Abstract
The aim of this paper is a reconsideration of the questions surrounding the film and audiovisual media experience in the light of the current debate in psychology and the neurosciences. It presents four steps to assess the current situation: first and most obviously, to define clearly both the field of research and the methodology proposed; secondly, to employ a grounding paradigm, which may be found in the concept of functional consciousness; thirdly, to address the core theories of the psychology of emotions, which today lies at the heart of the scientific debate, and to do so using the most up-to-date tools, with particular regard to the psychological construction of emotion and subsequently that of the film and audiovisual media viewing experience; fourthly and finally, to define the relevance of the model with respect to the specific field of film and media, which will be done here through the use of classic filmological models that take into account the dynamics of the attribution of reality to film images, emotional participation, and cinematic self-projection. The last of these, in my view, allows us on the one hand to draw a richer and more up-to-date picture of the film and audiovisual media experience and, on the other, to understand a neo-filmological approach as a mediator between phenomenology and functionalist psychology. Here, again, emotion will play a crucial role.

Keywords
Emotions; film experience; neuroscience and film; filmology; Jean Mitry; Albert Michotte.

Film and media theories have often drawn their conceptual tools from psychology: notions and ideas belonging to a particular psychological tradition disentangled themselves from their purely scientific status and gained one that is less procedural and relates to public opinion. Such borrowing contributed to legitimating film theory, in its early history, as a cultural phenomenon, and, subsequently, to further strengthen its theoretical paradigms. Classic filmology in the post-WWII era has always been particularly involved in this relationship: among its founders were names like Frederic Bartlett and Albert Michotte, or the Italian psychologists Agostino Gemelli and Mario Ponzo, but even its philosophical and epistemological foundations in the phenomenological circle — think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s or Ferdinand Gonseth’s involvement — were consistently rooted in psychological debates. A key concept that is owed to classical filmology is...
a description of film viewing as a situated experience, which leads today major neuro-scientists to acknowledge Merleau-Ponty a precursory role for later reflections on the bodily (embodied) dimensions of experience².

Developments in the field of cognitive film theories and of the neurosciences have provided a further impetus in this direction, as is clear from the models proposed more recently by Uri Hasson in his neurocinematics³, Arthur Shimamura in his psychocinematics⁴, and in the neurofilmology of Adriano D’Aloia and Ruggero Eugeni⁵, or in the contribution of Vittorio Gallese e Michele Guerra with regard to what they call the “embodied simulation”⁶. Contributions such as these are beginning to create an extensive toolbox that is useful for investigating questions of great cultural importance in terms of production, consumption and the impact on the collective imagination. Murray Smith latest contribution still pleads for a cooperative methodological stance, “where the knowledge and methods of the natural sciences come to complement rather than replace or eliminate those of the human sciences”⁷. The aim of this paper is to prove the usefulness and reliability of some traditional filmological conceptual tools in the light of this goal: I will propose that notions such as the attribution of reality to film images, emotional participation, and self-projection still have heuristic value.

Before reaching a hypothetical definition that takes account also of the historical and theoretical traditions of cinema and audiovisual studies, it is nonetheless necessary to undertake four steps to assess the current situation and build the appropriate methodological framework. First and most obviously, we have to define clearly both the field of research and the methodology proposed: consequently, part of the interpretative keys that will enable us to explore in depth the wider questions of film and media experience are to be found in the models offered by the current debate in psychology and the neurosciences, which is undoubtedly setting the scientific and cultural agenda of our time using the most up-to-date tools. We will highlight those which directly focus on the film and audiovisual media viewing experience, and point out the central role still played by the psychology of emotion, with particular regard to the psychological construction of emotion approach. Secondly, as the theme of the emotions lies at the very center of the debate surrounding the definition of consciousness, we are in need of a grounding paradigm of subjectivity, which will allow the convergence of a phenomenological view and the most recent proposals in a naturalized philosophy of the mind: a paradigm which may be found in the concept of functional consciousness. Thirdly, we will thus be able to introduce those tools which will lead us from the core dimensions of what has been called a “minimal subject”⁸ to the thick, representational subjectivity of a film viewer:


⁶ Gallese, Guerra, Lo schermo empatico. Cinema e neuroscienze, 23 ff.
Antonio Damasio’s “as-if circuit”, mind-reading and self-representation, and the specific sense of reality we attribute to media images should together constitute such a conceptual frame. Fourthly and finally, we will consequently specify the relevance of the model with respect to the specific field of film and media. It is only at the end of this journey, in fact, that we shall bring into play older terms like *participation* and *projection*, which, though belonging to debates that might appear outmoded, now seem to have recovered a heuristic value precisely in the light of the most recent neuroscientific studies into consciousness: taken together, the dynamics of the attribution of reality to film images, emotional participation and cinematic self-projection allow, in my view, on the one hand to draw a richer picture of the film and audiovisual media experience, and on the other hand to understand a neo-filmiological approach as a mediator between phenomenology and functionalist psychology. Here again emotion will play a crucial role.

1. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF EMOTION

Ever since the dramatic tradition of the nineteenth century, psychological research has constantly accompanied reflections around the writing techniques employed with physiological or physiognomic descriptions of our reactions and emotional behaviour. Particular attention has naturally been given to acting techniques, especially where they express and arouse the emotions. Over time this interest – if we wish, this collaboration, even – has become more marked, to the extent that nowadays a large number of contemporary serial productions openly stress the explicit emotional characterisation of individual roles and the techniques of emotional emphasis borrowed from the literature of the scientific community. This is especially true in the crime genre, from *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) to the contemporary series *Lie to Me* (Fox, 2009-2011), which, inspired by Paul Ekman’s works on the physiognomic recognition of the emotions, makes use of his scientific consultation.

In the following pages we shall refer to the broad field of studies that have led to an understanding of the film and media viewing experience, starting from a re-evaluation of its emotional components, as in the reflections of Ed Tan, who explicitly defines cinema as an *emotion machine*, and those of Noël Carroll and Greg Smith concerning the fundamental emotionality of genre and mainstream cinema in particular. Along similar lines, Torben Grodal has attempted to design a map of the narrative forms in film experience, recognising as genres a certain number of fundamental emotional dynam-

9 The best known case remains the animated film *Inside Out* (Pete Docter, 2015), which we may recall is based on the theory of basic emotions of Ekman himself. An essential element of the launch campaign, in fact, emphasised the explicit nature of this collaboration, signalling the interest in this type of research even among the general public.


11 Noël Carroll describes genres as prefocussing criteria, markers that may be traced back to specific emotions, by means of which “filmmakers encourage spectators to assess or to subsume the events onscreen under certain categories, namely the categories pertinent to the excitation of the relevant emotional states.” N. Carroll, “Film, Emotion and Genre”, in Plantinga, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, edited by C. Plantinga, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999, 21-47 (47); Greg M. Smith defines emotion markers as those textual elements that signal to the public the possibility of “travelling down the goal-oriented path of a narrative, cuing them to engage in a brief emotional moment”. G.M. Smith, “Local Emotions, Global Moods”, in Plantinga, *Passionate Views*, 103-126 (118).
ics, characterized by different cognitive, emotive and enactive variables. In this sense, genres no longer coincide with the text, and production formulas can correspond to one or another form of generic experience only in an approximate manner.

This line of research has been particularly influenced by advances in the study of the emotions over the last thirty years, and may be traced back in simplistic terms to a dispute between, on the one hand, theories of basic emotions, such as those of Paul Ekman himself and Jaak Panksepp, and, on the other hand, cognitive models which place emotional experience firmly in the noetic sphere. The former identify the neurophysiological response system to external stimuli as the original and emotional heart of our primary consciousness and have had a strong influence on theories of media experience that are essentially naturalized and neuroaffective, such as that of Torben Grodal. The latter insist on the distinction between physiological response systems and “felt” emotions, as in the writings of the most important specialist in studies into fear and anxiety, Joseph LeDoux. Independently of the core question as to the precise location and definition of our own self and identity, which we will address later, it seems clear at the time of writing that consciousness is a multimodal process which, operating at a number of closely interconnected levels and emanating from different neurophysiological systems, contributes to the definition of the self-ownership of the individual through her/his primary affectivity and her/his emotional reactions.

Antonio Damasio was perhaps the first to attempt to define states of consciousness in a modular sense and with reference to the original affectivity from which we are born (the core self); as early as 1996 he suggested referring to the physiological reactions that underlie the emotions as somatic markers, functional markers directing our conscious or unconscious evaluations and, consequently, our decision-making processes; this hypothesis has also had a great impact on studies in disciplines far beyond the neurosciences, including economics and the political sciences, and has contributed to bringing research into the emotions into the public sphere.

Paul Ekman’s theory of basic emotions presupposes that certain fundamental emotions (“there are probably more emotional words than there are emotions”) are linked to systems of response to external stimuli that are inherited phylogenetically and which

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16 The sense of ownership is a grounding aspect of a “minimal” definition of the self, and could be defined as “the sense that I am the one who is undergoing an experience, for example, the sense that my body is moving, regardless of whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary. […] The SoO may be tied to sensory feedback, its attenuation or crossmodal attenuation”, K. Vogeley, S. Gallagher, “Self in the Brain”, in Gallagher, The Oxford Handbook of the Self, 111-136 (119).
17 Damasio introduced the idea of a evolutionary chain that from a proto-self, a collection of neural patterns, to the individual organism (the core self or nuclear consciousness) and an emotional self, which, in turn, allow the emergence of an autobiographical self and an extended consciousness which, finally, is the place in which the phenomenic consciousness is generated. A. Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness, San Diego: Harcourt, 1999.
are thus the fruit of the evolution of the species. His theory was substantiated using neuroscientific tools by the confirmation of the existence of autonomous subcortical paths delegated to the activation of emotional responses – the amygdala, for example, is central to managing the physiological response to threatening stimuli (fear-relevant stimuli). However, the structural aspects of the theories of basic emotions have subsequently been criticised in their more radical or reductionist dimensions. Jaak Panksepp refined this approach, and in his studies of neurophysiology and animal behaviour he was able to point to the ancestral dimension of these systems, which pre-date our conscious awareness. He discovered seven subcortical circuits whose activation gives rise to a range of emotional responses which are necessary but not sufficient for “emotional experiences” in the strictest sense of the word. Comparative studies based on substantial meta-data, case studies aspiring to reassess and reinterpret older problems that seemed to have been solved, and new research methodologies such as resting state functional magnetic resonance imaging (rsfMRI), would suggest that rather than highly specialised circuits, phenomenal consciousness is made up of complex domain-general systems. Osterwijk, Touroutoglou and Lindquist listed them in a recent meta-analysis as following: vision, hearing, somatomotor control, attention, object salience (i.e., the bottom-up attention demanded by external stimuli), executive control, affectivity and the autobiographical memory, and the default mode network (DMN), commonly active when the person is not concentrating on the outside world, as when the mind is fantasising, daydreaming or simply wandering. Emotion would, in turn, be related to a general, functional, multi-modal model of states of consciousness, and would appear to be constituted as a cognitive elaboration of the various response systems.

The amygdala itself, though hypothetically related to a general system of evaluating stimuli in terms of pleasure or pain, would thus no longer be the determining centre where interconnected activity prevails between the different areas of the brain, including the cortex, that are involved in cognition. In short, what popular literature would call a “switch” for the emotions would appear not to exist. Joseph LeDoux, well-known since the nineties for his specialised studies of fear, has admitted that his idea of an autonomous system of fear linked to the amygdala requires reinterpretation. Emotion “is a conscious state that emerges when certain kinds of nonconscious ingredients coalesce and are cognitively interpreted”, and the innate response circuits to situations of danger are precisely – and only – that: response circuits to certain situations, which become emotional states at the moment in which they appear on the horizon of our phenomenal consciousness via interconnected systems. The notion of emotion must thus be redefined as a function of the psychological construction of consciousness, and therefore in a cognitive or meta-cognitive sense, and with the necessary implications with regard to language and memory.

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19 Ekman, Basic Emotions, 54.
24 LeDoux, Anxious, 46.
25 “We learn what our feelings are and this learning has a social-verbal experiential basis”. J.P. Forsyth,
and social story, and we learn to utilise culturally determinant categories to indicate the affective states and emotional values of our experiences, categories that we call emotions. Cultural products – fictional ones, in particular – become a fundamental tool in this sense, and a number of academics have begun to research interpretative hypotheses with relation to filmic experience, considering the emotional dimensions as a dynamic, interactive process that develops over time and at different levels. It is necessary at this point, however, to deepen our understanding of this framework. What precisely is the relationship between the emotional core of those perceptive-cognitive paths leading to the experience of one’s identity over time and the subjectivity of a film viewer? We need to define properly the multi-modal notion of consciousness and then relate it to high-order levels of agency.

2. FUNCTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Let’s start again from the beginning: who am I? Following Michael Gazzaniga, “a device that begins by asking how one thing relates to another, a device that asks about an infinite number of things, in fact, and that can get productive answers to its questions, cannot help but give birth to the concept of self”. Whatever the function of consciousness may be, it’s this questioning activity that leads us to press the play button or enter the movie theatre that we must describe and understand.

Though no unified theory of consciousness has yet been reached, the most recent research in this field has established constructionist models that demonstrate the various interconnections that exist between the different neural and/or physiological systems: the highly specialised areas of the brain revealed by the neuroscientific disciplines since the Nineties, in particular, can only be seen as being inter-dependent and functional. The neurobiologist and aesthetician Semir Zeki has managed to identify micro-conscious states for each component of our system of visual perception (the areas dedicated to the elaboration of perception data relating to shape, space, movement, and so on), demonstrating in turn the need for a multimodal, composite notion of consciousness in which specific processes work towards the “globalisation” or harmonisation of local data into a coherent image. In the same way, correlating the rapid responses that are activated automatically and the slower deliberative processes that allow us to realise, for instance, the presence of danger, is now recognised as a fundamental organisational principle of the mind.

According to a substantial body of research in the cognitive sphere, the formation of consciousness depends precisely on the effort of our mind to constitute itself as a


26 G. Raz, B. Hagin, T. Hendler, “E-motion Pictures of the Brain: Recursive Paths Between Affective Neuroscience and Film Studies”, in Shimamura, Psychocinematics, 285-313. Gallese and Guerra refers to the multimodality of our somato-sensory system as a grounding principle in the synaesthetic of film viewing (cfr. also Gallese, Guerra, Lo schermo empatico, 223-224) and even Murray Smith in his latest reflections on a naturalized film aesthetics goes back to the importance of «the multimodal nature of film perception», Smith, Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film, 17.


unified entity in the face of a physical reality that is made up of many different phenomenological states, from visceral sensations to perceptible physiological reactions, from motor-sensory impressions to attentional processes, from the activation of frameworks for understanding to a complex temporal structure for meta-representation. With their different nuances, proposals such as the component process model of the emotions\(^{30}\), the theory of the brain interpreter\(^{31}\), the self-representational approaches to consciousness\(^{32}\), and, finally, the theory of the psychological construction of emotion\(^{33}\) suggest interpreting consciousness as a construct which, *de facto*, moderates the very different impulses that characterise each of our phenomenal states and experience levels – physiological, perceptive-cognitive, relational and social –, shaping an individual self and giving a final sense of identity even to any gaps or contradictions that may exist. We should stress here the fact that, from a neuro-scientific point of view, “psychological processes are distributed throughout the brain with contributions from multiple subcomponents determining discrete mental activities that come together to give rise to the human sense of self”, but nonetheless “this emergent conscious experience occurs in a social world”\(^{34}\) and thus requires the higher-level contribution of a narrative self\(^{35}\).

It should also be noted that some of these models accept that we can reconfigure our own path of systemic adaptation and implementation through an effort that we could describe as a metacognitive experience\(^{36}\): Robert van Gulick, referring to the classic experiments with rats in the research into learning systems, underlines the capacity of these little creatures to adapt to a situation, modifying their own behavioural “rules” according to the type of adverse stimulus administered and to their ability to predict the effects on their visceral state: an auto-reflexive loop, which for the author “appears one of the basic processes driving the evolution of the mind. Organisms come to better understand their worlds by coming to understand themselves and the ways in which their structures engage their worlds”\(^{37}\). A social and auto-reflexive understanding of the problem of consciousness and the self could accommodate a recognition that “con-

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\(^{37}\) The experiment of Garcia e Koelling cited (1967) subjected the lab rats to a delayed negative stimulus after each meal: a shock, administered after a certain time lapse, did not prove to condition their behaviour as it would have done had it been administered immediately. However, a similar experiment with the administration of toxic substances led the rats to refuse the food, even if the poisoning was repeated some time after the meals. R. van Gulick, “Mirror Mirror – Is That All?”, in Kriigel, Williford, *Self-Representational Approaches to Consciousness*, 11-39 (23).
scious wordly agency is typically temporally extended and involves dynamic sensory feedback\textsuperscript{38}, while instead rejecting an overall functionalist metaphysics\textsuperscript{39}.

3. THE “AS-IF” CIRCUIT, MIND READING AND THE SENSE OF REALITY

Emotions, then, may be described as “emergent phenomena comprised of discreet mental events that themselves are not specific to any emotion”, occurrences that may include core affects processed according to the positive or negative nature of the experience, language, cognitively elaborated concepts of social and situational contexts (cognitive schemes), and processes of decision-making and executive control\textsuperscript{40}. A definition of this type does not conflict with the idea of an “as-if body loop”, a system hypothesised by Damasio to describe the re-creation at a mental level of emotional states, where the bodily feedback is absent or, at least, not required. Damasio observes, in fact, that the activation of the memory of an emotional state is sufficient to enable us to relive it\textsuperscript{41}. This circuit might be referred to as the system that manages (or, rather, as the substratum that nourishes) our meta-representations, the narrative universes in which we live in our imagination and in our consumption of cultural products, linking these with both our noetic and autonoetic memories and our affective system. It is where we are constituted as individuals, through a process of construction which, from its neurophysiological and phenomenological bases, becomes on one hand phenomenological (the sense of identity in relation to the external world) and on the other linguistic and semiotic (its definition in a categorial and causal sense).

The overall relationship between the circuits of the “as if” and of meta-representations with the phenomenal consciousness and the psychological construction of emotions may well prove to be an important development in research into aesthetic and cultural experience. This hypothesis recalls the studies of philosophers as diverse as Daniel C. Dennett and Alvin Goldman into our capacity to understand the mental states of others (mind reading), which is essential to understand how social relations work\textsuperscript{42}. In line with the cognitive model of mind theory, literary scholars with a background in

\textsuperscript{38} B.W. Kobes, “Functionalist Theories of Consciousness”, in Bayne, Cleeremans, Wilken, The Oxford Companion to Consciousness, 310-315 (314).

\textsuperscript{39} Radical functionalism excels in grounding the epistemological value of neuroscientific research, when it states that “neurochemistry matters because – and only because – we have discovered that the many different neuropeptides and other chemical messengers that diffuse through the brain have functional roles that make important differences”, but a hard computational view, or «strong Artificial intelligence theory», find its limits in its own paradoxical stance. If a zombie would watch a movie, should be put aside as a filmological non-problem: what matters in my opinion is the older, vexed question: why we watch zombie movies “as if” they were real. Here D.C. Dennett, Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness, Cambridge (Mass.)-London: The MIT Press, 2005, 19.

\textsuperscript{40} Note that “these elements are always combining to create mental states, only some of which are emotions”. J.A. Coan, M.Z. Gonzalez, “Emotions as Emergent Variables”, in Barrett, Russell, The Psychological Construction of Emotion, 209-225 (217).

\textsuperscript{41} “Because our perception of any body state is rooted in the maps of the somatosensing regions [of the brain], we perceive the body state as actually occurring even if it is not”. A. Damasio, Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain, New York: Pantheon, 2010, 102.

the cognitive sciences such as Lisa Zunshine have recently interpreted the act of reading in the light of the need to understand others, attributing to them mental states that are clearly not observable except by inference. In this framework fictional narration constructs virtual sets in which readers may test their own competence in mind reading in a simulated manner, thus, as it were, honing their skills in this area so as to apply them subsequently to the more complex relational, socio-political and historical situations of the real life-world. According to this theory, it is from this “gym” of inferential capacities that we draw part of the pleasure of reading.

But to delve into the question, one of the biggest problems that cinematic and audiovisual experience pose to its understanding as part of a self-recognizing, embodied life project, is the issue concerning the value of reality of media images. Why should we accept them as phenomenal experiences, if not merely for their technical dimensions (colour, shape, light)? A first proper solution has been traditionally found in the “complex-specific salience” of photorealism, which gives the viewer, states Torben Grodal, “the sense of being confronted with real physical events and phenomena.” But Grodal himself needs to widen his definition(s) of realism, as not all audiovisual narratives rely on photorealism, and takes then into account social cognitive frames ranging from individual recognitions of lyricism and poetry to typicality and familiarity, and even to the pragmatics of non-fictional “assertive-performative” voices. In his earlier work, the Danish scholar argued that judging reality depends on the modularity of the mind, and posited two systems: “Any percept or schema has the same ‘local reality’ as existing in mind, whether it is part of a fictitious or a real event, and as such it has an activating impact on the mind. The cognitive evaluation of reality-status takes place on a global level as a labelling of local phenomena.”

A multi-modal, functional interpretation of states of consciousness allows us to reconsider the question. To do so, we shall also, and finally, take in account a classical filmological approach: French film theorist Jean Mitry, indeed, categorised film images as second-level reality: “l’image filmique est, de toute évidence, une image objective, concrète, située “quelque part” - spatialisée en quelque sorte” and, consequently, “il n’y a, là aussi, en tant que ‘participation psychique’, qu’une différence de degré ou d’intensité” with respect to every other type of mental image. For Mitry it is our emotional participation as such (we could say the bodily activation that triggers our attention and emotional participation) that leads us to attribute reality to media images; and today we have a descriptive model that is useful to ground his original observations. Responsible for the pre-cognitive attribution of a value of reality with regard to the experience seems to be cortical activity: but, as they are linked to the core affects and the salience network, which usually work in tandem, the response circuits are activated, in fact, independently of cortical retroaction. So, in the case for example of our threat-induced reaction network, the sense of reality comes into play just after the activation reflex (the

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45 Ibid., 265.
48 “This helps account for why threat detection results in risk assessment and heightened sensitivity to the environment. If your brain has detected a potential source of harm, and arousal has been triggered, through focused attention you begin to monitor the environment in search of other possible harmful things”. LeDoux, *Anxious*, 221. Cfr. also A. Touroutoglou e.a., “Dissociable Large-scale Networks Anchored in the Anterior Insula Subserve Affective Experience and Attention/Executive Function”, *Neuroimage*, 60 (2012): 1947-1958.
(trigger) and is a function, rather then a cause, of our evaluation of the risk. Only at this later point do these representations require the individual – at a meta-representative level – to ascribe to them the value of reality. The sense of reality is thus hypothetically a discrete, scalar value which, at the moment in which the stimulus is processed in conscious states with emotional and autonoetic significance (memory, understanding, attribution of sense, etc.), may refer to various different levels of representation (relating to objects, memory, fantasy, dreams, hallucinations – or, indeed, to media). This obviously also means that we may easily be mistaken in our attribution, or tricked by perceptual illusions, by our own pre-conscious systems of reaction and evaluation, as well as by our memory, or by cultural products that play on the ambiguity of their status. Anxiety and fear become reality each time we sense them as such, even in lab tests, and not as a simple stimulus-response dynamic.

4. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUESTION AND THE PROJECTION OF THE SELF

The elaboration of a model of psychological construction of cinematic experience might help to understand and tackle another fundamental, unresolved issue. On the one side we have an intentional phenomenology, classically understood as a constitutive opening to the other and thus as a fluid relationship between shapes and backgrounds, between passions which alter and transform gradually, through a subtle semiotics of nuances. On the other side we see a functionalist psychology which, however much it is refined, nevertheless remains linked to the recognition of hard-wired, differentiated mechanisms. How to relate these two positions to each other is not at all obvious: quite the contrary, in fact. The most recent cognitive models seek, indeed, to mediate between the two positions; and this is the objective that I have set myself in this paper. We shall now return to the classic phenomenologist Frederic Bujtendijk, in order to state the structural relationship between emotional instances and functional consciousness. In his works on affectivity, the Dutch scholar described feeling as the intentional projection of the self onto the world and emotion as its rebound in the identity of the individual thus constituted; this is, in fact, not so dissimilar from the more recent approaches we met earlier. However, in view of the specifically intentional dimension of feeling, he also pointed out that the same “feeling is a mode of replying to a situation and transforming it as a projected new world, in which unknown qualities are categorically experienced”, and therefore “emotion is the specific quality of our existence”. Thus, feeling is the intentional push to open ourselves up to the world which beckons us, while emotion is in turn the specific, sensory quality of the experience we have lived, which we organise into categories. Feeling is an intentional, constituting act of an individual present in the world, while emotion expresses his or her experience of life and may be structured (again) in


51 “Our feelings are no senseless states of consciousness or psychic facts, but modes to detect the significance of situations, to know what is savory, disgusting, alarming, distressing, lovely, etc.”. Ibid., 128-129.

52 Ibid., 130.
discrete, scalar terms. Albert Michotte, a father of modern psychology, similarly pointed out how emotion is an integrating part of processes of the attribution of causality, through which we give sense to the world that surrounds us. He described emotions as the expression of a “functional” correspondence with kinetic structures of perception (triggered by the movement of objects). That is to say, there are structural functions of movement (expressive movements) to which we ascribe affective meaning. In the same way, the flash of anger, the attack of anxiety, the sudden fright, the shiver of fear are—as suggested by the very lexis we use to indicate them (flash, attack)—all phenomenal manifestations of an emotionality that opens us to the world but which depends in turn on the concreteness of the stimuli and on our capacity to relate them to specific, concrete and discrete emotions. They are particular functions of our own unique life project, which is in turn the place where we unify and give sense.

One of the terms that is classically brought into play to define this life project and this intentionality is that of projection; this has often also been used in theoretical reflections concerning film experience and I would like to relaunch it here as a conclusion. It is not by chance that the notion of self-projection has returned again in neuroscientific experiments to qualify the capacity to create an identity for oneself, or to “shift our perspective from the present to vivid memories of our personal past, conceive what others are thinking and imagine ourselves in situations before they happen”, as stated by Buckner and Carroll. In a recent neuro-imaging study, they have in fact identified a network involved in the organisation of the self through typically projective activities (prospection/anticipation, remembering, and theory of mind), and chosen to define this with the label self-projection; they, too, underline once again the modularity of such activities (which are, indeed, part of a network), the functionality of the process of consciousness, and the constructional processes that ensure its development.

Cinematic and audiovisual narratives suit this background particularly well. We may imagine the cinematic and audiovisual apparatus as a projective device which opens up to the viewer opportunities for self-representation and for a “protected” constitution of individual identity. Although the field of research into neuro-physiological forms of self-projection remains still to be ploughed, it seems that future studies into the psychological construction of media experience, if methodologically defined as I have attempted to do, may well yield more detailed and more complete answers.

54 I tried in my previous works to trace back some of these trajectories in the history of film theory. See e.g. M. Locatelli, “Perception, Projection, Participation: Film and the Invention of the Modern Mind”, in Dall’inizio, alla fine / In the Very Beginning, at the Very End. Teorie del cinema in prospettiva/Film Theories in perspective, edited by F. Casetti and J. Gaines, Udine: Forum, 2010, 483-490.