

I hear moaning down the hallway. Why can't I go to sleep? Because death is hovering. That is not something to sleep in the presence of. I am waiting for death to manifest itself, to show its face. What should I do next? Maybe then I can sleep easy. I eventually need to write something about cinema becoming. That is the general idea. The year is coming to an end. The corpse is coming. I already decided that I will not look at it. I will cremate it. What will I do with the ashes? Something is always becoming.

I'm bleeding. I guess that is a normal way to wake up when one is waiting on death to deliver itself. I had a dream last night. I was taking a taxi. When I arrived at my destination I realized I forgot my bags in the car. I had also forgotten to exchange money to pay the cabbie. Negotiations begin. I often have this dream. I get the sensation that I am testing the driver to determine if he is honest or not. It is a language game, also a cultural challenge.

What are you writing? It is an essay about cinema becoming. Not really about that. More about death becoming. They always say that cinema is dead, or at least film is. I am tired of hearing that. Film is living material, a celluloid composite. The moment of conception is when light touches the film strip and exposes it. Raw stock is like an egg waiting to be fertilized. Projection is the act of deliverance into the world. Cutting. Robert Bresson said that editing is the passage of dead images to living ones. However, films are now rarely 'cut.' They are 'coded.' We have penetrated the cinematic genome.

There is a chalky taste in my mouth. That is the taste of death approaching, of pain approaching. It is coming out. The sun is rising. Still, we are waiting. Beeps. Clicks. Whirls. We try to monitor and control death with apparatuses. The frame rate, the luminosity, the focus. *Instructions for a Light and Sound Machine*. Shooting off the cuff. They say Griffith birthed narrative as well as a nation. Death, twenty-four times per second. If death gives off the illusion of life, what is life an imitation of?

What's (not) cinema (yet) becoming

MÓNICA SAVIRÓN

How could anyone know what the future of cinema is? How could anybody be sure about the future of anything, really? Truly ethereal and mutable, cinema seems obliged to respond to the profit-driven demands of marketing. Length, themes, and style get subjugated to commercial practices, including social media. As a consequence, we are fomenting a field where mainly easy digestible (and apparently radical) films, or filmmakers without scruples achieve visibility. But films, and their language, will always have the same risk-taking and adaptable persona that evolves over time, space, and circumstances—just as light blends and expands throughout every chink, interstice, fissure, crevice, slit, and split that attempts to modify its shape and direction.

Despite industry efforts to categorize genders, budgets, countries of production, artistic means and methods, no rules apply to filmmaking. Each film is inwardly endowed with its own future. Each filmmaker should decide what the destiny of their work is. Based on these parameters, the following reflections respond not to what the coming times will be, but how they, ideally, should be. We will focus on avant-garde filmmaking—what aspects of its production and distribution could and should be improved.

“We talk so often about what kind of future we want for ourselves that we don't occupy ourselves enough with the question of what past we want”, reflects music conductor Daniel Barenboim.¹ With cinema, we dismantle canons and bring new technologies to the game without properly assuring a past that is saved and accessible. By moving forward too fast, we might overlook important moments in the history of cinema. There seems to be a disruption in the avant-garde film community over whether to continue showing “old” works or only searching for new definitions in contemporary filmmaking. The future, though, is there to bring the past in the context of the new, making generations and approaches dialogue. At the same time, it should be necessary to be in constant touch with the new impulses and efforts to better understand the newness of the past.

¹ Daniel Barenboim and Edward W. Said. *Parallels and Paradoxes*. Vintage Books, 2002, p. 126.

Avant-garde cinema would benefit from increased conversation between curators and artists. The exhibition process should embrace an understanding about how to show the work in a way that is in tune with its intentions. For the artist, there is a silent anxiety that comes with the impossibility of knowing about the curated experience in which audiences will encounter their work. On the one hand, in many cases filmmakers have no chance to express the technical and conceptual specificities for the projection of their own film. On the other hand, there is no way for them to anticipate the dimensions and acoustics of various exhibition spaces, the demographic of the audience, or the context of the program—especially group shows that may alter or inhibit the film's meaning. The act of programming and contextualizing is a most difficult task that juggles (among other less creative variables) considerations of tempo, balance, dynamics of interpretations, dramatic junctures, and overall orchestration. Nurturing a dialogue curator-filmmaker could open up ideas for the spectator to encounter a truly unique experience, in new ways.

Therefore, the future of avant-garde cinema is intertwined with the future of curation. Due to the profound lack of distribution for avant-garde cinema, film festivals have become an almost monopolistic showcase. In most cases, they assemble programs that will suffice for the night (and for the received fundings), but very few of them care enough to actually cultivate and spread their film selections at times and places where the access to the work is nonexistent. Festivals create a formula (with overlapping shows, competitive sections, and Q&As) that is not always in synchronicity with the fragile poetics of the films they show. Artists find themselves on stage, microphone in hand, to reflect upon their work with no previous preparation or time to engage in positive exchange. We are encouraging a chain of egos, TED-talk-based showmen/women who entertain audiences for the time being. A long-term, in-depth appreciation and discussion of the work has nothing to do with systems of power and stardom. Opposite from film screenings understood as spectacle or social event, avant-garde programs need of a more meditative time. They should grant discussions guided by curators or scholars who can share previous research and interdisciplinary reflections about the work. Pushing expectations when it comes to make and present these films will break a circular pattern in which the future gets stuck in a malfunctioning past. Repeating formulas will only asphyxiate a body of work whose health is, by nature, vulnerable.

During the act of watching cinema, we more often isolate our perceptions from external disturbances so we can have the most personal and subjective revelations. In the case of avant-garde films, we seem to necessitate the opportunity to interact

with other viewers, and to share and put together a puzzle of artistic impressions. Due to the inner complexity of these films, constructive dialogue can only be achieved with a humble attitude towards discovery. In this sense, it is not difficult to foresee some initiatives in which less will be more. Fewer hastily conceived programs in lieu of more carefully organized screenings that take pride in the details, allow for repeated viewings, and facilitate expanded conversation between audience, curators, and filmmakers. Projections would be designed by taking the space into account, maybe under varying or even unconventional architectural conditions that will enable alternative perceptions. There is no need to continue relegating avant-garde filmmaking exclusively to uneven walls, small and unmasked screens, and poor sound systems. Programs could combine film with musical performances (independent of images) and other arts that resonate with the film work, proposing a web of connections and experiences. The results would have less to do with pageantry, but more with attention and community.

Viewers around the world (including researchers and writers) cannot exclusively depend on curatorial and institutional politics and fashions to be able to experience an artist's film work. An increase in accessibility necessitates decentralized distribution, and archives/depositories that include cinema from all countries. Even filmmakers need to know about the rest of the world, even if we only seem to care about having our own work shown worldwide. Hopefully more and more films can be digitized to facilitate a first viewing—that could be followed by the rental of the original work for exhibition.

An ideal future would not disregard celluloid in favor of digital work or vice versa, whether for creation, preservation, or exhibition. Artists should feel that they can use all the mediums to make the work express itself as its fullest, without fearing imposed stigmas or transitory trends. Ethics, then, will also be part of this future of cinema—with a criteria of pushing boundaries in the creation, presentation and exhibition; bringing unexposed work to light (the number of cult filmmakers or lesser-known artists whose films are rarely shown is outstanding); never utilizing the programs as platforms to include the curator's own film oeuvre; and respecting the subjects of the films, in every possible way. On-line video catalogues; DVDs conceived and designed with the most artistic demeanor; dialectic and paratactical collaborations among microcinemas from distant regions; fluid communication between theatrical milieus and art galleries (which does not mean a migration of the work, but a double-way transformation where the treatment of sound might be the most challenging variable); and restoration, preservation and digitization of work made by all

gender artists from all periods; this could all comprise in one word. What is needed is access, which is not to say films free of charge, but nonetheless available and obtainable. Hopefully non-profits, private institutions, and filmmakers will fill the gap that governmental organizations and film cooperatives have not yet achieved to finance. Avant-garde cinema may need to be experienced in the dark, but this does not mean it ought to be obscured.

We cannot expect a film to be the same each time it is projected, as we ourselves are not the same—the energy of each room and moment is different, the brightness of the screen fluctuates, the aesthetic illusions triggered vary in mode and intensity, and we observe new aspects and hear extra nuances depending on our alertness. Critically reframing avant-garde cinema should bring width and breath as long as we know and understand what the intentions and changes are, and how the original work is meant to be, so we can then explore the possibilities and intricacies of other platforms.

We do not have to accept things as they are just because they have been that way in the past. We decide which future we want, and the way we want it. Previously unexplored paths can become creative solutions for our ideals, ways of knowledge and resistance. Ironically, avant-garde filmmaking seems to be related to the archaic, to what is near vanishing—we thrill on the verge of unexpected discoveries and memories, on the psychological dimension of celluloid decay that questions origins and meanings, the sensuality and braveness of all things ephemeral. However, the avant-garde was and always will be the future that explores languages and technologies, by opening the mind and senses. No matter if the projection is downsized to a small screen and very simple apparatus, if the experience expands to all the walls of a dark room with the latest state of the art, or if it is an outdoor event that combines old and new technologies—we will not be the ones limiting the imagination. If dreams are the material films are made of, then the future is (almost) here.

Che cosa (non) sta diventando il cinema?

CARLO CHATRIAN

La profezia non è tra le mie virtù. E, a dire il vero, un po' mi terrorizza. Ogni profezia cerca di indirizzare il futuro, secondo una sottile logica impositrice; ciò che mi affascina al cinema è invece la sua imprevedibilità. Il suo essere dove non te lo aspetti: in un frammento di reportage, in una pièce teatrale filmata, in un'opera d'autore, in un esordio sbilanciato dalla troppa voglia di fare. Detto altrimenti, il cinema è essere sempre e comunque al presente, anche nei più pedissequi flashback, anche nei film visti e rivisti, anche e soprattutto quando riprende se stesso, attraverso l'archivio. Il cinema non è in divenire; è.

O, il che equivale, non è (più).

Come ricorda Rancière, che rilegge Epstein, il cinema si appoggia su un meccanismo che in qualche modo esclude l'uomo. La sua obiettività meccanica lo rende adeguato a riprodurre l'illogica struttura della vita e del cosmo, una struttura che non segue un disegno preordinato, anche se a volte si ha l'impressione che qualcuno la stia orientando.

Sarà così anche oggi che il cinema ha abbandonato il principio analogico? Il "numerico" non rischia di subordinare la sua infinita potenza creatrice alle potenzialità limitate della mente umana? Passando da Eraclito ad Archimede, dal permanere delle contraddizioni a una realtà declinata in numeri, non si rischia di portare il cinema (tutto il cinema anche quello del passato, trasformandolo in DCP, pacchetti di contenuto surroganti una matrice persa per sempre) al di fuori del suo rapporto fondante con il reale? O forse il cinema troverà la via per ribaltare gli assunti?

Se il cinema tiene qualcosa dell'umano è nel suo essere un'arte della resistenza. Resistere al tempo, resistere alla tentazione di sovrapporsi bovinamente al reale, resistere al principio che lo vorrebbe un'arte della ripresa indiscriminata, costante e assidua del fluire della vita. In questo scorcio di millennio su cui noi cinefili, vecchi e giovani, proiettiamo le nostre ombre, quest'arte del far sentire il proprio respiro tra le cose sembra sempre più un affare di vecchi (Godard con i suoi splendidi ottanta-quattro anni guida una nutrita comitiva). Forse è una questione di prospettive e generazioni, forse è un modo di vedere le cose che non risponde più a un sentire condiviso... L'equilibrio tra chi ha fatto e chi sta facendo pende pericolosamente a favore dei primi. Così se devo pensare (in negativo) alla domanda proposta e vestire i panni del profeta che si straccia le vesti; direi che il cinema non sarà più il cinematografo, così come lo intendeva nelle sue note draconiane Robert Bresson.