

Film and its Double

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Traduction



Translation

«Un médium peut-il persister dans son être à travers ses mutations technologiques?»

Telle est la question que lance Erik Bullot à l'ouverture de son livre¹ *Le Film et son double: boniment, ventriloquie, performativité*.

Ce médium, c'est le cinéma. A l'ère de sa métamorphose par le tournant numérique, que reste-t-il du dispositif tel qu'il a été historiquement défini par la projection d'un film dans une salle obscure pour un public assis pendant la durée d'une séance fixée à un horaire précis? Le cinéma, encore plus que la photographie, expérimente avec le numérique une mutation qui outrepassa le changement de support d'enregistrement des images en mouvement. Si les avant-gardes puis le cinéma élargi ont engagé une mise à l'épreuve du dispositif cinématographique dans ses composants et son cadre de diffusion, la technologie numérique – outre le bouleversement des pratiques – en a organisé la dissémination dans l'espace social; des écrans de *smartphones* et d'ordinateurs aux murs des galeries et musées jusqu'à l'espace partagé offert par Internet.

Cinéaste et théoricien, enseignant le cinéma à l'école nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges, Erik Bullot² s'attache depuis longtemps à ces mutations qui engagent à re-

penser le cinéma dans son dialogue avec d'autres pratiques artistiques. En 2013, en post-scriptum de son ouvrage *Sortir du cinéma*³, il soulignait combien le cinéma était «hanté par son dehors, qu'il soit théâtral ou performatif» (p. 254). C'est de performativité qu'il est ici question, dans l'extrait que nous avons choisi. Erik Bullot y illustre la sortie du cinéma par le récit de l'occupation du parc Gezi à Istanbul. En juin 2013, le projet du Premier Ministre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan d'implanter un centre commercial a soulevé un mouvement d'opposition et transformé le jardin en une tribune publique: une scène performative. «Définir le cinéma comme performatif attire l'attention sur le rôle des agents ou des médiateurs œuvrant à l'activation d'un film», rappelle E. Bullot au début de son livre (p. 18). Le parc Gezi, où les énoncés visuels, verbaux, sonores, corporels interagissent⁴, en fournit le terrain d'exploration. Dans ce contexte d'activisme politique, où est le cinéma?

Nathalie Boulouch

1. Voir la note de lecture publiée sur le livre dans ce numéro de *Critique d'art* en pages 163-164.

2. <http://www.lecinemadeerikbullot.com/>

3. Bullot, Erik. *Sortir du cinéma: histoire virtuelle des relations de l'art et du cinéma*, Genève: Mamco, 2013

4. Cf. *Du film performatif*, Faucogney-et-la-Mer: It:éditions, 2018. Sous la dir. d'Erik Bullot

Erik Bullot's book¹, *Le Film et son double: boniment, ventriloquie, performativité* begins with this question: "Can a medium remain itself despite its technological mutations?"

The medium in question is cinema. In a time of transformations due to digital technology, what is left of the apparatus, such as it has been historically defined as the projection of a film in a theatre, for an audience seated for the duration of a screening scheduled at a precise time? Even more than photography, cinema, faced with digital technology, is undergoing a mutation that goes far beyond the change of medium used to record moving images. Although avant-gardes, followed by expanded cinema, initiated a testing of the cinematographic apparatus, its components and its diffusion frame; digital technology—as well as disrupting practices—organised its dissemination throughout the social space; from smartphone and computer screens to the walls of galleries and museums, as well as the new space offered by the Internet. Erik Bullot², a filmmaker and theoretician, teaches Film at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'art in Bourges. He has been investigating the shifts that encourage a reconsideration of cinema in dialogue with other media for a long time. In 2013, in a *post-scriptum* to his book *Sortir du cinéma*,³ he highlighted the extent to which cinema is "haunted by its exterior, be it theatrical or

performative" (p. 254). The subject of the following excerpt is this very performativity. Erik Bullot illustrates the exit from cinema through the account of the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul.

In June 2013, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's project to establish a shopping centre sparked an opposition movement and transformed the park into a public tribune: a performative scene.

The author argues that "To define cinema as performative draws attention to the role of the agents and mediators working towards the activation of a film" (p. 18). The field of investigation is Gezi Park, where visual, verbal, sonic and bodily statements interact.⁴ In this context of political activism, where is cinema?

Nathalie Boulouch

Translated from the French
by Phoebe Clark

1. See the review published in this issue of *Critique d'art*, p. 163-164.

2. <http://www.lecinemadeerikbullot.com/>

3. Bullot, Erik. *Sortir du cinéma: histoire virtuelle des relations de l'art et du cinéma*, Genève: Mamco, 2013

4. See *Du film performatif*, Erik Bullot (ed.), Faucogney-et-la-Mer: It:éditions, 2018

Erik Bullot

Film and its Double

Overture

Pierre Sorlin wonders: "If you change all the parts of your car one by one, is the vehicle you drive still the same as the one you bought?"¹ Can a medium remain itself despite its technological mutations? Ever since the appearance of digital technology, cinema has undergone a radical metamorphosis, which has modified its technical modalities and its definition. However, we continue to call cinema an apparatus that is very different from the more or less stable form that it has had for over half a century. The disappearance of analogue, digital representation, the dissemination of the medium within the social space, its fragmentation into domestic forms, have disrupted uses. Film theory has taken the full measure of this shift by trying to isolate the elementary data of the medium. Recently, Raymond Bellour has offered a restricted definition of cinema.

"The experience of a movie shown in a theatre, in the dark, the predefined time of a more or less collective screening, has become and remains the condition for a unique experience of perception and memory, defining its spectator, and that any other visioning situation more or less alters. And only this is worthy of being called 'cinema'.²"

According to him, as soon as one departs from these objective conditions—projection, darkness, community, time—, it is no longer cinema, which is inseparable from its regulated technological and social apparatus, and historically situated. However, we are witnessing a massive migration towards new diffusion spaces, which sometimes observe a certain schedule, other times are on a loop, be it on the screen of a mobile phone or a computer, the wall of a gallery, the museum space, or the database created by the Internet. How do things now stand,

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1. Sorlin, Pierre. «L'Ombre d'un deuil», *Cinergon*, no.15, «Où va le cinéma?», 2003, p. 15

2. Bellour, Raymond. *La Querelle des dispositifs*, Paris: P.O.L., 2012, p. 14

regarding this medium called cinema? Has it become a definitely closed-up object from the past, the object of critical, cinephile and museological care, connected to its original technical apparatus, or can it emancipate itself without renouncing its identity, by negotiating, through its different incarnations, the conditions of its metamorphosis? How much can it split and transform itself?
[...]

It is worth recalling that according to historians, the institutionalisation of cinema is spread over the first twenty years of its history, and was renewed on several occasions, in keeping with local and cultural situations. For a long time, the medium was faithful to the fairground tradition by relying on attractions and the voice of the barker. These were all signs of the instability of the technological, ideological and legal apparatus, which was in a constant state of flux that included crises and stages, stops and starts. The increasing interest in expanded cinema bears witness to this situation.³ Therefore the digital transformation and the dissemination of the medium throughout the social space raises new questions about the place of cinema and the possibility of surpassing or abolishing it. It does not so much concern, nowadays, its extension within the spirit of expanded cinema than it does its ontological variability. As soon as cinema abandons its technical basis, placing it in between life and death, it is liable to actualise promises that were left dormant. Film is no longer given, it must be animated or even reanimated, like a puppet or a fetish. Film without film.⁴ To actualise a potentiality—that is, to perform it.

The word performative, as an adjective, has two meanings: one of them is strictly linguistic, according to the criteria defined by Austin in relation to performative verbs that realise an action through their enunciation in precise social situations, like the verbs *baptize* or *promise*, the other one is connected to the wider field of artistic performance as it has existed since the 1960s.⁵ It is difficult to completely separate these two meanings: the artistic act, which

3. See *Expanded Cinema*, Steven Ball, David Curtis, A.L. Rees, Duncan White (ed.), London: Tate Publishing, 2011; *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema*, Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, Simon Rothöhler (ed.), Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2012; “Cinéma élargi”, *Décadrages*, no. 21-22, 2012; *L'Exposition d'un film*, Mathieu Copeland and Lore Gablier (ed.), Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2015; *Cinema in the Expanded Field and Exhibiting the Moving Image*, Adeena Mey and François Bovier (dir.), Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2015.

4. I should like to mention the programme “Memories Can't Wait. Film Without Film” led by Mika Taanila, at the 2014 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival. See Erika Balsom, “Live and Direct: Cinema as a Performing Art”, *Artforum*, September 2014, p. 328-333.
5. Austin, John Langshaw. *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1962

insists on the primacy of the event and experience, carries a performative dimension through the production of *sui generis* situations. Nowadays, the concept of performativity does not only apply to acts of language but is also used to analyse and interpret our social, political and sexual conducts. What of the performative dimension of cinema? At first glance, the regulated apparatus of cinema is not a performative art. Indeed, performing film implies that it is not a closed, pre-defined technical object, but rather that it is able to lead to retroactive loops with the audience during every presentation.⁶ Performativity requires a certain amount of unpredictability, and avoids the dichotomy between cinema and its exterior, shattering the autonomy of the medium. Yet this is precisely what the institution of cinema has succeeded, more or less, in foreclosing, through the relative automation of its praxis, and the establishment of production and diffusion standards. However, it is not so much a question of opposing real and technical presence. To define cinema as performative draws attention to the role of the agents and mediators working towards the activation of a film, which often constitutes an overlooked part of its history. We now know that barkers, whose role was overlooked for many years, accompanied screenings with their discourse, shedding light on the plot, narrating, embroidering, according to the cultural and geographical context. The evolution of the projectionist's task, a mediator of an endangered species, merges with cinema's progressive automation, at the expense of his or her active presence. For a long time, barkers and projectionists shaped film through the voice that narrated and the hand that activated the handle or moved from one projector to the next during the screening. [...]

Where is cinema?

Although for many artists during the [recent] occupation movements, political cinema became a practice that helped overcome the aporia of institutional critique, is the use of the word "cinema"

6. Here I am indebted to Erika Fisher-Lichte's arguments devoted mostly to theatre, in her book *Estética de la performativo*, translated by Diana González Martín and David Martínez Perucha, Madrid: Abada Editores, 2011

still relevant in this context? How efficient is it? Up to what point can a concrete action or situation be assimilated to film? Let us draw up an inventory of filmic traits and their shifts in order to test the validity of such a category. *Movement film* most often implies its assimilation to time, characterised by a beginning and an end, the choice of a space delimited by borders or the presence of a threshold, a representation that sometimes obeys a script and, above all, a new distribution of relationships between actor and audience, typified by the disappearance of the separation between the audience and the stage, a sense for improvisation and participation. These traits are to be found in Kuleshov's pedagogical experiments, Nicolas Boone's reel-less shootings or the Lettrist's proposals (on the other hand, super-temporal film, as the name suggests, does not conform to any temporal limit). Although *movement film* is still explicitly connected to cinema by referring, even indirectly, to the screen, projector or camera; the occupation movements seemed to be characterised by their transcendence of the medium. Admittedly, the occupation of the Gezi park was limited in time (it lasted two weeks, although it was continued by symbolic actions over the course of the following months, like the standing man initiated by the choreographer Erdem Gündüz), in a determined space (the park adjoined Taksim Square), it was ruled by a schedule (forums, general assemblies) and let anyone partake in numerous activities (gardening, library work, meal distribution, nursing, counselling). The publishing of letters, tracts, leaflets, posters should also be noted: they were like so many paper films, combining drawings, diagrams and scripts, revealing the activists' intention to document and archive.⁷ Entering the garden meant entering a separate world, a suspended world, an intense interlude. But here, the connection to cinema was tenuous. Was theatre to be revived?

The performative dimension of the event is decisive. The sharing of activities, the primacy given to dialogue and debate, the promise of community actualised by the self-organisation, here and now,

7. See Sholette, Gregory. "Occupology, Swarmology, Whateverology: the city of (dis)order versus the people's archive". *Art Journal* (online), 2011

resting on the density of relationships, acts of self-designation, a sense of sharing and exchanging, the creativity of public space. In their manifesto *The Coming Insurrection*, the Invisible Committee writes "A commune is formed every time a few people, freed of their individual straitjackets, decide to rely only on themselves and pit their strength against the reality." ⁸

"Communes come into being when people find themselves, understand each other, and decide to go forth together. The commune itself makes the decision as to when it would perhaps be useful to break it up. It's the joy of encounters, surviving its obligatory asphyxiation. It's what makes us say 'we,' and what makes that an event."⁹

In this sense, occupation movements such as Gezi share one of the promises of cinema: the formation of an ephemeral community, gathered for the duration of a screening. "We" was also the title of the Kinoks futurist-inspired manifesto, published in 1922.¹⁰ It is in this sense that the word *cinema* maintains its efficiency, by re-emphasising the deep relationship between the medium and the creation of a "we" or a community. Although they resort to speech and debate, developing forms of direct democracy by relying on bodies in public spaces, the occupation movements also encourages the use of social media, relaying information and digital connection. They do not tend to value presence outside of all mediation in a vitalistic fashion, but imply on the contrary the articulation between presence and potentiality, improvisation and technology. The body itself becomes a transmitter, a projector, a screen or even a microphone by incorporating technology. We should recall that during Occupy Wall Street, the protestors would repeat, part by part, from one square to the next, the words of the speaker, in a play of successive ventriloquisms and in the manner of a human microphone, in order to get around the ban on using

8. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, https://tarnac9.noblogs.org/gallery/5188/insurrection_english.pdf, p. 43 (accessed 16 February 2018)

9. *Ibid.*

10. Vertov, Dziga. "We: Variant of A Manifesto", trans. Kevin O'Brien, in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Annette Michelson (ed.), Berkeley: Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984, p. 5-9

megaphones. The body itself had become a performative tool.

Judith Butler has recently insisted on the bodily exposure that is characteristic of some political gatherings, by producing a stage on which to appear, real or virtual. She believes it is not so much about asserting the presence of precarious life in an already constituted public space, but, on the contrary, about producing a new public space through performative action. In this sense, action cannot be detached from its mediation.

“The street scenes become politically potent only when and if we have a visual and audible version of the scene communicated in live or proximated time, so that the media does not merely report the scene, but is part of the scene and the action; indeed the media is the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions.¹¹”

11. Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 91

The Gezi Occupation was not only actualised in public space, among stages and tribunes, even though the feeling of intensity, even of joy, was very perceptible on the spot. It also circulated through pictures and graffiti, voices and slogans, spread on social media, encouraged by the work of journalists and the presence of domestic cameras, in ways reminiscent of Nicolas Boone's carnival-like productions, where each participant contributed to the making of a collective film. Poetic or humorous images stencilled onto walls or graffiti on the main avenue, blending highbrow and lowbrow culture, films shot by phone and circulating on social media, pictures that have become icons, like the photograph of the woman in a red dress being tear-gassed, the penguin stencil, or the insult *çapulcu*: each of these visual or acoustic propositions defines the conditions of possibility for a new public space. “In this way, they (the bodies) formed themselves into images to be projected to all who watched, petitioning us to receive and respond and so to enlist media coverage that would refuse to let the event be covered over or slip away”¹² This is filming without a main camera or

12. Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly*, *Op. cit.*, p. 97-98

a director, where bodies themselves become cameras, transmitters, projectors, disseminated by the myriad points of view and social media. "The connection of the public square with the media that circulates the event means that the people disperse as they gather; the media image shows and disperses the gathering."¹³ This is expanded cinema in the literal sense: the film is dialectically actualised, between presence and distance, by defining the possible terms of a we, at the intersection of the bodily and the visual, the filmic and the linguistic. It is not so much a revolutionary or messianic promise than a performative putting into practice. The movement film produces the film, reminding us of the French word "*réalisateur*" to describe a director. [...]

Translated from the French by Phoebe Clarke

13. *Ibid.*, p. 167