A Fascinating Building:

The Configuration of the Cinema and Its Films Under the Influence of the Female Audience

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A Struggle Over the Cinema

The following will deal with the influence of the audience, especially the female audience on cinema and film history. It is well known that the relationship between film producer and film spectator is not a one-way street. For example, there have been genres that were created with a female audience in mind, the woman's film, "weepies," or "handkerchief movies," or test screenings in Hollywood to secure the best success possible on the film market. In the European auteur film, the term of the productive power of the spectator emerged, a third force alongside the auteur and the producer. And yet the influence of the audience on the creation, the formation of films, and film genres cannot be sufficiently understood in the triangle of producer, auteur, spectator. For this we need a notion, a concept of what cinema is. Or what it was. Then we can also better understand what it means when film leaves the cinema. The audience manifests itself first in the form of the cinema and through this in film form and content.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a struggle over the cinema arose. This was preceded by a struggle in the 1920s over film. The artistic and critical avant-garde focused on the recognition of film as film. They confronted the capitalist film industry and a conservative understanding of art. And in so doing, they relied on the interest and the formability of the audience. Film was asserted to be art, and later the cinema—beyond the role of mass entertainment—took on the significance of an art space, and subservient function vis-à-vis the work. A programmatic text published in 1970 by Anthology Film Archives explained this in some detail: it bears the significant title "The Invisible Cinema."[1] The cinema movement in contrast emerged at the close of the 1960s to grant cinema visibility in society. This was also about the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*): the aim was to gain an audience in the emphatic political and cultural sense, and to counteract the trend of retreating to private domesticity before the television. The concept of the "public sphere" also accompanied the rediscovery of the early cinema. An echo of Negt and Kluge's text on the public sphere and experience can still be found in Miriam Hansen's last book *Cinema and Experience*, published in 2011, on the film theory of the Frankfurt School, i.e., Adorno, Benjamin, and Kracauer.[2]

With the emergence of communal cinemas and art houses, the cinema movement experienced a heyday in many places, but it clearly did not suc-

ceed in the long run. Today, it seems dubious to me whether the term public sphere had anything more than strategic significance. It brought the cinema once more back into the context of bourgeois society, precisely by extending it to include the proletariat or women. As the transformation of the classical public sphere, in the course of the integration of non-bourgeois, the cinema, especially in retrospect, became conceivable. The theory of the public sphere, however, made the break with tradition that modern mass society contains more or less invisible. The influence of various audiences on the formation of cinema could not be thought through to the end, where it questioned the institution of the public sphere itself.

Film Theory and the Audience

Among all film theorists, Siegfried Kracauer took audience research the most seriously and yet did not proceed in a strictly sociological fashion. He used the term of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) from phenomenology alongside that of society. Unlike the work of Frankfurt's Institut für Sozialforschung and the Critical Theorists, in Kracauer's writings of the 1920s there is a sober gaze at society with no catastrophic or utopian light. In this gaze, the present no longer offers the hope of democratic developments or revolutionary hopes. Society is the mass of humanity, abstracted from their realities. It has its mirror in the bodies of the Tiller Girls, become ornament.[3]

A central issue in the epilogue of his 1960 book *Theory of Film* is progressing abstraction, of "things in their fullness."[4] Yet as early as 1922, Kracauer wrote, "We have moved horribly far from reality."[5] With the forceps formed by the capitalist economy and the state, society is abstracted from "nature," as its opposite was once again understood like bourgeois public understood itself as the opposite of privacy. Society defines itself and its opposite to the extent that it excludes the reality of its opposite. What remains is the empty term "nature." Kracauer already uses the term in his 1927 essay "Photography." But if photography, as he writes, reveals the "unexamined foundation of nature",[6] then it reveals nature not as an entity, as an organic unit, but as a fragment, a fragment for which all reality is nothing but a possibility. The task of film is to present this possibility: a world in which we live, in which we could live. According to this logic, it is not the success of the technical reproduction of reality that grounds film history, rather its failure. From the perspective of filmmakers, the cinema in the twentieth century has significance for the *Lebenswelt*, it is a site of the permeability towards an "outside," "nature," "physical reality," from which society is abstracted. A threshold. The attempts to integrate the cinema in society are thus not only in vain, in a certain sense they are false, run counter to its obstinacy (*Eigensinn*).

The question remains, however, how is this (threshold) site situated within society? This question is answered by the people that go to the

cinema, they formed the cinema, in cultural voids that emerged because the institutions of bourgeois culture just as so-called "folk cultures" in modern mass society underwent a loss of substance. This depletion is the subject of numerous essays by Kracauer, not least the essay series The *Employees*.[7] Here, he published observations about working conditions and leisure. Among all the palaces of amusement, the cinema stands out in his work, but unlike Béla Balázs in *Visible Man or the Culture of Film*, Kracauer did not welcome a new culture in the cinema. But nor did he speak of the culture industry, the sellout of old bourgeois culture. Instead, he opened an entirely different perspective. Beyond aesthetics and cultural theory, the "cult of distraction" takes on a "moral import."[8] This also means: the audience is neither a direct producer who gets involved in the processes of capital or the project of the author, nor a consumer, who is subject to the industry's profit orientation. But what might "moral" mean in the context of the cinema?

The Moral Human Being

I turn to the history of philosophy, but not to Kant, who still plays such a prominent role. Arthur Schopenhauer, the philosophical pessimist of the bourgeoisie, cherished in the early 19th century no hope for a gradual or revolutionary improvement of society. At the same time, his lack of illusions did not lead to cynicism, he did not abandon the idea of morality itself. He understood it rather free of all pathos, in an unethical, indeed anti-ethical, anti-Kantian sense. In the fourth book of *The World as Will and Imagination*, we read the following:

> "Therefore we shall have no hesitation, in direct contradiction to Kant, who will only recognize all true goodness and all virtue to be such, if it has proceeded from abstract reflection, and indeed from the conception of duty and of the categorical imperative, and explains felt sympathy as weakness, and by no means virtue, we shall have no hesitation, I say, in direct contradiction to Kant, in saying: the mere concept is for genuine virtue just as unfruitful as it is for genuine art."[9]

Schopenhauer considered the notion that philosophers could establish rules of action—categorical imperatives—absurd. Philosophers, in his view, could only research, observe people. His own research brings him to two kinds of conclusion: on the one hand, morality is a quality of man on the threshold between nature and society, and secondly, it is communicated not in words but in actions. Actions are manifestations of goal oriented behavior combined with empathy. Seen in this philosophical light of a combination of *ratio* and empathy, the processes of abstraction in modern society destroy the *Lebenswelten* and at the same time the reality and possibility of morality.

Schopenhauer saw in the self-empowerment of the bourgeoisie the self-destruction of human society. This came to pass in the First World War. At the end of the war, and with the establishment of a precarious peace, humanity saw itself confronted with an inner void. Kracauer wrote of this in his essays "Boredom" and "Those Who Wait." The void, the "gap," that opens instead of a filled self takes on importance.[10] As an answer to the urgent question of what is to be done, the only answer is waiting as such, in an awareness of the lack of a morality that could direct our actions. It is only in insisting on its lack that morality persists. In so doing, distraction in the cinema that presents the void has a moral significance.

Needs

Both film history and the cinema are no random accessories of modern life: they fulfill basic needs that emerged with modernity; they were necessary to survive humanly within modern mass society. In the possibility of humanity.

Photographic technology can respond in film to the need to be contained in a lifeworld in a way that the fine arts of the twentieth century no longer can. In a similar way, with the emergence of the cinema, a need continues to stage itself en masse where the cultures fail. They fail before the possibility of a moral existence. This relies ultimately not on teaching, knowledge, or the capacity of judgment, not on internalizing laws and norms, but rather fundamentally, thinking in Schopenhauer's terms, on a life on the threshold between society and nature, in a combination of a rationality of action and empathy. The expropriation of physical existence in serfdom and the *fronde* under the dictate of the market and patriarchal social order also took place before the technologization of everyday life. Its dehumanizing consequences were countered with cultures of leisure and the private: festivities, fairs, and the bourgeois house, including a cultivation of gender-specific role divisions that played with the boundaries between society and nature. The moral importance of these cultures of leisure or cultures of the private and the importance of the cinema lies not in the aesthetic communication of a normative morality, but in regaining for societalized humanity a physical existence that has been taken away, to enjoy it, to have it become palpable and conscious.

The philosopher dismantled the pretension of philosophical ethics in theory. Cinema brought it down in practice. As a result, the ideological supports of society saw themselves threatened by it. As the cinema debates in the early twentieth century document paradigmatically for many later discussions. The offensive aspect was ultimately not the bodies shown, given that man was considered as a creature of reason, but that it made present the life from which humanity was torn, one marked by a history of expropriation, abstraction. Walter Serner commented in 1913: "divested

life, gruesome, bloody, burning."[11] And early fairground films give a sense of this in showing distorted bodies, monstrous bodies.

Early Cinema

As the early cinema was re-discovered around 1980, film archives together with the academy seemed prepared to open our eyes to an overlooked history of a cinema culture. Restoration, screening, and research practically countered the dominant tendency of following media progress. Yet the term introduced for the early cinema, "cinema of attractions," ultimately proved ambivalent. During the 1980s, the term made it possible to bring the political discussion on publicity to the aesthetic aspect of the films. In the aesthetic structures of early films, an audience was reflected that had a different, a more autonomous relationship to the films than the later "dream factory" condemned by critical scholarship. In the eyes of the researchers, however, this relationship is on the one hand stored in the films, on the other hand it was in its physical presence a palpable part of a non-cinematographic event. The fact that these films were shown at fairs and variety shows ultimately set the "cinema of attractions" apart from the cinema itself, it does not belong to it – according to the doctrin of André Gaudréault.

But ultimately, it was not the still extent institutions of a culture of the fair, the variety show, or the like that shaped early films, but rather the emptiness of these institutions, emptying in the course of the progress of modern society. And this is the element linking the itinerant cinema of the early years and the fixed cinema of later years. The audience no longer found what they needed to live in these cultural offerings. Yet the films met the need, because they themselves resulted from the lack, from the void, and did not repress the loss. In the sense of something lost, a gap, they also shaped other cultures of the cinema.

The Culture of the House

The eighteenth and above all the nineteenth century created a specific bourgeois culture of domesticity, complementary to worldwide trade and capital profit. A great deal has been written about this, especially in the exploration of the private as the other side of the public. The private house was more than just a dwelling, it represented a kind of threshold space between society and nature, and thus a site, a lifeworld in which moral man reproduced himself while escaping from the capitalist society of competition. In the home, the children grew to become social beings, and it was to the home that citizens could turn after having done their work, to again feel human. Maintaining the threshold space in the midst of a society that was encapsulating itself, the house in an emphatic sense

was for Georg Simmel the primary cultural achievement of woman, which had previously been misjudged in terms of its importance. He wrote in 1902: "Even where the greatest estimation of 'the house' has taken place, they are linked to its individual achievements, but not to the category of life in general that it represents."[12] Like religion, art, and knowledge, the house is a part of life, but also "an entire world."[13]

> "It is a part of life and at the same time a special way of bringing together life as a whole, reflecting it, shaping it. This is woman's great cultural achievement."[14]

Film theory of the 1970s—especially, but not only feminist film theory—took a critical view of how the cinema reproduced the structure and function of the house. Attention was directed at the gender dualism, the role of woman as image of nature and the screen as mother's breast (according to Jean Louis Baudry), that satisfies regressive needs in the dark space of the cinema. Seen in political terms, in film a reproduction of morality in the private sphere was seen as ideology, that is, invested in the function of repressing dominant amorality. In a certain sense these theories represented a farewell to the cinema, that seems to have largely become primarily an instrument of domination. By this time, the majority of women no longer went to the cinema.

But those who rediscovered their love for the cinema in the 1960s and 1970s repeated—before all critique—a movement that took place during the first half of the twentieth century. Then, at the time of the first women's movement, the process of the emptying of the house began. Once a site of culture, of humanity, it began its transformation into a mere means of exploitation and repression, and set the foundation for seeking life in the cinema. This was first of all corporeality, which was repressed, excluded under the image of femininity, with its role as nature on the one hand and a moral being on the other. To that extent, female cinemagoers were of the same mindset as the visitors of the fairground cinema. But in remembering the lifeworld, they differ. Not the open market, but the closed space is well suited to allow what was lost, what was being lost to come back to life. This includes the fact that the screen presence, the light presence of woman moves to the center of the cinema. That an aura of projection light embraces the female figure.

A star is born. But also the female cinemagoer. For the female audience, the cinema takes on a new attraction in its form as urban building. This is embodied not by the spectator spellbound by the screen, but the female cinemagoer. The movie house becomes the epitome of emancipation, going to the cinema has the glow of an escape from the domestic lack of freedom. At the same time, it is a metaphorical process in which the house as a lifeworld phenomenon, its imago, is transferred to the cinema building.

Contemporary Sources

Both aspects—leaving the house and the projection of the house on the cinema—were reflected in contemporary sources from the period. The female cinemagoer was documented by Emilie Altenloh's empirical study *Zur Soziologie des Kino* in her manifold manifestations—the working class woman, the girl, the clerc, the upper class woman.[15] This account also records when the women went to the cinema, with whom, which films they loved, etc. A preference for cinema dramas was evident, for love stories with a female star—above all Asta Nielsen—at the center. The women went to the cinema to flee the narrowness and loneliness of their own house (the men attend meetings or go to bars at night), and the makeshift solution became "an important part of their existence."[16] For in the cinema, they found visions of life that corresponded to their dreams, dreams for which their own home offered no room.

In 1916, the trade journal *Der Kinematograph* dedicated an issue to mark its ten years of publication to women: "On the occasion of our journal's ten years of flourishing existence, we dedicate No. 520 as the 'women's issue' to express our thanks for the inestimable help of women and the rock steady interest of the world of women for the cinema."[17] The female audience is a decisive factor, both in the spread of the cinema and its gains in prestige. But above all, the journal sings the praises of the "female souls," which in their opinion caused a significant transformation in "film," the move from the "living photography of everyday motion" the "magical burlesques" and "technical tricks" to dramas and comedies, to an art without words that can bring the psychological to expression in the physical.[18] This in turn corresponds with Simmel's views on acting, in which he sees another "specifically female achievement." For acting relies on the ability of not completing the separation between the product and moment of creation. In light of the new technique of film, this entails an ability to not subject oneself to the seriousness of abstraction and fragmentation immanent to the technical aspects, but rather to play with it.[19]

Karola Gramann's film program "A House is not a Home" (1): THOSE AWFUL HATS (D.W. Griffith, 1909)

Cinephilia and the Love of the Cinema

The dissolve of the cinema with the house as a space of childhood, of intimate life that is undistorted by society and last but not least a site of femininity and eroticism has an amazing attraction not only for the masses, but also for a bourgeois-intellectual audience. The star, the diva is the emblem of such attraction. Béla Balázs' hymn to Asta Nielsen attests to this: this language of nature or natural language is not of the theater, it is only possible in the cinema. It returns to the actor something of what the societalized language with which he works has lost. But Balázs does not treat the cinema as such. With Simmel, it could be said that he reflects the "individual achievements" but does not see the "entire world" that it forms. Balázs himself moves film to the horizon of what in today's terms is called media history, as if film, like the printed book, could go from hand to hand and be read or seen individually. The visible man or the culture of film: or cinephilia.

The Cinephile seperates the cinema that in the 1920s, now dependent on distribution and production, clearly threatened to become an instrument of capital and the state from the films that emerged at the hands of those who did not subject themselves to abstraction, the regime of economy and state. Cinephilia developed as a culture of spectators, film critical spectators, with the cinema as its cult location. For the female spectator such a division and hierarchization, between film and the cinema, was not possible. For this, her life investment in going to the cinema was too great, the dark, empty inner space is essential, that is once again transformed in the lost threshold space, in which now, unburdening her, the films and the actress bear the possibility of

"A House is not a Home" (2):
LA SOURIANTE MADAME BEUDET
(Germaine Dulac, 1923)

reproducing a moral humanity. The love of the cinema went down in film history, in the forms and contents that films have taken on. If it is practically excluded, through the development of the media away from the cinema, it becomes impossible to make such films, except as pastiche.

Cinephila tends to suppress something that its love object depends on, to ignore it in its specifif nature. It leaves aside the historical fact of cinema in a turn to the site of the film's creation. In relation to the filmmakers that they imagine as artists, it reproduces a culture of art, indeed of genius. The cinema books of Gilles Deleuze, *Movement Image* and *Time Image*, are the writing of a spectator who reflects his film perceptions in the ongoing imaginary presence of the filmmaker, in dialogue with him.

Cinema in Film

In the framework of the International Bremen Film Conference, this contribution was combined with a film program presented by Karola Gramann. Her program of short films stretched from the early cinema to the 1980s, and took its own position on the subject at hand. The program "A House is not a Home" focused on the ambivalences that inhere in Georg Simmel's attempt to read the "home" as a "female culture."[20] Whereas I used Simmel to show something of the importance and meaning of the movie house in the history of film in the early twentieth century. The film in the program that came closest to this was Franz Hofer's WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN from 1914. Here, the Simmelian *imago* of the home seems to move from reality of bourgeois life to the cinema. Hofer is fascinated by the inner spaces the warmth, the light, Dorrit Weixlers display of femininity. Yet at the start of World War I, the luster of the interior is also overshadowed by threatened loss. The other films shown, dating from 1923 to 1983, showed the disillusion and sobering of the image of the home. A response to this can be seen in Uli Versum's FASZINIERENDES PUPPENHAUS from 1987, which playfully exudes splendor and misery.

"A House is not a Home" (3): EIN HALBES LEBEN (Christine Noll Brinckmann, 1983)

And finally, Georg Simmel once again on the house, on the cinema:

> "That the cultural formation of the house has not always been clearly recognized is due to the fluid, labile details of his appearance, serving the needs of the day and individuals, and as a result the objective cultural significance of the form in which the house completes the synthesis of these flowing, passing achievements."[21]

A more recent advocate of the importance of the home is Hannah Arendt. Her philosophical work revolved constantly around the subject of the public sphere, which she conceived in mutual dependence with privacy. Margaretha von Trotta's film HANNAH ARENDT caused me to return to this. Arendt speaks of "home" as a place that lends our self a depth of sensation, which allows it to "ris[e] into sight from some darker ground."[22] In exile, Arendt found a home in New York. In the age of nickelodeon the cinema offered the immigrants a replacement for their own home. Apart from using the "house" to think about the influence of a female public on the cinema, it seems to be possible to understand the importance and meaning of the cinema in the context of immigration, emigration, and societies of migration.

Translated by Brian Currid

Notes

1 Anthology Film Archives Collective, "The Invisible Cinema" (1971).
2 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). See also Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
3 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Levin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
4 "The other, less noted characteristic of our situation can briefly be described as abstractness . . . We not only live among the 'ruins of ancient beliefs' but live among them with a best a shadowy awareness of things in their fullness" (Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960], 291).
5 Kracauer, "Those Who Wait," *The Mass Ornament*.
6 Kracauer, "Photography" (1925), Critical Inquiry 1993, Vol. 19, No 3, pp. 421–436, here p. 435.
7 Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quentin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998).
8 Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," *The Mass Ornament*.
9 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1910), 485.
10 Kracauer, "Bordeom," *The Mass Ornament*.
11 Walter Serner, "Kino und Schaulust" (1913), *Kino-Debatte. Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929*, ed. Anton Kaes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1978), 55.
12 Georg Simmel, "Weibliche Kultur," *Philosophische Kultur: Über das Abenteuer, die Geschlechter und die Krise der Moderne* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1986), 243.
13 Ibid., 244.

14 Ibid., 245.
15 Emilie Altenloh, *Zur Soziologie des Kino* (1913) (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2012)
16 Ibid., 78
17 *Der Kinematograph* 520 (December 13, 1916).
18 Emil Hartmann, "Die Frauenseele im Film," *Der Kinematograph 520* (December 13, 1916).
19 See Heide Schlüpmann, "Hausfrauen im Spiel," *Frauen und Film* 66.
20 The program: THOSE AWFUL HATS (D. W. Griffith, 1909); WEIHNACHTSGLOCKEN (Franz Hofer, 1914), LA SOURIANTE MADAME BEUDET (Germaine Dulac, 1923), EIN HALBES LEBEN (Christine Noll Brinckmann, 1983); FASZINIERENDES PUPPENHAUS (Uli Versum, 1987).
21 Simmel, "Weibliche Kultur," *Philosophische Kultur*, 245.
22 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 71.