

## *Foyer*

The word used in English for copies of a film distributed to cinemas is 'print'. A film print. Like screenprint or newsprint, that from which the print is made has no value or no use value in the way that the printed item does. The mass-produced is primary. There are objects; there is not *an* object. In German, the word used for a film print is *Kopie*, which also straightforwardly translates into English as 'copy'. In cinema, then, an industry and economy are built on reproduction, and spectators are fashioned by it, delimited. We do not contest that film is a distributable media. We might though question what is ordinarily a clear assumption about the implications of this, or if/how distribution is used. The assumptions and implications are less clear, or at least muddied, or repressed by at least one industry and economy that reproduction sustains and by one that it might threaten. Vested interests are muddy waters to be splashed around in (not drunk). Might such pressures be relieved? Made into content? Exploited for other means? A differentiated cinema...

*First:* I am always writing about the need to calibrate this category 'cinema' – a process of differentiation that would begin by separating off, or pointing to, industrial cinema and everything that it has been/is responsible for (the auditorium as we receive it, multiplexes, mass-distribution circuits, hierarchical organisation of labour from

production to exhibition) as just one form of cinema rather than *the* form. Industrial cinema only defines itself, being the subsection of a category that might also be occupied by other subsections, none of which exactly regulates the others, even if it might also – quite appropriately and in part – reproduce them. Like experimental film, or artists' film and video, etc. Once this calibration begins, we very quickly find ourselves in a field of copies, where the original has no value or no use value, or cannot even necessarily be identified. A potentially uncontrollable sea of reproduction that is not about one form of cinema borrowing from or reproducing aspects of other kinds of cinema, but more broadly one that also extends from the film print (copy) to the situation(s) of its public display – an amorphous mass that has no origin, no point of origin within it, does not point to an origin outside of itself. There are no originals although such a liberation should at the same time be interrogated and invites license, regulation and definition, while also potentially threatening already established systems of knowledge, power and authority that otherwise depend on them.

*Second:* By means of this invitation in some hands we can imagine that 'things' could start to collapse. The film or video considered (whether as a work of art, a unique object and/or as a distributable infinite number in whatever form) is inevitably immaterial. Look at a reel of film, a tape, a hard drive and you cannot see with the eye alone the information it carries, as its purpose would have you see it. The projector is (just!) a machine. You cannot touch a projected image and feel anything other than a screen or wall.

*Second (a):* Though it might only be imaginary, what (other) 'things' collapse? I mean what things collapse other than/as well as/because of what can happen to unique objects in this situation? The collapse of: political regimes, private ownership, 'passive' reception (being told), narrative, hierarchical order, the Institution, exclusion, lies. There is (or was) this much at stake. The film co-op movement in America and Europe pinned much on such promises. In 1971, what the first Forum at the Berlinale<sup>1</sup> shared with contemporary Conceptual art practices

was not necessarily anything entire or even coherent, but was an ethos predicated on the critical (new) intersection of cinema (auditorium), media and communication. A kind of cinema-as-vehicle. Perhaps, as the early columnist Dorothy Richardson had already optimistically described in one of her columns for the modernist periodical *Close Up* in 1932, this is/was cinema as 'a medium... at the disposal of all parties' that is/was 'turning the world into a vast council-chamber'.<sup>2</sup> A dissolution of political and geographical boundaries (or at least a reordering). A giving-voice-to as content, or as the criteria that determined the works' selection. A connection between making, representation, and the erosion of traditional authorship immediately understood, if this is/was a project.

*Second (b):* Douglas Crimp has famously theorised this collapse in his essay 'On the Museum's Ruins', which is another talisman to which I return and return in thinking and working among all of this. I point at it often in things I write (and still it still doesn't bore me). It's an essay ostensibly about the works of Robert Rauschenberg. In particular, about the way in which Rauschenberg's use of silkscreened photographic *reproductions* transforms the picture plane into that of a flatbed printing press, while at same time making a peculiar museum of the canvas – like an extension/derivation of André Malraux's museum without walls, which is after all the description of a book – with revolutionary implications. 'This flatbed picture plane is an altogether new kind of picture surface, one that effects, according to Leo Steinberg's 1968 essay 'Other Criteria', "the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture."<sup>3</sup> But as for the picture plane, so as for the institution and its accumulation and ordering of knowledge. This *reordering* of 'the tables on which knowledge is tabulated',<sup>4</sup> is a disintegration and interdependent reconstitution of the institution: the museum, ruined. (Jump to *Fourth*)

*Second (c):* Which is how I still regard the potential threat of reproduction to the tables on which knowledge is tabulated now: it is the threat (read: potential) of distribution (as a definitive attribute of

the legacy/history of the moving image, read through the co-operatives and their collections, which are, as they always have been, continuously still falling apart, rightly so). If the meaning of a work is at least in part contingent upon its distribution – a work disseminated not as a unique object, but as many (immaterial) objects viewable everywhere, simultaneously – it is also a medium that works against the very foundations of the museum that persists in spite of Crimp and Steinberg. Institutional responsibility in this schema would not be to protect an object by limiting access, but to present it by doing the opposite. To undo and be undone.

(Or)

*Third: 'Things' could start to collapse* and (in even the same or some others' hands) positions could be constructed, or even actual buildings – careers, definitions, collections, archives, restricted zones, police patrols. Is it that fiefdoms are built in the name of definition (of industry and economy)? Utopia: control, exclusion, limited access. The film co-op movement in America and Europe constructed canons, collections. And where they did not, we do now. Jonas Mekas's Essential Cinema collection was a deliberate establishing of a canon for pedagogic and associated cultural purposes, a power structure the effect of which remains current. The collection of the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek in Berlin, absolutely tied to the Berlinale, to a mission centred on access (*Second [a]*), can nonetheless still be experienced as a secret society, databased against access, inaccessible to anyone who does not know what a name/title they've never heard of might indicate about anything in a language they do not necessarily speak.<sup>5</sup> When every member of the London Filmmakers' Co-op had the right to deposit their own work there as available for distribution, what was established was an ideal that was limited then by the number of artists active in this area; now, it is limited by the impossibility of sustaining such a model, because there is hardly an artist who has not made a moving-image work, and who would not want this work to be available. The moving image enters the museum as an object, not a medium.

And up until our digital present (which is radical with regard to all these issues), this work might only have been seen by the physical movement of the viewer, sometimes across continents, to place a reel of 16mm on a Steenbeck at a distributor's in New York, London or Paris. Even now, we might only aspire to the digital, and still also resist it. So these collections could be understood to have been effectively open *and* closed (inaccessible, barely catalogued, unnavigable without having already, somehow, somewhere, been navigated). Geography uniquely in tandem with material is re-imposed like borders that it becomes difficult to cross. As difficult as getting a reader's pass for the British Library which houses every book ever published (here, I write from London), by law, if you only have an interest in reading. Insider jobs. (Digital present: China vs Google (or vice versa); America maybe not bothering to distribute DVDs in Spain vs Googlebooks; Ubuweb increases audiences.) Enough. This is hopeless.

*Fourth:* The auditorium need not be understood as the indivisible sum of the industry and the economy of the cinema, with which it has become synonymous. There are splashes in muddy waters.

*Fourth (a):* It could, for example, be considered a ruined museum. Such a thought might precipitate others as a plethora of hybrids, and this proliferation might make a differentiation out of such excess. The copy made into theatre. Context and/or the act of reading (anything) made into content, the wrong/right material, a proper inappropriate, productive almost-mess as the only way to describe a reordering without/before knowing what this looks like.

*Fourth (b):* And by so doing it becomes a situation as well as, or even instead of – a location that is architecturally, culturally or socially determined. A place that slides between positions, potentials, instructions, openesses, closures. Say, the site of language rather than inscription. Such a site might be imaged as the fixed form of the auditorium-as-industrial cinema transposed, decomposed, ruined, or disintegrated and reconstituted as if it might now more accurately occupy its own

foyer – an engine room that is also by necessity otherwise regarded as marginal. That is, the foyer understood as the Antechamber described by Roland Barthes, the arena of Racinian tragedy, if Racine and tragedy could be put to one side in borrowing his thought.

*Fifth:* So annihilating gender specificity and crossing out ‘tragic’, imagining a situation in which we are all actors and viewers, equal with a thing presented where:

The Antechamber (the stage proper) is a medium of transmission; it partakes of both interior and exterior, of Power and Event, of the concealed and the exposed. Fixed between the world, a place of action, and the Chamber, a place of silence, the Antechamber is the site of language: it is here that *tragic* man [*sic*], lost [or found] between the letter and the meaning of things, utters his [*sic*] reasons. The *tragic* stage is therefore not strictly secret, it is rather a [wonderfully] blind alley, the anxious [as in productive] passage from secrecy to effusion, from immediate fear to fear expressed [from a being-told to expression]. It is a trap [opened because it is] suspected...<sup>6</sup>

Which might be optimistic, but is to say nonetheless that it is where things happen(ed).

1. [‘Forum’ is the International Forum of New Cinema, the strand of the annual Berlinale film festival dedicated to experimental film and video art.]
2. Dorothy Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance: The Film Gone Male’, *Close Up*, vol.9, no.1 (March 1932), reprinted in *Close Up, 1927–1933 Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), p.207.
3. Douglas Crimp, ‘On the Museum’s Ruins’, *October*, no.13 (Summer 1980): reprinted in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1983), p.44.
4. *Ibid.*, p.45.
5. [The database was still in development when this text was first published, but can now be found at <<https://www.deutsche-kinemathek.de>> last accessed on 16 July 2016.]
6. Roland Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p.4.