

University of Groningen

Watching a Film With Others

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Published in:
Screen

DOI:
[10.1093/screen/hju026](https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hju026)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Final author's version (accepted by publisher, after peer review)

Publication date:
2014

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hanich, J. (2014). Watching a Film With Others: Towards a Theory of Collective Spectatorship. *Screen*, 55(3), 338-359. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hju026>

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WATCHING A FILM WITH OTHERS
TOWARDS A THEORY OF COLLECTIVE SPECTATORSHIP

[A revised version of this pre-print has been accepted for publication in
Screen. Volume 55, Issue 3, 2014.]

In this article I suggest that collectively watching a film in *silent attention* should be regarded as a joint action. When silently watching a film together in a cinema (or elsewhere) the viewers are not engaged in individual actions that run parallel to each other – watching a film *with others* often implies a *shared activity* based on a collective intention in which the viewers jointly attend to a single object: the film. To be sure, this type of joint action is not in every respect comparable to more emphatic and skilful collective activities like ballet dancing, singing in a choir or marching in a peace parade. Compared to playing a piece of orchestral music together or playing badminton together, watching a film in silent attention is a somewhat special case. First, it is also *possible* that we do it alone. Plus, the common goal of *watching the film* is rather easily achieved. This simple – but, in fact, tricky – aspect should not make us oblivious to the essentially and irreducibly social experience of the theatrical situation and the joint action it may involve.¹

Proponents of diverse film theoretical approaches such as cultural studies, cognitive film theory, film phenomenology or reception aesthetics consider the viewer actively involved with the film: he or she decodes and interprets the film, consciously builds hypotheses and draws inferences, fills blanks and omissions, visually imagines what is suggested but not shown etc. This is not to deny that watching a film is simultaneously characterised by a certain passivity, particularly when compared to other more prototypical actions. Granting a passive as well as an active *doing* makes it possible to ignore the much discussed, but overly broad and fuzzy distinction between an active and a passive viewer: while passive in some sense, the viewer is simultaneously active in another.

Now, it is, of course, a thorny issue to define actions.² Nevertheless, I believe that ‘watching a film’ consists of various characteristics that should allow us to treat it as an action proper. ‘Watching a film’ can be considered a *mental* action once we devote our *ongoing attention* and *interest* to the film in order to *follow it to its end*. This act is *voluntary*, not only in the broad sense of ‘under my control,’ but also in the sense that is specific to human action: It is motivated by my own *desire* as well as my *intention* to find out how the film progresses. I seem to have a free choice and nothing stands in the way of me performing it. Moreover, once we agree that some doings are actions even if

our effort is limited and happens with no great strain, 'watching a film' should be regarded as a *sustained* action. Inversely, we would have trouble with defining 'watching a film' as an action *only* if we, firstly, restricted the definition of action to overt *bodily* actions like paying for admission, but not allow *mental* actions like 'paying' attention to a film; and secondly if we would only include *events* like walking to the cinema, but not *states* like purposely watching moving images for ninety minutes with the intention of following the progress of the film to its end, and of enjoying it. In the comparable case of meditation, we would most likely have no problem in granting that meditation is an instance of a sustained action. Silently watching a film is somewhat like meditating: it is a *sustained mental act* that lasts some ninety minutes or so.³

But if you as spectator and I as spectator and all the others in the audience as spectators are all active, sitting in the same cinema watching the same film in a silent, attentive way – does it sound outlandish to argue that in some important sense you, I and the others are acting jointly? Just compare the qualitative difference between the silent attentive audience and, say, a crowd of people sitting in a train compartment or sleeping next to each other in a hospital room: while we might agree that the former *share* an activity, we would hesitate to argue that the latter act jointly. Moreover, it can hardly be denied that there is a substantial phenomenological difference between watching a film in a cinema *alone* and following the film as part of a silent attentive audience. I will therefore propose that silently watching a film as part of a collective is a shared activity based on a *we-intention* and a *joint attention* focused on a collective intentional object.

There is no doubt that the silent collectivity of the theatrical experience rarely becomes thematic in a full-fledged sense: the audience predominantly experiences jointly without reflectively experiencing each other. I therefore need to emphasise that the viewer's conscious experience of others is predominantly a phenomenon at the *margins* of consciousness that *can* become explicit, but it certainly *does not have to be* reflected upon. This implies, in turn, that even when an audience pays 'full' attention to the film, the individual viewer has not 'forgotten' the other co-present spectators – they have simply receded to the fringe of the field of consciousness. What is more, throughout the film this *basso continuo* of pre-reflective *acting* jointly may be supplemented by *feeling* jointly. During specific moments of high emotionality the collectivity can reach a higher level: shared *activity* plus shared *feeling*. Again, this is not to say that these shared feelings are necessarily fully reflected upon, but they may more likely become part of the audience's focal consciousness. Thus in special cases the collective experience can become thematic in the strong sense of the word.

If we look at historical instructions on how to watch films, we would have to locate the ideal type of the silent attentive audience at the far end of Vachel Lindsay's 'Conversational Theatre'. The American poet's model of a cinema

with no sound except the critically conversing, intellectually active audience murmuring 'like a pleasant brook' is the prototype of a public sphere of communicative exchange.⁴ In 1915 Lindsay proposed this way of film exhibition and reception to local exhibitors, encouraging them to make viewers discuss and aesthetically judge the picture with their friends in a kind of running commentary.

But what would be a good example for a silent attentive audience? A perfect instance can be found in Peter Kubelka's 'Invisible Cinema', designed for the Anthology Film Archive in New York. Its alleged sole function was to bring 'the filmed message from the author to the beholder with a minimum of loss' and in which 'the film can completely dictate the sensation of space,' as the Austrian inventor of the Invisible Cinema put it.⁵ No latecomers were admitted; apart from some exit signs installed for safety reasons, everything was kept in black; the elevated seats with their 'shell-like structure' were designed to shield the viewer's upper body and to make it impossible to see one's neighbours to the sides as well as in the front and in the back. While this arrangement might sound like the *antithesis* of joint action and collective experience, almost the opposite is true: the 'aspect of community' played a significant role in Kubelka's concept. Kubelka did not conceive of the viewing situation as a *solitary* confrontation with the film, but had specifically planned the cinema with the *collective* aspect in mind. In 1974, shortly after the Invisible Cinema was closed, he described its collective dimension:

You knew that there were many people in the room, *you could feel their presence*, and you also would hear them a little bit, but in a very subdued way, so they would not disturb your contact with the film. A sympathetic community was created, a community in which people liked each other. In the average cinema where the heads of other people are in the screen, where I hear them crunching their popcorn, where the latecomers force themselves through the rows and where I have to hear their talk, which takes me out of the cinematic reality which I have come to participate in, I start to dislike the others. Architecture has to provide a structure in which one is in *a community that is not disturbing to others*.⁶

Hence even in extreme cases of silent attention, the collectivity of the audience makes itself felt. The Conversational Theatre and the Invisible Cinema involve two very different types of collectivity, but *both* are collective nonetheless.

I will go even further and suggest that collectively watching a film in silent attention should be considered as a kind of *joint action*. This claim rests, of course, on the question of how one defines 'watching a film with others'. Arguing that the audience's joint action is based on joint attention presupposes that there is attention to the film in the first place. People who talk, who sleep, who kiss, who send text messages on their cell phones do not attend (let alone attend *jointly*) in the emphatic sense of the word – and hence do not *watch* the film in the way I define it here. This is, of course, not to deny that people may temporarily drift away. By granting that not all viewers in the audience watch

the film together all of the time, my definition is not blind to the widespread phenomenon of distraction and diversion. However, *those* who focus their attention on the film – that is, most viewers most of the time – contribute their individual share to the joint action of the attentive audience.⁷ In a phrase: those who *do* watch the film, watch it with others – and therefore watch it jointly.

To be sure, the silent attentive audience does not exist in an artificial vacuum left untouched by various influences ranging from the architecture and interior design of the cinema to the technological equipment used and the films projected, not to forget various social factors. Hence the intensity of the silent collective experience – the role it plays in actual cinematic constellations – depends on a variety of empirical variables. To begin with, there is the architecture of the cinema: does stadium seating hide me from others and my co-spectators from me? And: Do we sit in a small, rather intimate shoebox cinema or in a large modern-day megaplex? Moreover, the interior design can contribute its share, as when reflections from the walls or lights from exit signs illuminate the audience. So, too, does the sound system: does the loudness drown the presence of the other viewers and turn my attention predominantly toward the film or am I conscious of their silent attention? Other variables are the size of the screen (Am I placed in front of a small screen or an IMAX screen that dominates my attention?) as well as my place in the audience (Do I choose a seat in the front, the centre or the back of the cinema?). There is also the question of institutional context: am I attending the film at a premiere, a press screening, a film festival or in an educational context such as a seminar screening? The number of spectators also plays a role, because it certainly makes a difference if I watch the film with two or with eight hundred other viewers. Next we may think of the density of seating: do I sit very closely to my co-viewers or are we scattered around the audience, sitting far apart? No doubt, the intimacy of the social connections may influence collective experience, too: do I know all of the other viewers or are we a completely anonymous group of people in a city centre cinema? Do I attend the film alone or with one or more companions? Last, but not least, we must not ignore what kind of film is shown: is it an immersive action film or a silent drama, an experimental film or a documentary?

All of these aspects can influence the audience's collective experience. It would seem to me an extremely worthwhile endeavour to create more empirical knowledge about these factors – via third-person quantitative research, via second-person qualitative interviews, via first-person phenomenological descriptions or some productive combination thereof. Unfortunately, this is not something I can provide here. What I propose, then, is merely a *theoretical abstraction* of silent collective spectatorship. I suggest my definition as an ideal type in the Weberian sense. This ideal type might serve as a heuristic to compare actual historical cases of various and diverse silent attentive audiences actively following various kinds of films, genres and modes. Moreover, dis-

cussing the silent attentive mode as an ideal type also implies that I have to downplay the fact that in reality the silence might be interrupted by instances of laughing, screaming, moaning or gasping. These and other forms of expressive response bring the collective aspect to the fore in quite different ways and should be taken into account in a comprehensive phenomenology of shared spectatorship. I have made suggestions along these lines in a number of previous articles.⁸

This essay draws its inspiration from recent debates in analytic philosophy and phenomenology about collective intentionality and shared feelings.⁹ Following the lead of philosophers like Raimo Tuomela and John Searle, Hans Bernhard Schmid, Margaret Gilbert and others have refined this complex discussion about social ontology. I will rephrase some of their arguments with the cinematic constellation in mind and show that this import of social philosophy can have productive ramifications for film theory and historiography. I believe that it serves at least three goals.

First, it may help to reevaluate the silent attentive audience, which in recent years has been (either implicitly or explicitly) compared unfavourably with other, more expressive or communicative types of audience. Think of praise for the spectators of early cinema, the vocal audiences of cult films, the boisterous consumers of gross-out movies or the Indian audience. Hence Miriam Hansen approvingly talks about the 'casual, sociable if not boisterous, atmosphere' of the nickelodeon with its interactive experience and contrasts it with the restrained middle-class viewer and the 'merely passive experience' of Classical Hollywood. William Paul honours the expressive activity of spectators of gross-out horror films and animal comedies (and implicitly disregards silent attentive spectatorship). As Lakshmi Srinivas points out, the advantages of the Indian way of watching films: 'In Western societies mainstream film audiences [...] rarely talk out loud and never engage in the overtly interactive and spontaneously expressive style of reception seen in theatres in India and with Indian audiences. [...] Rather than the loss of community and face-to-face relations, which theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer associated with the growth of mass culture in the West, the Indian case reveals the generation of community and face-to-face interaction through consumption of mass media.'¹⁰ In a somewhat simplified and schematic way we can conceive of the difference between the silent attentive audience (film theorist Francesco Casetti would call this kind of spectatorship 'attendance') and more expressive and distracted types of spectatorship (Casetti would speak of 'performance') in binary oppositions: restrained behaviour vs. outspoken behaviour; display of emotion vs. suppression of emotion; loss of agency vs. entitlement; discipline vs freedom; physical passivity vs. bodily activity; silence vs. vocal expressivity; and, most important of all: individuality vs. collectivity.¹¹ However, as we shall see, there is much to be said in favour of the 'active silence' of the attentive audience.¹² The schematic binary oppositions simply do not hold.

Second, my argument may have consequences for film historiography. Below I test my proposal by using it as the backbone of a critical rereading of an influential film historical thesis. For scholars like Miriam Hansen and Thomas Elsaesser the transition from early cinema to Classical Hollywood Cinema implies a profound change in terms of the *social relations* of the cinema: a loss of collectivity and an individualisation of the audience. This ‘individualisation thesis’, as I will call it, has since gained the status of received wisdom and is repeated unquestioningly in articles and encyclopaedias.¹³ However, it seems overstated to me, precisely because the silent attentive reception of Classical Cinema more easily allowed for joint attention, joint action and even shared feelings. Hence it is far from clear why Classical reception should *automatically* result in individualisation – what happens is a shift in *types* of collectivity. Audience interrelations may no longer be dialogic. Yet they are not merely imaginary either (as are, for instance, the ‘imagined communities’ of dispersed television audiences). This essay may therefore also be seen as a critique of normative conceptions of collectivity based on communicative discourse and face-to-face interaction.

Third, my proposition can be seen as a step toward a more comprehensive theorisation and phenomenology of *collective* spectatorship in the cinema, an aspect comparatively undervalued in the history of thinking about the cinema.¹⁴ Apart from some important exceptions (Edgar Morin or Roland Barthes come to mind), the cinema’s *collective experience* has for the longest time played a negligible role in thinking about the cinematic *dispositif* as such.¹⁵ It has mostly been taken for granted, unless discussing the audience helped to distinguish one type of film-historical period, genre or national cinema from another (hence the arguments about the audiences of early cinema, cult movies, horror films, teenage comedies or Bollywood films). Not even at the height of the discussion about the cinematic apparatus did the collective experience come into view. Take Jean-Louis Baudry’s seminal articles on the cinematic apparatus.¹⁶ For Baudry the cinematic apparatus consists of the dark inside of the cinema, the relative passivity of the situation, the forced immobility as well as the projection of moving images – but there is not a single word on the other anonymous viewers co-present in the cinema. Baudry relates every argument to the single viewing ‘subject’. Only in recent years proponents of New Cinema History like Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, Annette Kuhn, Philippe Meers or Robert C. Allen have started highlighting the social significance of watching films. What is missing in their historical approach so far is both the *phenomenology* of the cinema’s collectivity (i.e. the lived experience of being part of an audience) and, more specifically, a theory of the collective aspects of the *silent attentive audience*.

One of the reasons for the historical reluctance to theorise the cinema’s (silent) collective experience might be the fact that other art forms—like theatre, opera, ballet or classical music—also involve silent audiences. Eager to demonstrate what is specific about the cinema film theorists in the past largely down-

played what cinema shares with other arts. While this argument might have some explanatory value for the history of film theory, it still leaves open what *distinguishes* these various types of collective audiences. Unfortunately, in this article I cannot focus on these differences: what I develop with the silent attentive audience of the cinema in mind, may *grosso modo* be the case for silent audiences in theatres, operas or concert halls as well. What makes the cinema's silent attentive audiences special merits further fine-grained discussion – a discussion that would have to take into account, among other things, the lack of co-presence of the performers (i.e. the screen effect) and the more pervasive darkness in most cinemas. Unless they want to argue that theatre, opera and cinema involve an identical form of collective experience, film scholars (myself included) should try to demonstrate their competence in comparative media studies. However, while further research seems strongly called for, I do not think that the level of inclusiveness and generality of the present article devalues the applicability of my suggestions for film theory or historiography.

Before my argument might sound plausible, however, I need to address some terms that so far have only been mentioned in passing: we-intention, joint attention and joint action.

We-Intentions In what way can we say that each *individual* member of the audience has a *we-intention* to watch the film *jointly* rather than an *I-intention* to simply watch the *film*? Since we usually do not know most of the other spectators, we can hardly say 'we-intend' to watch the film. Or perhaps we can?

I believe there are various reasons why we can assume that watching a film with others implies an intention and commitment to watching the film *jointly*. At the very least, simply by choosing a certain film, deciding upon a specific screening time, driving to the cinema, queueing, buying an 8 Euro ticket and taking a seat in the audience we signal that we have the *common goal* of watching this particular film. As such, we perform a minimal practical *we-intention* for each other: by attending the film we share a goal and therefore form a voluntary association for a certain amount of time.¹⁷ This *practical* collective intentionality (we have a common goal right now) can be distinguished from *cognitive* collective intentionality (we share a common opinion or conviction at this moment) or *affective* collective intentionality (we have a common emotion or mood right now).¹⁸ The former does not have to presuppose a shared cognition and affect, but often it includes both. Firstly, by attending the show we also signal a *common interest* in this particular film: the cognitive collective intentionality refers to sharing the opinion or conviction that this film is worth watching and that we might all have a *common taste*. Secondly, from the outset our co-presence might also indicate a minimal affective collective intentionality as we presumably share the *common hope* for a 'good' film and the *common anticipation* of an experience that is worthwhile – otherwise we would not be here. Of course, stronger forms of shared emotions and moods-being

afraid together, say, or enjoying the film together--can later supplement this minimal affective collective intentionality throughout the film.

In particular cases these minimal types of practical, cognitive and affective collective intentionality may be more intensive. Consequently, there is a continuum from weak to strong forms of collective intentionality. On the strong end of the spectrum there is a straightforward we-intention to watch the film together – an intention often expressed verbally. Think of the family, the couple, or the group of friends who go to the cinema *as* a family, a couple, a group of friends. Provided they have collectively decided to attend the film, their decision expresses a we-intention rather than an I-intention. Or think of the film night in my home to which I invite various friends: in this case we all have a strong intention to watch the film *together*, since my friends would surely be able to rent the DVD on their own. I want to label these cases instances of *strong we-intention*. In the case of *medium we-intention* we may think a group of people going to the cinema largely anonymously, but still as part of a specific collective or community. The Danish Embassy in Berlin invites fellow Danes to watch the opening film of a retrospective devoted to Danish cinema. Fans of Manchester United, and of Eric Cantona in particular, go to see *Looking for Eric* (Ken Loach, 2009), in which the former Manchester United star plays a major role. *Star Wars* fans, having camped in front of the cinema for hours or even days, eagerly watch the first screening of the newest instalment of George Lucas's saga. These groups share a certain identity as Danes, ManUnited fans or *Star Wars* aficionados. Here the we-intention might not be as strong as in the first examples. But as long as the individual members of the audience consider themselves a part of a larger collective, we may assume there will be a *medium we-intention*.

But even in the majority of cases in which we simply drive to the neighbourhood cinema in order to watch the newest film, we can speak of a *weak we-intention* once we slightly change the perspective. Most of the time we may not have an explicitly formulated goal to watch a film *together* with other anonymous viewers. However, sitting at this time of the day in this cinema in this neighbourhood with this audience for this film, the experience stands out from the normal flow of life. Moreover, once we *adhere to the social norms of behaviour*, we implicitly acknowledge that we have a *common* goal: to watch the film. This is not to deny that there might be many reasons why we go to the cinema rather than watching the film at home: the film comes out earlier; the screen is bigger; the quality of the image is better; the sound-system is more impressive, and so on. At the same time, however, we do not behave as we would in our private surroundings: the fact that we sacrifice many of our short-term self-interests like answering the phone or talking to our partner underscores our *joint* – not just private – *intention* to watch the film (I will come back to the cinema's normative agreement below).

Furthermore, the fact that watching a film in the cinema involves something more than an I-intention follows from the relatively high price we pay in

terms of personal freedom. Thomas Elsaesser has characterised the theatrical experience as a 'fixed term of imprisonment.' The viewer is 'pinned to his seat' and 'enclosed in a darkened room, cut off visually from the surroundings and exposed to a state of isolation.'¹⁹ Comparing the filmic atmospheres of three *dispositifs* – the living room, the museum and the cinema – Margrit Tröhler points out the *freedom* to come and go when looking at a moving-image installation or projection in a museum.²⁰ Hence in a museum we are much more dependent on our decision to stay or go than we are in the cinema. Since in the cinema the common goal of watching the film requires such a comparatively *strong adherence* to social norms, we can infer that accepting these *social* norms and rules implies that we tacitly signal our (albeit weak) *we-intention*. We *all* want to see this film. And--we all agree to see it *jointly*.

Lest this might sound too schematic or homogenising, let me point out that within a single auditorium various levels of *we-intention* can exist simultaneously, even within a single spectator. A hypothetical viewer from Copenhagen visiting a retrospective of Danish films in Berlin can at one and the same time have a strong *we-intention* to watch the film with her husband, a medium *we-intention* to view it with the other co-present Danes, and a weak *we-intention* to see it with the whole audience.

Joint Attention refers to the fact that you, I and others present have a common understanding of 'what we are doing' and that we are not focussing on the same thing by accident.²¹ We must have a minimal mutual awareness that we are perceiving the same thing. But this awareness need not be reflective: I do not need to *focus* on the others jointly attending. It can also be relegated to the fringe of consciousness. Tom Cochrane, in an article on joint attention to music, points out that 'joint attention can vary in intensity [...] as a product of how much we monitor each other.'²² But given that in silent attentive audiences there is little or no verbal communication and little or no face-to-face interaction, how can we explicitly infer or implicitly presuppose that we, as an audience, follow the film in joint attention?

First of all, there are the preconditions of the cinematic *dispositif*, which rule out that we have the same intentional object *by accident*. Our seats are all facing towards a single object: the illuminated screen which stands out from the surrounding darkness. The unidirectional seating position prevents us from looking at each other: our vectors of perception and attention are directed towards the film. In contrast with the museum, say, there is little else to focus on. When moving through the museum the visitor is constantly confronted with questions about the time and attention he or she should pay to various objects. Citing an observation by Serge Daney, Volker Pantenburg argues that in fact the museum visitor's aimless stroll past video installations resembles (window-)shopping behaviour.²³ Film viewers, on the other hand, do not have to face the same series of choices, because they are devoted to the single object on display: the film.

Secondly, there is an absence of motor activity. The structure of most cinemas is not conducive to bodily activity: viewers do not wander around, but remain seated throughout the film. Consider, again, the case of watching a film in a museum: the black box projection room or the space in front the monitor is a place of transition.²⁴ The *dispositif* of the museum is much more mobile and individualistic and thus allows for joint attention only briefly, if at all. In contrast, sitting in their seats viewers in the cinema deactivate specific parts of their body, rob themselves of their motor freedom, *in order to* pay full attention to the film. As Pantenburg points out, the early 1970s were not only the age of paranoid apparatus theory which characterized the cinematic situation as captivating, but also a time of utopian ideas about the cinema as a place of focused, concentrated perception. Filmmakers like Hollis Frampton, Peter Kubelka or Robert Smithson regarded immobility and stillness as preconditions for (joint) attention.²⁵ (Here one might spot the seeds of an ethical argument in favour of silent attentive viewing. As in recent discussions about ‘slow’ or ‘contemplative’ cinema and its merits in terms of the ‘dedicated attention’ and ‘emotionally rich experience’ in minimalist film, the joint attention of the silent attentive audience may potentially – albeit not necessarily – imply *more meaningful* ways of watching films in our contemporary ‘attention economy.’)²⁶

Thirdly, and most importantly, we can explicitly infer or implicitly presuppose that we follow the film in joint attention once there is silence, and an absence of verbal interaction prevails. The silence is an *audible* phenomenon just like more specific acoustic reactions such as talking, laughing or screaming. Importantly, in my definition of ‘silent attention’ I presuppose *attention*. Hence the collective silence in the cinema cannot derive from passively doing *nothing*. My definition therefore rules out an auditorium of sleeping viewers. The ‘silent attention’s’ *silence* is the outcome of a concentrated audiovisual attention. Of course, this definition presumes a third-person perspective that simply *postulates* an attentive audience. But what about the first-person perspective? As long as I do not actively assume that the other co-present viewers are sleeping or absent-minded (which for various reasons I usually do not), I will always tacitly presuppose that their silence indicates attention. From this perspective, we can describe silence as a specific type of communication: it signals that the film *and* its collective reception prevail over individual reactions. Hence silence does not mean an absence of collectivity (just as the lack of motor activity does not signal disembodied viewing). Once other viewers start to talk, send text messages or move around the auditorium, we realize that during these moments their attention and our attention are *not* joint.

The fact that the silent attentive audience is united in joint attention *during* the film may become even more obvious when we compare it to the moments *before* the film begins. People walk through the auditorium looking for seats; they chat with their neighbours; they talk on their mobile phones; they read magazines. Once the lights go out a transitional period begins that

consists of commercials and trailers and may involve the film's opening titles. During this phase one can sense a shift: the scattered foci are gradually united and directed towards a common intentional object – the film. A 'phenomenal change' takes place, as Hans Bernhard Schmid would put it, from the dispersed attention of individuals to a we-intention and joint attention of the audience.²⁷

Joint Action is sometimes mentioned in the same breath with joint attention. For instance, in a recent article, Anika Fiebich and Shaun Gallagher argue that intentional joint attention – i.e. joint attention in which individuals 'intend to be mutually attentive towards the same entity (where the shared intention may just be to maintain joint attention)' – already qualifies as a *basic* joint action.²⁸ Here I want to discuss joint attention and joint action separately, partly because I wish to emphasize the stronger – and maybe more controversial – claim that the joint attention of the silent attentive audience goes beyond a 'basic' joint action. In the literature on collective intentionality at least three aspects recur with regard to joint action: attuned behaviour, we-intentions and normative agreements.

The philosopher Angelika Krebs defines attuned behaviour as follows: 'In joint action the participants continuously attune their inputs to the inputs of the others and to the action to be actualized [...], taking the others to be doing the same kind of attuning'.²⁹ If in an orchestra one person plays a different tune from the rest, it becomes blatantly obvious. If one dance partner stops moving, there is no longer joint action. On the face of it, this might seem different in the cinema. Here, behaviour that is not in tune with the common goal of watching the film together *can* become conspicuous (think of talking on the mobile phone), but it can also go unnoticed (consider someone falling asleep). However, the fact that someone can stop acting jointly without becoming noticeable does not disqualify watching a film together in silent attention as a case of joint action. While in many paradigmatic cases of joint action the whole cannot be thought without the individual parts (think of the dance example), this does not apply to every case: the viewer who falls asleep simply does not partake any longer; but the rest of the audience is still acting jointly.

Furthermore, prototypical joint action seems to be characterised either by *identical* motor movements (walking in a parade) or *attuned* motor movements (playing in an orchestra). Again, *prima facie*, this seems to be different in the cinema: isn't the cinema audience characterised precisely by its *lack* of motor movements? So how can we speak of action, let alone joint action? We can speak of *action* precisely because actions cannot be reduced to motor movements. Even if prototypical examples of action rely on motor movements, paying attention to a film – watching and listening to its unfolding – is a *mental* action based on perception. As noted in the introduction, today very few film theorists would consider the viewer as a passive receptacle. Secondly, we may talk about *joint* action as long as the collective audience fulfils a necessary con-

dition of joint action: attuned behaviour. In the case of the silent attentive audience the synchronisation and coordination of behaviour depends on three prerequisites: stillness, silence and attention. Viewers show restraint in motor activity by not going in and out or walking around; viewers do not talk on their mobile phones, whistle, scream, burp, moan, and so on; viewers refrain from other silent activities like reading, fondling or playing with their mobile phone, devoting their attention to the film. Taken together, sitting and watching in silence do not imply an absence of motor movements, but are exactly a form of synchronisation of activity: silence and motor stillness coordinate what might otherwise result in highly diverse motor movements, compartments and expressions, and thus signal a joint attention. Of course, there might be more obvious examples of cinematic joint action such as laughing together, screaming together, singing along together or speaking the dialogue together. However, this would not only reduce action to expressive behaviour and ignore the active attention of the silent attentive audience, but would also give too much weight to a few exceptional kinds of behaviour.

However, the synchronised and coordinated behaviour of joint attention is merely a necessary condition from which one might *infer* the joint action of the silent attentive audience, but it is not sufficient.³⁰ In other words, just because silence and stillness prevail does not mean that we are dealing with cases of joint action. As a consequence, the joint action of the cinema is not something that can be observed from a third-person perspective—for instance, via infrared cameras. In an extreme case the camera might show four hundred people silently following the film, when in fact they are all day-dreaming about very different things. Following Hans Bernhard Schmid we may assume that *we-intentions* are another necessary condition for joint action and group membership.³¹ Importantly, a reflective awareness of being part of a group is *not* a necessary condition for the existence of a group: we do not have to reflect on – and thus be consciously aware of – the fact that we belong to a certain collective in order to be part of it.³² This point requires re-emphasis because critics may object that in the cinema we are often not aware that we are acting jointly. As long as there are *we-intentions* and the attuned behaviour of joint attention, we do not need to be fully aware of our collective activity.

However, it seems crucial that the three types of *we-intention*, as distinguished by Schmid, do not contradict each other: *practical* collective intentionality (sharing a goal), *cognitive* collective intentionality (sharing an opinion or conviction) and *affective* collective intentionality (sharing an emotion or mood). Even in the case of a *practical* *we-intention* to watch a particular film as well as an active joint attention of the whole audience, one would not be able to decide from a third-person perspective that every single viewer following the film in silent attention is part of a jointly acting audience. Joint attention and the common goal of watching the film are not enough when the *practical* collective intentionality is disrupted or contradicted by the fact that there are differences in *cognitive* or *affective* collective intentionality. Think, say, of a fe-

male viewer watching a misogynist action film with a male audience and interpreting their silent attention as a sign of a pleasurable viewing experience that she cannot share. Here the silent attention of the other viewers signals to the individual viewer her *difference* in terms of *cognitive* collective intentionality (she finds the film politically retrograde, whereas the others do not care) and *affective* collective intentionality (she is angry at the filmmakers, whereas the others enjoy the film). This particular viewer would hardly say that she and the other viewers watched the film *jointly*. It seems important, however, that in this case the audience situation becomes thematic: the viewer is conscious of her difference. However, as long as it does *not* become thematic in a *negative* way the we-intentions and joint attention of the silent attentive audience are simply presupposed. The assumed commonalities often prevail until differences become thematic.

Perhaps the most obvious objection to my argument that the silent attentive audience acts jointly is the fact that every single viewer would also be able to watch the film in identical fashion alone. However, the similarity between a viewer who watches a film alone and someone who watches it as part of a group exists only from the outside. As John Searle would put it: 'Externally observed, the two cases are indistinguishable, but they are clearly different internally.'³³ The objection not only ignores the necessary we-intentions; it also overlooks the important point that once I watch the film *as a group* I immediately have to take into account the *normative agreement* this entails, including its *social* obligations and entitlements. Consequently, once I follow the social norms of the cinema and rely on all the others to do so as well (absence of communication, interaction, motor activity and other pursuits), the perspective changes from *I* watch the film to *we* watch the film.

Importantly, going to the cinema does not only imply that we follow social *obligations*; it also grants the *entitlements* that come with the commitments of we-intentions. This is a point that Margaret Gilbert has drawn attention to.³⁴ Discussing the example of walking together, she notes:

As long as people are out on a walk together, they will understand that each has an *obligation* to do what he or she can to achieve the relevant goal. Moreover, each one is *entitled* to rebuke the other for failure to fulfil this obligation. It is doubtful whether the core obligations and entitlements in question are moral obligations and entitlements. At the same time, they are not merely a matter of prudence or self-interest. Importantly, they seem to be a direct function of the fact of going for a walk together.³⁵

Let me rephrase Gilbert's talk about obligations and entitlements in terms of the film experience. As a backdrop I take, again, the not-so-hypothetical case of watching a video-film individually in a museum or an art gallery on a monitor. There are people standing in the surrounding area whose talk about a different museum object distracts me from concentrating fully on the film. In contrast to the cinema, where the same kind of talk with the same kind of loudness would annoy me a great deal more, I do *not feel entitled* to reproach them, just as they

do not feel an obligation to remain silent. While in the museum space we do not have a we-intention to watch the film together, in the cinema we do.³⁶ In fact, reproached cinemagoers often tacitly acknowledge other viewers' entitlement to rebuke them for being disruptive: reminded of their obligation, they usually do not argue back.

The more we expect the cinematic situation to be a *shared* activity, the more significant the normative agreement, the stronger the obligation to act accordingly and the bigger the entitlement to be angry about its disruption. This is not only true for the silent attentive audience, but goes for expressive types of spectatorship as well. Think of someone ostentatiously remaining silent when all others accompany the songs of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975): other viewers might consider this person's stubborn refusal to act jointly as negatively disruptive. In turn, while I go to the cinema predominantly for other reasons, I may not be angry at someone who does not participate in our acting jointly – in fact, I may not even notice a disruption, because there was never an expectation of a shared activity in the first place. Take the case of noticing someone falling asleep next to you. If you have no we-intention and the co-viewer is an anonymous other, you might find it funny or maybe strange, but you will hardly wake him up to remind him of his obligation to attend the film together. If you see a film with your husband or wife and presuppose a strong form of we-intention because this is a film that you were both looking forward to watching together, you might feel disappointed or even angry if he or she falls asleep. Hence depending on the strength of the expectation of a we-intention, there will be differences in what viewers are entitled to expect and what they can remind others of.

Further evidence for considering collective viewing as a shared activity derives from the built-in *teleology* of joint actions and the obligations and entitlements that come with it: Once we start a joint activity, it implies the expectation that we *finish* it together. As Kriebich and Gallagher note, 'In general, joint actions involve the basic joint commitment to pursue the shared intention until it's fulfilled'.³⁷ We can see the pertinence of this point for our discussion once we briefly switch to the example of watching a film together on television at home. If a couple of friends and I watch a film jointly, there is an implicit commitment to watch it until the end. Even if I am bored with the film, I commit myself to not changing the channel, to not reading a newspaper and to not setting off for a walk with my dog. These distractions would be considered impolite. Of course, it is always possible to negotiate verbally about doing something else, but this would involve *changing* the shared activity. In the cinema my commitment to finishing the film as well as the other viewer's entitlement to expect me to watch the film through to the end may not be so obvious (and probably not as strong), but it certainly exists there too. One indication is the fact that in the cinema viewers tend to feel reluctant and even awkward about leaving prematurely. But if there was no *implicit commitment* to watching the film jointly, why should these anonymous viewers feel a disincli-

nation or even embarrassment about leaving the cinema? No such commitment exists, of course, when I watch a film without others: watching a film on television alone, I can be much more inclined to channel-surf or turn off the DVD and thus not finish the film.

Here we can find an argument for the crucial difference between a collective experience based on *real* co-presence and a collective experience based on an audience that I *imagine* watching the same film in another cinema at the same time. Apart from the fact that in the latter case we cannot be influenced by the affective atmosphere in the cinema and the emotional contagion it may imply, there are no real obligations and entitlements *vis-à-vis* those other imagined viewers.

So far my argument has been couched largely in negative terms. Let me now formulate my case for joint action more positively: absences of verbal communication, expressive non-verbal comments, motor activity and diverse foci of attention are at the same time the prerequisite for the *presence* of silence, stillness and a shared intentional object. Silence, for example, does not necessarily imply a negative absence of communication: it can involve a valuable auditory situation in which nothing specific stands out apart from the film. This could mean that at least some types of silence and stillness should be cherished rather than condemned (although I do not deny that other types of silence can be either regulatory and oppressive or negatively disruptive, as in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* example above). Interesting arguments along these lines come from ethnographic work on silent meditation. Michal Pagis suggests that in sociological research a negative view predominates, taking silence exclusively as a forced, oppressive situation. As a result of power relations that deny the self-expressive voice, destroy the communication-based affinity between people and therefore create social distance, silence implies the opposite of freedom and community.³⁸ This seems to be the view that underlies much of the abovementioned film-scholarly work celebrating the cinematic practices of talking, call-and-response, singing along and suchlike as liberating and creative of social bonds. However, Pagis also shows that there are chosen and shared silences that function as constitutive mechanisms allowing for certain experiences to surface in the first place – as in collective meditation.

I would argue that in the cinema the fact that the audience remains silent often functions as a precondition for a synchronised collective experience, because it allows for the tacit sense that the others not only *act* as I do, but also *experience* similarly to me and hence that we act jointly and experience something collectively. Again, as the notion of “tacit sense” indicates, this is not something we consciously focus on. Collective aesthetic experience often relies on silence as an important precondition, because expressive reactions – and verbal comments in particular – often bring experiential *differences* to the fore. Just think of derisive as opposed to approving laughter. Or consider comments like “Wow, look at this!”, “Come on, that’s unbelievable!” or “He’s so cute!”.

While these expressive reactions might *include* some viewers, they simultaneously *exclude* other spectators who think or feel otherwise. And even those who feel included in terms of the aesthetic judgment might still feel a rupture with regard to joint action – in fact, necessarily so, because commenting verbally on the film involves acting differently from attending to it in silence. What was synchronised collective action a moment earlier now temporarily veers in different directions. Silence, on the other hand, can allow for a more inclusive, albeit tacit, intersubjective experience. As Pagis puts it,

Silent intersubjectivity is [...] qualitatively different from the type articulated by speech. It allows for a more general and inclusive form of intersubjectivity, a form that is not obsessed with content, with exact comparisons of one mind to another. Silent intersubjectivity can actually prevent such processes of ‘othering’ by allowing for difference under a general rubric of sameness. It offers a wide canopy that connects people based on embodied involvement in the same event.³⁹

The silent attentive audience is particularly conducive to this kind of intersubjectivity. As we have seen, small nonverbal cues bolster it, the most important being non-movement and silence. This is, of course, not to say that the other viewers do indeed experience just as I do. As Pagis points out, ‘since miscommunication and misinterpretation are quite common, intersubjectivity is more an experience than an actual truth claim about the world.’⁴⁰ One might be totally wrong about the experience of one’s co-viewers and still experience intersubjectivity. Even if in actuality we often do *not* think and feel the same – a point that reception studies have made quite clear – the viewer tacitly takes it for granted as long as not contradicted or proved otherwise. Hans Bernhard Schmid even goes so far as to claim that

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.⁴¹

While we do not have to follow Schmid’s strong claim all the way, we may still argue that in aesthetic contexts we often subconsciously ‘project’ our individual experience onto others and thus make it unintentionally and pre-reflectively a temporary norm. Cinematic joint action and experience appear in the likeness of our own experience – as long as no one disproves it by doing and feeling something else or until *I* shift my focus on the singularity of my own experience (and even make this singularity public, for instance, by connoisseur laughter or verbal comment). If this sounds too much like Freudian narcissism, it might become less controversial when put the other way round. In aesthetic experience individual viewers do *not* presuppose that everyone feels *differently* all the time: the likeness of the experience is tacitly taken as a default. To be sure, there are instances when we do not take the

default. To be sure, there are instances when we do not take the likeness of the collective experience as the norm: when we feel excluded or when we put ourselves deliberately outside the group. However, as long as there are no explicit sociological or cultural differences from the outset, the default of the collective experience holds. The silent attentive audience is particularly helpful for this collective experience.

We should not forget that the collective experience of acting jointly may also allow for a special kind of *pleasure*. Sitting in the audience and watching a film jointly can be pleasurable because of the fact that we all *do this* at this very moment. Much as when we silently go for a walk together, when we watch a film together the pleasure can derive from the flow of our joint action: from the fact that we are dedicated to a silent activity. In contrast to other kinds of spectatorship the silent attentive audience is conducive to this pleasure of acting jointly, because synchronisation and coordination are rather easily achieved: we simply have to focus on the film and watch it in silent, motionless attention. Alternative kinds of joint action in the cinema – singing along, speaking the dialogues, screaming, and even laughing together – are much harder to synchronise and coordinate. On the other hand, collective silent attention is also particularly fragile, because its preconditions are so easily undermined. Unlike a person who falls asleep and thus remains inconspicuous, someone taking a call or talking loudly to his neighbour signals that he or she – however temporarily – has no *we-intention*, does not attend jointly, is acting individually.

Watching a film jointly in silent attention enables a collective experience *per se* that we, as viewers, do not have to reflect upon in order to enjoy. Just as I can prefer taking a walk with someone to walking alone without thinking about the fact that we are doing this together, I can enjoy watching a film collectively without being fully aware of this fact. However, watching a film in silent attention can also become the basis of a different kind of collective experience: the sharing of emotion and affect. In this case, there is not only shared *activity*, but also shared *feeling*. Fear, for example: like no other director Alfred Hitchcock voiced his intent to elicit a collective viewer response, to homogenise and standardise the response of his audience, to create a 'mass emotion': 'If you've designed a picture correctly, in terms of its emotional impact, the Japanese audience would scream at the same time as the Indian audience.'⁴² Particularly celebrated in this respect is Hitchcock's attempt to make the audience watch *Psycho* (1960) from beginning to end, in that order. Via trailers he would urge audiences to come in time; latecomers were not admitted.⁴³ Astonishingly, viewers voluntarily submitted to Hitchcock's dictates. Why?

In her essay on *Psycho* Williams argues that there were significant benefits that turned the audience into willing disciples. The rapt collective attention made fear all the more acute and effective: the greater the bodily discipline, the more bodily reactions. Furthermore, the collective emotions and per-

formative responses created a bond between viewers: collectively submitting to strictly dictated viewing times and strong regulations how to watch the film enhanced the pleasure of the group.⁴⁴ As Williams notes: 'What we see here is the conception of the audience as a group with a common solidarity – that of submitting to an experience of mixed arousal and fear and of recognising those reactions in one another and perhaps even performing them for one another.'⁴⁵ Discipline seems to be an enormously important part of the social experience of cinemagoing, Williams concludes. Watching the film together in silent, fearful attention and breaking out into collective responses at scattered points throughout the film, the audience acted jointly as a group and thus enhanced the pleasure of its collective experience. While *Psycho* might be an especially useful example, its effects can be found in various other cases as well.

Silent attentive viewing is a historically and culturally specific active response based on display rules and behavioural codes. It is certainly socialised and learned, as basically all forms of audience response are. What theorists who argue for a kind of learning theory of classical reception seem to overlook is the fact that even the various forms of *expressive* behaviour do not come naturally, but have to be 'learned' and 'internalised'. The history of audience response is full of actively produced 'audience gestures' that were often the outcome of social expectations rather than a natural reaction.⁴⁶ As Richard Butsch notes in his history of American audiences: 'How public discourses construct audiences, how audiences conceive themselves, and what audiences do are historically contingent.'⁴⁷ The expectations of what audiences *have to do* and the rules about what they *should not do* change over time. There is no one-way street of growing self-discipline (Michel Foucault) or suppression of affect (Norbert Elias), since this would presuppose that expressive reactions came naturally in a quasi-reflexive way.⁴⁸ If we resuscitate the worn-out analogy between the cinema and Plato's cave, there must already have been audiences who followed a spectacle of images in silent rapt attention some 2.500 years ago.

By now it should be evident that I take the silent attentive audience to imply a specific kind of *collectivity*. However, this is far from common opinion. A widespread position, most forcefully articulated by Miriam Hansen and Thomas Elsaesser, sees individualisation at work.⁴⁹ In this conclusion I shall put my argument to the test and mount a critique of the 'individualisation thesis.'

Both Hansen and Elsaesser argue that historical changes in film style and mode of address, exhibition practice and behavioural norms have consequences for viewers' mode of reception as a collective. As proponents of New Film History and steeped in the history of early film, both scholars paradigmatically contrast two important periods: early cinema versus Classical Cinema. Hansen and Elsaesser describe the difference between these periods as a story of increasing regulation of the collective audience: a story of discipline and order. Hansen favourably cites the buzz and idle comment, the boo-

ing and applause, the howling of small boys in neighbourhood cinemas.⁵⁰ Elsaesser regrets that the audience had to learn to remain seated and concentrate on the screen: the change from early nickelodeons without rows of seats to later cinemas implies a regulation of an audience forced into order.⁵¹ In contrast, early cinema was characterised by a constant coming and going, with movement enabling or even favouring communication. People smoked in the theatres, drank beer, read dime novels and ate sweets: 'peripheral activities that provided potential for an alternative organisation of public experience', as Hansen puts it.⁵²

The transition from the small neighbourhood nickelodeon to the elegant picture palace, from the exhibitionist cinema of attractions to the voyeuristic Classical Hollywood Cinema thus led to an individualisation of viewers. In Hansen's words an 'institutionalization of *private voyeurism in a public space*' took place in which an 'invisible, private consumer' replaced the 'social audience' (or 'collective audience', in Elsaesser's phrase).⁵³ Hansen even talks about an 'isolation endemic to the classical apparatus.'⁵⁴ What once was a lively place – a communicative public sphere – turned into a lonely crowd of isolated recipients sitting obliviously next to each other. More recently, writing with considerable regret about the silent audience, Jean Châteauevert and André Gaudrault note that 'with silence, the regime of film consumption may have let the spectator move imperceptibly from a *solidary* to a *solitary* mode of consumption!'⁵⁵

Both Hansen and Elsaesser come from a critical background, following specific goals that had their undoubted merits as part of a specific film-historical discourse in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, their critical formation led these theorists to throw out the baby with the bathwater by neglecting important facets of the audience's collective phenomenology. The recent return of phenomenology as well as the growing focus on emotion and affect in film studies allows us to judge some of their arguments as too sweeping and arrive at more nuanced descriptions of viewer interrelations. Hansen and Elsaesser believe that once new modes of exhibition and new norms of behaviour were established, the film would cast a spell on viewers, who henceforth followed the flow of moving images in isolated absorption. I think that this at once *overestimates* the impact of the film and *underestimates* the impact of the collective viewing situation. Or, perhaps more precisely, Hansen and Elsaesser seem to believe that a collective audience experience and absorbed viewing are mutually exclusive. But is it not possible that 'addressed as individuals, we simultaneously feel embedded in the crowd,' as Tröhler puts it?⁵⁶

Hansen's concept of the public sphere and Elsaesser's notion of the collective audience depend on verbal communication and other kinds of communicative interaction, which they oppose to the still, silent and absorbed audience of Classical Hollywood reception. The individualisation thesis is therefore particularly convincing if we consider the social experience of the cinema in terms of *face-to-face interaction* and *expressive participation*. But this is a

reductive perspective on social life. We can easily come up with examples of less-than-passive social experiences that do *not* involve face-to-face interaction and expressive participation. Just think of playing music together, meditating together or silently mourning together during a funeral. The individualisation thesis seems to me one-sided, because it conceives of social life in a specific, highly normative, way. This normativity becomes all too obvious when Hansen decries the rule of silence as a middle-class suppression of 'working-class norms of conviviality and expressivity' and Elsaesser considers silent and concentrated reception as a contradictory behaviour that is not natural, but had to be learned.⁵⁷ Here the authors come close to articulating a romanticised anti-bourgeois idealisation of the communicativeness and liveliness of the lower classes. They overlook that we-intention, joint attention and joint action can imply a different *type* of collectivity.

Furthermore, there is at least a certain logical tension between the notion of a *homogenous* group of classical spectators and the idea of an *isolated* and *individualised* viewer. At the same time, the assumption that the diverse boisterous audiences of the nickelodeon necessarily formed a collective sounds somewhat problematic. Hansen notes that the early-to-Classical transformations 'subdue the social and cultural distinctions among viewers and turn them into a homogenous group of spectators.'⁵⁸ But if there were strong social and cultural distinctions with ingroups and outgroups, how could there be a collective audience in an emphatic sense?

Moreover, the individualisation thesis harbours another contradiction: the individualisation of the viewer supposedly took place at the moment when in the urban centres of North America and Europe the audiences inside cinemas grew massively in size. At the end of the 1920s the famous Roxy theatre in New York offered seats to more than 6,200 viewers. In Europe cinemas like the Ufa-Filmpalast in Hamburg existed with more than 2,700 seats. Did the viewers in these cinemas have no sense of watching the film jointly, but rather considered themselves as a lonely crowd? Compared to the dozens of viewers in small storefront theatres, the hundreds and even thousands of people following a film in the 1910s and 1920s meant a completely different collective experience. We might ask, then, why viewers would accept all these negative transformations? Possibly because the story of loss was intertwined with a story of gain. Hansen and Elsaesser remain oblivious to this compensatory reward.⁵⁹

To some readers my revaluation of the silent attentive audience may seem retrograde or normatively constraining. Especially against the background of a Brechtian-Benjaminian-Frankfurt School critique of mass culture and the 'bourgeois' reception practices of uncritical absorbed contemplation (a critique that feeds the individualisation thesis), my arguments may sound like an apologia for the culture industry and the *embourgeoisement* of the cinematic experience. This is definitely not my intention.

Firstly, my vindication of the silent attentive audience is valid also for the reception of many experimental, avant-garde or modernist works. The suspenseful reception of a Hollywood thriller like *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) may look like the prototype. But the focused attention paid to a modernist *auteur* work like *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) in an art-house cinema counts just as well as the silent concentration that audiences in a film museum (or the Invisible Cinema, for that matter) devote to an avant-garde film like *Wavelength* (Michael Snow, 1967). I am not saying that these types of film are experienced identically. What I have tried to show is merely that where people watch a film in silent attention my argument about the cinema as joint action is applicable to all types of film.

Secondly, my argument for the silent audience's collective dimension does not subscribe to a 'bourgeois' understanding of aesthetic experience, with its connotation of an *individual* devotion to and contemplation of the work of art. In this respect I agree with Walter Benjamin who contrasts the solitary experience of a painting with the experience of film as 'an object of simultaneous collective reception'.⁶⁰ However, unlike Benjamin I have not celebrated a distractive mode of spectatorship as politically emancipating or morally significant here. Rather, my argument implies that watching a film in silent attention can enable one of the rare instances in our culture in which we do not have a dissonance of intentions requiring coordination (since we *all* intend to do the same thing); we are not subject to a permanent imperative to decide (since we have *already* decided what to do); and we are not forced to create collectivity through verbal or written interaction (since our joint action is based on *collective* silent attention). This neither implies that I want to discard Benjamin's intervention, nor does it mean that I intend to set the silent attentive audience as the norm. Although this article may be read as a forceful plea to reconsider the benefits of the silent attentive audience, I have tried to avoid sounding normative.

Thirdly, my argument does not depend on naïve, uncritical absorption, but allows for critical distance and reflection. In fact, collective silent attention may be particularly conducive to reflection. In this regard, Alexander Horwath favourably compares the cinema with the museum: 'in today's socio-economic and cultural climate the spatially and durationally *unflexible* space of cinema is potentially more inviting to a reflective or critical experience of the world via images than most museum spaces are.'⁶¹ Note, however, that the type of joint action suggested in this essay has its roots in analytic social philosophy and philosophical theories of action rather than in political science. One would expect too much from the notion of joint action if it were understood in terms of resistance or collective struggle: joint action, as I use the term, does not equate to political activism (even if it does not rule out more political forms of action in the long run).

Last but not least, in my book on the phenomenology of fear in the cinema I have myself argued for the advantages expressive reactions can have

for the establishment of collectivity. For instance, screaming collectively in moments of shock is precisely a way of communicating with others – and thus enabling a collective experience.⁶² While audience communication is not celebrated in the present essay, this does not mean that I reject these kinds of spectatorship. I simply offer an heuristic that allows us to differentiate various *types* of collective experience – the silent attentive one among them.

Pointing out that even silent attentive viewing implies a type of collective experience, my argument may ultimately underscore what is at stake once the film experience increasingly becomes a *truly* individualised and solitary experience: when viewers watch films *alone* on television screens, computer monitors, smart phones and the like. There has been no intention here of intoning a nostalgic aria about the disappearance of the theatrical experience. But at the same time I want to go beyond simply noticing that something is, for better or worse, changing: I wanted to present a strong argument as to why silently watching a film alone is not the same as silently watching a film jointly minus other viewers. In an important way, it is a different experience: Silent collective attention, then, is an enabling condition for another type of collectivity – one very much in tune with societies that insist on remaining highly individualised and yet simultaneously yearn for a collective experience.⁶³ If we consider watching a film in a cinema as an inherently social act – a joint action with collective intentions and often shared feelings – we gain a different picture. Viewers are no longer part of an individualised lonely crowd. Watching a film with others means watching a film jointly.

¹ The significance of the cinema's social experience becomes particularly vital in this quote: '[F]or most audiences for most of the history of cinema, their primary relationship with "the cinema" has not been with individual movies-as-artefacts or as texts, but with the social experience of cinemagoing.' Richard Maltby/Melvyn Stokes, 'Introduction', in Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (eds.), *Going to the Movies. Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007). p. 1-22; p. 2.

² For a good overview, see Alfred Mele, 'Action' in Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). p. 334–357.

³ As philosopher of action Alfred Mele reminds us: 'Mental action [...] has received far less philosophical attention than overt action, and certainly less attention than it deserves.' 'Agency and Mental Action', *Noûs*, vol. 31 (1997), pp. 231-249; p. 247. If my arguments sound convincing, we do not have to go as far as recent proponents of enactivism like Alva Noë who claims that perception *in general* should be considered an action. See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

⁴ Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915). p. 196.

⁵ Peter Kubelka, 'The Invisible Cinema', in *Design Quarterly*. Special Issue on Film Spaces, no. 93 (1974). pp. 32-36; p. 32.

⁶ Kubelka, p. 34 (emphasis added). Ken Kelman, a founding member of the Anthology Film Archives, also stresses the efficiency of their cinema in preventing verbal disturbance: 'it discouraged people from talking to the person next to them, and in those terms of counteracting certain disturbances the theatre largely succeeded.' Quoted from: Sky Sitney, 'In Search for the Invisible Cinema', in *Grey Room*, vol. 19 (2005). pp. 102-113; p. 106.

⁷ Cf. Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle. Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). p. 14.

⁸ Cf. Julian Hanich, 'Collective Viewing. The Cinema and Affective Audience Interrelations', *Passions in Context. The Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010). 'Laugh Is in the Air. Eine Typologie des Lachens im Kino', *Nach dem Film*, vol. 12 (2010). www.nachdemfilm.de/content/laugh-air.

- ⁹ For a helpful overview in German, see the extensive anthology by Hans Bernhard Schmid and David P. Schweikard, *Kollektive Intentionalität. Eine Debatte über die Grundlagen des Sozialen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).
- ¹⁰ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 61. William Paul, *Laughing Screaming. Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 17/18. Lakshmi Srinivas, 'The Active Audience. Spectatorship, Social Relations and the Experience of Cinema in India', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2002), pp. 155-173; p. 171/172.
- ¹¹ Francesco Casetti, 'Die Explosion des Kinos. Filmische Erfahrung in der post-kinematographischen Epoche', *Montage/AV*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2010), pp. 11-35.
- ¹² I borrow the felicitous term 'active silence' from Richard J. Gerrig and Deborah A. Prentice. Gerrig and Prentice argue that film viewing is comparable to the side-participation of a conversation: the silent attentive viewers are prepared to respond in an *as-if* mode that approximates the response they would have, were they actually part of the film's events. As an example they cite the inner tendency to urge or warn characters to act or avoid something. See their 'Notes on Audience Response', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory. Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 388-403; p. 402.
- ¹³ Cf. Jean Châteauevert/André Gaudreault, 'The Noises of Spectators, or the Spectator as Additive to the Spectacle', in Richard Abel and Rick Altman (eds.), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 183-191 (see especially p. 190). Karel Dibbets, 'The Introduction of Sound', in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 211-219 (see especially p. 214).
- ¹⁴ I have undertaken a first step in my essay 'Collective Viewing' (see footnote 10).
- ¹⁵ Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or the Imaginary Man* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005 [1956]). Roland Barthes, 'Leaving the Movie Theater', in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989 [1975]), pp. 345-349.
- ¹⁶ Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' and 'The Apparatus. Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema', in Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 281-298 and 299-318. The articles appeared in 1970 and 1975 respectively.
- ¹⁷ I leave aside the fact that there may be other reasons why some viewers are present, for instance as accompanying partners or professional critics. Suffice it to say that initial individual preferences and motives are not decisive for joint action, even if they may play an important role for the duration and stability of acting jointly. What is crucial is the *actual doing*. Cf. Hans Bernhard Schmid, *Wir-Intentionalität. Kritik des ontologischen Individualismus und Rekonstruktion der Gemeinschaft* (Freiburg: Alber, 2005), p. 19.
- ¹⁸ For this distinction between three types of collective intentionality, see Schmid (2005), p. 47.
- ¹⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Narrative Cinema and Audience-Oriented Aesthetics', Tony Bennett et al. (eds.): *Popular Television and Film* (London: Bfi, 1981), p. 270-282; p. 271 und 271.
- ²⁰ Margrit Tröhler, 'Orte des Spektakels bewegter Bilder. Filmische Dispositive und ihre Atmosphären', in Philipp Brunner, Jörg Schweinitz and Margrit Tröhler (eds.), *Filmische Atmosphären* (Marburg: Schüren, 2012), pp. 53-71; p. 58/59.
- ²¹ Margaret Gilbert, 'Mutual Recognition, Common Knowledge, and Joint Attention', in T. Ronnow-Rasmussen, B. Petersson, J. Josefsson and D. Egonsson (eds.), *Hommage à Wlodek. Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz* (2007). www.fil.lu.se/hommageawlodek (last access: October 24, 2012).
- ²² Tom Cochrane, 'Joint Attention to Music', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2009), pp. 59-73; p. 65.
- ²³ Volker Pantenburg, 'Attention, please. Notizen zur Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie in Kino und Museum', in *Kolik.film*, vol. 14 (2010), pp. 68-74; p. 70.
- ²⁴ Tröhler, p. 59.
- ²⁵ Pantenburg (2012), p. 82/83; Pantenburg (2010), p. 71. The revaluation of alternative types of audience and dispositifs does not only deplore silence (favouring expressivity), but also stillness (favouring mobility). Pantenburg therefore launches a convincing critique of the idea that spatial mobility implies more intellectual activity. Pantenburg (2012), p. 80.
- ²⁶ Yvette Biró: 'The Fullness of Minimalism', *Rouge*, vol. 9 (2006). See also Matthew Flanagan, '*Slow Cinema.* Temporalität und Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film. PhD Thesis. University of Exeter (October 2012).
- ²⁷ Schmid (2005), p. 18.
- ²⁸ Anika Kriebich/Shawn Gallagher: 'Joint Attention in Joint Action', *Philosophical Psychology*, published online 28 May 2012, pp. 1-17.
- ²⁹ Angelika Krebs, 'Dialogical Love. Analyzing Joint Action', in *Paper for the Library of Living Philoso-*

- phers' *Volume on Martha Nussbaum*. Retrieved from: www.ethics-etc.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/krebs.pdf (last accessed: October 24, 2012).
- ³⁰ Cf. Schmid (2005), p. 19.
- ³¹ Schmid (2005), p. 99.
- ³² Schmid (2005), p. 98.
- ³³ Quoted from Schmid (2005), p. 53.
- ³⁴ There is no consensus among proponents of collective intentionality whether or not it necessarily implies social norms. Gilbert thinks that collective intentions *always* imply commitments, obligations and entitlements, whereas Searle believes that this is not the case. Hans Bernhard Schmid takes a moderating position. Cf. Schmid (2005), p. 205.
- ³⁵ Margeret Gilbert, 'Walking Together. A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. XV (1990). pp. 1-14; p. 6.
- ³⁶ This is not true for those cases in which one can watch the film collectively, as in a projection room or black box. In terms of silence we encounter similar obligations and entitlements as in the cinema.
- ³⁷ Kriebich/Gallagher, p. 6.
- ³⁸ Michal Pagis, 'Producing Intersubjectivity in Silence. An Ethnographic Study on Meditation Practice', *Ethnography*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2010). pp. 309-328; p. 311/312.
- ³⁹ Pagis, p. 324.
- ⁴⁰ Pagis, p. 314.
- ⁴¹ Hans Bernhard Schmid, 'Shared Feelings. Towards a Phenomenology of Collective Affective Intentionality', in Hans Bernhard Schmid, Katinka Schulte-Ostermann and Nikos Psarros (eds.), *Concepts of Sharedness. Essays on Collective Intentionality* (Heusenstamm: Ontos, 2008). pp. 59-86; p. 78.
- ⁴² Quoted from Linda Williams, 'Discipline and Fun. *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema', in Robert Kolker (ed.), *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho. A Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). p. 168
- ⁴³ Williams, p. 183.
- ⁴⁴ Williams writes: 'This discipline is for fun. And the fun derives partly from the exhilaration of a group submitting itself, as a group, to a thrilling sensation of fear and release from fear.' Williams, p. 184.
- ⁴⁵ Williams, p. 185. The pleasure that audiences take as a *group* in the film can also involve a new level of audience performance inside the theatre – think of screaming, moaning, hiding one's eyes, holding one's ears, clutching the neighbour.
- ⁴⁶ Kennedy, p. 15-20.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences. From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). p. 2.
- ⁴⁸ To be sure, silence is a matter of decorum and demands a control over the body.
- ⁴⁹ See also Daniel Fritsch, *Georg Simmel im Kino. Die Soziologie des frühen Films* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009).
- ⁵⁰ Hansen (1991), p. 66.
- ⁵¹ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Wie der frühe Film zum Erzählkino wurde. Vom kollektiven Publikum zum individuellen Zuschauer', in *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2002). pp. 69-93; p. 75.
- ⁵² Hansen (1990), p. 233.
- ⁵³ Miriam Hansen, 'Early Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?' in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: Bfi, 1990). pp. 228-246; p. 233 (emphasis added) and Hansen (1991), p. 34. Elsaesser (2002), p. 69. See also Thomas Elsaesser, 'The New New Hollywood. Cinema Beyond Distance and Proximity', in Ib Bondebjerg (ed.), *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000). pp. 187-203; p. 194.
- ⁵⁴ Hansen (1991), p. 94.
- ⁵⁵ Châteauevert/Geaudrault, p. 190 (original emphasis). In *The Imaginary Signifier* Christian Metz argues quite similarly. He considers the viewers in the cinema as an accumulation of individuals who more closely resemble the fragmented group of readers of a novel than the audience of a theatre play. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). p. 64.
- ⁵⁶ Tröhler, S. 67 (my translation).
- ⁵⁷ Hansen (1991), p. 95 and Elsaesser (2000), p. 36.
- ⁵⁸ Hansen (1991), p. 66.
- ⁵⁹ To be sure, Hansen mentions the effect, but seems unwilling to draw the consequences when she notes that the changes 'subdue the social and cultural distinctions among viewers and turn them into a homogeneous group of spectators.' Hansen (1991), p. 66.
- ⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version', in *Selected Writings 1935-1938*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). pp. 101-133; p. 116

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- ⁶¹ Quoted from: Volker Pantenburg, '1970 and Beyond. Experimental Cinema and Installation Art', in Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg and Simon Rothöhler (eds.), *Screen Dynamics. Mapping the Borders of Cinema* (Vienna: Synema, 2012). pp. 78-92; p. 92 (original emphasis).
- ⁶² Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers. The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010). On screaming and shock see particularly chapter 5 (pp. 127-154).
- ⁶³ Hansen notes: 'the cinema rehearsed new, specifically modern forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.' Hansen (1991), p. 105. If this is true for early cinema, one could claim that the Classical Cinema rehearsed specifically *advanced* modern forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. For an argument along these lines, see chapter 9 of my *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*.