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Introduction

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Introduction

edited by MARK BETZ

As was the case for authorship around 1990, in the last decade the tide has turned for cinephilia. Raised from the critical doldrums in which it had drifted since the 1970s, it has in the new millennium gathered momentum in the form of an outpouring of published essays, special journal issues, and book-length collections (as well as a singly authored monograph) devoted to its numerous manifestations and implications. As some of the contributions in this dossier indicate, it was Susan Sontag's 1996 *New York Times Magazine* lament for the bygone days of cinephilia, "The Decay of Cinema," which sparked the powder keg—buried, not forgotten, unearthed anew—for critical work on what might be termed the new cinephilia. Much of this work proceeds from and along the faultlines that have divided academic film studies proper from the more broadly based film culture which partly gave rise to the discipline in the first place. And it is along precisely these faultlines that cinephilia's future must be envisioned.

I consider this in-between-ness to be a good thing: cinephilia may be understood as something of an irritant to certain entrenched conceptions about what academic study proper is, what it might concern itself with, how it should carry out its procedures—and this is very much the spirit of George Toles's piece which concludes this dossier. It also flies in the face of the "death of cinema" doom-mongering that came into vogue around the time of Sontag's article and that fixated on how new digital media are effecting a fundamental break in the history of the medium. For it is without question that two particular growth technologies—DVD and the Internet—have fueled cinephilia in ways that are swerving it away from previously privileged sites and forms of consumption (i.e., the movie theater, 16mm and 35mm projection). On the one hand, as Liz Czach points out in her examination of film festival going, the affiliations between a classic, big-screen cinephilia and the fiscal realities underpinning contemporary festival economies are now ones held in an uneasy tension, with both stargazing and the construction of the festival audience threatening to imperil

those individually experienced filmic moments that have heretofore come to define cinephilic knowledge. On the other hand, Jenna Ng explores how cinephilia is facilitated anew, and in increasingly interactive ways, by home viewing and re-viewing enabled by an array of technologies, of which DVD is inarguably, at least at the moment, the most significant. Twenty-first-century cinephilia thus marks a move away from the rarified, quasi-religious theatrical experience of the filmic relic, but at the same time carries with it both a version of the cinephilic object as fetish (the DVD as collectible) and of the myth of total cinema as articulated by André Bazin in the childhood of cinephilia itself, a phase and a filiation of central concern to Chris Darke.

It is important to underscore how the unpredictable convergence and rapid accretion of advances in not only moving image but also informational technologies and cultures are essential for the prominence and variegated forms of cinephilia today. Along with film festivals and DVD, the Internet emerged in the late 1990s to effect several polarities which distinguish contemporary cinephilia as much more complex than its forebears. DVD collecting and viewing, carried out online now to a degree unthinkable a decade ago, perforce turn audiences and spectators into atomized consumers, and so engender a different kind of cinematic apparatus from that theorized in the 1970s, but one even more complicit with the ideologies of capitalism—in this sense, the impetus for the era of so-called *Screen* theory which threw cinephilia into such critical disfavor might easily weigh in on the implications of its current manifestation. But DVD has also made much more widely and immediately available a wealth of global film history that does not require the cinephile to live in or near a major urban center (a “world city”) in order to access these treasures, in dribs and drabs, via the archive and cinemathèque circuit—its recognized democratizing function. Marijke de Valck’s contribution, which opens the dossier, addresses how the digital is a nexus for debate in the world of film archives on precisely these terms, throwing into question the material integrity of the filmic object on the one hand and driving its preservation and restoration on the other—and with much wider constituencies than ever before potentially reaping the benefits. For the study of film inside the academy and out, the Internet has proven to be an equally powerful force for cinephilic engagement. Myriad types of writing and reflecting on cinema now appear across a range of online journals; *Offscreen* and *Screening the Past* emerged in the year following Sontag’s (inadvertently?) generative death knell for cinephilia, *Senses of Cinema*, at the century’s end. But the bulk of Internet writing lies, of course, beyond properly academic discourse: fan and cult Web sites, festival and DVD reviews, “100 Best . . .” lists, blogs, and so forth. These are having deleterious effects on professional film criticism (especially post-credit crunch) at the same time as they foster increased interest, awareness, and knowledge of films and cinemas of all types. They also serve to remind us of the hale and hardy state of film culture, and of the central importance of the filmic object, indeed the filmic moment, for cinephilia, certainly, but also perhaps for a newly engaged and reinvigorated academic film studies.

The study of contemporary cinephilia can thus be parsed out in many ways. One approach would be to separate it into its venues of consumption, its technologies of vision, and its activities and forms of production—but such a separation must be seen from the start as an artificial one. Another approach would be to consider cinephilia

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).