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Collective Viewing

The Cinema and Affective Audience Interrelations

Abstract

When we watch a movie with others, we automatically enter a social relationship that changes our experience of the film—collective viewing is different from watching a film alone. Particularly when strong emotions and affects come into play, we often become conscious of what I call “affective audience interrelations” in the cinema. In this essay I make three broad suggestions as to how we might usefully distinguish and classify these affective audience interrelations. Firstly, I argue that emotions like joy, shock, and sadness and concomitant expressive reactions like laughing, screaming, and weeping can change the *degree of awareness* of our relationship to other audience members. Secondly, I suggest that strong emotions and affects as well as their concomitant expressive reactions can influence the *mode* in which viewers experience their relationships to each other. They can push the viewers’ experience toward unattached individuation or toward collective integration, toward an antagonistic “I-you connection” of social distance or a mutual “we-connection” of social proximity. My third point concerns the *source* of the emotions and affects responsible for our awareness of social relationships in the movie theater. Do these emotions and affects derive first and foremost from the film or from the presence of the other viewers?

The Primal Scene of Collective Viewing

I must have been eight years old. My parents and I were sitting in a Munich art-house cinema in the eighties absorbed in *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1939), that most powerful of classic film melodramas. Suddenly our shared experience of movie-watching was interrupted—by a kiss! Rhett Butler seized Scarlett O’Hara and pressed his lips upon hers. And I was thunderstruck. All of a sudden I felt as though my parents were observing my reactions reproachfully. Since I did not dare to move, I could not tell whether or not they actually looked at me (in hindsight, I suspect they could not have cared less). But at that moment, the feeling of being watched drastically changed my immediate relationship to them. Before the kiss, we had been deeply involved in a joint activity. The kiss disrupted this sense of commonality and drew me apart from my parents. I had a strong desire to disappear from this exposed position. What was, in fact, only a short scene seemed to go on forever. It evoked a curious state of arousal (due to the kiss), shame (because of my parents’ presence), and anger (toward the film that caused the shame).

Have we not all had similar experiences? During such primal scenes of collective viewing, as it were, we become aware of a simple but rarely acknowledged fact: once we watch a film with others we automatically enter a social relationship that fundamentally changes our experience of the film. It is different from watching a film alone. As viewers we always have at least a certain awareness of the other people in the auditorium. And this is all the more true when strong emotions and affects come into play and we suddenly become conscious of what I will call “affective audience interrelations” in the cinema. The French sociologist and film theorist Edgar Morin has observed of the cinema spectator: “So there he is, isolated, but at the heart of a human environment, of a great gelatin of common soul, of a collective participation, which accordingly amplifies his individual participation. To be isolated and in a group at the same time: two contradictory and complementary condi-

ons..."¹ Unfortunately, Morin did not elaborate on this curious "contradictory and complementary condition." And it is a subject that has also largely been ignored by subsequent film scholarship.

In this essay I will make three broad suggestions as to how we might usefully distinguish and classify these affective audience interrelations. Firstly, I will argue that emotions like joy, shock, and sadness and concomitant expressive reactions like laughing, screaming, and weeping can change the *degree of awareness* (consciousness) of our relationship to other audience members. Elements of the experience that might have lingered at the fringe of our field of consciousness might move to the center of it; conversely, those that were at first in the foreground might be relegated to the background of awareness. In my opening example it was the mixed state of erotic arousal, shame, and anger that suddenly raised my degree of awareness of the collective situation. However, once the kiss was over, the film itself reclaimed the central position in my field of consciousness.

Secondly, I will suggest that strong emotions and affects as well as their concomitant expressive reactions can influence the *mode* in which viewers experience their relationships to each other. They can push the viewers' experience toward unattached individuation or, conversely, toward collective integration. In fact, they can even cause an antagonistic "I-you connection" of social distance. Or they can create a sense of commonality, a mutual "we-connection" of social proximity. At the moment when I felt singled out and exposed in shame during *GONE WITH THE WIND*, I was no longer able to take for granted the "we-connection" of social proximity to my parents. In fact, I felt opposed to them. While this example points to a negative aspect of the social relationship between audience members, antagonistic individuation is by no means the rule. There are, of course, instances of pleasurable we-connection. Laughing together is a prime example of this, as I will show.

¹ Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or the Imaginary Man* (1956), trans. Lorraine Mortimer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 97.

My third point concerns the *source* of the emotions and affects responsible for our awareness of social relationships in the movie theater. Do these emotions and affects derive first and foremost from the film or from the presence of the other viewers? Does the aesthetic or the social experience predominate? What I have called the “primal scene of collective viewing” underscores the idea that a strong awareness of the collective situation does not have to come from emotions intended by the filmmakers: *GONE WITH THE WIND* is not a film that seeks to put young boys in a state of shame. The emotions and affects that cause a central awareness of our social interrelations can, in fact, be directly related to the film, indirectly related to the film, or not related to the film at all.

Why Collective Viewing Matters

When film scholars discuss the aesthetic experience of the movies, they concentrate first and foremost on the relationship between viewer and *film*. The relationship between viewer and *viewer* has been less closely examined. There are certainly a number of valuable studies that look at film as a collectively consumed form of entertainment or art. Among them is Miriam Hansen’s concept of the cinematic public sphere; Janet Staiger’s historical studies of collective viewing; and Henry Jenkins’s fan studies; as well as interview-based empirical work by Annette Hill.² While different in many respects, these studies have one thing in common: they do not describe affective viewer interrelations as a subjectively lived experience. Rather, they look at this form of social relationship from an objective third-person perspective without providing a phenomenological I- or we-perspective.

This is understandable on one level, since it is reasonable that the film itself should remain the primary object of film studies. However, this appro-

² Cf. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Annette Hill, *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Movie Violence* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1997).

ach neglects the fact that the presence of other, mostly anonymous individuals necessarily influences the viewer's experience of the film in a cinema or other communal setting. The shared space of the gathered and present audience of the movie theater is unlike the unshared space of the solitary and dispersed audience in front of the TV screen at home. When we sit in a movie theater, we sit there with others; when we watch a film with others, we experience it in a way that differs from watching it alone. In other words, the cinematic audience is always more than the sum of its individual viewers. It might therefore be worth extending current reception theories to incorporate responses emerging from the very experience of collective viewing.³

But why should we consider the social relationship of cinemagoers at this moment? What developments allow, and perhaps even necessitate, an examination of individual and collective experiences at the movies? The most important of these are the technological transformations and processes of remediation and relocation of the film experience. As D. N. Rodowick has proposed, film scholars must draw two conclusions from these recent technological developments (the italics are in the original text): "First, we are witnessing a marked *decentering of the theatrical film experience*, which already has profound consequences for the phenomenology of movie spectatorship. Second, this decentering follows from the *displacement of a 'medium'* wherein every phase of the film process is being replaced with digital technologies. The experience of cinema and the experience of film are becoming increasingly rare."⁴ These days screens are neither found exclusively in movie theaters, nor are films still necessarily watched collectively. The theatrical experience has lost its centrality. People watch films alone or as members of a dispersed audience, on television screens, as video projections in art galleries, on computer monitors, on handheld devices like cell phones, on seat-back screens on airplanes, buses, and minivans. Yet it is precisely in contrast

³ This essay is part of a larger project in which I try to provide a detailed phenomenological description of the various states of audience interrelation at the movies.

⁴ David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 27–28.

to these new modes of viewing that the specific characteristics of the old forms of communal watching become more palpable: the multiple forms of individualized reception enable us to grasp with greater precision those experiences that derive from the collective situation of the cinema.

A second development that makes audience interrelations a timely subject of investigation is the enormous recent growth of scholarly interest in cinematic emotions and affects. In particular, film scholars working within a cognitivist, Deleuzian, and phenomenological framework have put strong emphasis on emotions and affects. Although affective viewer relationships have rarely played a role in their accounts (the occasional reference to “emotional contagion” being an exception), their work has established the ground for an investigation into this field in the first place. On this basis it is much easier for scholars like me to argue that moments of strong affectivity can make us vigorously aware of our fellow viewers, in both positive and negative ways. For one thing, emotions have a spatial tendency: they can open us to the world or isolate us from it. As the important work of phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz reminds us, once we are overcome by an emotion and affectivity has taken hold of us in one way or another, we often experience a phenomenological change in our lived-body’s spatial sense of direction to the world. We might centrifugally expand into the world, with a powerfully active tendency to contact or even embrace others (in the case of joy, for example); or our emotional space might narrow and we centripetally and a-socially become withdrawn from the world (as with sadness or melancholia).⁵ This has undeniable ramifications for viewer interrelations among audiences watching comedies and melodramas, for instance. Another particularly important emotion in this respect is shame (or fear thereof). Shame has a strong social component as it isolates and exposes the individual in front of a group, an actual or imagined one.

A third important development is the return of phenomenology as an accepted (if not always fully appreciated) approach in film studies. The revival

⁵ Hermann Schmitz, *Der Gefühlsraum* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969).

of interest in the phenomenological description as the most sophisticated form of subjective perspective on experience supports a new focus on the viewer's actual experience of audience interrelations. Good phenomenological descriptions provide assumptions that meet the scientific requirement of being intersubjectively verifiable. At the very least they establish a theoretical and conceptual basis for film scholarship that relies on the strictly empirical methods of the social sciences. Before film scholars can usefully interview cinemagoers and use questionnaires, they need guiding concepts and hypotheses. It is precisely because the various shades of collective viewing remain largely pre-reflective that there is a strong need for clarification. Phenomenology, first reintroduced to film studies by Vivian Sobchack in the early nineties, is a method that allows for a rigorous examination of personal experience that can supplant merely impressionistic accounts.

The fourth precondition for a change of perspective toward the social relationship of the viewer to the wider audience is only just beginning to emerge in current film studies. It is evident in recent debates about collective emotions, emotional contagion, and collective intentionality in the work of such scholars as philosopher Hans Bernhard Schmid; social neuroscientist John T. Cacioppo; evolutionary anthropologist Michael Tomasello; and sociologist Randall Collins.⁶ The complex discussion of collective intentionality, one which began in the eighties and is now fully underway, is of particular interest for film studies.⁷ Central to the debate is the question of whether or not and how we can share actions, belief, intentions, or emotions: in which ways

⁶ Hans Bernhard Schmid, *Wir-Intentionalität. Kritik des ontologischen Individualismus und Rekonstruktion der Gemeinschaft* (Freiburg: Alber, 2005); Michael Tomasello and Hannes Rakoczy, "Was macht menschliche Erkenntnis einzigartig? Von individueller über geteilte zu kollektiver Intentionalität," in *Kollektive Intentionalität. Eine Debatte über die Grundlagen des Sozialen*, ed. Hans Bernhard Schmid and David P. Schweikard, pp. 696–737 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: Norton, 2008); Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁷ For an overview, see Schmid and Schweikard, *Kollektive Intentionalität*.

are they sometimes more than just individual? Its main arena is analytic philosophy, but some of its more historically informed protagonists, like Hans Bernhard Schmid, also take into account the rich phenomenological tradition of Max Scheler, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others. Against this background of technological development, changes of focus and method within film scholarship, and larger debates about collectivity, it is no longer considered outlandish for scholars to reflect on the ways viewers experience each other—and the role emotions and affects play in this scenario.

Viewer Interrelations and the Degree of Awareness

I have argued that emotions and affects as well as concomitant expressive reactions can influence collective viewing by changing the viewer's *degree of awareness* of other audience members, drawing them from the periphery to the center of his or her field of consciousness and back again. How is this possible in light of one of the movie theater's most significant features, its hiding effect? The extreme darkness, the unidirectional viewing position, the sloped stadium seating, the loudness of the surround sound system, the relatively large amount of space around each seat, and the screen as the sole light source, hide the viewer, at least partially, from the attention of others *and* hide others from his or her attention.⁸ Nevertheless, the viewer as an embodied being—a subject simultaneously having and being a lived-body, situated in a concrete environment—is always to a certain extent conscious of other people in the theater. Since he or she is neither the bodyless “subject-eye” of seventies Apparatus theory nor the hypothesis-building, inference-making processor of eighties Cognitive film theory, the embodied viewer cannot be unaware of others.

Further, since watching a film does not mean looking at an unchanging representation, but rather following a constantly shifting series of moving

⁸ See Julian Hanich, “Multiplexperiences: Individualized Immersion and Collective Feelings,” in *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers. The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

images, the relationship to the other viewers is far from static. It is in a continuous state of flux, pushing audience members into a state of mutual awareness in one instance and pulling them apart in another. In moments of strong melodramatic or suspenseful immersion, particularly powerful examples of aesthetic *involvement*, the viewer might be primarily focused on what goes on in the fictional world of the film. The tense minutes leading up to the climactic shoot-out in *HIGH NOON* (1952) are a prime example of suspenseful immersion. Moreover, in what can be defined as instances of spellbinding aesthetic enthrallment, a particularly intensive form of aesthetic *appreciation*, the viewer might, by contrast, focus almost exclusively on something like the formal ingenuity of the film and hence have little awareness of others in the cinema. Here we might consider the almost hypnotizing play of geometrical forms in Hans Richter's *RHYTHMUS 21* (1921).

Of course, the viewer's field of consciousness can quickly be restructured when his or her awareness of others suddenly moves to the center. This is particularly true of such anti-immersive and theatrical elements as aggressive humor, disgusting scenes and cinematic shocks in slapstick films, slasher horror, thrillers, splatter films, and gross-out comedies. When I laugh, am shocked, or experience strong revulsion, I am distanced—sometimes even extricated—from my engagement with the film itself. It is as though the film has shoved me away, destroying my immersion in its world. This often results in an increased awareness of my presence in the movie theater. While this does not automatically result in a renewed focus on my fellow audience members, it certainly does this when the highly affective, anti-immersive scenes of theatricality and attraction are accompanied by such audible reactions as laughing, roaring, screaming, or moaning. Similarly pertinent in this context are the (inter-)active audience performances at cult movies like *THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW* (1975) with viewers singing along or speaking lines of dialogue. These audible responses cut through the darkness and force their way over the soundtrack, signaling not simply the presence of other viewers, but also communicating their current emotions: This is hilarious! This is shocking! This is gross!

But apart from the materially present audible reactions and interactive responses that announce the presence of others, there are also imaginary phantoms that noiselessly and somewhat malevolently whisper in our ears: “You are not watching the film alone.” This is the case when social emotions like guilt or shame come into play. Their effect does not necessarily depend on face-to-face interaction, but often relies on the imagined, phantomlike gaze of others. When I felt ashamed watching Rhett Butler kissing Scarlett O’Hara, it was simply on the basis of having imagined my parents’ disapprobation at my arousal. As Jack Katz notes, “What brings shame is taking toward oneself what one presumes is the view that others would have, were they to look.”⁹ Of course, my parents’ actual presence had a strong bearing on my imagination. The situation would have been rather different had I watched the film with my friends or even alone—situations in which the phantom menace of my parents’ disapproval would have been relatively weak.

Another example might illustrate the way the emotion of guilt can make us aware of other viewers. Some years ago I was watching the documentary *ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER* (1999) in a San Francisco theater with my girlfriend at that time, a Jewish-American woman who was very sensitive to instances of anti-Semitism. The film deals with the terrorist attack on the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich in which eleven Israelis were killed. The movie emphasizes the incompetence of the Bavarian police force: had they acted more professionally many lives could have been saved. As a German from Munich—not only the capital of Bavaria, but also the capital of Hitler’s National Socialist movement—I had a strong sense of collective guilt. During the film, I was imagining, distractedly, what my girlfriend might feel and think, constantly triangulating between the film, my own feelings, and hers. Again, it was her actual presence that made me take on an imagined version of her perspective. Alone, I might have responded with anger or regret or a vague feeling of collective guilt. But I would not have been anchored as strongly in the experience of being in the theater rather than fully immersed in the film.

⁹ Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 149.

There is a third way in which an emotion can become the reason for our central (not just peripheral) awareness of being in a collective situation in a movie theater. This is the case during moments when we actively concentrate on the presence of others—in order to soothe ourselves, for instance. A terrifying horror film can create a strong urge to counter the phenomenological isolation typical of fear by focusing on the collectivity of the situation: I am not alone, hence there is less reason to be afraid. In contrast to the previous cases, this type of awareness depends on a more active stance.

The Experiential Modes of Audience Interrelations

Strong emotions, affects, and expressive reactions not only have a bearing on the degree of awareness but also on the experiential mode of audience interrelations. I will argue that they can push social interrelations toward experiences of individuation or collectivity, of feelings of detachment or commonality. In fact, I will even show that the two extremes of audience interrelation comprise a phenomenologically distanced, antagonistic I-you-relationship at one end of the spectrum and a phenomenologically close, mutual we-connection at the other.

Let us begin at the antagonistic end. The most extreme cases of antagonism come in moments when the shared activity of movie-watching suddenly falls apart, either because of someone else's audible expression or due to the imaginary distancing that comes with shame or guilt. Just imagine a moment when you are deeply involved in a touching melodrama like *MY LIFE WITHOUT ME* (2003)—and suddenly someone in the audience laughs condescendingly. The contempt and derision expressed by the other spectator destroys your highly emotional immersive engagement with the film; it also reminds you that the other viewer experiences and evaluates the film quite differently. This, in turn, contradicts the background assumption of collective intentionality that you might have thought defined the situation. As the other viewers were hidden in the darkness, drowned in surround sound, and concealed in front of their seatbacks, you tacitly presupposed that the others were experiencing the film in the same way. Until proven otherwi-

se by the sudden laughter, you presumed that all members of the audience would think and feel alike. Even if this might have been wrong when judged from an objective perspective, in the dark concealment of the cinema you subjectively took for granted a situation of shared thinking and feeling.¹⁰ Since the nasty laughter disrupted this presumed state of shared intentionality, you might feel an upsurge of irritation or even anger. The situation has changed into a paradigmatic state of distanced I-you social antagonism.

In this case, the antagonism depends on an active and evaluative expression of emotion, insofar as the other viewer utters his or her derision and contempt non-verbally through laughter. This, in turn, entails an open type of objectively observable antagonism (particularly when you shush the disturber or even insult him or her). This is not the case when shame or guilt come into play. Here the antagonism is more passive and hidden, dependent as it is on what may well be an imagined standpoint. It is therefore experienced primarily by the person who is ashamed or feels guilty, but rarely by the others present. In fact, they may be entirely unaware of your feelings of shame or guilt. When shame gripped me as a boy, placing me in opposition to my parents, they probably did not even notice it; when I felt collective guilt as a Bavarian, my girlfriend might not have noticed it either. Under the conditions of viewing a film in the cinema, this type of antagonism is hardly ever observable by anyone else. But it certainly entails a very real emotional experience of phenomenological detachment. As Jack Katz makes clear, sha-

¹⁰ In this respect philosopher Hans Bernhard Schmid makes a significant phenomenological observation: "It seems that in everyday life, we experience only very few of our conscious states as our *personal conscious states*. In fact, it seems that we take our conscious states to be our own only where we have reason to think that our conscious states might be different from anyone's. Where this is not the case, we simply think what *one thinks* or *what is generally thought*, in an a-personal or anonymous mode, as it were. We do not take our thoughts or feelings to be our own in any meaningful sense." Hans Bernhard Schmid, "Shared Feelings. Towards a Phenomenology of Collective Affective Intentionality," in *Concepts of Sharedness. Essays on Collective Intentionality*, ed. Hans Bernhard Schmid, Katinka Schulte-Ostermann, and Nikos Psarros, pp.59–86, 78 (Heusenstamm: Ontos, 2008).

me distances us from a real or imagined community, while simultaneously creating a wish for reintegration so that the painful emotion will disappear.

Such antagonistic forms of I-you relationship strongly posit the fellow audience member as an opposed “other.” However, viewers can also be merely phenomenologically detached in moments of strong individuating immersion. When we are deeply involved in a moment of sadness or suspense it can reduce our awareness of others, thus distancing them in a non-antagonistic way. When we weep, for example, we are not only emotionally captivated by the movie in a passive way; we must actively lower an inner barrier to let the tears flow. “Through [this] act of inner capitulation,” explains Helmuth Plessner, “the person separates him- or herself from the situation of normal behavior in the sense of isolation.”¹¹ In silent weeping, we feel somehow cocooned, thus focusing predominantly on our lived-body interaction with the film and relegating the rest of the cinematic surroundings to the edge of our experience. Obviously, this is possible only in the case of inconspicuous weeping. The closer we are to overt crying, the more imminent the threat of shame. And as I have suggested, shame might change the situation by making the individual aware of the rest of the audience in an antagonistic way.¹²

Finally, at the other end of the continuum, we find what I call “phenomenologically close, mutual we-connections.” These experiences can be characterized by a high degree of awareness as well as the opposite of social antagonism: the viewers consciously experience something together and alike, not individually and parallel to each other. Once again, emotions and affects are particularly strong driving forces. In moments of strong affective we-connection the viewers not only share the basic joint commitment to watching the film together as part of an anonymous group. They also share their thoughts and feelings. One could say that their joint commitment to wat-

¹¹ Helmuth Plessner: *Philosophische Anthropologie* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1970), p. 159 (my translation).

¹² For a more detailed account, see Julian Hanich, “A Weep in the Dark. Tears and the Cinematic Experience,” in *Passionate Politics. The Cultural Work of American Melodrama*, ed. Ilka Saal and Ralph Poole (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

ching the movie collectively in the theater (the basic form of collective intentionality) is the *basso continuo* on which the various shared feelings play their melody (the strong form of collective intentionality).

I will illustrate this concept with another personal example. In fall 2006 the film *DEUTSCHLAND—EIN SOMMERMÄRCHEN* reached the German theaters. It documented the fortunes of the German soccer team during the World Cup that had taken place the preceding summer. Once the film arrived at the moment when the German player Oliver Neuville scores the long-awaited 1-0 goal against Poland, something unusual happened in the theater. Watching again what was arguably the single most intense scene of the World Cup (from the German perspective), we, the anonymous viewers in the multiplex auditorium in Berlin, exploded into a loud round of cheers and applause. Our joyful collective outburst created a momentary feeling of phenomenological closeness and, at the same time, expressed this feeling of proximity in an audible way: like a giant magnet, the situation centripetally drew the individual viewers together, evoking a fleeting feeling of mutual connection among anonymous strangers. The situation cannot be characterized by saying that I was happy and you were happy and all the others were *also* happy. Rather than being individually happy, we were happy together. It was a collective happiness.

To be sure, the sense of collective integration was based on our common nationality, and was thus exclusionary to all the Poles or people of other nationalities possibly present in the auditorium. Yet there are other, more innocent forms of we-connection. Think of laughter in relation to humor that is not based primarily on a nationalistic connection. When Buster Keaton, Jacques Tati, or Adam Sandler make us laugh, we exclude only those who do *not* find the scene funny. While the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion is also at work here, it is less dependent on an arbitrary identity marker like nationality. In fact, enabled by the specific spatial, social, and technological characteristics of the movie theater, the collective emotions are responsible for the emergence of something that was nonexistent before the beginning of the movie: a mutual we-connection among (largely) anonymous strangers. In the darkness of the theater these we-connections can momentarily transcend

such preexisting sociological categories as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. They might even become a source of pleasure since we often enjoy phenomenologically close we-connections at the cinema. This pleasurable feeling of collectivity arises together with the collective emotion and is causally dependent on it. In other words, the pleasurable feeling of emotional sharing is not the same as the collectively shared emotion, but derives from it. It is a sort of second-order emotion, a state of shared happiness.

Since these we-connections only emerge during and because of the collective cinematic experience, they are undeniably fleeting. As a particularly time-bound experience, watching a film means following a sequential process whose constant metamorphoses affect the status of viewer relationships. Hence the phenomenological distance between viewers is subject to permanent transformations. The audience members might feel pushed from a state of antagonistic distance to mutual closeness during one scene and pulled from such a sense of common connection to one of individuality in another. It would be wrong, however, to conceive of the audience as a monolithic block. The movie can create a momentary sense of collectivity in the audience; in the next instant the audience might disintegrate into various subgroups and even individual subjects. The case of laughter is instructive here. In films with various sources of humor—sick jokes, sophisticated wordplay, rough slapstick, gross humor, and parody—audience allegiances will change continuously. While some might feel excluded by one type of joke (say sexual innuendo), they might feel included by another (slapstick, for example), siding with one group of audience members at one moment and becoming part of a new subgroup at another. These laughing collectives are open, fleeting, and have a transient membership. Their emergence remains random, incalculable, and spontaneous.

The Source of Affective Viewer Interrelations

My third suggestion for bringing some order into the muddled field of affective viewer interrelations focuses on the *source* of the emotions and affects

involved: do they derive primarily from the aesthetic experience of the movie or from the social experience of the auditorium? Again, I will propose a continuum. At one end of the spectrum we find those states of audience interrelation *directly* related to the movie: they derive from emotions and affects that the film is intended to evoke. Take fear in horror films. Since the viewers share the frightening film as their collective intentional object and they may well equally appraise the film as threatening, they collectively experience fear while watching the film. The mutual we-connection coming from the collective cheering and applauding in *DEUTSCHLAND—EIN SOMMERMÄRCHEN* is another example of this. As is the collective screaming that accompanies the extremely shocking conclusion of *FRIDAY THE 13TH* (1980).

Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum are affective audience interrelations *indirectly* related to the movie; they are based on emotions evoked but not intended to be elicited by the film. The shame I felt in relation to my parents while watching *GONE WITH THE WIND* as a boy relied on the erotic arousal caused by the kissing couple. Since my parents were sitting next to me, the film became the source of a shameful experience. This shame was not, of course, inevitably experienced by other viewers at that moment. A slightly different case is the anger a viewer might feel at a fellow viewer's derisive laughter. Again, his or her emotion does not relate directly to the film, but this time is caused by another person's expression of emotion. I do not imagine someone else's perspective (as in shame), but I react to another person's actual response. Similarly, I might feel amused or respond condescendingly when someone reacts to an apparently unspectacular scene with a cry of shock. In these cases the audience's shared collective activity disintegrates into parallel individual activities.

At the other end of the continuum are affective audience interrelations entirely *unrelated* to the film: they originate in emotions outside the aesthetic experience of the movie and are anchored exclusively in the here and now of the cinema. There are, for example, antagonistic states deriving from emotions not evoked by the film like anger at someone talking on his cell phone; envy in the face of a happy couple openly embracing; disgust at an unkempt,

malodorous neighbor. We might also consider integrated states like the mutual arousal of the aforementioned couple.

Even if these kinds of audience interrelation may have a powerful effect on the viewer's aesthetic experience, however, they must mark the end of our line of inquiry. The emotions in which they originate are simply too contingent and remain too loosely connected to the aesthetic experience of the film proper. Nonetheless, it should be clear by now why I consider it essential to take collective viewing into account. The various types of affective viewer interrelation are possible *only* in the collective situation of the cinema; the presence of other viewers is the precondition for the whole spectrum of emotions from I-you antagonism to a sense of mutual we-connection. To put it bluntly, when I watch a movie alone I simply cannot have these experiences. For better or worse.

Notes

- Cacioppo John T. / Patrick, William: *Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: Norton, 2008)
- Collins, Randall: *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004)
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