Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone[1]

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Digital is now at the center of all discussions within the film industry. How does digital change the means of producing and directing films? What new opportunities does it offer to filmmakers? What business models does it imply? And will digital 3D become the norm? It also focuses the essential issues in theoretical discussions. Does digital radically change the identity of cinema, or does it merely push to the limit the combinatory logic that was present from the outset?[2] Does it modify the ontological relationship of film to the world and to humanity?[3] Does it lead to a loss of the indexical relationship?[4] What does it change at the level of directing and viewing films? Does film theory as it was constructed account for what is happening, or do we need a new approach, which would merge film theory into media theory? We are even witnessing the reappearance of that old theme of the death of cinema.[5]

What is striking in all these debates is that they take very little account (if they take any at all[6]) of a phenomenon that seems to me of very great importance for the consequences it entails: this is the potential that now exists on the vast majority of mobile phones to view and make films (77% of mobiles today are equipped with a mobile video application).The purpose of this chapter is to try to identify what changes mobile telephones have brought for the film viewer.

Following my usual semio-pragmatic approach, I propose to address this issue in terms of *communication space*.[7] By communication space, I mean a construction made by the theorist, a *heuristic* tool to reveal *differences* between the lived experiences of various communicative situations.

> Definition: a communication space is a space within which the combination of constraints leads *actants*[8] (transmitter and receiver) to share the same experience. This array of constraints governs the construction of the actors and the relationship between them, the choice of mode of production of meaning and affect, and the construction of the communication *operator* (from which the meaning will be produced).[9]

Identifying a communication space as a theoretical construct allows me to avoid entering the intractable debates raised by the famous question, "what is cinema?,"[10] while allowing the reader to know what I mean when I talk about film's communication space.

By film's communication space, I mean a space where communication actors share the experience of constructing a film: building a world which the viewer is invited to enter, a world within which various events occur (usually structured by narrative), and whose rhythm the spectator is encouraged to share (I call this the "phasing" process).[11]

We know that the cinema[12] was designed to promote this positioning (an enclosed darkened space with a big screen, projector in a separate cabin, immobile spectator, etc), and that it induced a regressive voyeuristic position (a relationship with the Freudian primal scene and the mirror stage). My focus here is on three situations: watching films on a mobile, watching films *made* on a mobile, and communicating through audiovisual language. In each case, I ask what is the space of communication (or rather the spaces of communication, since we are mostly at the intersection of several spaces) that needs to be constructed to reflect adequately what is happening in terms of our experience?

Watching Films on a Mobile

At first sight, everything seems to be the opposite of watching a film in a cinema when we watch on a mobile: small screen, poor sound and picture quality, unenclosed environment, mobility, and the subordination of the viewing subject to external circumstances. On a mobile phone, the communication operator is not really a film, as David Lynch insists, in a tone that expresses real anger:

> Now if you're playing a movie on a telephone, you'll never in a trillion years experience the film. You'll think you've experienced it, but you're cheated. It's such a sadness that you think you've seen the movie on your fucking telephone. Get real![13]

Lynch is not alone in this feeling: just look at any internet site where people report their experiences: "Watching a film on your mobile seems quite depressing," "Watching a film while walking along on a postage stamp size screen with rotten sound doesn't interest me," "Bursting your retina guaranteed after five minutes," "it's only to show off at the office," "give the impression of being ahead of your time." Theorists are for the most part equally skeptical. Jan Simons called the first part of his article "YouTube but iPhone: what are the films shot with a mobile phone?," "The end of cinema as we have known it?" And when he concludes with the question: "are we still talking about film?," it is clear that for him the answer is negative: this does not belong to the communication space of film.[14]

Fig. 1: "The end of cinema as we have known it," or a new communication space?

Yet, without any contradiction of our first impression, the mobile *is* often part of the filmic communication space. Mobile phone operators have understood it is in their interest (especially since some are also involved in film production[15]) to build on the desire of mobile users for cinema, and to provide a range of promotional elements for films being shown, or about to be shown, in cinemas (jingles, stills, trailers, teasers, brief excerpts and such like.). One example among many: to launch the Luc Besson film, ARTHUR AND THE INVISIBLES (December 2006), Orange and EuropaCorp (Besson's production company) established a cross-media operation that included decorating Orange shops in the colors of the film, creating a special Christmas pack based on its themes, sending the film trailer to all customers and streaming every day at noon – in what was a world first – twenty-one mini-sequences [*mobiséances*] consisting of two minutes of the film. On Sunday at 15.00, a compilation of all the episodes aired during the week was offered.[16] The mobile phone also offers, through its web connection, opportunities to learn about filmmakers and films, to read reviews, find out where a movie is playing, and to book a seat in advance. The relationship between film and movie phone works well in both directions: first, the film is a kind of bonus for the promotion of the mobile; and on the other hand, the mobile is a compound of the "filmgoer" that is in us and of the "cinema machine" (Metz) to which it contributes (both these elements, as Valentina Re observes, serve "to

ensure the presence of the film in the world, to guarantee, incentivise and guide its consumption").[17]

We might note here, however, that if there is any inscription of the mobile in cinema space, what is seen on the mobile is not a film but what Gérard Genette calls a "paratext," and elements of the paratext have been designed (or at least formatted) for the mobile. Even the fragments of films streamed are chosen to meet the particular conditions of viewing on mobiles: avoiding wide shots, sequences with high emotional intensity and rapid editing.

Apart from these promotional items, there are a large number of productions specifically designed for the mobile phone. Thus we see Orange encouraging customers to subscribe to the film option by offering access to 3,500 videos "specially adapted to the mobile." Nor are other operators standing still, and the audience is growing rapidly – even if this trend is slower in the West than in the Far East, particularly India, Japan and China – to the point that one could describe the mobile as "the fourth screen" (after the cinema, television and the computer screens).[18]

Three broad categories of production can be distinguished. The first takes the form of a series of mini-episodes [*mobisodes*] lasting between one and three minutes. Many of these productions are spin-offs from existing television series, such as, for example, 24 CONSPIRACY, with a different cast and production company from the original series 24, and coordinated with the creation of a video game and a comic-book in a dynamic process of *transmedia storytelling*.[19] Others are original series like THE SUNSET HOTEL, a mixture of thriller and soap opera, or LOVE AND HATE, a quasi "reality" series (following the daily lives of a dysfunctional family).[20] GREEN PORNO (USA, 2008) by Isabella Rossellini (daughter of Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini)[21] has acquired a real cult following.[22] Each episode begins with a statement about how "if I were a spider, a bee, a dragonfly, a fly, a praying mantis…" Then Isabella appears disguised as an insect (the set and costumes are made of paper), usually as the male of the species in question, and mimes sexual intercourse to completion. All these productions are closer to the communication space of television than that of film. The viewer seems to expect that they will give the same pleasure s/he has in front of the television, with the mobile serving merely as an external extension of the domestic receiver, in the "non-places" (Marc Augé) and dead times of life.[23] We are in the realm of "interstitial consumption."[24]

The second category of productions exists outside both television and film space, within the space of Internet communication.[25] In terms of form and content, this is an extremely heterogeneous category, according to Paola Vocci, who has studied such productions in China and concludes that they "defeat any reasonably manageable categorization."[26] Shot with the most diverse devices (cameras, camcorders, mobile phones) by professionals, and also very often by amateurs, or artists who did not originally work in film (often sculptors), these

productions use every kind of short form, and are characterized by a strong hybrid tendency – a mixture of documentary and fiction, documentary and video art, animation and digital art, diary and experimental cinema, of sex, gore, trash and politics, professionalism and parodies, and the like – and by a tendency to work with "hyperstimuli."[27] The viewer is encouraged to exercise the "energetic" rather than the "fictionalizing" mode of consumption.[28] By making them available at any time or place, the mobile offers these productions a space of circulation and consumption that they would never have had otherwise.

The third category is that of feature films, for despite the comments of internet users mentioned above, and despite the skepticism of theoreticians, the practice of watching features on mobiles does exist. While I know of no statistics on this, the fact that telecoms companies offer thousands of feature films to watch on mobiles, and that there are advertising campaigns on the theme – "watch movies when you want to or on the go" (Sony Entertainment Network) – suggests that there is sufficient take-up to warrant their interest. Chantal Duchet has noted that Nokia promoted its new mobile model 93 by offering previews of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 3 (2006) starring Tom Cruise.[29] In Italy, there is even a channel completely dedicated to features for mobiles: Sky Cinema Mobile.[30]

In fact, it seems that we are now witnessing the emergence of a spectator less bothered by the small screen, a viewer born in front of the television, used to playing on his mobile, and therefore ready to watch anything on the mini-screen. This does not prevent him from enjoying the big screen (and even the very large screen) and the apparatus of cinema (including 3D projection), but why not take advantage of the mobile screen that is always available in his pocket? The major problem of viewing feature films on mobiles that remains is managing duration. A film of one and a half hours (or more) cannot be seen in one go in most mobile situations. And even if the viewer plans ahead to adapt their viewing to a journey, (for instance by choosing a bus or subway route according to what one wants to watch), s/he must accept a fragmented mobile viewing.[31] We might describe this new positioning as a move from the position of a spectator to that of a reader: unlike what happens for the performance (of a play, or a film in the cinema), we rarely read a novel from beginning to end in one sitting, and even if we might think that the quality of the reading experience would be better in a continuous session, nobody would dream of criticizing a reading because it was often interrupted. Why then should this not apply to film? Why not accept different degrees of spectatorial investment?

But here another problem arises in comparison to the book, which is related to the rate [*défilement*] of consumption. With a film, the speed of viewing does not depend on the viewer. Today, however, this problem has been partially solved by the invention of the pause[32] and reverse buttons.[33] I can now, as when reading a book, re-view a passage, or suspend the flow of the film, if I want to doze, waiting to resume its course in better conditions, or simply because external constraints

force me to stop. One thing is certain, however: any film when viewed on a mobile becomes a film formatted for mobile (= fragmented), whether this formatting is carried out in advance or during the individual spectator's viewing.

We have three categories, then, each inhabiting a different communication space (the spaces of television, the Internet and film), all spaces that intersect with the new communication space which is that of film seen on mobile. In this space, the viewer oscillates between three kinds of positioning. On the one hand, moments of strong investment, where the surrounding emptiness isolates the viewer mentally (we see spectators forget to get off at their planned subway station or bus stop because they are caught up in what they are watching). The mobile, as Nanna Verhoeff has written, is like "a remote control for the subject itself. Like a pocket teleporter, it transports us while being on the move."[34] These are different kinds of immersion from those experienced in front of the *silver screen* of cinema: here, entering the space of the film is the result of personal effort. Rather than the apparatus effacing the screen, it is the desire for fiction that is in us, together with our previous experience of cinema. Moreover, the relationship to the film is more personal (I hold the screen in *my* hand), also more intimate (the mobile is the most personal of objects). But such moments of investment can only last for a limited time.

At other times, the viewer, while continuing to look at what is happening on the mobile, starts looking at the mobile itself, suddenly paying attention to the outside world (the mobile is an object that belongs to the outside world). The viewer is then *in between*. This divided positioning, ambivalent, absent-present, is characteristic of the mobile: with a mobile I am here, but at the same time also there, with my family, friends, colleagues, anyone who can call me at any time.[35] Watching a film can only overcome this dividedness[36] momentarily, by bridging between the film world and the outside world.

Finally, and occasionally (when engaged in downloading, saving, stopping or rewinding), a tactile relationship is established with the screen. While I would never touch the cinema screen, my thumb starts to navigate the mobile screen, a screen that is not a window but an opaque surface, "a dirty window." Nanna Verhoeff, following Bill Brown (referring to the promotional video for the Nintendo DS), offers a little story to help us understand the nature of this experience, both mundane and magical: "A boy approaches the dirty rear windows of a van and writes 'GO' with his fingers, upon which the van drives away."[37] Some productions inscribe this interactivity in their apparatus (*sharing the uncertainty* allows us to move our finger on the screen to advance the story).[38] It's also such a movement of the thumb that will allow me to share with one click a film (or any other production) with others: the mobile encourages sharing; with mobiles, viewing becomes part of the movement of participatory cultures analyzed by Jenkins: fans, bloggers, gamers, but also groups of friends, diverse acquaintances, family members and the like.[39]

The characteristic feature of all these various experiences is that they presuppose, to varying degrees and according to various modalities, a recognition by the viewer of the specific object of the mobile phone. The communication operator is not only constituted by the productions available for viewing, but by the mobile itself.

I propose to call this new communication space, *film space p* (the space of mobile phone film).[40] The negative effects produced by this new communication space have often been noted: a trivialization of viewing due to the fact that the mobile is a multi-purpose device[41] (the issue of convergence);[42] the porosity created between culture and entertainment; the tyranny of the fragment and of easily digestible short form; participation in a "snack culture,"[43] in which "we devour pop culture like candy or potato chips, in convenient packages containing pre-packed morsels that are easy to chew with increasing frequency and maximum speed."[44] This analysis seems to me to require nuancing. On the one hand, convergence is not a new phenomenon in cinema: the film show was traditionally a mix of various things (advertising, sung interludes, dances, magic tricks, selling candy and other products); only the degree of convergence has changed. Nor is the mixture of culture and entertainment new: a "film" seen in the cinema is most often nothing more than entertainment. Even fragmentary viewing is hardly new: do we really watch a film from start to finish in the cinema? Who has not yielded to the temptation to look sideways at a neighbor, or to lose concentration to think about something else, or even just to doze? As for cultural value: the range of films available on mobiles bears comparison with those available to cinemas (and vice versa). So there is little reason to despise what is happening with the mobile.

To characterize what is happening throughout the communication space of *film p*, I will make use of the notion of *lightness* proposed by Paola Vocci:

> I borrow and adapt the notion of *lightness* from Milan Kundera's association between the multiplicity of insignificant events and their deep (and in Kundera's terms, "unbearable") meaning in defining human existence. By describing smaller-screen movies, movie-making, and viewing as *light* realities, I want to point to their "insignificant" weight in terms of production costs, distribution size, profit gains, intellectual or artistic ambitions, but also their deep meaning in defining an alternative way of seeing and understanding the world. Paraphrasing Kundera, in our contemporary social and cultural space, we relentlessly see smaller-screen realities, we cross paths with them, we might even notice some extraordinary coincidences between them and other realities, but we do not really pay attention to them as we do not recognize their meaningful attractiveness. "But is not an event in fact more significant and noteworthy the greater the number of fortuities necessary to bring it about? Chance and chance alone has a message for us."[45]

The Viewer of Films Shot on a Mobile

The productions that are seen on mobiles, as discussed above, have rarely been shot on phones (although some may be). Yet today, more and more films are being made with a mobile, and these are not only very short films or even more conventional "shorts,"[46] but also feature-length films.

In terms of spectator experience, we must recognize that a film made on a mobile is not necessarily seen as a film made on a mobile. A number of films shot on mobiles are seen simply as "films" (within the meaning of that term defined at the beginning of this article), that is to say, as inhabiting "film space." This phenomenon has assumed remarkable proportions in Africa, where we see films shot on mobiles becoming a substitute for 35mm film. The process had already started with video and camcorders, but found its ideal tool in the ubiquitous mobile. The most striking example is undoubtedly that of Nigeria's Nollywood: in Lagos, one of the three leading film production centers in the world (along with Hollywood and Bollywood), a significant amount of production is now carried out on mobiles. The films are B-movies, often fantasy or detective films, dramas with local color; "poor" films certainly, but nonetheless "films." Obviously, the main reason for this use of mobiles is economy, but it is important not to overlook the exceptional shooting convenience offered by this new "camera." "This camera has liberated moviemakers from the tyrannies of the 35mm set. Finally I can truly say that I film what I like," says the South African filmmaker Aryan Kaganof, director of the feature film SMS SUGAR BLUE (2005) which tells the story of a pimp strolling through the city of Johannesburg on Christmas Eve with four of its high-class luxury whores ("a feel-good story on a dark evening, for the modern urban viewer," according to the producer). "We shot with up to eight Sony Ericsson W900i mobile phones, and the results are beyond our expectations. The results of the blow-up tests were amazing."[47] The fact that in Africa such material does not generally reach cinemas, but circulates on DVD (and hence is most often seen on television screens) does not change the fact that the spectatorial position is that of a film viewer. For the vast majority of Africans, the cinema is no longer the privileged place of film, even for films shot in 35mm, because the theaters have almost disappeared from African cities, after viewers deserted them for safety reasons.

While this kind of production is undoubtedly most developed in Africa (although India should also be mentioned), we find the same trend around the world. A recent example is the movie OLIVE, released in Los Angeles in 2012. This tells the story of an encounter between a ten-year-old girl, an old woman, an obese man and a foreigner to the United States. Its director, Hooman Khalili, is not only determined that his film be read as "cinema," but he even admits his ambition to be an Oscars contender. The way that this film was made shows that the economic issue (it cost less than $500,000) and a well thought-out advertising

strategy (there was much talk on the Internet of OLIVE being "the first film shot entirely with a cell phone," which is incorrect, but created, as we say today, "a buzz"…), justify the choice of mobile shooting. As far as the film itself is concerned, everything has been done to ensure that the viewer is not aware that it was filmed on mobile. On the technical level, for example, a 35mm lens was placed in front of the smartphone lens to improve quality. Moreover, the film features famous actors, such as Gena Rowlands as the heroine.[48] In this case, the mobile is effaced by the overall effect of the fiction, and the viewer becomes simply a filmgoer.

In other situations, however, the fact that the film is shot on a mobile phone becomes the major focus of attention. I will take here the example of the Pocket Film Festival (held annually at the Forum des Images in Paris). Summing up the festival's first edition in 2005, its founder, Benoît Labourdette, admitted his astonishment: "The incredible conclusion is that films shot with mobile phones are, paradoxically, for the most part cinema films, conceived for the big screen. One would have imagined the opposite, before artists took up this new tool, this new form of camera."[49] We are therefore in the communication space of film. However, even if these products are "films," either short films or features (the Pocket Film Festival imposes no time-limit), things are not so simple. It would very probably be disappointing for the spectators of the festival to discover that the filmmakers were not concerned about the differences between shooting with a camera and with a phone (that they just wanted to make "a film," as they could have done with a camera). If we go to the Pocket Film Festival, it is above all to see films shot on a mobile. The festivalgoer is already wondering: what did the filmmaker find to do differently with a mobile phone, compared to a normal camera? And it is this issue that will dominate how s/he views the films on offer.

Certainly, not all the films screened at the Pocket Film Festival meet this expectation. Many of them are just "films," sometimes also good films, but films that do not take into account the specificity of the mobile phone compared to a camera.

I propose to call that space in which consideration of the specificity of the mobile phone governs both the production and playback/consumption [*lecture*] of films, the communication space *p film*. As with the communication space of *film p* (the film made to be seen on a mobile) emphasis is placed here on the medium,[50] where it is up to the viewer to adapt to the portable object, and learn to use it, with *p film*, we are in a meta-reading in which the mobile creates a reservoir of questions that the viewer has to ask if s/he wants to take these films made on mobiles seriously.

Let us try to list some of these issues. What connection does film have with the phone function of the mobile (which is still its primary function)? There are many films on this theme, but often they simply illustrate more or less cleverly small events related to the mobile in everyday life: no answer, connection problems (I

hear nothing), misunderstanding (this is not the right number), loss of the mobile (in Raymond Daniel's THE LOST PHONE, this leads to a mini-crime fiction). More subtly, Alain Fleischer stresses the connection to the ear and speech: in A FILM WITHOUT FILM, he shoots, with the phone to his ear, while a voice guides him from street to street in search of a mythical place of cinema. In CHINESE TRACKS, he shoots while talking on the phone and walking through an incredible maze of streets, searching for the home of the most beautiful woman in Beijing. The originality of this way of filming is that the viewer does not see what Fleischer sees, but it is as if the ear sees… thereby creating a gap between three representations: the representation given by the speech that describes the direction to be followed, the representation of what is offered to the lens of the phone and then to Fleischer's ear, and finally the representation corresponding to what he sees and what the film's viewer later discovers, when Fleischer turns his head.

What connection does film have with all the features that have been added to mobile phones (and they are constantly increasing)? In TOTEM (Delphine Marceau), we witness the accumulation of all the objects that the phone replaces: computer, television, radio, still camera, video camera, flashlight, notebook. Conversely, MULTIPURPOSE OBJECTS (also by Delphine Marceau) shows us that phoning with a mobile is like phoning with a television, a radio, a computer, a pencil, a flashlight (we see people holding these objects to their ears and mouths to call). In GPS YOURSELF (Remi Boulnois), a man throws his phone in the air so that it shows a satellite view of where he is. Some films push an idea to the point of absurdity: if a mobile can do anything, why not use it as a razor (EXTENSION OF THE MOBILE DOMAIN, by J. B. Pouy), or as soap (in SOAP by Sylvie Moisan, we see from the point of view of the mobile a woman using it as soap in the shower)? Note that in both these cases the substitution gag rests on an analogy of form.

How does film deal with the fact that the mobile is a social object that is involved in certain types of relationship? Relationships with others: the mobile is often used to locate its owner; "where are you?," as we know, is the question most often asked in a mobile communication.[51] Relationship to the self: films on mobiles are often ego-centered in the form of a diary (see for example the feature by Joseph Morder, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE THE SPRING WITH SOMEONE (2007),[52] or the short by Rachid Djaïdani, THE BROWN LINE (2010), in which the author shares his feelings during the nine months of his girlfriend's pregnancy.

How does the filmmaker handle the poor quality of the mobile phone image (due to pixilation[53]) to benefit from it, as a positive effect for his film? In NOCTURNE FOR THE KING OF ROME (John Charles Fitoussi, 2006),[54] this pixilation is made diegetic and subjectified: the film tells the story of an old musician who returns to Rome, years after the violent death of someone he loved (it was war-

time and Italy was under fascist rule). He is old and has partially lost both his eyesight and his lucidity (he mixes up different eras), and the film shows us the world as he sees it, through a permanent fog. In SOTCHI 255 (Jean-Claude Taki, 2010),[55] pixilation becomes a part of the film's aesthetic: shot with different mobile phones, in the way that a painter works with several brushes, Taki plays on the differences in quality of images taken by these various phones (in terms of definition, grain, field of vision, density) to give a specific tone to different parts of the film. Other films engage in forms of pictorialism: thus, in THE PEARL (2006), Margaret Lantz depicts a young girl who uses the phone as a mirror to turn herself into Vermeer's *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* (also known as *The Girl with the Turban*); and the resemblance between the painting and the film image is staggering, but this effect only works because the pixilation gives the image a texture that evokes the brush-strokes of the painting. However, as the image definition of phones has significantly improved in recent years, so the deliberate use of pixilation is becoming less interesting from a creative and aesthetic standpoint.

Fig. 2: Jean-Claude Taki's SOTCHI 255 (2010): filmed on a mobile phone and distributed on-line.

How does using a mobile affect filming? Mostly this is a matter of the relationship between the phone and the hand. The mobile functions like a prosthesis, an "extension of the hand."[56] The viewer sees what the hand sees, rather than the eye. Films made on mobile phones abound with images reflecting the immediacy and

the impulsiveness of the act of filming (filming with a phone is like pointing): seeing and shooting, there is no time to think or even to frame; what matters is that people understand the things and events that are around you. Such an approach is particularly suited to filming in the street (as the Italian activist Delbono has done, recording the plight of those who sleep in the street in PAURA, 2008). Another influence of the mobile is to encourage filming vertically, that is to say, when the height of the image is greater than the width. Alessandro Amaducci has rightly noted that the mobile gives the filmmaker the double possibility of framing that he already knows from still photography, namely the choice between vertical and horizontal format.[57] We know that in still photography, vertical framing is usually called "portrait," and it is often used in mobile films (such as THE PEARL).

Many other questions could no doubt be explored, but these examples will suffice to show that the spectator at the Pocket Film Festival is very different from the normal cinema spectator, who never considers what camera was used to make a film, much less how this might have influenced the film. Even when it is a 3D movie or an IMAX presentation, these are not questions that the audience asks. They go to see a 3D film for its special effects, and not to wonder about the technical resources that make these possible. However, at an event such as the Pocket Film Festival, the interest in the films is closely linked to the fact that these films are shot on mobiles.

I propose to call this kind of viewing which speculates about the nature of the production apparatus the *"making of" mode*. Any reading which turns upon issues of making belongs to this *making of* mode. The consequence of using this mode is often to reduce interest in the content: "how is it done?" outweighs "what does the film mean?" In 1999, writing about the space of amateur film for the journal *Communications*, I noted that these filmmakers tend to be more interested in the technical know-how involved in making a film (what kind of film stock? what focal length of lens? what lighting source?) than in its content.[58] The fact is that today, especially with mobile phones, we are all amateurs; hence the increasingly frequent use of this mode and the temptation to reduce "communication" to matters of technique.[59]

From the Viewer to the User of Film Language

So far, I have dealt with changes in the positioning of the spectator brought about by mobile phones. But the influence of the mobile extends much further. Just as every individual has an implicit competence in the language into which s/he is born, so today, we all have some competence in the language of cinema, a language into which it could be said we have also been born. The range of shot scales, various types of camera movements, patterns of editing – in short, what is

sometimes called (incorrectly) the "grammar" of film – is no longer a secret for anyone. The process was initiated by television, which has become an excellent teacher of the language of film. However, until recently this competence was only exercised in terms of reception. Even in relation to family films, the *making* of amateur film has never involved more than a tiny fraction of the population. Now the mobile has created a radically new situation: this competence can be mobilized in production by everyone. In my opinion, this is the single most remarkable and socially significant aspect of the cameraphone. Our position as filmgoer is paralleled by a positioning as producer of audiovisual sequences. Cinema is no longer only a matter of films but has become a language of communication.

If the reality of the phenomenon is new, the idea itself is not new. Between 1948 and 1949, Alexandre Astruc declared: "The future of film lies entirely in its possibilities for development as a language." He was thinking then about the prospects opened up by 16mm.[60] However, two points should be made. On the one hand, when Astruc spoke of filmic language to compare it to the use of verbal language, he was thinking of the literary use of language: "The cinema has had its chroniclers and photographers, now it awaits its Stendhal, its Shakespeare, its Pascal, Valery and Proust."[61] For Astruc, the development of film language was viewed not only as part of what I have called the "space of film communication" (he was certainly thinking of "films"), but within a framework that is the counterpart of literature, where one can speak of the communication space "film as art." On the other hand, Astruc suggested that the language of images will change; and commenting on his metaphor of "camera-pen," he wrote: "This image has a specific meaning. It means that film will gradually tear itself away from the tyranny of the visual image for its own sake, from the anecdotal story, and the here and now, to become a means of writing as flexible and as subtle as written language." He also added: this means that "no area should be forbidden."[62] In particular, the language of film must be able, like natural language, to express abstract reasoning: "Today a Descartes would retreat to his room with a 16mm camera and film and write the discourse on method in film, because a *Discourse on Method* today could only be adequately expressed in film."[63] Later he quotes Feyder: "I can make a film of *The Spirit of Laws*." I am not sure that the language of film will make possible something like the *Discourse on Method* or *The Spirit of Laws*; indeed I think that this amounts to a semiologically erroneous conception of film language, which can certainly communicate and generate thought, but not in the same way as languages. And the expression of abstract reasoning is certainly not its forte, since there is no abstract vocabulary, a lack of logical connectors, and the difficulty of producing an argumentative discursive construction without the use of language, to name but a few considerations.

However, what is undoubtedly true is that the mobile has changed the status of film language (and I stress *status*, rather than nature). Specifically, what has changed is that film language is circulated [*vehiculé*] by the cameraphone. For ex-

ample, the mobile leads to the passage from an impersonal utterance, as Christian Metz described it (a description that I think is still valid),[64] to a personal utterance: it is the mobile and not film language that says "*I.*" Note also that this change in status is not an obligation: the mobile can also be used to make a fiction film in which the enunciative structure is not personal. It is the use of mobile as an everyday tool, the fact that it belongs to an individual (as opposed to the traditional phone that belongs to a place or family), which enables it to give this personal value to the images it produces. The process is the reverse of "cinema," where impersonal utterance comes first, although it is also possible to use a camera to say I (as in any number of diary films); with the mobile, which is a private object, even an intimate one (psychoanalysts see it as a "surrogate me"),[65] what is produced is first and foremost personal.

More generally, the mobile gives its images their *deictic* value, conveying, for example, the sense of "here" and "now." It is no accident, as I have already noted, that the question most frequently asked in conversations on mobiles is "where are you?" And remarkably, thanks to the video function, it is now possible to answer this question by showing the caller directly where we are: a shot of the Grand Canal from the *vaporetto* which is taking me to Saint Marks, a shot of the facade of Notre Dame, a shot of the country road where I'm taking a walk.

The mobile has achieved the dream of immediate communication with the moving image, a dream that was portrayed historically before the existence of cinema and television. Thus Robida, in *The Twentieth Century* (1882), envisaged the "telephonoscope," a technology that could bring distant scenes into the home and fulfill the mission of "suppressing absence" by facilitating face to face communication in real time over long distances.[66] This dream was also shared by some filmmakers, notably Dziga Vertov, who envisioned a "method of radio transmission of images."[67] We might note that the mobile actually goes beyond these dreams (which television already realized), since they only envisaged communication between fixed points, whereas now, with one click and wherever I happen to be, I can send my films to any individual, group or even to an entire community (via a mailing list).

But there is even more. The mobile has given film language real interactivity, an interactivity based on the possibility of immediate transmission of images and words. Even if a conversation by mobile is not quite like a conversation by means of natural language [ordinary speech], it is now much closer. The mobile makes possible, for example, an exchange of videos in "copresence": two or more people can communicate with Bluetooth and images that are exchanged face to face. It would be interesting to see if these exchanges of videos are based on "rules" similar to those that govern conversation by language. All the questions that Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni asks about verbal interactions deserve to be considered:[68] is there any word-play? how is the interaction structured? what kind of interaction is taking place (a dialogue, a conversation, debate...)?, what are the

objectives of this interaction? One thing is certain, we are now witnessing interactions in a hitherto undefined filmic language.

The theoretical consequence of this analysis is that it must now be worth considering whether the theory of cinema needs to be distinguished from that of film language. Indeed film language has now become independent of films. This process had already made a serious start through television, but with the mobile, a tool that is always in the pocket, film language can be mobilized when and where we want, not to make "films" or "cinema," but simply to communicate. According to Carole Rivière,

> The cameraphone brings photography into the 21st century as an agreeable form of communication or *language*, one that can be used by anyone, anytime, anyhow. In this sense, it makes photography "commonplace," stripping it of every intention other than for one's own pleasure and the pleasure of expressing something in the immediate present.[69]

Rivière is talking about photography, but the same applies to film language. Using film language no more implies any intention to make "a film" or "cinema" than using language implies making literature. In fact, if one starts to think about it, this distinction between "films" and "film language" has existed from the outset. In previous articles, I have shown that within the space of the family, the family film is not (and should not be considered as) "cinema;"[70] and other than in a few cases, such as that of Painlevé, the scientific film also does not belong in "cinema space," any more than does the industrial film (except when it is by Resnais). The key difference today is that "film language," when it is not used to make "cinema," is no longer confined to certain areas of specialized communication, but is mobilized by the space of everyday communication. The era of film language has truly arrived.

Translated by Ian Christie