

Chapter Title: Conclusion "Cinema and ..."

Book Title: Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art

Book Author(s): Erika Balsom

Published by: Amsterdam University Press. (2013)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt45kdsq.9>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



*Amsterdam University Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*

## Conclusion – “*Cinema and...*”

And, finally, Z is for Zero – ZERO FOR CONDUCT, zero visibility, and Godard’s slogan, “Back to Zero.” As we enter the age of new media, the cinema is reinventing itself. We need to see that reinvention in radical as well as mainstream terms, to try and reimagine the cinema as it might have been and as, potentially, it still could be – an experimental art, constantly renewing itself, as a counter-cinema, as “cinema haunted by writing.” Back to zero. Begin again. A is for Avant-Garde.

–Peter Wollen<sup>1</sup>

Without a doubt, one must see here neither the completion of cinema nor its death, but simply the development of this singular situation: next to cinema, which continues its existence as a celibate art, an exploded and metaphorized cinema is unfolding, muddling the borders of the art that is now becoming art.

–Jacques Rancière<sup>2</sup>

In his “Alphabet of Cinema,” Peter Wollen implies that the age of new media constitutes something of an end for cinema, but also an opportunity to begin again. This chance at recommencement is borne precisely of the ways in which digitization has prompted a simultaneous compromise and reassertion of the boundaries of cinema. “Z is for zero”: a point that marks both a complete exhaustion and a reservoir of possibility from which the new might spring; “Z” arrives at the end of the alphabetic sequence but as the “Z” of zero, it is also a beginning. In the preceding pages, I have attempted to provide an overview of one site where such a new beginning is occurring: contemporary art. This book has traced the emergence of what I have called, in a slight adjustment of Raymond Bellour’s term, the “othered cinema” – that is, a cinema that has become other to itself by entering into aggregate formations with elements and institutions that have historically not been a part of it. This emergence takes place, as Jacques Rancière suggests, alongside what has traditionally been considered to be cinema, both paralleling it and commenting on it. It must be noted, however, that the continued existence of this traditional cinema may not be as “celibate” as Rancière takes it to be; rather, Rancière provides a better description of the contemporary situation when he speaks of a muddling of borders.

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have argued that the increased integration of cinema into the spaces of art after 1990 enables a rethinking of the histories of cinema and provides a microcosm in which to take account of its con-

temporary mutations and its possible futures. This integration abides by a tension between old and new media: older than new media and newer than old media, cinema enters the gallery under the specter of mass cultural obsolescence but also infuses that space with spectacular novelty. Over the past two decades, curators, artists, and critics have conceived of cinema as an old medium linked to cult value, historicity, and patrimonial inheritance. Notions of ruination and refuse come to figure the way elements of this now old apparatus persist and reappear in new configurations. This becoming-old of cinema in an age of new media is important, for it not only traces a historical trajectory that sees cinema change from a technological novelty at the end of nineteenth century to an old medium at the beginning of the twenty-first, but also opens the possibility of extrapolating from this to think about how today's new media will one day become old as well.

Alongside this senescent cinema, the spectacular novelty of cinema continues to exert a prominence and a deep-seated fascination within the gallery and without. Just as the multiplexes have recently turned (once again) to the technological marvel of 3-D to ensure box office revenues, so have museums exploited the sensory possibilities of large-scale projected images in their efforts to maintain relevance and appeal to broad demographics. The new technology of video projection and its mobilization as a part of a broader transformation of the museum space have constituted one major site of cinema's novelty within an art context, but it is matched by another: the ability of these moving image practices to forge the novelty of the blind spot, the newness that disturbs established frameworks of understanding. I have unfolded this tension between old and new across four primary sites of inquiry: the way cinema transforms the space of the museum and is transformed by it, uses of celluloid that align the material of film with a spectral historicity, practices of remaking that ambivalently call upon cinema as a lost site of collectivity, and multiprojection installations that hybridize the modes of fiction and documentary in order to investigate subjective and historical experience.

With these propositions established, it is now time to return to the primary question I posed in the introduction, namely: how does the progressive integration of film into the gallery and the museum, as it mutates and fractures, change our conception of cinema? The characterization of cinema as older than new media but newer than old media is one principal answer to this question. But what other answers might obtain? To rephrase the question: if the tendency under discussion here "exhibits cinema" in the sense of holding it out for examination, what qualities or attributes – other than an interplay between novelty and obsolescence – are repeatedly exhibited or "held out"?

Whereas the investigations into cinematic specificity undertaken by artists in the 1960s and 1970s tended to focus on the materiality of the apparatus, contem-

porary artists interested in exhibiting cinema partake of a different kind of reflexivity, fastening on to the cinema's historical and social dimensions and foregoing materiality as their primary focus. They allow one to see anew what the cinema has been all along, though not always recognized as such: an institution at once public and historical that extends far beyond the hegemony of the fiction feature and that is in conversation with competing media forms. It may sound obvious and uncontroversial to characterize cinema in this manner, but it is in fact quite different from conceiving of the cinema as a primarily narrative form made for the purposes of entertainment, as have many popular cinemas, or from seeing it as a pure entity used for formal experiments of light and sound, as the avant-garde so often has. These four attributes emerge as particularly salient features of the institution as anatomized in contemporary art. It is worth examining each one briefly.

- **PUBLICITY:** Though the cinema has always been a public institution, canonical accounts of filmic spectatorship advanced in the 1970s focused on the two-term relation of the spectator to the screen. Instead, echoing Walter Benjamin's notion of cinema as allowing “room for play” and more recent accounts of cinema as an alternative public sphere, the othered cinema evinces a distinct emphasis on cinema as a public institution throughout its many facets. The museum and gallery emerge as public sites of spectatorship in an era marked by individual, domestic viewing, while many artists take up questions of collectivity, sociality, and publicity in their work.

- **HISTORY:** Cinema has come a long way as a historical institution since the era in which film prints were burned as soon as they were no longer commercially exploitable. Throughout the twentieth century, one may glimpse moments at which the cinema manifested an interest in its own history – be it in the found-footage genre of the avant-garde or in Hollywood's homages to the silent era such as *SUNSET BOULEVARD* (1950) and *THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER* (1955) – and others at which it served as a way of investigating historical experience. In contemporary artists' uses of the moving image, such concerns become primary. A desire to grapple with the history of cinema through cinema is paramount. Celluloid's link to a spectral historicity is underlined repeatedly. Artists question the way Hollywood has informed our understanding of historical events and engage the moving image as a way of grappling with historical experience. Owing to the digitization of media (which both recasts analogue specificity and allows for the easy recycling of footage), tied to fears of the institution's future, and in reaction to a postmodern waning of historicity, the othered cinema is a key site at which the relationship between cinema and history has been investigated. This relationship has three primary facets: the history of cinema, the historicity of analogue film, and the notion of the moving image as producing a historical archive through the recording of actuality.

- **BEYOND THE FICTION FEATURE:** The hegemony of the fiction feature film has held strong since the consolidation of the form in the late 1910s, but alternatives to it have always existed. It is precisely such alternatives that achieve a new regularity and visibility in the othered cinema. Documentary and non-narrative forms are common, as are extremely short works and works too long to be apprehended in a single museum visit. In a single piece, the viewer might encounter one projection or a dozen and these projections might be frontal, immersive, or even cast onto objects. The projector might be hidden or exposed as sculptural element of the installation. Quite simply, a principle of variability obtains, taking the cinema back to the multiple exhibition situations and nonstandardized formal structures that marked both its preinstitutional years and the extrainstitutional experiments of the avant-garde. From the permutational narratives of Stan Douglas to the movie theater protocols of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij, from the multiprojection documentary of Amar Kanwar to the extreme slowness of Douglas Gordon, this unleashing of cinematic heterogeneity and multiplicity emerges as one of the most striking attributes of the othered cinema, mirroring the new malleability and transportability of cinema witnessed across the cultural field in the wake of digitization.

- **COMPETITION OF MEDIA FORMS:** As noted in chapter two, though it is all too often forgotten, cinema has always existed within a competitive media environment. This has never been truer than today, when a multimediandscape of miniature devices, gigantic video billboards, and everything in between has definitively dislodged the traditional viewing situation of cinema as the primary site for the consumption of moving images. Cinema is both in competition and in aggregate formations not only with television, its long-time opponent, but also with video games, amusement park rides, mobile phones, and the Internet. The othered cinema is constitutive of an arena in which this contemporary “battle of the images,” to use Bellour’s term, is not only witnessed, but also critically interrogated. The relationships between convergence/specificity and hybridity/purity are relentlessly negotiated, whether it is in the return to 16mm as an outmoded device, in cross-medium remakes, or in the creation of new intermedial configurations that bring elements of cinema into confrontation with those of other media. The idea of cinema that one finds exhibited in contemporary art today is one of contaminated media forms that may no longer be considered outside of their encounters with one another. Infrastructures, personnel, modes of production, aesthetics, and technologies are shared between cinema, art, and a broader visual culture.

Given the scale and significance of this development, if art history is to keep pace with the developments of contemporary art, it must expand into the vocabularies and methodologies of film studies. And if film studies is to keep pace with the changing shape of its object, it must take seriously cinema beyond

what has traditionally been considered to be cinema. Together, both of these disciplines must confront the implications of digitization, not merely at the level of materiality but also as it affects the time and space of aesthetic experience, the relation between image and commodity, the parameters and mandates of cultural institutions, and the understanding of history. In this regard, these disciplines might learn much from the artistic practices confronted throughout this study, for these are precisely the issues they address. At stake here is the need to maintain an attention to specificity of the aggregate formations that arise while at the same time making interdisciplinary connections in order to best grapple with interstitial objects of study.

In a tribute to Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour attempts to describe the contribution Metz made to the study of film, using Foucault's concept of the *fondateur de discursivité*, or “founder of discursivity,” to do so.<sup>3</sup> He writes,

Which would, then, be discursivity established by Metz, the equivalent of his “Marxism,” his “psychoanalysis,” his “archaeology,” and mainly of what is implied by the rather diabolical force of the singular effect Foucault tries to recover? In my opinion, neither the semiology of the cinema, nor the relation postulated between psychoanalysis and the cinema, nor the sum of both, nor the one modified and enriched by the other. Put in a simpler and more secretive way, a movement which, closer and beyond the relation it established, appears to consist in the establishing of the relation in itself, the *and*. It is the force, at once simple and unexpected, which consists in saying *cinema and....*: and thus accepting all the consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Bellour locates, then, at the very foundation of what is now considered to be orthodox film studies, a transgressive “and....” This small conjunction functions to describe the ways in which, from its beginnings in the academy, film studies has always opened onto an outside and has made use of this outside while retaining an attention to the aesthetic, historical, and material specificities of cinema. Though the contemporary moment is one in which the discipline feels in crisis in large part due to the uncertain status of its object, it by no means is time to invoke the call to order and imperative to obey inherent in the term “discipline” in an attempt to shore up the boundaries of what properly does or does not belong to it.<sup>5</sup> Rather, this state of affairs means that it is more than ever the time to reinvigorate the study of cinema by returning to Metz's wager of “cinema and...” Saying “cinema and...” is very different than asserting an undifferentiated plane of converged media forms. It is, rather, to understand the self-difference of cinema as always engaged in a process of becoming-other while still maintaining an investment in the rich traditions of both film history and film theory.

In this study, I have drawn upon many insights that stem from the film theoretical tradition embodied by Metz's dare of the “and,” modestly attempting to

propose another conjunction – cinema *and* contemporary art – and to accept all the consequences. I have brought the history of film theory in conversation with developments in contemporary art to argue that these contributions to art history are also contributions to film history. These are artworks that move beyond the movie theater – and the television, the laptop, the tablet computer, the smartphone, the airplane seat, and even the minivan screen – to find new ways of exhibiting cinema.