

The Viewer's Autonomy

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Auteur television and *auteur* cinema were related from the beginning. Rossellini, for instance, started his career as a film author and at a certain point, when the Italian film promotion was oriented to the commercial, he exiled himself in television. He made then a great film about Louis XIV; from that point on he did nothing but films for television. The same happens with several other authors-filmmakers, such as Edgar Reitz, who did not shot the mini series *Heimat* (1984-) exactly for movie theatres. If it had depended on me, I would have always worked on cinema –in fact what I do, is cinema, and I am a film history patriot, not one of television– but I have to accept that since a certain point, television became a dominant medium. And if I want to be independent, I have to defend that cause in television's core, independency, to the last consequences. That was what we did and as a proof, we have achieved the same status in television as that we had as authors-filmmakers. Some of us have done so by partnering with other media such as Spiegel TV, The BBC, The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* or The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*... To illustrate it: the *auteur* principle is that of an artisan and it is distinguished from the so-called “dressmaking cinema”, what a tailor does, and where distribution is dominant. While production and financial capitalism exist, one can choose to remain in the side of production and be independent as Asterix, the Gaul, or to aim for Julius Caesar's politics and be on the dressmaking side. But do not get my wrong, I am not against the dressmaking, it is just not what I do. I am the son of a doctor, and a doctor is not a pharmaceutical industry employee. A doctor remains independent.

That quest for an independent place within a dominant medium such as TV, how does it relate to the notion of public sphere as you conceive it?

We wrote a book titled *Experience and Public Sphere* with Oskar Negt, along the lines of Jürgen Habermas' *History and Critique of the Public Opinion*. What is consummated in intimacy becomes experience, for example, inside families, in romantic relationships or at work. However, those personal experiences only acquire self-confidence if they are exchanged in the public sphere. Love is something intimate that can acquire either confidence or an inferiority complex depending on how it is publically discussed. If the French crown publically exhibits its lovers as a political gesture, just like Henry IV proudly exhibits

Gabrielle D'Estrées, and the entire nation feels proud with the fact that their King has both a legitimate wife and a beautiful lover, one's self-confidence regarding loving matters is defined very differently from that among puritans.

You advocate for men to have better self-confidence...

Autonomy. I think all men behave in an autonomous way, as long as they can, in the most essential aspects. This is to say, as long as they find a hole in oppression. In arts, particularly, autonomy is especially important. Salzburg's cardinal had a completely different musical taste from Mozart, he hated his music, but Mozart did not compose it in a different way because of that. Godard will never be obedient, even having made films for advertisement. He is still autonomous. That is *auteur* cinema. Another example is Truffaut.

You claim for an autonomous attitude in the viewer as well?

Yes. But I do not need to claim a thing. Viewers are autonomous by themselves. Sometimes one constructs a mistaken idea about this. Let us take as an example Lady Di's death: most of the television network directors in my country thought that the news was a sensationalistic matter: ‘we do inform about it, but it is not important’. Nevertheless, people started to feel identified with the princess. The death in the tunnel was important to them, they were shocked. Consequently, they insisted and the medium had to give in. Actually, the media were the ones upside down. The viewers are the medium, what they cannot imagine neither can exist in the medium. In this sense, to honour ratings is to make a distorted reading of that reality. The viewers are the ones that should be honoured. Audiences resist a lot more that one thinks.

Resist?

For example, I once made a very risky program together with Peter Sloterdijk about “The long way of God's rage”, ninety minutes without pause, in private television. A little while ago, I made another similar show with Peter Weibel about the methods of transcription in modernity. It does not seem simple, but it actually is: it exposes how an isolated avant-garde, moving far forward and completely annihilating the past by itself, does not exist. If we rather take any point of any existing text, whether

by Ovid, Montaigne or one from the avant-garde by Proust or Joyce, whichever, we could continue to write based on that point, in the same way a monk from the middle ages introduces small modifications to a text when making a transcription. That is the evolution towards modernity and our DNA is organized as such. The writing of life continues and it is updated through little transcriptions that imply little modifications. The same happens in art, Weibel states, and he develops the idea during the 90 minutes continuously. We had a lot of ratings; the show was watched by one of every five viewers.

In those two shows, as in many others, you assume the role of the interviewer yourself.

Yes, but I am not seen during the interview. I make questions, work as a pointer. My task is to make a distended situation arise, make my interviewee feel free, comfortable and make him talk. But if I notice that he is getting too comfortable, let us say, if he is “sleeping” in a certain way, or if he is no longer saying things that surprise me, I make him stop. I am a witness of a discourse that I accompany with incitement, incentives. To keep the attention of a viewer with a philosophical topic for ninety minutes seems a form of art to me. It is the rhetoric that the Greek sophists were already practicing.



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