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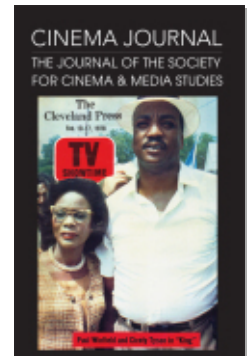
Reflections on the Recent Cinephilia Debates

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as *phenomenon* (cultural, historical, geopolitical), as *experience* (collective, individual), and as *knowledge* (fascination, reflection, interpretation). The contributions to this In Focus interface more readily with the latter approach, and have been organized along just such a circuit, from outside to inside—with the curious, happy coincidence of the final two concerning themselves with two American films from 1931. But these patently unapologetic textual analyses are not merely concerned with their chosen films, but also with what the films provoke outside of their own skins: their sociological contexts, their relations to other films, the various techne that weave the cocoons inside which they metamorphose into fluttering beings that captivate in their ephemerality and impermanence. What emerges, in the end, is the overwhelmingly physical disposition of film, how it figures bodies, machines, rooms, landscapes, and their relation as forms of deferral beyond the space and time of the film itself, leaving it for us to rescue, to explore, and to articulate—though not to complete—their moments of inscrutable pleasure. It is this sense of wonderment that academic film studies lost somewhere along its way, and through a renewed engagement with cinephilia might yet regain. *

Reflections on the Recent Cinephilia Debates

by MARIJKE DE VALCK

Much has been said about the death of cinema. In media industry circles the persistent decline in cinema attendance has ushered in a phase of serious reconsideration of existing business models. New industry strategies increasingly put forward the liquid notion of “content” as a replacement for the old edifice of cinema. Issues of convergence and technological change are at the heart of artistic and cultural concerns about cinema’s contemporary condition as well. Peter Greenaway, one of the more persistent purveyors of the death of cinema position for more than a decade, has proclaimed cinema “brain dead” and urged all filmmakers to leave behind the literary tradition of storytelling and convert to the new aesthetics, interactivity, and multimedia forms, as he has done himself.¹ While such talk of the “death of cinema” is widespread and developments in digital distribution and production reach new heights in bringing

1 For an in-depth exposition of Greenaway’s perspective, see Vernon Gras and Marguerite Gras, eds., *Peter Greenaway: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

about fundamental transformations to the moving image, it is important to remember that, together with the fascination with cinema's ending, cinephilia has resurfaced as a central concern, both in public debate and in academic writing.²

That interest in the "love of cinema" revives when the object of affection is perceived to be under threat is in itself not remarkable. One can indeed discern a certain defensive element in the recent cinephilia discussions, at times explicitly reactionary, to pronounce cinema "alive, well, and still developing in new and unforeseen directions."³ However, it would be a mistake to appraise the recent cinephilia debates merely as defensive rhetoric. My main objective in this essay is thus to draw attention to the valuable contributions these discussions have made to the positioning of professionals in response to the radical turn-of-the-millennium transformations.

In retrospect we can point to Susan Sontag's 1996 "The Decay of Cinema" as a starting point for the revived interest in cinephilia.⁴ Since then cinephilia has been discussed and referred to most productively and passionately by film critics, film archivists, film scholars, filmmakers, and, to a lesser extent, film festival programmers. The debates should above all be seen as a reaction to the "situation of crisis" in which film culture found itself at the end of the twentieth century: when digitization challenged cinema as both a technology and practice, as new technologies offered possibilities for new types of communities to emerge; when a steadily progressing globalization of cultures and industries combined with the bloom of filmmaking in Asia and South America to contradict existing Eurocentric perspectives on cinema; and when the commercial hand of large corporations increasingly reached for and interfered with everything. In this time of multiple transitions and maximum uncertainty about what cinema had been, was, and (if it) would be, the more steadfast *love for cinema* became a preferred vantage point from which to rethink and reassess cinema for today. Considering the fact that the men and women engaging in the discussions were professionally affiliated with cinema, their contributions were never just abstract reflections on this peculiar relationship to an art form, but always also intertwined with a wish to understand the changes happening in their field and to respond adequately to the current challenges. We could call this the "applied" side of the cinephilia debate, and I think it is particularly worthwhile to reassess its recent manifestations by looking more closely at two specific contexts in which cinephilia became a hot issue: film criticism and film archives.

Film Criticism and Cinephilia. Film critics were quick to respond to "The Decay of Cinema." From a professional commitment to report on the latest trends, styles, and shifts, critics accepted Sontag's provocative challenge to frame the medium's contemporary transformations. In order to assess the revival of interest in cinephilia, we should ask what was at stake for the film critics. At first sight, technological developments seemed to be playing a key role. Would cinema lose its value when watched at home

2 On the logics at work in the various figures of cinema's death in these debates, see Stephan Jovanovic, "The Ending(s) of Cinema: Notes on the Recurrent Demise of the Seventh Art, Part 1 and 2," *Offscreen* 7, no. 4 (April 2003), http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/death_cinema.html (accessed June 21, 2009).

3 Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, eds., *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), back cover.

4 Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, 60–61.

instead of in the magical surroundings of the cinema theater? Would the abandonment of celluloid be lethal for cinema as a unique art form?⁵ On closer inspection, the vitality of cinema as *aesthetic form* and *cultural practice* is a recurrent conclusion in critics' writings. An influential book edited by Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin is an emblematic example. In *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, gloomy talk about the death of cinema is countered by a rich patchwork of reflections, letters, interviews, and essays largely dedicated to the analysis of exciting films, filmmakers, and filmmaking that the contributors convincingly put forward as their collective rebuttal to the argument that cinema's days are numbered. The book, moreover, is not only a celebration of cinema as a mutating art form, but also of the evolving ways people worldwide continue to connect intimately with cinema, despite the profound technological changes that might be altering the patterns of its consumption. The position that cinema is not dead, then, and in fact is far from dying, is not only backed up by numerous examples of a flourishing art form, but also with the observation that film lovers still invest considerable time and effort in watching and discussing great films—maybe less in art houses, but then all the more by going to film festivals, watching DVDs at home, and participating in film communities on the Internet.

So what exactly is at stake here? Firstly, cinephilia appears to be brought into the “death of cinema” debate to prove the unchallenged significance of contemporary world/art cinema favorites—Abbas Kiarostami, Tsai Ming-liang, and Terrence Malick, to name but a few. Indirectly, however, this line of argumentation also supports a specific journalistic approach: it underscores how reviews written by “a certain kind of worldly film critic,” appearing in the culture sections of newspapers and in serious magazines about directors like Kiarostami, fulfill actual readers' needs.⁶ Secondly, it implies that the money allocated for such critics sampling the festival circuit is well spent. On reflection, the cinephilia discussion thus revolves around a crisis concerning not only cinema but also criticism or, to be more precise, the power play between contesting perspectives on what qualifies as *valuable* or *useful* criticism. On one side are the “serious” critics who defend close readings of noteworthy films, even if they are foreign and/or not released in their papers' markets.⁷ In “Is the Cinema Really Dead?” Jonathan Rosenbaum articulates how the debate on the death of cinema is connected to the contemporary practice of film reviewing. He laments the intolerant attitude of some of his colleagues who only review films showing locally and (ab)use the death of cinema line to reassure their moviegoing readers that what's available at their local multiplex or video store is all that's worth seeing.⁸ Rosenbaum avers that

5 For a short overview of the revived cinephilia debates, see Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, “Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia! And Other Videosyncratic Pleasures,” in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 12–14.

6 Adrian Martin, in correspondence with James Naremore, “The Future of Academic Film Study,” in Rosenbaum and Martin, eds., *Movie Mutations*, 122.

7 See, for example, Robert O. Wyatt and David P. Badger, “What Newspaper Film Critics Value in Film and Film Criticism: A National Survey,” in *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics, and Law*, Vol. 4, ed. Bruce A. Austin (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988), 54–71; and Greta Hsu, “Evaluative Schemas and the Attention of Critics in the U.S. Film Industry,” *Industrial and Corporate Change* 15, no. 3 (2006): 467–496.

8 Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Is the Cinema Really Dead?” in *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Limit What Movies We Can See* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 19–38.

any committed critic ought to look beyond the mainstream fare his editor wants him to cover, travel to film festivals to sample the unfamiliar, and do more research on emerging trends, even if these activities interfere with his paper's strategy.

On the opposite side are found not only the "intolerant" critics but above all their chief editors, who increasingly succumb to the influence of Hollywood's marketing machine and prefer running pieces on the most recent blockbusters, reporting on industry news, or doing festival (red carpet) atmosphere impressions.⁹ Placing the revival of interest in cinephilia in this framework makes clear how it plays a key role in the critical response to the publishing world, in which business interests are tightening their grip on an already alarming decline in the amount of column space devoted to culture; cinephilia helps advocate what one could call serious cultural film criticism by underscoring its value and invoking the existence of a dedicated audience of readers.

Ironically, the renewed attention for cinephilia and its new manifestations may at the same time make the position of film critics more vulnerable. The proliferation of amateur cinephilic writing on the Web especially can be seen as oil on the fire lit by those criticizing serious criticism as elitist and contemptuous of mass culture.¹⁰ For where is the value for money in paying professional film critics when plenty of reviews, discussion groups, and blogs are already available online? And if we follow the characterization by James Naremore that "[g]ood criticism needs to be written from the heart" and "informed by a spirit of discrimination and cinephilia," how can professional criticism be distinguished from amateur reflections?¹¹ *Sight & Sound* editor Nick James sounded the alarm in October 2008: "The dilemma is clear. There's a welcome increase in free access to writing about film, but the consequence has been a drop in the status of the professional film reviewer." He rightfully points out that the advantage bloggers have over paid critics is a far greater freedom in their writing—they are not curtailed by the power of advertisers and distributors. In this respect they might even provide a model for professional film reviewers, who according to James "must stop pretending to represent the norm and take a more prominent stand against the Hollywood machine and its avalanche of poor films, and to stand for a broader view of film culture."¹² James thus ultimately welcomes the new generation of bloggers and amateur reviewers. From a critics' perspective a new golden age of criticism is likely to emerge *if* a cinephilic commitment to exploring cinema in all its diversity prevails, and access to new movies and films from the archive is guaranteed. This second condition, however, has caused fierce debate among archivists.

9 See Robert Dawson Scott, "Bridging the Cultural Gap: How Arts Journalists Decide What Gets onto the Arts and Entertainment Page," *Critical Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 46–56. Nick James comments on how "the language of marketing" is nowadays more influential and powerful than criticism, even at "quality newspapers," in "Who Needs Critics?" *Sight & Sound* 20, no. 10 (October 2008): 16–29.

10 Peter Bart, at the time editor-in-chief of *Daily Variety*, provided a representative example in his January 6, 2003, column entitled "Critics' Year-End Lists: Triumph of Obscurantism: Looking at the Top 10 Lists, One Wonders Who's Drinking the Kool-Aid." See also Charles Taylor's riposte, "The War Against Movie Critics," *Salon*, January 13, 2003, <http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/feature/2003/01/13/bart/index.html> (accessed June 21, 2009).

11 Naremore, in correspondence with Martin, Rosenbaum, and Martin, eds., *Movie Mutations*, 127.

12 James, "Who Needs Critics?"

Film Archives and Cinephilia. Cinephilia has also featured in discussions on the future of film archives and film museums, in particular vis-à-vis digital developments. I will focus here on one particularly interesting collection, *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*, edited by Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein in 2008. Although cinephilia is not the main subject of the book, it frequently recurs as a concern in the transcribed conversations and written contributions that comprise the volume. In comparing the book to *Movie Mutations*, two striking similarities come to the fore. One is that both take the form of a collection of discussions, exchanges, talks, and essays that have been assembled over the course of a couple of years. Secondly, as was the case for film critics, film archivists' recourse to cinephilia is symptomatic of an attempt to reclaim power for their professional expertise and cultural perspective on the archival profession and practice. Like journalists, archivists are increasingly challenged by forces of commercialization and popularization now that media industries and governments have realized that archives contain treasures that can be mined indefinitely for television broadcast, DVD editions, on-demand Web viewing, and other future access technologies.

For film archivists, however, quite different issues are at stake than for critics. A brief look at the ambitious Dutch project Images for the Future (Beelden voor de Toekomst) highlights some of the major challenges faced by film and television archives today.¹³ The Images for the Future project has set out to preserve, digitize, and make the audiovisual collections of six major Dutch institutions available to third parties. It aims to save Dutch heritage, increase media literacy, and contribute to a strong knowledge society. Several obstacles, however, stand in the way of reaching these goals, and it is worth quoting the consortium's delineation of these at some length:

The market doesn't offer a suitable solution for the preservation and digitisation of the audio-visual heritage. This is due to several market imperfections. Potential commercial parties and users of the material simply cannot find the collections, or are discouraged by the question of copyrights. Secondly, market parties will shrink back from the considerable investments needed to disclose specific parts of the material, especially when it is only going to be used once. The material first has to be preserved and digitised before it is ready to be used in, for instance, schools or video on demand. The costs are prohibitive, and thus an obstacle to economic development. A problem of coordination will appear when necessary investments cannot be justified by one-off users, and when the material's owner cannot get access to the financial means needed for such investments. Moreover, a possible monopolization of the audio-visual collections by private financiers will be detrimental to the social importance and the educational value of much of the material. It's

13 A project of the Dutch Film Museum, Institute for Sound and Vision, Centrale Discotheek Rotterdam, National Archives, Association of Public Libraries, and KnowledgeLand, Images for the Future endeavors to "save an important part of the audiovisual heritage of the Netherlands through conservation and digitization," <http://www.beeldenvoortoeekomst.nl/en/1/Home> (accessed June 21, 2009).

therefore up to the government to level the obstacle and make available the means that will enable the preservation and digitisation of all the material in one project, and the accessibility to all users.¹⁴

There is, in other words, a discrepancy between the investment needed to disclose complete collections and the amount of material that might bring in extra revenue. In addition, there is a tension between the wish to make all historical materials available for educational purposes or research and copyright owners' resistance to free access. Moreover, before analog material can be digitized it needs to be preserved, which significantly adds to the total costs of the project.

In *Film Curatorship* an interesting discussion revolves around conflicting notions of good archival practice that draw on the divergent cinephiliac models of Henri Langlois and Ernest Lindgren (founding curators of the Cinémathèque Française and the British National Film Archive, respectively).¹⁵ Langlois was one of the first figures in the development of film archives to start collecting and preserving film, but he acquired his large and devoted following mainly due to the screenings he organized of these (at times unique or only extant copies of) films in the Cinémathèque, setting the standard for a cinephile film-viewing experience that still holds a mythical appeal today. Langlois's model helped educate the cinephile generation of the Nouvelle Vague, but—as the collection's contributors pointedly remind us—also resulted in the permanent loss of many films. Lindgren, on the other hand, was principally concerned with preserving cinema history and would always protect the original artifact from the wear and tear of projection if this was necessary to ensure its existence for the future. Assessing both models in light of the recent trends of access and digitization, the assembled archivists clearly favor Lindgren's respect for the film but also consider it their obligation to offer the original cinema viewing experience to the public, whose cinephile habits are now under the corruptive spell of what Vinzenz Hediger, professor of Media Studies at Ruhr University Bochum, elsewhere calls “contemporary mass market cinephilia.”¹⁶

Hediger offers an interesting alternative view of cinephilia and the archive. New media technologies, or what he calls “the industrialization of film cultural memory,” drive the *democratization* of cinephilia, which he defines as the initiation of the public into the secrets of the cinematic past. As a film historian rather than an archivist, Hediger is less concerned with preserving the technological apparatus of cinema than with widening the reach of our audiovisual heritage. He seems sympathetic toward the industry analysts, who regard movies as studios' major asset, which can be delivered as

14 Images for the Future, “Problem Outline,” http://www.kennisland.nl/binaries/documenten/rapporten/beeldenvoorde/toekomst_summary_2006.pdf (accessed June 21, 2009).

15 Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein, eds., *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum and SYNEMA, 2008), 63–65. For more on how Langlois and Lindgren served as foundational models in the history of the archive movement, see Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), esp. 23–36 and 49–59.

16 Vinzenz Hediger, “Politique des archives: European Cinema and the Invention of Tradition in the Digital Age,” *Rouge* 12 (November 2008), <http://www.rouge.com.au/12/hediger.html> (accessed June 21, 2009).

“content” via multiple platforms and will continue to attract viewers independent of their technological outlet. Clearly this view of film as “content” that should be made “accessible,” no matter how, clashes head-on with film archivists’ concern for the *material* history and specificity of the medium and its works.

There is a passage in *Film Curatorship* that makes crystal clear what’s at stake for the archivists. In it Alexander Horwath recalls a discussion with Jonathan Rosenbaum on subcultural DVD and download communities. While Rosenbaum points out their merits—namely, that they expand film-historical and film-philosophical thought and criticism—Horwath stresses how this do-it-yourself subculture “makes our work and our job harder at the same time. Because it contributes to the chimera of film’s and film history’s ‘all-over availability.’ And it doesn’t put a lot of focus on the issue of *how* we engage with films.”¹⁷ In other words, for film archivists the recent cinephilia debates have complicated their position and made it more difficult to find support for archival concerns in the face of widespread belief in, indeed misconceptions regarding, the digital era as one promising universal access. Their contribution calls attention to easily forgotten issues—for example, that there can be multiple copies and different historical versions of films that beckon curatorial handling instead of being simply made accessible to wider audiences. Theirs is a plea, in short, to love not only film, but also its material history.

Cinephilia as Middle Ground. The examples of film criticism and the archive make clear that from professional perspectives the cinephilia discussion constitutes an arena where conflicting interests are being played out, and where alternative positions to the mainstream tendencies of commercialization and economization are being hatched. For film critics, the assessment of the vitality of a certain type of affective and critical engagement with cinema is also a celebration of the vitality and significance of criticism itself. Therefore, regardless of any threat the new cinephile communities might pose for film criticism as a paid profession, print film reviewers commonly applaud the spread of online cinephile discussions and participate in these rewarding exchanges *ex aequo*. For film archivists, the recent revival of interest in cinephilia has given rise to the need to point out the reverse side of the democratization discourse subtending it, in particular the matter of access to our cinematic heritage. Three issues are thus brought to the surface. One, due to the commitment to preservation, presentation of archival films is never self-evident—projection will continue to jeopardize film prints if the funding to make screening copies is lacking. Two, the idea that films are unchanging objects that can easily be made accessible has to be problematized; when a film from the archive is made accessible it needs to be accompanied by explanatory material (such as introductions, discussions, publications, etc.) that frames the individual history of that (version of the) film. And three, analog films are physical (and perishable) artifacts, and people ought to be able to continue experiencing them via analog projection, especially in an era that is now witnessing widespread conversion to digital exhibition.

Elsewhere, Malte Hagener and I have written about the difficulties in distinguishing between cinephilia as a concept and as an individual emotional experience: cine-

17 Horwath, “Presentation and Performance,” *Film Curatorship*, 128.

philia has proven to be so enduring precisely because it forms a bridge between the biographical and the theoretical, the singular and the general, the fragment and the whole, the incomplete and the complete, and the individual and the collective.¹⁸ This essay confirms and reiterates such an approach to cinephilia as double-movement. It shows how film critics and film archivists engage in the debates with both intellectual interests and professional concerns in mind, moving back and forth between personal preferences and rational considerations. The editors of *Movie Mutations* and *Film Curatorship* have both chosen a strikingly similar format that dovetails neatly with a characterization of cinephilia as a quintessential middle ground: the *bricolage* of transcribed discussions, letters, e-mail exchanges, written essays, and interviews mirrors the double-movement between the anecdotal and the serious, between the spontaneous and the contemplated, and between the familial and intellectual. It is precisely its ability to move between positions that privileges cinephilia as a preferred conceptual starting point for so many constituencies in their discussions of contemporary transformations.

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- 18 Malte Hagener and Marijke de Valck, "Cinephilia in Transition," in *Mind the Screen: Media Concepts According to Thomas Elsaesser*, ed. Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters, and Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals

by LIZ CZACH

Since the publication of Susan Sontag's 1996 essay "The Decay of Cinema," cinephilia has reemerged as a subject of some debate and consideration in film studies.¹ Woven through these investigations has been the vexing question of whether cinephilia is dead, and if not, what new manifestations of cinephilia are evident. There is little doubt that cinephilia has undergone numerous transformations since its golden age, epitomized by the moviegoing habits of the devotees of the ciné-clubs and cinémathèques in 1950s and 1960s Paris. With more than a tinge of nostalgia, most commentators are willing to acknowledge that that era has passed. What, however, has taken its place? Have new kinds of "cine-love," as Sontag called it, emerged? If so, where do they transpire? And what forms do they take?

- 1 Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, 60–61.