories and models of interpretation. Not only for chronological reasons, Kracauer opens and closes this trajectory. The first part is dedicated to his writings in the twenties, whereas the last is about *Theory of Film*, which was written ‘in

exile’ in 1960 and ignored at the time of its publication in Germany in 1964, to then become a point of reference for the Munich movement of ‘Sensibilismus’ ten years later. From the phenomenology of the unapparent – the study of the ‘surface manifestations’ in which one can see the fragmentation and the serialization of sensory life in modern industrial societies – to the theory of the redemption of Physical Reality, Hansen delineates a story of loss and reconstruction in which cinema plays an essential role, not only as part and symptom of the crisis, but also as a powerful matrix for modernity’s liberatory impulses. Kracauer considers cinema, literally, as “a self-representation of the masses subject to the process of mechanization,” and consequently as a form of education to the new regimes of experience and models of identity.

In the middle of this trajectory, in which cinema defines the aesthetic-cognitive horizon of modernity, we find Walter Benjamin, to whom the most substantial part of the book is dedicated. Hansen considers his analysis of the new forms of perception – in which contemplation is replaced by a more general and complete sensorial stimulation – a fundamental and also prophetic response to the increase of nervous stimulation in modern technological societies, since it identifies a sort of physiological, and anthropologically fixed features of them. This idea is still valid and useful to understand the way in which new media are assimilated today. Crucial in this reflection is the idea of *innervation* as a way to adapt to technology and to incorporate it, a sort of imitative faculty which allows a new perceptual experience that does not oppose human and machine, subject and technique. “In Benjamin’s dictionary, innervation broadly refers to a neurophysiological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and machinic registers.” Also the ‘optical unconscious’ – a

key concept in Benjamin's thinking – is read by Hansen “as a form of mimetic innervation specifically available to photography and film.”

If *Cinema and Experience's* interpretation of Benjamin and Kracauer is not altogether a novelty in Hansen's *oeuvre*, the interpretation of Adorno is undoubtedly new and surprising if compared with his stereotypical image as a firm opponent of mass culture. Hansen's book is almost a counter-interpretation of Adorno, depending less on classic references to his *Culture Industry* in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, and more on his essays on theory of music. In Adorno's analysis of the changes brought about in musical listening by the new technologies of sound reproduction and diffusion, Hansen looks for an interpretation of the changes and the opportunities imposed by all technological media. The author challenges Adorno with the same weapons and uses his categories to interpret in an emancipatory way the new sensory culture created by technological modernity.

By combining the speculative accuracy of the German tradition with the freedom and inter-

pretive hazard of the American school, Hansen leaves us illuminating philological interpretations and unexpected questions. Not only does she confront Adorno's writings on musical aesthetics and propose a sort of 'implicit theory of cinema' attributable to the Frankfurt philosopher, but she also builds an unexpected and fruitful bridge between past and present: she never reduces history to a relic but releases the new and the unexpressed that the past brings to us and that still belongs to us. It is 'the heritage of our times,' as another Jewish-German thinker, exiled in America, had understood.¹

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1 Negt and Kluge's *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972) is the continuation of (and the answer to) Jürgen Habermas's likewise famous book on public opinion: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962 (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*). Miriam Hansen wrote the foreword to the American edition: *Public Sphere and Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993.

Jacques Aumont,
Que reste-t-il du cinéma?,
Vrin, Paris 2012, pp. 120

The digitalization of the media had the effect, among others, of having renewed an ontological speculation. Or, at least, that was the case of cinema, an 'old' medium apparently overwhelmed by the new ones, significantly transformed by the emergence – in the name of plurality and impurity – of a new phenomenology of 'making a movie' and 'going to the movies,' and crossed by unusual phenomena, in nature and intensity, of displacement and evasion from itself. Thus, think about the forms of survival of cinema in contemporary society and, at the same

time, about the constant elements of its technological, experiential and cultural identity, elements that have proved to be necessary and urgent in some ways. And France has undoubtedly been the center of this renewed speculation, as evidenced by, among others, *Horizon cinéma* by Jean-Michel Frodon (2006), *Virtuel?* by Angel Quintana (2008), *Cinéma contemporaines* by Luc Vancheri (2009) and *La querelle des dispositifs* by Raymond Bellour (2012). The publication of *Que reste-t-il du cinéma?* by Jacques Aumont dates back to January of this year, and it does not only fit perfectly this scenario, but it is also an attempt to provide a definitive answer to the doubt that the book presents in the title, where it claims in