INTRODUCTION

The history of cinema is rife with models that have never established themselves, projects that have never taken form, "incorrect" theories. It is a history that began long ago, and which saw the films, the technology, and the idea of cinema of the Lumière brothers prevail over other models of showing images in motion, models destined to have a brief and ephemeral existence. It is a history in which a *narrative* cinema – derivative of the novel and French melodrama more than any other communicative, performing, or expressive art forms – has constituted the central and dominant axis. *Along the way*, we find numerous different directions, some ambitious and audacious, others simply inventive and sensible, which have been thought of as different hypotheses of development, for a radical transformation of the system, or as a corrective to some of its elements. In many cases these are "micro projects," unsystematic contributions, brief theoretical interventions by writers who soon fell, or remained, in the shadows. In other cases, they are greater elaborations, by well-known scholars not necessarily working within the field of cinema studies. In still other cases, they are utopic visions, imaginative projections developing in the context of projects and experimentations of the avant-gardes. And yet, this story is also made of concrete choices, "institutional" projects, paths of development designed and used by productive sectors, which, however, were abandoned and replaced by different models of development.

Reconsidering the traces of these "detours," these dead-end streets, is not only a scholarly and archaeological task. By looking knowledgeably at what cinema is not, we can better evaluate what it is. Exploring the web of possibilities it could have followed, we can see, behind the apparently natural course of events, the singularity, and possibly, the arbitrariness of the trajectory leading up to the present. Re-examining abandoned and discarded models, we are better able to investigate the fundamentals of the new medium's resources and structures, as we now know them. Even more: by bringing to light the blind alleys and the abandoned roads, we can get a better perspective on the directions that *contemporary* cinema is exploring and experimenting with.

The visions of the avant-gardes are probably the most often visited chapter of this history. We have decided to set it aside on this occasion – without intending to downplay its importance or influence – only because it is so well-known, at least with regard to those imaginative visions linked more to an utopic and experimental dimension of cinema, than to real "institutional" hypotheses of transformation. It is to the latter, I emphasize, that we would like to draw attention, convinced that the evolution of cinema has been less linear and "necessary" than it continues to seem.

A perfect example, from this point of view, is the role played by the pantomime in early cinema and in particular in the Twenties, during the intense phase of development that

led to the hegemony of a stable narrative and communicative model, accepted on an international level (feature films, new formats of the cinematic "spectacle," new distribution systems, new exhibition sites). Ben Brewster's investigation calls into question the commonplaces linked to the evaluation of the relationship between pantomime and film. He also gives us the basis for analyzing the *concrete* results of grafting the principles of pantomime onto the new medium – ranging from the artistic contribution of the actors/mimes to the impact of the new forms of expression of the "new" pantomime at the end of the century. Elena Mosconi reconstructs the theoretical debate that accompanies this relationship in the Italian context and suggests, originally, some outcomes of this relationship (in particular, in analyzing the "mimicry of the masses"). But it is also true that in some cases (that of German *Autorenfilm*, for example), the pantomime becomes, in effect, one of the models employed by the cinematic system in pursuit of new developments: with concrete prototypes, the mobilization of authors, directors, and actors, and the involvement of a critical and theoretical discourse. After a few tries, this model too ran right into a *dead end*.

In the case of pantomime, the hypothesis of development is constructed along the lines of autonomous, pre-existing models of representation. And, we know, other systems (in addition to those derived from the theater) are also called upon in the same time period: painting (the idea of a film as a development of thematic and iconographic motives of a painting, or of a cycle of paintings), sculpture, graphic art (culminating in some experimental works, such as *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, in the early '20s). But cinema can also be considered as a way of creating a more exhaustive representation of reality because is capable of accommodating and reproducing its phenomenological data. Or it can be seen as an instrument of the most extensive spectacularization of act of viewing, capable of surpassing human perception itself. The recurring proposals to re-plan the new medium in pursuit of the ideal of stereoscopic vision, discussed by Paola Valentini, also fit into this picture. Before becoming the basis of a specialized sector of cinema (although that plan also went unrealized) – or of a genre, as sustained by Valentini – stereoscopy had birthed projects for a "machine" for the spectacularization of representation, still mostly unexplored (as shown by the discovery of Guazzoni's photographs brought to light by Claudio Domini and illustrated in the photo-essay appearing in this issue).

But cinema could have been a quite different medium, precisely because it is a system for revealing reality. No longer a form of spectacle, it could have become an instrument for scientific inquiry. The experiments conducted by Marey and Muybridge, as everyone knows, bring us to the idea of cinema as an apparatus making visible that which escapes observation, a machine that acts as an extension of sight. Less known is the thread unfolding from this concept, and which concerns what Michael Barchet calls, in his essay, the "non-public spectacle."

Beyond the *poetics* of individual directors and the *aesthetic* projects aimed at overcoming the limits of the cinematic system of representation and spectacularization, and crossing the borders between cinema and other communicative and expressive fields, the theories and practices of *expanded cinema* of the '60s embodied the tendency *to bring cinema out of itself*. This is a familiar situation in early cinema (the flexibility of the context and forms of exhibition, its co-existence with other forms of entertainment) and accounts for a system continuously facing its own exterior while being contaminated by it. It was with the introduction of sound, with the rigid normativization of classical cinema, that these

processes solidified, and seemingly disappeared from the history and even the genesis of the new medium. Consequently, cinema became identified with a device that makes the screen-as-frame the only basis of expression, which elects the direction that goes from the screen to the audience as the only axis of communication, which makes the dream-like state of the spectator the only model of spectatorship, and turns the film into a closed textual system. This is a model that Ruggero Eugeni invites us to interpret as linked to the hypnotic state, in a way that is sometimes veiled but nonetheless strict. The institutionalization of classical cinema, he tells us, goes hand-in-hand with the constant thematization of the hypnotic experience itself, as we can see in a range of genres from horror to film noir.

The tenets of "expanded cinema," on the other hand, called this fixity into question and reactivated processes that, as already mentioned, were already inscribed in the history of cinema.

We would have liked to bring to light other models and paths. For example, the idea of cinema as a portrait, as a system that, parallel to other systems (painting, photography), could have been primarily an instrument for recording a family's memories, a gallery of characters, a cultural archive; or as a form of visual thought (from Epstein to underground cinema); or as a *langue* (Pasolini). Maybe this issue of *CINEMA & Cie.* will have a sequel: it will depend on the interest that it is capable of generating, on the echo that the issues raised here will create.

Reflection needs to be done not only on these issues, but above all, on the ways in which we approach them. I have used terms such as "dead end," or "incorrect theories," but I do not believe, at all, that these terms are absolute. Contemporary cinema, the spectacular forms currently employed, the new models of *integration between vision and experience*, have re-opened paths that seem to belong to the archeology of missed opportunities. Pantomime (as expressive system for organizing body language) has found, in hip-hop culture, in music videos, or rather, in the new musical cinema, boundless possibilities of expansion. The experiments of video art, the "fruitive" model of the installation, the wide diffusion of digital supports, and the world of video games and the internet have made the idea of expansion a common and a daily one. And these are not processes merely involving these new communicative and expressive systems, parallel to or bordering with cinema. It is cinema itself which is implicated. It is the models of classical and modern cinema that today appear as "dead ends." The multiplex is more similar to the forms of fruition of the "invisible cinema" of Peter Kubelka than to the hegemonic models of the movie theater prevailing from the '20s to the '60s. IMAX is closer to the conditions of stereoscopic vision than to the institutional model of movie theaters. Currently, not only individual artist's experiments (such as the contaminations of Peter Greenaway, the multiplications and the interactions of stories and screens of Mike Figgis, or the polyptychs of Lucas Belvaux) but the tenets of every cinematic narration move further away from the spatial and temporal categories of classical, and "modern," cinema.

Looking at the cinema as an *open* system, and looking at its history as a *history of possibilities*, can help us formulate models for understanding today's cinema and the paths it is following even now.

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