

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

the first place the recovery of a ‘singular look.’ “Le cinéma, seul,” to quote Daney: it carries not only the meaning of a lonely cinema, perhaps put aside as something outdated, but it rather conveys the idea of “just the cinema.” Aumont’s book reacts explicitly against the media model – very popular today – of convergences, changes of medium and short circuits. This model seems to annihilate a sectorial look, since it is interested in understanding the differences and not – for the umpteenth time – in the superimposition of practices and languages. On the contrary, it shows a peculiarity of contemporary communication strategies: “redouble their media and remove all traces of mediation: ideally, it would like to erase their own media at the same time which multiplies them” (Bolter-Grusin, 2002). A model that, among other things, feeds a dangerous tendency: that of “plaquer le même nom de ‘cinéma’ sur ce magma,” the magma of contemporary vision; that of exchanging the dissemination of cinematographic models or elements with the dissolution or the uncontrolled expansion of cinema (Youngblood and the *Vulgata* of expanded cinema are liquidated maybe a little too radically), and hastily assimilating the fate of cinema to the fate of moving images.

Aumont’s discussion then proceeds, in the four chapters of the book, to mark the differences or, better, to remember that there are, even today, *differences*; that cinema is neither dead nor gone, nor digitally disfigured to the point of being unrecognizable. And the progress of the argumentation is both historical and ontological: on the one hand, in fact, Aumont focuses on the ‘historicity’ of cinema in the present, he establishes a comparative path with art, and he concludes that if it is true that cinema has lost the monopoly of the moving image – more radically, “il n’a plus tout à fait le prestige d’être le seul art d’image mouvante” – it continues nevertheless to appear, for ethical and aesthetic reasons, “la référence positive et dernière.” On

the other hand, the last part of the book, aptly titled ‘Permanences,’ is properly of ontological order: the author proceeds to analyze the reasons for this centrality, of what cinema is – and continues to be – on the basis of what it does and of what it still manages to do. Briefly: it creates “un’alliance originale d’une fiction et de conditions de réception propices à la captation psychique sur un mode à la fois individuel et collectif,” which, in fact, continues to “distinguer le cinéma de toutes autres sortes d’images en mouvement et de pas mal d’autres pratiques culturelles et artistiques.”

A triple singularity, that of cinema: the structure of the device, the linguistic operations, the values offered to the experience of the viewer. And as to the first point, Aumont does not fall into the common error of interpreting the current proliferation of visual platforms as an index of the dissolution of cinema identity; the architecture of the cinematic apparatus, historically settled, should be rather understood as a mental model, formed by the junction of some elements (in particular, the dynamics of the projection and the experience of a “matière visuelle” that is released in front of the viewer) and liable to happen even outside the context of a seemingly ‘canonical’ model such as that of movie theater. In short, the cinematographic device can be defined as the meeting between a specific and original way to experience the moving image and an intention, that of a spectator who chooses to “voir (et entendre) un film,” in respect of the temporal integrity of the projection. This last comment introduces the second value that Aumont recognizes as specific of cinema: the production and the complex management of time, which leads to a ‘three-dimensional’ experience of temporality: the time of the vision, the time represented by the diegesis (through which the film captures one of the world *tout court*), and the time “sculpté, modelé, mis en forme, celui du film, qui nous apparaît avec son

rythme c'est-à-dire son écoulement, fluide ou heurté." It is from here, from this work of narrative and articulation, that cinema can achieve a 'realist' equivalence between the world of film and life, where it gives rise to a unique and original 'meeting,' to the "expérience d'un monde que nous ne connaissons pas, mais qui s'accorde à notre vie." A relation through which the film celebrates and realizes a dramatic and aesthetic

confrontation between the human being – whose "corps tout entier" is brought into play – and the reality that surrounds him. Including, of course, that of contemporary society, in which cinema participates without sacrificing its own identity, but continuing to exercise its faculties. Those that belong to cinema, and to cinema only.

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