

Cinema as *Afterward*: Images After Initial Consumption

Debates over cinema have long relied on the premise that cinema is defined by the conditions under which it is viewed. The darkened theatre is positioned as its essential site while the laptop and the phone are treated as degraded substitutes. A film streamed on a phone and the same film projected in a theatre deliver the same sequence of images, but distinguishing them requires a look into what each spectator does with those images afterward. This response argues that cinema exists in that *afterward*, in the reworking and recombination of images, on whatever screen consumption took place.

By consumption I mean the encounter with a film in the form its makers delivered, a fixed sequence watched from beginning to end. By what is done *afterward* I mean any act in which an image is transposed from its original position to being placed in relation to another image, another text, or the spectator's own life. The clip, the screenshot, the reaction image, and the scene recounted to a friend all perform this transposition. Film, in this account, refers to the delivered object. Cinema refers to what happens to the object once it has left authorial control.

The operation at stake is montage. For Eisenstein, montage is an idea that "DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another" (Eisenstein, p. 95), a term not present in the collided images. Therefore, any *afterward* of any image may constitute an image in itself, thus producing new(er) meaning. The shot of Leonardo DiCaprio raising a glass in *The Great Gatsby* (2013), a reaction image and meme, was lifted straight out of Luhrmann's sequence and circulated as such. Each time it was seen in the 2010s, it was set against a new second shot, a headline or a joke, and generated a new meaning. The cinema of that image was made by the spectators who cut and remixed it against something else. Four sites of meaning are

clarified: the image itself, the editing, its consumption, and a fourth one, the way it is re-consumed tenfold.

The creative act is thus relocated as a consequence. Maya Deren insisted that the photographic image "can and should be only the beginning" of that act (Deren, p.159). Her claim can now be extended in that a finished cinematic object has itself now become raw material, and the editing Deren reserved for the filmmaker is distributed across every spectator.

This definition of cinema today proposes that the cinematic art may have now become decentralized, and the practice of filmmaking has now incorporated this fourth site in the way trailers are cut for reposting, post-credits scenes are staged for pageantry and 'hype,' and internet creators abound with the creative freedom of re-cutting films. These acts extend the film's life and its sequence, without breaking the original film object. They do this by stacking each new meaning against the last, thus producing a relation that neither the film nor its distributors prepared for. As a result, the struggle over cinema's future takes place entirely in the interval after the credits, wherein the spectator either reproduces meaning or cuts against it.

Works Cited

Deren, Maya. "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality." *Daedalus*, vol. 89, no. 1, 1960, pp. 150–67. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026556>.

Eisenstein, Sergei. "The Dramaturgy of Film Form." *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, pp. 45-63.