IN SEARCH OF EXPANDED CINEMA

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The theory of *Expanded Cinema,* taken from the title of a famous and enlightening book by Gene Youngblood (1970 – and never translated into Italian), which, in Europe, has probably been quoted from more often than it has been read cover to cover, is usually reduced to the notion of the "expansion" of cinema to the forms of media that came after it, namely video and computer. Yet, in that "after," cinema still remains the main instrument, the father or master, in the era of moving-images. The rare passages from the text that have been translated into Italian[1] only give a glimpse of the varied and intricate network of references, and of the cultural context, which is rich with ideal and creative fervor. Although Youngblood's interventions after the book have been few, they have been more expansive and in-depth, and his new imposing work, which was started at the end of the eighties, still remains to be completed.[2]

Re-reading *Expanded Cinema* today, can help us understand, again, – in a new way, in the light of the events that have taken place since its publishing – a projecting optimism that echoes (with the due differences), some of Marshall McLuhan's theories; it would help us replace, in a challenging manner, some very famous quotations, which have been extracted from the text and the context; it would help us trace the thread that has crossed the decades, intertwining precisely with the most different forms of cinema, to the present day. And re-reading Youngblood would also mean rediscovering that rich mesh of references, from poetry to science, and art to ecology, which characterizes the (poignant) introduction by Buckminster Fuller: a planetary vision, both humanistic and scientific, of technology as the art of the possible dream, and of technological evolution as the strengthening of the senses, of the consciousness, of the awareness of the condition of man, and of the need to better it, yet, not so naive as to ignore the enormous destructive potential of science; Buckminster Fuller is, however, able to see, in the conscious use of the technologies of simultaneous image and sound, the mechanical vision, which is much stronger than the human one, in the ubiquity, and the intimate and "portable" nature of audiovisual devices (but also in their ability to take us outside ourselves, outside our physical limits, and to establish relationships, reciprocity, planetary nearness), a new educational and cognitive possibility, so much so as to prefigure an "Expanded Cinema University."

One of Youngblood's ideas is that of a mediating environment, or rather that of an "intermedia network:"

> *the cinema isn't just something inside the environment; the intermedia network of cinema, television, radio, magazines, books and newspapers is our environment, a service environment that carries the messages of the social organism. It establishes meaning in life, creates mediating channels between man and man, man and society.*[3]

It is a *noosphere,* (Youngblood quotes Teilhard de Chardin), as "the film of organized intelligence that encircles the planet, superimposed on the living layer of the biosphere and the lifeless layer of inorganic material, the lithosphere."[4] The pre-figuration of the communications network – not only in this passage, but also in other passages in *Expanded Cinema* that allude to "actual communities" established by technological possibilities and not by geographical or familial identities – and, above all, of a potentially liberating understanding of it, in many aspects similar to the one recently put forth by Pierre Lévy in his book *L'Intelligence collective*,[5] is quite evident. After all, Youngblood continued to repeat his theory as many as twenty years later, extending it to all the new technologies that were developed in the meantime, when in 1991 he stated that a revolution in communications should concern its self with creating a medium by combining television, computer, telephone, and satellite in one sole multimedia network that is run by the consumer, and which should be used free of charge, and intended, he added, to change mass communications into inter-subjective conversation.[6]

His idea of "intermediality" does not only regard interactions that take place between the different forms of media, but also outlines the character of synaesthetic cinema, which "includes many aesthetic modes, many 'ways of knowing,' simultaneously omni-operative;"[7] capable of expanding our vital capacities (he makes many references to the texts by Norman O. Brown, Marcuse, and Laing) –, toward a polymorphic conception of erotism, and of going beyond the constrictive separation of mind-body, emotion-conscience: "the only understanding mind is the creative mind."

Naturally, this "going beyond" regards – we will be able to understand it better later on in the text – rising above the concept of cinema as entertainment, evasion, and a way of presenting stories taken from literary or theatrical tradition. Cinema, as Youngblood sees it, should never be a repetition of what is already known, but the development of the intellectual-emotional powers, the creation of the unknown and the unseen before, consciousness.

Expanded screens, exploded image

An anticipation, even though different in context and tone, of the idea of expanded cinema can be found, at the end of the fifties, in the "manifeste" written by Nelly Kaplan. It analyzes and re-proposes the theory of "polivision" that was formulated between the twenties and thirties by Abel Gance, both in regards to synaesthesia, and the *explosion* of the image itself, through simultaneity, and a combining of possibilities. Kaplan was sure that music, voices and the "sound belt" would come from everywhere, wherever needed, and would embrace and direct the attention. She predicted that the vertical and horizontal unrolling of the scenes would be simultaneous and that it would stimulate the numbed attention and the association of ideas hidden in the unconscious. Kaplan theorized that the psychological euphoria of the new sensations, the suggestion of a new world hidden behind the images, would be elevated to the infinite power, because multiplication would no longer be enough. She thought polivision to be the cinema of the future, the sole art in the atomic era, which had already opened before them. Nelly Kaplan was certain that the era of the "exploded image" had arrived.[8]

The expansion and explosion of the cinematographic image also takes the matter of the screen into account; Youngblood treats the argument in *Expanded Cinema* – when

he discusses the pioneering experiences made in computer films by the Whitney family. The 16mm film, (without a title), made by John Whitney Jr. between 1966 to 1967, foresaw multiple-projections on three screens (with the use of nine projectors):

> *The film is a sequential triptych: it develops in time and space, exploring the relationships of both form and color, visual tensions, rhythmic modes, and optical illusions in a way that relates each screen to the other with flawless exactitude. It is among the few independently produced multiple-projection films to justify its own multiplicity. Whereas most multiple projections is gratuitous and arbitrary, the Whitney film is a cohesive whole, each element accentuating and complementing the other two in ways that make the experience incomplete without all three parts. The flanking images are identical, though reversed, so as to frame the center screen symmetrically, and the close synchronization of form and color among the screens demands highly controlled projection conditions.*[9]

It is not merely a coincidence that John Whitney Jr. himself, when interviewed by Youngblood, referred to the mental associations, to the "continuous flow of energy between me, the machine, and the images," and to letting forms and suggestions dictated by the unconscious flow through. Here is yet another of the "threads" that tie *Expanded Cinema* to the cinema of the past, and even to pre-cinema: the words of John Whitney Sr. on the metamorphosis of images and the abstractions allowed by the computer, as well as on the possibility of understanding dreams (and the connection between Oriental philosophy and Western projecting technology) are, in this case, quite exemplary. It is an "inner revolution through exterior manipulation."[10] It is the *thread* that goes from Robertson's "nottograph" to surrealist cinema, from Whitney's computer films all the way to present day theorizations and to the production of video art, without overlooking the *underground*. It brings everything together into the same *expanded cinema* category: the live performances and the experimental animation, the artistic use of live, and closed circuit television, multiple projections and computer films, intermedia events, computer graphics and video. Some examples are: James Seawright, Otto Piene, the *Cathode Karma* by Nam June Paik, the decollages by Wolf Vostell, Stan Van Der Beek, but also the "videographic cinema" by Scott Bartlett, and the "cosmic cinema" by Jordan Belson, holographic films and certain aspects of *2001: A Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick (of which Youngblood presents a keen analysis, crowning it all with an interview with Arthur C. Clarke and Douglas Trumbull). The Stargate Corridor sequence is analyzed as one of the examples of the beginning of a new era of cinema: "if one considers the introduction of sound and then color as successive 'generations' in the history of cinema, it is possible to say that we've entered the fourth generation by marrying basic cinematic techniques to computer and video sciences..."[11] It is an era, according to Youngblood, which no longer needs *fiction* to "narrate" things, or to narrate itself.

Cinema, therefore, expands, also because the surface and space for viewing has multiplied, dilating the associative and visionary capacity of our minds simultaneously. The very idea of the screen as a limited, two-dimensional surface is dated, replaced with projects of multiple visions, or with notions of "infinite volume," made up of one or more images that envelop the spectator who then becomes a part of the whole. Youngblood stops to analyze a few examples: on the one hand, the ones made possible by the enormous world expositions (Montreal 1967, Osaka 1970), and on the other,

those run by the artists themselves; their own experiences can be linked to the revival of the theatre, with happenings, with performances, and with the blending of art and technology. The author does not set first type of performance against the second type, because although the huge hyper-technological multiple visions are a commercial response to world expositions, they allow the average man, writes Youngblood, to try, even if "for a limited time, the wealth and inventiveness that is kept from him in everyday existence;"[12] after all, the seminal figures of these devices, like Roman Kroitor (with his *Labyrinthe* for the Expo in Montreal in 1967), and Francis Thompson, seem to be inspired by the same profoundly experimental and innovative passion, more than they are by the search for a technology that is surprising or spectacular, in the most banal and brutal sense. Among the other characteristics of the multiple vision *Labyrinthe*, we may note the horizontal projection (at times together with a perpendicular, vertical one), the enormous dimensions (70mm.), and, in the various cinema halls of the maze, the use of different, ever changing combinations of the various screens – and three times bigger than Cinerama; special attention is also paid to the highly enveloping sound environment (we mustn't forget the "sound belt" that Nelly Kaplan mentioned). The creators of these devices include them in the sphere of expanded cinema, which is capable of overcoming the logic of the traditional plot, and of creating sensorial experiences that are deeper than the ones created in narrative films. And here, as we will see, is one of the divergences between the multiple vision and the mega vision that Youngblood talks about, and what has, in fact, asserted itself in both the world exhibitions and the theme parks.

According to Abel Gance, Moholy-Nagy, Eisenstein, and later Nelly Kaplan, Youngblood, Kroitor and Thompson, overcoming the original format of the screen, its oneness and size, its fixed nature and two-dimensions, is an intrinsic part of the cinema; it is an expansion, which they hoped would spread and become "natural," and not marginal, in this art, and in its reaching out to "the average citizen," as Youngblood says. In other words, this spectatorial aspects are the "experimental" tips of the iceberg, prototypes for a different but not marginal spectacularity, entrusted, only for the moment, to randomness. It is a spectacularity, in other words, which should become a constitutive, in an organic and widespread way, of the experience of the spectator. Whereas this overcoming has become – we will discuss it in detail later on in the text – an area of research which extends (expanding and contracting) to two different areas of the audio-visual world: on the one hand, experimentation, which is still elitist, in video art, and on the other, the commercial and spectacular sensationalism of Imax, Omnimax, of the world exhibitions and of theme parks. In the vast, central region between these poles, at the boundaries of which we can see these two distant and contrasting profiles, we have the cinema of the cinema halls, the cinema of the "average citizen," which is (or is it still?) deaf to new methods, new postures and new viewing experiences.

It is also rather interesting to note how the experiences of the sixties echo the spirit of "polivision" by Abel Gance, but also (with the dream of the overcoming of the screen itself) of the "total cinema" by René Barjavel who said that no satisfactory solution could be met as long as cinema was a slave to that "flat tape" called film, and that changing a flat image into a three-dimensional one, even if we were to project it on a spherical screen, would be not only difficult, but illogical. He was convinced that the only solution was to transform real objects directly into waves and then these waves into virtual images that would then materialize without a screen, or on a massive transparent

screen, made perhaps immaterial, only of waves.[13] We have an image, which, as we can see, foresaw and suggested electronic technology, and the overcoming – or rather the extending and expanding – of cinema.

Metamorphosis versus editing

What promoted the idea of polivision, of multiple and "eccentric" screens, with respect to the classical format and position – right up to foreseeing virtual screens – was not, in these as in other theorists (and artists, and experimenters), the idea of a cinema that progresses towards an integral realism, more and more accentuated and credible, inevitably reaching that ontological vocation theorized by André Bazin. Cinema has gone from silent films to sound, then color, then research and experimentation on Cinemascope and Cinerama, on to the three-dimensional image, the Imax and Omnimax cinema halls, and we could also add the improvements that have taken place in sound, and, naturally, the use of more and more sophisticated special effects. Yet, if what counts in the cinema that prevails today, or rather what dominates uncontestedly, is the simulation of reality, and all the technical improvements are aimed at giving the maximum credibility possible to a story (credibility even when the story is incredible), then utopian forms of cinema that we have just mentioned, *another* cinema is being proposed, that is indifferent to traditional fiction, and hostile to the concept of cinema as entertainment or as evasion, as show in the banal sense of the word. At times, we could even re-read the history of these utopias and of these artistic practices (even of the recent, and very recent ones), like a voyage back in time, in search of the "dead-ends," towards the "defeated" yet rich cinema that is overflowing with ideas and suggestions; we would be going back to the primitive cinema, the cinema that is not yet trapped in the cages of genres and of codified length: this is a refusal or relativization of speech, of visual and urban symphonies, of spaces and ways of viewing not made for the classical "cinema halls" and for screens that are not modifiable and mobile. Let us also look at the improvements that have been made in sound with the introduction of the "multiple track:" if on the one hand they definitely intensify the impression of reality, then on the other hand, they compensate for the shallowness of the image in respect to dialogue, and therefore restore, finally, dignity to noise, and, as Michel Chion wrote, a decline in the spoken word in favor of a landscape of sound.[14]

In Youngblood's opinion, as we have been able to see, classical fiction is no longer desirable or necessary in *expanded cinema*: "the simulation of reality has delivered its maximum performance; it no longer benefits us as it has in the past." Cinema, thanks to the new technologies, can go beyond this simulation (deriving from the pre-stylization, and from the fictional organization of the *profilmique*), and represents so called reality through "post-stylization of unstylized reality" in a dialectical manner, by creating:

> *a myth born out of the juxtapositions of the paradoxes of reality [...] The natural phenomenon explained by synaesthetic cinema is the filmmaker's consciousness. It is a documentary of the artist's perception. Since this is not a physical reality, it must be a metaphysical reality, that is, a myth. In the approximation of this intangible, however, the artist's language is reality, not fiction. What we see on the screen is not an act. True, it's processed through the medium until it no longer is objective reality, but it is nonetheless real. This is mythopoietic reality. In one sense it renders fiction obsolete.*[15]

In this area that explores the oscillation between reality and representation, Youngblood's thought – supported by the analysis of a wide range of works and authors – tries to get past the misunderstanding of a harsh contraposition, and restores depth to *realism*, which is not the banal and mimicking simulation of reality. This theory clearly echoes the reflections of Maya Deren, but also of the New American Cinema, and vindicates reality and *concreteness* for films that are certainly not considered realistic (something that Youngblood did, in fact, when examining the kinetic paintings by Jordan Belson). We must remember here Jonas Mekas' observations on the concrete essence of cinema, of all forms of cinema (which, being a moving art, is never abstract when it comes to color and movement). Thanks to its poets, he said, this art of matter (Mekas adds celluloid and the screen to light and movement) will go beyond being merely a medium for telling stories.[16] Cinema is art of matter on the one hand and "immateriality" of electronic technology on the other: today this debate also regards the level of realism and of abstraction obtainable thanks to scientific devices – images of medical diagnostics, satellite images, infra-red camera images – which allow us to see the invisible, the infinitely small, the infinitely big, not with traditional "realistic" rendering (even abstract at times), but with something definitely real about it.[17]

This consideration on realism cannot sidestep the theories on editing: synaesthetic cinema holds within itself the idea of conflict, and that of the harmonic combination of the images, and precisely because it goes beyond the notion of reality to establish a direct link between the author and the spectator, it is not interested in the classical staging, nor the exasperated fragmentation of the material collected: "it doesn't 'chop the world into little fragments,' an effect Bazin attributed to editing, because it's not concerned with the objective world in the first place."[18]

It is interesting to note how Bazin's ideas are (at a distance of thirty years from Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*), full of stimuli, even in respect to the poetry and practice of video: the same Bazinian difference between "directors who believe in reality and directors who believe in image," are found in the two different ways of interpreting electronic technologies: their capacity to continually register reality on one side (an exasperation of the *plan-séquence*), and the rich scope of effects, decomposition, and fragmentation that electronic post-production offers on the other. Of course, this extremely schematic distinction must be re-invented – the use of video often reflects, in the same work, the two distinct poles of this "contrast" – and above all, it must be a contradiction that can exist between the maximum of realism and the maximum of artifice in the greater part of mainstream cinema, which certainly betrays the Bazinian ideal.[19]

It is exactly because it wants to represent "harmonic opposites" that synaesthetic cinema cannot be identified with the extreme temporal continuity of certain films by Warhol, and yet, at the same time, refuses the violence of cutting. The solution is found in the transition and the mixing of images, capable of using at its best "a space-time continuum, a mosaic of simultaneity [...] A synaesthetic film is, in effect, one image continually transforming into other images: metamorphosis." The use of "overlapping superimpositions" allows the non-traumatic, yet complex passage from image to image, and "it's the only style of cinema that directly corresponds to the theory of general relativity, a concept that has completely transformed all aspects of contemporary existence except traditional Hollywood cinema."

Above all, according to Youngblood, this permits us to also recuperate Eisenstein's theories because "the conflict-juxtaposition of intellectual effects is increased when they occur within the same image..."[20]

The superimposed image, as is well known, is one of the effects that cinema no longer uses, and which has found its new identity only in the vast and different uses made of it in experimental and underground productions, as well as in video art. In video art in particular, if we want to take Bazin's observation into account again – we note a sort of rejection of the cut, which is expressed in two totally different ways: the use of long sequences, of the "contemplative" capability of the mechanical eye (Bill Viola, one of the authors most loved and studied by Youngblood), of smooth transitions and uninterrupted and soft stratifications, of the "mélanges d'images" (Robert Cahen), or of the absorption of the cut inside the frame (which naturally, can no longer be called frame), with an extremely fragmented interior leading to decomposition, the creation of mirror effects, opening of windows, and so on (as with Nam June Paik, but also the video productions by Peter Greenaway).

Let us consider the use of superimposed images in Jean-Luc Godard's striking work *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), in which the sliding and the crossing of images acquires further complexity with the insertion of written texts on the screen: a palimpsest effect, in which even the moments of exasperated cutting are an intrinsic part of a concept suspended in time:

> *ici, le montage par 'saccades,' hyperrapide, quasi stroboscopique, jouant de tous les principes de l'ornementalité (entre autres symétrie, dissymetrie et asymétrie, répétition, accumulation et juxtaposition), ce montage va à l'encontre d'une possible contemplation, produit un effet de syncope du temps, syncope d'une ligne qui se dessine dans le chaos de la mémoire.*[21]

Youngblood makes further reference to the subject of "re-reading" the cinema in his article on *The Art of Memory* (Woody Vasulka, 1987) – one of the pioneers of international video art, of whom Youngblood has often written on it – who composed a moving fresco on the history and images of the twentieth century. In it, Vasulka intertwines vastly varied and fragmented visual references into a continuous stream; he reconstructs a film made up of many films, photographs, pages from books (about utopias, wars, and revolutions in the past century), which unfold in ever-changing shapes and forms against the majestic landscape of New Mexico. On various occasions Vasulka, has, in fact, been open about his aversion to editing, and about his research on the transition of images, which continually change in space and time.[22] Youngblood, when presenting the article at the end of the eighties, wrote that it has a musical structure, and is a panorama of associations that moves on through wipes, and not cuts.[23] In 1991, it is Vasulka again who quotes Bazin, and Youngblood's theories on synaesthetic cinema when he states that according to Bazin, reality exists, therefore why manipulate it? He goes on to say that with computers everything is manipulation and "reality," and that the new media have redefined the characteristics of narrative, thanks to an interactive mechanism. And, adds Vasulka, they are able to unhinge the renaissance prospective that has dominated the construction of the images up to the present. A digital version of the soft transition from one image to the next, is the morphing effect, which smoothly combines different forms by passing form one to the other: Daniel Reeves made artistic use of the morphing effect in

Obsessive Becoming (1995), in order to make an incessant – obsessive, in fact – transformation of memories (through photographs and family films) over the years.[24]

In both cases (complex and smooth transitions, or fragmentation within the shot) the important thing is to recuperate and recreate a richness of the *figures d'écriture*, which the cinema had explored and then abandoned. It is a richness that, on film, reveals itself to be long and difficult, if not impossible, and which, however, was almost completely eliminated with the advent of the logic of imitation and the ultra narratives of sound films. The electronic image allows for and facilitates the expansion of cinema towards a new way of portraying and narrating: its natural habitat is metamorphosis; its actor is the image itself in continual transformation and proliferation; its *mise-en-scène* is *mise-en-page*, wrote Pascal Bonitzer in 1982.[25]

Where have all the effects gone?

As we run through the history of cinema, progressively "overcome by a "normality" of language, which often makes it so very uninteresting," declared Carlo L. Ragghianti in an article written in 1955 (dedicated, not by chance, to "Television As an Artistic Fact"), we note the vanishing of the effects "that, by multiplicity, used to characterize up to a certain point in time the cinema views of various original directors and which became basic elements of 'film grammar' (slow and fast motion, framing, cut-off frequency, fades, passing matte shots, halation, lens diaphragm, back projection, intercutting, paced editing, etc.)."[26] It is needless to say that the trick shots and special effects of mainstream cinema do not go in this direction, but rather remain slaves to technical perfection, against which Ragghianti himself warned us, as well as of a dimension of verisimilitude of the narration.

Video has, in a certain sense, rediscovered and recreated the effects, giving them a Vertovian value, of normal "proceedings" of language; video has invented new effects and using the extraordinary potential (even interactive), of the live show: among the elements of expanded cinema we can also find, in Youngblood's theory, the recovery of a real communicative and relational dimension of television technology (a dimension which Brecht sincerely wished for radio in the thirties), which is able to put real people and far-away experiences in touch. It is not by chance that the book he has been working on for the past fifteen years, *Electronic Cafe: The Challenge To Create on The Same Scale As We Can Destroy*, opens with the pioneering research and the famous performances of two authors, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, who, as early as the eighties, had created interactive and highly participatory systems (and therefore also deeply "spectacular"), thanks to live television. Their *Electronic Cafe* (1980) involved a hook-up between a road in New York and one in Los Angeles (from the store windows of two famous department stores), giving life to a succession of exciting, funny, creative and also socially important dialogues, coast-to-coast sketches, meetings and mini-stories. It was both a social and public concept of cinema, which had characterized part of the European avant-garde movement of the twenties (in particular in the Soviet Union), that led to the idea of a screen set up in public places and the prefiguring, de facto, of TV.[27]

Youngblood's new book proposes a more general reflection on the history of media arts and, among other things, the expansion of telecommunication art to what is now

called net art. Yet, from the point of view of the *figures d'écriture*, it is also the relationship between the in and off images, which is questioned by the new video technologies: the very idea of frame is questioned by the possibility of easily combining the two spaces in the same image – returning to cuts inside the frame, to the collage – or of presenting them together on various TV sets in video installations. Youngblood gives us a stimulating account of how the relationship between the shot and the reverse shot was overthrown when, in 1991, he presented the amateur-like, seemingly private works of George Kuchar: in his video diaries the author, thanks to his easy-to-handle small video camera, is able to film both himself and the reality he is communicating with by going from one to the other and then back again. The subject is, therefore, a particular type of reverse shot, "guided" by the author without cuts. Youngblood describes Kuchar as being in the center of this exchange of glances the whole time, and says that when he points the camera at himself, he is the *énonciateur*, and we, the spectators, "see" his point of view; he is part of the image but his dialogue with others, and his interior monologue, become one. It is a sort of "live editing," of both documentary and fiction.[28]

Leaving behind film-makers and independent video makers for the moment, one of the film-directors, and later video-directors, who have studied the changes that have taken place in the relationship between the on screen, the off screen and the reversed shot, is Peter Greenaway. In his *A TV Dante* (with Tom Phillips, 1985-89), he combines the techniques of soft transition and superimposed images, and the extreme fragmentation of the collage inside the frame: the image – he says – is forced into the frame like into a straightjacket, but it will be able to free itself thanks to the new technologies, to the combinative possibilities, and to the spherical showings in the panoramic cinema halls: exactly the way painting did, thanks to the work of disintegrating the limits that was done by such painters as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.[29] In Greenaway's film with electronic post-production *The Pillow Book* (1996), we have both the objective and the subjective in the same image: "we follow, objectively, the character's movements, and, at the same time, we see through his eyes, in a frame cut inside the screen, like a *subjective-window* that opens and closes, and then flickers away into a greater image..."[30] Greenaway, after all, is truly convinced that the road to fiction is the real "dead-end" of cinema, which must still analyze its possibilities and will be able to do so only when it has overcome itself. Greenaway finds it stimulating to try to combine the new technologies with the dislocation of the text, with the multiple screens already used by the avant-garde, to re-invent a new cinematographic language. He is convinced that the cinema of the future will have five new characteristics: it will have multiple screens, and therefore the screen will disappear; it will involve the five senses; it will be much more interactive so that the public will be able to control the events; it will move away from the present idea of the medium that illustrates themes; and mostly, it will rotate around the individual spectator/screen relationship.[31] The social dimension of Greenaway's cinema – it is quite clear – is not as strong as it is in Youngblood's: the cold formal perfection, the narrative geometry and the absence of pressing socio-political needs, puts distance between Greenaway and the author of the utopian and political tensions of *Expanded Cinema*. However, on many other points, we hear the evident echoes of these authors (multiscreens, synaesthesia, interactive, non-narrative...), and in this case we are in the realm of a cinema that is anything but marginal.

Live roads (Living ends, as opposed to Dead-ends)

Let us try to recapitulate, to summarize the theoretical points of Youngblood's reflections and identify all the possible passages that further expanded of his thoughts with modern day audiovisual methods.

The first part is that of synaesthesia, of the combination of sensorial perceptions and of media (in later works, Youngblood has named the computer the *metamedium* par excellence), which goes well with the question of the position (mental and physical) of the spectator, with his or her experience of the different visions of images – multiple vision, spherical, labyrinthine. The idea is not so much that of situations that engross and render passive as much as that of the possibility of confrontation and mental associations (Eisenstein, again), and, as Youngblood stated in 1991, of "distancing." He is sure that alternative cinema does not have the problem of seducing the public, but rather, it has the objective of keeping distance, and separating the public from the product.[32] It is maybe for this reason that in 1966 Jean-Louis Comolli wrote of the need for "illuminated cinema halls," especially for modern cinema. Since light is both a metaphor and a synonym for knowledge, the spectators as well as the characters on the screen, should come out of the darkness, and be brought out into the light in the same manner: both as protagonists of the work and of life.[33]

Now, it is obvious that the Imax and Omnimax cinema halls follow a different objective; they mean to fascinate and be sensationally spectacular, which is totally in line with the commercial approach to cinema.[34] This fact might induce us to think that the dreams of the avant-garde cinema and of "expanded" filmmakers have been trapped in a dead-end, but other audio-video forms (and not only) have shown us the extraordinary vitality of these dreams and have placed themselves among the liveliest and most prolific experiences in contemporary art. Let us consider video-installations, for example, and video-environments, and how they have been able to use some of the research done by the historical avant-garde, and by experimental cinema, and to re-invent the notion of projection and that of the screen (as a support, but different from the fixed and two-dimensional one: screens made of sand, of salt, of shreds of paper, accidental screens, living screens – projections on human bodies – cut, inflated, extremely thin, screens made of vapor...), of the synaesthetic or trans-sensorial dimension on which they are based, and of the "new drama" that the works are striving for. It is not by chance that some of the most perceptive filmmakers of our time (like Chantal Akerman and Chris Marker) have tried their hand at this type of "construction." It is also interesting to note an "expansion" of cinema in non-traditional spaces and conditions. For example, the biennials of contemporary art (as in Venice, with the installations of some filmmakers like Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi), are exhibitions that concentrate on a re-reading of the "old" cinematographic devices, by re-introducing the big, possibly vertical, screen (Bill Viola, Robert Cahen, in their last installations), or by leaving the screen in the classical position, but move it outside the cinema hall and into exhibition spaces, art galleries or in the open in churches and squares. If we take a look at the iconographic wealth of *Expanded Cinema* we are surprised at the number of inventions, forms, devices that "immigrated" from pioneering experiences to the modern day video art practices: the already mentioned *Labyrinthe* by Kroitor (1967) seems to be re-evoked in later installation videos like *Trinité* by Jean-Paul Fargier (1990), or in multimedia shows (theatre, literature, music, interactive devices) like *Giacomo mio,*

salviamoci! by the "Studio Azzurro" Group (1998), who set up screen horizontally in the place of the stall and a vertical screen, perpendicular to the other, on the stage. We can add *HPSCHD* by John Cage and Ronald Nameth (1969) to the hundreds of films and thousands of slides, diverse and simultaneous spaces for the image, as was seen recently in the video *Ich Tank* (David Larcher, 2000) that combined a live remix with nighttime multivision for spectators who, in Belfort, France, layed on the ground to watch screens of at different heights inside a huge, glass hall. There are hundreds of examples can go from installations, to video environments, to interactive environments: the Festival "Ars Electronica" by Linz in Austria, has been exploring, during the past decades, the artistic value of huge multimedia devices that combine music, theatre and interactivity.

We have discussed the new *figures d'écriture*, the combination of multiple images, the notion of metamorphosis, and have underlined how they have become common practice in most modern day video art, just as the use of tiny video cameras has spread and affirmed itself: they allow an ever-growing production of a type of diaristic registration, based on the particular configuration of on-screen/reverse-screen mentioned earlier in the text (it is an "expanded" cinema in the sense of comprehensiveness, and of the diffusion of personal shooting devices and, at this point, even the editing, and in the sense of its ability, again, to be the direct expression of the stream of consciousness of the visions of the author). And the "effects" are the object of an experimentation that transcends verisimilitude and tends, rather, to unveil the device, and "cool" the narrative. The effect go beyond the cut in favor of a patient digging into the image, a sort of revealing of a "new alchemy" ("the image has different possibilities of becoming. An image can be elaborated for years, endlessly..." says Angela Melitopoulos, in her explanation on why she prefers the term *video-processing* to the term editing; Irit Batsry uses the term *image processing* to underline the patient job of transformation from one image to another – was as if one was hidden inside the other – of controlling it live, as if it were an improvised jam session: her *These Are Not My Images (Neither There Nor Here),* 2000, seems to correspond entirely to the idea of expanded cinema: there is a fluidity that proceeds by transition and metamorphosis, that at the same time, keeps a diaristic style and pace, as a documentary and as a "narrative").[35] Video art – both as a single-channel work and as installation – seem to have taken up the challenge of expanded cinema, freeing it from the dead-end in which it had been trapped by the dominating cinema.

> *Cinema is the art of organizing a stream of audiovisual events in time – wrote Youngblood in 1988, underlining the theories expressed almost twenty years earlier in Expanded Cinema – an event-stream, like music. There are currently at least four media through which we can practice cinema – film, video, computer, holography – just as there are many instruments through which we can practice music. Of course each has distinct properties and contributes differently to the theory of cinema. Through its technology and the cultural and aesthetic milieu in which it has developed, video expands the possibilities of cinema, enlarges our understanding of what cinema can be and do. What we really mean by "video art," then, is experimental cinema practiced electronically – a personal rather than institutional enterprise, representing the poetic form of cinema as opposed to the prose form of narrative storytelling. In other words, it's the true art of cinema, the opposite of entertainment, if by art we mean a process of exploration and inquiry.*[36]

We come straight back to *Expanded Cinema*, and to the clear distinction between art and business: "commercial entertainment works against art, exploits the alienation and boredom of the public, by perpetuating a system of conditioned response to formulas..." And yet again: "the notion of experimental art, therefore, is meaningless. All art is experimental or it isn't art."[37] Utopia? Yet, the roads, as we have sought to underline, are still open; these ideas have found a narrow aperture, and have been able to make space for themselves and cross different settings in which their energy has proved to be artistically vibrant and theoretically prolific. It is, rather, on the very nature of "utopia" that we must reflect, as Youngblood writes today, after more than thirty years from his important text:

> *I have a political approach to utopian thinking these days. I think that if a social proposal is not "utopian" it is not radical enough. By "utopian" I mean "that which is not permitted." Some people define utopianism differently. For them, an idea is utopian if it is beyond the psychological capacity or abilities of humanity. We are not capable of doing it, so it is impossible, i.e., utopian. I say that is not an answer, it is the problem. If we as humanity are not capable of a certain "utopian" action, then our task is to transform ourselves so that we become capable, because the only valid social action today is radical action, and utopianism is radical. It is the dream of freedom, equality, and fulfillment.*[38]

Yet, this living utopia needs new eyes also:

> *mostly even critics are blind* – wrote Jonas Mekas. – *We have a number of talented men and women creating a new cinema, opening new visions – but we need critics and an audience capable of seeing these visions. We need an audience that is willing to educate, to expand their eyes. A new cinema needs new eyes to see it. That's what it's all about.*[39]

That was back in 1964.

[Translated from Italian by Matilda Colarossi]

1 The book by Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, was published by Studio Vista, London and by Dutton & Co, New York, 1970. The unabridged text can be found today at the Steina and Woody Vasulka web site: http://www.artscilab.org/expandedcinema.html. The passages translated in Italy: "La videosfera," in *L'altro video. Incontro sul videotape*, "Quaderno informativo" no. 44, 9th Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro (1973); "Il cinema sinestetico" and "Mitopoieia: la fine della fiction," in R. Albertini, S. Lischi (eds.), *Metamorfosi della visione. Saggi di pensiero elettronico* (Pisa: ETS, 1988, 2nd edition 2000). Published in the same volume is the text "Cinema elettronico e simulacro digitale. Un'epistemologia dello spazio virtuale," comment by Youngblood at the International convention *Cinema: dietro e dentro l'immagine elettronica*, Rome, November 1986, also in *Cinema Nuovo*, no. 2 (March-April 1987), under the title "Simulacro digitale e virtualità dello spazio". The text was published again in the *Salso Film & TV Festival* catalogue, 12th edition, April 1989; today in M.M. Gazzano (ed.), *Il "cinema" dalla fotografia al computer* (Urbino: QuattroVenti, 1999). The Festival invited Youngblood to hold a conference on "Film, video, computer image: il futuro del cinema," which included an exhibition directed by Youngblood himself (whose commentary notes are also published in the catalogue).

Among the other publications in Italy, following *Expanded Cinema* we can find: "Il mito utopistico della rivoluzione comunicativa," in F. Colombo (ed.), *Parole sul video*, special edition of *Comunicazioni Sociali*, no. 2-3 (April-September 1992). Some of the texts, as well as articles quoted in the notes that follow, are the consequence of Youngblood's conferences and other interventions in Italy: they include a series of meetings and video presentations at the University of Pisa, together with Woody Vasulka (under the title"The Radical Image") in May 1991.

2 Among the other interventions we would like to include (a special thanks to Susanna Carlisle who sent me useful information in regards to them) "Cinema and the Code," *Leonardo* (*Computer Art in Context. Supplemental Issue,* 1989) and the weighty work on Bill Viola, "Metaphysical Structuralism. The Videotapes of Bill Viola," *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 20-21 (Fall-Winter) 1988-1989. Youngblood has also edited the videodisc edition of the works of Bill Viola and the *L'Avventura* by Antonioni, for Voyager Press, Los Angeles. His last book, which is in the process of being finished, is called *Electronic Cafe: The Challenge To Create on the Same Scale As We Can Destroy*.

3 G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), p. 54.

4 *Ibid*., p. 57.

5 P. Lévy, *L'Intelligence collective. Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994).

6 Youngblood, "Il mito utopistico della rivoluzione comunicativa," cit.

7 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., p. 109.

8 N. Kaplan, *Manifeste d'un art nouveau: la Polyvision* (Paris: Caractères, 1955).

9 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., p. 231.

10 *Ibid*., p. 238.

11 *Ibid*., p. 156.

12 *Ibid*., p. 352.

13 R. Barjavel, *Cinéma total. Essai sur les formes futures du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël, 1944).

14 M. Chion, *L'audio-vision* (Paris: Nathan, 1990).

15 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., pp. 107-108.

16 M. Deren, "Cinematography: the creative use of reality," in G. Kepes (ed.), *The Visual Arts Today* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1960); J. Mekas, *Movie Journal* (New York: Collier Books, 1972; December 9, 1965: "There is no abstract cinema: all cinema is concrete"). In the texts of *Movie Journal* from 1964 and 1965 we can find the expressions "expanding eye" and "expanded cinema." See also D. Noguez, *Eloge du cinéma expérimental*, (Paris: Paris expérimental, 1999 [1979]), Ch. Lebrat (ed.), *Peter Kubelka* (Paris: Paris expérimental, 1990), A. Aprà (ed.), *New American Cinema. Il cinema indipendente americano degli anni Sessanta* (Milano: Ubulibri, 1986).

17 See the section "Tutte le immagini sono astratte," opinions of various Italian independent authors and video artists on this theme (ed. by F. Pesoli) in S. Lischi (ed.), *Un anno italiano in video* (Milano: A&M Bookstore, 1996).

18 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., p. 86.

19 For a change in thought regarding the more or less "realistic" worth, in a cinema that strongly believes in the cut, I refer to the recent reflections by F. Albera, "Le teorie del montaggio in Unione Sovietica. Da Kulesov al 'realismo socialista,'" in G.P. Brunetta (ed.), *Storia del cinema mondiale V. Teorie, strumenti, memorie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001).

20 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., pp. 86-87.

21 P. Convert, "La Couleur dit et ne dit pas," in *Art Press* special edition *Le Siècle de Jean-Luc Godard* (November 1998).

22 K. Ausubel, "Entretien avec Woody," in *Steina et Woody Vasulka vidéastes, 1969-1984* (Paris: Cinédoc, 1984); on *The Art of Memory* see also R. Bellour, "Les Images du monde," Catalogue de la 3ème Semaine Internationale de Vidéo (Genève: 1989).
23 Paper on "The Art of Memory" by G. Youngblood, in the catalogue *Salso Film & TV Festival*, *op. cit.* Also see the text by Youngblood on the same video presented for publication *Steina & Woody Vasulka*, Denver Art Museum (January-March 1992).
24 W. Vasulka in D. Evola, "Woody Vasulka," *Fare Video* (July-August 1991).
25 P. Bonitzer, *Le Champ aveugle. Essais sur le cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard, 1982).
26 C.L. Ragghianti, "La televisione come fatto artistico," special issue of the review *Il Mercurio* (1955); later in *Cinema arte figurativa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964). On the reflections on the relationship between these reflections and the modern practice and theory on the electronic image see my text "Chiaroscuri elettronici. L'immagine televisiva come arte nella riflessione di Carlo L. Raggianti," in AA.VV., *Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti e il carattere cinematografico della visione* (Milano: Charta, 2000, bilingual edition Italian and English).
27 See F. Albera, "Le teorie del montaggio in Unione Sovietica. Da Kulesov al 'realismo socialista,'" cit.
28 Youngblood in Evola, "Gene Youngblood," *Fare Video* (September 1991).
29 See M. Cieutat, J.-L. Flecniakoska (eds.), *Le Grand Atelier de Peter Greenaway* (Strasbourg: Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg/Les Presses du Réel, 1998).
30 T. Porcelli, "Equivoci della soggettiva," *Cineforum*, no. 6 (July-August 1997, special edition: *Quel che resta nella cornice*).
31 P. Greenaway in M. Polsinelli, "Peter Greenaway. Paesaggi con figure," *Bianco & Nero*, no. 1-2 (1996).
32 G. Youngblood in Evola, *op. cit.*
33 J.-L. Comolli, "Salles obscures, salles claires. Notes sur le nouveau spectateur," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 177 (April 1966).
34 For the history of these devices and reflections on the intertwining of dreams and commercial interests that have accompanied their development see P. Véronneau, "Imax, l'eccezione canadese," in Brunetta (ed.), *op. cit.*; see also E. Michaux, *Du panorama pictural au cinéma circulaire. Origines et histoire d'un autre cinéma, 1785-1998* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).
35 A. Melitopulos in M. Lazzarato, "Vidéo, temps et mémoire," *Chimères*, no. 27 (1996); I. Batsry in S. Cargioli (ed.), *Immagini oltre* (Pisa: Ondavideo, 2001). For these and other reflections on electronic effects (but also the continuity from cinema to video) refer to my book *Visioni elettroniche. L'oltre del cinema e l'arte del video* (Rome: Scuola Nazionale di Cinema, 2001). Also F. Beau, Ph. Dubois, G. Leblanc (eds.), *Cinéma et dernières technologies* (Paris-Brussels: INA/De Boeck Université, 1998); and M. Rieser, A. Zapp (eds.), *New Screen Media. Cinema/Art/Narrative* (London: BFI, 2002, book and DVD).
36 Youngblood, "Metaphysical Structuralism. The Videotapes of Bill Viola," cit.
37 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, cit., pp. 59 and 65.
38 Youngblood, from his letter to me on July 16, 2002. An approach similar to utopia, in particular to communicative utopia and the social possibilities of radio, is found in Brecht, in 1930, who, when commenting on the extraordinary possibilities of the use of this medium, wrote: "if you find all this utopian, I beg you to reflect on the reasons why it would be utopian." In *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967).
39 J. Mekas, *Film Journal*, cit. (February 6, 1964: "On the expanding eye").