

## INTRODUCTION

The spectatorship experience and viewing forms have deeply changed during cinema's more than a century of existence. The evolution of the apparatus (from the multi-faceted technological innovations that have transformed the cinema medium, to the regeneration, driven by digital technology, of the media scenarios), the changing viewing conditions (the evolution of the trade, the multiplication and differentiation of the fruition spaces), the metamorphosis of the social and cultural scenario (the extension and transformation of the social and discursive networks that the viewers are inserted into and that constitute the inescapable framework of the viewing experience) have changed the relationship forms between film and viewer and the habits and the value of going to the cinema. The present issue of *CINEMA & Cie* aims straight for the heart of a question that today, due to the drive towards interactivity and media convergence, is ever more relevant, by examining in depth the viewer's experience. This involves on the one hand an understanding of how many and which factors shape the cinema viewing forms, how they interact with each other and what type of observation, method or approach is more suited to grasp the variety and complexity of the relationships and on the other hand to assess how the cinematic experience can contribute to define the usage modes of other media and even a canon of apperception and understanding of the extra media reality.

More than on the epoch making changes, we focus our attention on the transitions, on the small cracks in the social viewing ritual that reveal the dynamism and reactivity of the spectatorship processes in respect of the evolution of the apparatus and the transformations that occur in the broader relational and cultural context. The common theme of the essays collected here is the conviction that the viewer's experience is a combination of many variables, a good part of which outside the cinema itself, and that the viewer's experience can provide a privileged point of view from which to observe and understand the transformations taking place in the social and cultural, as well as the media, environment.

Francesco Casetti, in the opening essay, highlights the close relationship that ties movie going to modernity's trends, needs and restlessness. A bijective relationship in which the forms of cinematic vision incorporate and render paradigmatic certain distinctive traits of modernity. Through specific filmic samples, the essay illustrates how the viewer's experience is the result of two orders of processes, respectively social and symbolic, and it highlights their inextricable connection. More specifically he hypothesises a relationship that is at the same time symmetrical and compensational, between

the contact that the viewer establishes with the screen and the relationship that he builds with the rest of the public in the cinema. An unresolved tension between the virtual nature, that is never fully realised, of the symbolic identification with the film and the physicality, never fully sublimated, of the presence of other viewers in the cinema.

The perception of a liminality of the viewer's experience shapes and guides Annette Kuhn's reflection. By studying the recollections of cinema viewers from the 1930s, Kuhn identifies an essential ambivalence in the images and perception of cinema. The cinema places, in particular, occupy in the viewer's memory an interstitial position between the private and public sphere borrowing from the first the sense of proximity and safety and from the second the perception of alteration and extraneousness that feeds the escapist attraction and function of viewing. Veritable transitional spaces that, due to the intimacy that they establish with the viewer, become safe havens for the exploration and appropriation of the external environment. In the interwar years going to the cinema represented an important experience to know and familiarise oneself with the neighbours and the social context of the neighbourhood. A significance that, Kuhn specifies, is closely tied to that particular historical moment and the characteristics of the apparatus.

The inter-dependency of the forms and functions of going to the cinema, with the social and cultural surroundings and with the configuration of the media environment, constitute the leitmotiv of Vinzenz Hediger's research. Hediger examines a particular form of viewing: the practice of the repeated fruition by reconstructing its progressive affirmation from the 1930s and by trying to identify its origin both within and outside the cinema medium. A complex network of interferences is revealed, in which the apparatus nevertheless plays a primary role. From the restraining effort exercised by the distribution and exploitation strategies of the films during the classic cinema period, to the contemporary propulsion exercised by the diffusion of domestic viewing technologies (VCR and DVD).

James Hay explores the closeness and interaction between cinema and television and other forms of consumption. Starting from an analysis of a recent car advert, Hay's text highlights the ever-closer interaction between media environments and even non-symbolic forms of consumption. The media convergence is masterfully illustrated through a rich repertoire of examples that range from the more traditional contamination of the discursive forms (for example, the translation of contents from one medium to the other), to the influence of apparatus and other consumptions not necessarily of symbolic goods, in the definition of the usage canons of a medium. The case of the first car stereos radios as a model of television fruition is exemplary. The fusion and relation between media, and not only, consumption experiences offers unprecedented interpretations. The association between radio and car, for example, brings into play a series of values, such as the sense of freedom and contemporaneously the control and obedience of rules of behaviour (highway code and by extension the social system), that can effectively be applied to the examination and understanding of the television viewing experience and its social impact.

Inter-discursiveness and inter-operativeness are other key words that appear in the text that closes the monographic section. Mariagrazia Fanchi's analysis concentrates on the most advanced forms of spectatorship experience tied to the introduction of digital technology. By examining the institutional forms of cinema consumption, without looking at its most extreme and innovative aspects (such as the use of the web to down-

load and watch films), Fanchi detects the signs of a change in progress that assails the status of the viewer and the values and forms of his viewing praxis. The examination of the multiplexes (with particular attention to the Italian situation) allows us to glimpse the progressive expansion of the cinema viewer experience: on the sensorial level the development and diversification of the stimuli, on the social level the crucial role of the cinema as meeting place and focus of a network of relations that innervate the surrounding territory and on the symbolic level the re-investment on the consumption experience of the opportunity for self-expression. New ethical principles and rules of behaviour shape the viewer's action, which is progressively less tied to a single media environment and its discipline. It is now engaged contemporaneously in different contexts, negotiating between the rules of each context, and organising a variety of offers in an experience that assumes hyperbolic characteristics.

Inter-media, evolution of the viewing syntax, development of the senses, radical transformation of the relationship with the filmic text. The new forms of cinema viewing are still largely to be explored, both in terms of their phenomenology and, especially, in terms of their social consequences. But also the study of spectatorship from a historical point of view continues to present broad shadow zones: the complex relationship with the apparatus, the variety of viewing modes and the interferences, exchanges and connivance with the social environment reveal a poorly explored research territory.

The following essays do not propose systematic explorations or final mappings. They provide an awareness (towards the social and cultural, as well as the semantic and symbolic, aspects of viewing) and a method (able to capture and reconstruct the variety of elements that come into play when defining the viewer's experience) that can certainly contribute to bringing together in a more critical and conscious manner the diachronic and synchronous study of cinema spectatorship.

[f.c., m.f.]