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| Expanded Cinema |
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| Within the ferment of the 1960s underground cinema emerged what critic Sheldon Renan described as a ‘whole new area of film and film-like art’ (Renan 227) characterized by the combination of film with other media and with performance, and labelled ‘expanded cinema’ by some of its practitioners, among them experimental filmmakers Carolee Schneemann and Stan VanDerBeek. Expanded cinema was theorised by Renan himself and, most notably, by Los Angeles-based critic Gene Youngblood in *Expanded Cinema*, the most thorough treatment of the phenomenon. For its cross-media vocation and its destabilisation and dematerialization of the traditional art object, expanded cinema is an important development in the deconstruction of high modernism. |
| Within the ferment of the 1960s underground cinema emerged what critic Sheldon Renan described as a ‘whole new area of film and film-like art’ (Renan 227) characterized by the combination of film with other media and with performance, and labelled ‘expanded cinema’ by some of its practitioners, among them experimental filmmakers Carolee Schneemann and Stan VanDerBeek. Expanded cinema was theorised by Renan himself and, most notably, by Los Angeles-based critic Gene Youngblood in *Expanded Cinema*, the most thorough treatment of the phenomenon.  Expanded cinema integrates into the cinematic event new artistic techniques, media, and processes, bursting apart the self-containment of the traditional screening situation. In this respect, expanded cinema can be regarded as a further evolution of such early twentieth-century developments as the Futurist concerts or the legendary Dada performances at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich — attempts to create total, all-involving works of art that combined various media and disregarded the organic unity of the traditional work of art.  For its part, expanded cinema broadened the definition of what film could be by combining it with cutting-edge technologies, including video and computer graphics. The innovative cinematographic and cinematic devices of expanded cinema included the use of multiple projectors; the use of computer-generated images (as the ones designed by John Whitney on IBM equipment); the electronic manipulation of images on television; the integration of filmic projection in light shows; and, at times, even live shadow plays that reproduced the look of film. Additional ingredients of the ‘media-mix or cinema-combine’ include live performers, dance, painting, and other media (Renan 228).  As an aesthetic phenomenon, expanded cinema is one more example of the varied cross-media experiments of the 1960s. Renan, in addition, sees in this development a compelling reflection on the temporality of the image and the ephemerality of light as cinematic support (Renan 104). He also defines expanded cinema as ‘deflated cinema’, that is, a form of cinema from which everything has been removed, keeping only its essential components, such as light running through the projector, or the alternating black and white frames used in ‘stroboscopic style films’. In his view, expanded cinema is not the name of a particular style of filmmaking; instead, it can be defined as ‘a spirit of inquiry that is leading … to the point at which the effect of film may be produced without the use of film at all’ (227).  For Gene Youngblood, expanded cinema ‘does not mean computer films, video phosphors, atomic light, or spherical projections’; it actually implies an ‘expanded consciousness’ that tries to grasp life as a ‘process of becoming’. Drawing on the terminology of media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who was at the height of his popularity in the mid and late 1960s, he characterizes expanded cinema as an ‘on-going historical drive to manifest … consciousness outside of [the] mind’. A pervasive feeling among artists and theorists at the time was that it proved no longer possible to express a clear picture of one’s relationships to one’s surroundings by devoting oneself to a single discipline. ‘This is especially true in the case of the inter-media network of cinema and television, which now functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind’ (Youngblood 41). Expanded cinema sought to modify the spectators’ perceptual habits by questioning the habitual relation between time and space, and offering at the same time an alternative understanding of artistic practice; it tried to offer a context within which human beings could come to terms with their own senses and arrive at a better understanding of themselves and their environment.  Renan concludes that expanded cinema may be considered ‘a fourth avant-garde’: ‘. . . many of the underground film-makers are working in this area. But avant-garde/experimental/ underground film is only one of the sources of expanded cinema. What has changed cinema to expanded cinema has been nothing less than the development of whole new conditions and sensibilities spreading across all the arts’ (228). Commonly cited pioneers of expanded cinema include filmmakers who experimented with multiple-screen projection, such as such as Stan VanDerBeek, Andy Warhol, and Barbara Rubin, along with others who integrated film with video and other media, such as the USCO (Us Company), David Hall, Steina Vasulka, Nina Sobel, and Joan Jonas, among others.  File: VanDerBeek1.jpg  1 Stan VanDerBeek: from Movie-Drome (1963-66/2012)  Expanded cinema has survived well beyond the 1960s. Isaac Julien’s ten-screen installation *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010), for example, is a contemporary descendant of the form, as are Fiona Tan’s *Saint Sebastian* (2001), about a coming-of-age-day ritual in Kyoto, Japan; and Yang Fudong’s *The Fifth Night* (2010), filmed with seven 35mm cameras running simultaneously, each positioned at a different angle and using different lenses. In addition, the projector performances of Luis Recoder and Sandra Gibson are, according to Joan Hawkins, among the most inspired and inventive examples of contemporary expanded cinema; they make full use of the optical and mechanical qualities of film projection in order to transform the projection room into a sensual three-dimensional space.  For its cross-media vocation and its destabilisation and dematerialization of the traditional art object, expanded cinema is an important development in the deconstruction of high modernism. Paratexual Materials Link: <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.dk/2009/08/expanded-cinema-and-video-art-tate.html>  2 Expanded Cinema and Video Art: Tate Video and Essays from REWIND (Cubitt, Atherton, Hatfield)  Link: <http://expandedcinema.blogspot.dk/>  3 Expanded Cinema  Link: <http://www.narocinema.com/>  4 Naro Expanded Cinema  <http://www.rewind.ac.uk/expanded/Narrative/Home.html>  5 Narrative Exploration in Expanded Cinema  Link: <http://www.stanvanderbeek.com/>  6 Stan VanDerBeek  Link: <http://www.warhol.org/>  7 The Andy Warhol Museum |
| Further reading:  (About Expanded Cinema)  (Curtis)  (Expanded Cinema: A Bibliography)  (Hawkins)  (Renan)  (Youngblood) |