

Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art

Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art

Expanding Cinema

*Edited by
Jill Murphy and Laura Rascaroli*

Amsterdam University Press

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In memory of my mother, Mary Murphy, who was wise, warm, and true. (JM)

To Mara – cousin, twin, friend – to the sinuous fabric of love that connected
our lives in proximity and distance, to the anguish of the tear, to the day
when it might heal. (LR)

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Jill Murphy and Laura Rascaroli
Cork, March 2020

Foreword: Courtesy of the Artists

Sandra Gibson + Luis Recoder

Expanding cinema by means of theorizing film through contemporary art. Expanding it, that is, by theorizing-film-through something other than film itself and yet in affinity with it. The cinematic affinities in contemporary art as the occasion through which theorizing film projects itself into an expanding cinema that promises to become the theoretical apparatus par excellence of a new dispositif for its expanding theory. In expanding cinema through contemporary art the expanding theory preserves the legacy of theorizing-film-through-film by other means. The ever-expanding dispositif of theorizing-film-through-art reinstalls itself in the new installation, namely, from the cinema to the gallery. The coming attraction, or rather distraction, is no doubt the post-cinematic condition of possibility for its own projection performance: theorizing contemporary art through film. Whether the dispositif of theorizing-film-through-art takes hold of the dispositif of theorizing-art-through-film as the uncanny shadow of its shadow is a possibility among possibilities in the throw of the thematic scope outlined in the handsomely edited volume before you. A retrospective foreword by way of a collection of aphorisms in the form of artist statements, proposals, and correspondences from our collaborative work as Gibson + Recoder registers the vertiginous twists and turns of a threading path entangled in the light spill of an expanding cinema: Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art.

I.

In our installation work, we use projected light to articulate space and time. Film projectors and celluloid are the material base of our constructions in light and shadow, the elemental properties of cinema. These things are deeply imbued with a history of viewership in the dark of the theatre. To remove it from darkness is to flood this history and cast a certain illumination upon it. A certain exposure. Light spills in the shifting of film from its native



Figure 1 Gibson + Recoder, *Light Spill* (2005). Modified 16mm film projector, film, screen, dimensions variable. Installation view, Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2016. Photo by Hans Wilschut.

darkness in enclosed chambers (camera obscura) to the uncanny openness and defamiliarized illumination of installation. We are exploring the shift, elaborating the displacement, recasting the light mechanics of a peculiar

estrangement of the medium. The art of cinema, yes. But more timely: the becoming cinema of art. That is the coming attraction for us.¹

II.

Our work employs the medium of film at the moment when film is no longer the industrial standard of motion picture technology. Film is obsolete. But if this is the case from an economic point of view, it has always been the case from an artistic one. Artistic obsolescence in the medium of film is a primordial fact that does not wait for the waning of its technological base; film is obsolete at the moment of its birth. Film is fundamentally obsolete in the same way that all art is obsolete at the moment of its birth. In the realm of aesthetics, the emergence of beauty is utterly precarious, unstable, decomposing before our very eyes. The economic view of obsolescence in the medium of film is merely the vantage point through which to glimpse the artistic view of obsolescence in its correct, even if belated, perspective.²

III.

To ask about cinema is not the same as asking about film. Cinema is the metaphysical idea (of cinema) and not the phenomenological 'thing itself'. It is bereft of materiality in its escape into a dream-like immateriality. Cinema is not film. It is the death of film (from the moment darkness settles in, the materials disappear in the dark fabric of an abysmal masking device). Film is not cinema. Film goes up against the grain (but it has no grain) of cinema. It is the rotting flesh made up of bones and other corporal beasts lurking in the dark, suspended in a murky substance. The organic nature of film is the long intestine (umbilical/spinal cord) unwinding and slithering silently behind our backs (our spines), wrapping its infinite coil (or noose?) ever so swiftly around our necks! The death of film is not the death of cinema. Disembodied/disembowelled from an apparent (though not transparent) darkness, film is cut loose from its immaterial bond (its false disappearance, its fake death) and made to roam the world for the first time. Film can do without cinema once and for all. While cinema pretends to be continued...³

1 Gibson + Recoder, 'Coming Attraction'.

2 Gibson + Recoder, 'Cinematograph'.

3 Gibson + Recoder, 'Cinema/Film'.

IV.

Film projection exceeds the limits of its concept as a mere functional apparatus for the mechanical performance of cinematic works. A concept of 'projection performance' is, therefore, inherent to the medium which *performs* not only the negation of its mediation and thus subordination to the celluloid material, but also its resistance as a passive carrier. (Projection projects its ambivalence to the material, intermittently hesitating between its slavish animation of a dead object and its absolute indifference as to whether the object is already dead or missing.) To perform the already performed is to raise this element of resistance to a second-degree awareness. In light of this awareness, the concept of projection performance becomes a tautological concept in which 'performance' merely doubles and thus foregrounds the specific functioning of the projective apparatus.

To work as an artist within a certain tautological understanding of projection-as-performance is precisely to perform and reperform ad infinitum the already performed. Film projection has always relied on a projectionist to perform and reperform ad infinitum (ad nauseam) the already performed and preformed functioning of the projective apparatus. An aesthetics of projection performance is an apprenticeship to this dedicated custodian of darkness (of nothingness, of disappearance, of invisibility, of transparency). To work or labour in utter darkness is one thing (i.e. to make a bare something out of a bare nothing), but to shape and reshape the intermittent im/palpability of this void through the tyranny of cinematic time is another thing, one which incessantly haunts in its stubborn resistance to the resistance. To break free from this temporal tyranny of narrativized time, or at least to slip beneath its gaze, a shift in the projective location presents itself as a possible exit, though by no means an escape.⁴

V.

We work with projection and this is a very material, object-based practice; but in our projection performances, more than in the installations, we are interested in framing a certain dialectical slippage between materiality and immateriality. We imagine the viewer being completely lost in the illusion of the screen events, almost forgetting the live aspect of the experience. The

4 Gibson + Recoder, 'Projecting Projection'. Based on a lecture presentation delivered at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in New Orleans, 10–13 March 2011.

slippage between being a live, non-reproducible, event and a reproducible event occurs also because of the durational nature of the work and its illusive character. We are interested in foregrounding radical materiality, exaggerating it to the point where, paradoxically, it is no longer the material itself that is experienced but pure light, sheer illusion, absolute immateriality, or what have you.

There is a difference between working materially in a gallery, where the approach tends to be literal, the object is there, and in a theatrical space, where the tendency is to withdraw from materiality, simply because the cinema space is so overloaded with a kind of illusory forgetfulness of the material conditions. The architectural contributes to this effect. As much as you try to pry into it, call attention to it, unmask it, and expose it for what it is, the cinema is resiliently stubborn and rebels against transparency.

We like to think of the footage as just another element in the ensemble that constitutes the apparatus. Our apparent ambivalence with the footage is not unlike any other element in this multiplicity known as the cinematograph. The footage as a found object is no more special than the found object of the cinema machine itself. We are working with the totality.

Film projectors are not meant to be running all day, as they overheat and break down, and so we discovered that minimally chiselling away at some key components allows for an uninterrupted, continuous exhibition of something that wasn't designed to be presented in this manner. In general, any kind of intervention we do with the projector has to do with the sheer impossibility of the cinematograph to project non-stop 24-hours and seven days a week, unlike a static object such as a painting or a photograph. And that comes from the fact that the machine resists that kind of viewing situation, and also resists being viewed as a machine – it's got to be tucked away in a hidden chamber so as to keep from view the medium's utter fragility and precariousness.

Whenever we exhibit *Light Spill*, someone always asks: 'What do you do with the film pile afterwards? Do you rewind it?' – and so the idea of *Threadbare* came from the act of rewinding the film back onto the projector, but in such a way where the return of the material is so vast that it overwhelms the take-up mechanism to the point of rendering the entire machine inoperable. Perhaps it is a form of mummification. Some say it resembles the signature silhouette of Mickey Mouse's head.

We have two different practices which are in conversation with one another. In order for us to express something essential about the projection performances, it is imperative that it be achieved in displaced form, outside the dark chamber. The open space of a gallery allows us to express a kind of



Figure 2 Gibson + Recoder, *Threadbare* (2013). 16mm film projector, reels, film, 27 x 35 x 12 inches. Courtesy of Gibson + Recoder Studio, Brooklyn, NY, 2013. Photo by Rachel Hamburger.

materiality that is not allowable even in the most material gestures of our performances in the closed space of the cinema. Open and closed spaces work together, the one expressing what the other cannot articulate.

Much of our sculptural work attempts to frame a certain paradox of the still life of motion picture phenomena. What we have achieved with this work is extremely cinema- or even film-specific, even more so than in the cinema space proper, which again rebels against its transparency.⁵

VI.

What is the status of an artwork when nobody is in the gallery? What is the status of an artwork outside the gallery's exhibition hours? What is the status of an artwork that requires light once it is no longer illuminated? What is the status of an artwork that runs on electricity once the power is shut off? What is the status of an artwork that has been destroyed or gone missing? What is the status of an artwork when the viewer is blocked from experiencing the thing itself? What is the status of an artwork as a concept

5 Excerpts from an interview conducted by Tommaso Isabella.

without an object? What is the status of an artwork amidst the scrutiny of questions concerning the inaccessibility of the artwork?

Artworks that run on electricity and are intermittently turned on and off in compliance with a museum or gallery's exhibition schedule seem to beg the question whether their status as artworks undergoes a certain disequilibrium in the constitution of their spatiotemporal currency. Can you imagine that the artificial light works of major artists such as Dan Flavin, Keith Sonnier, and Jenny Holzer are switched on and off, day in and day out, to comply with museum exhibition hours worldwide? Can you imagine a permanent installation of fluorescent or neon-light works at a prestigious art foundation flickering in and out due to a power surge or blackout? Can you imagine a light blowing out and a technician attending to the 'problem' while viewers eagerly wait for the incandescent resuscitation of the artwork? Or the more common practice of posting signage indicating that the artwork is temporarily 'out of order'? Can you imagine a famous painting, say Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* (aka *Mona Lisa with a Moustache*), with signage indicating that the artwork is temporarily 'out of order'? Perhaps the closest one may get to witnessing such an unlikely, not to mention absurd, scenario is when curatorial practice insists on displaying an empty frame indicating a missing painting that was allegedly the target of an art heist. The uncanny framing of invisible canvases by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Manet at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum comes to mind.

Again, what is the status of an artwork when it is not altogether there or absent, when the power flickers out or the viewer is blocked from experiencing the thing itself?⁶

VII.

STILL: NOT OR HARDLY MOVING; AN ORDINARY STATIC PHOTOGRAPH (AS OPPOSED TO A MOTION PICTURE); WITHOUT MOVING (STAND STILL); EVEN NOW OR AT A PARTICULAR TIME (THEY STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND); NEVERTHELESS; EVEN; YET; INCREASINGLY (STILL GREATER EFFORT); MAKE OR BECOME STILL; STILLNESS; STILL LIFE. STALL: THE STALLING OF AN ENGINE (THE CONDITION RESULTING FROM THIS); REACH A CONDITION WHERE THE SPEED IS TOO LOW TO ALLOW EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF THE CONTROLS; CAUSE (ENGINE) TO STALL; PLAY FOR TIME WHEN BEING QUESTIONED; DELAY; OBSTRUCT.

6 Gibson + Recoder, 'Electric Shadows'.

STILL STALL: REACHING A CONDITION WHERE THE SPEED IS TOO LOW TO ALLOW EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF THE CONTROLS, CAUSING THE ENGINE TO STALL SO AS TO NOT OR HARDLY MOVE. THE CAUSALITY AND CASUALTY OF A STAND STILL. AN ORDINARY STATIC STILLNESS AS OPPOSED TO A MOTION STALLING. NEVERTHELESS, AND WITH INCREASINGLY AND STILL GREATER EFFORT, A HARDLY MOVING AND YET EFFECTIVE OPERATION IN OPPOSITION TO A MOTION PICTURE. TO DELAY EVEN NOW OR AT A PARTICULAR TIME A WITHOUT MOVING PLAY FOR TIME OBSTRUCTING THE OPPOSITION.⁷

VIII.

FILM IS...NOT FILM. IT IS EVERYTHING THAT IS WHEN REDUCED TO THE SHEER NOTHINGNESS OF NOTHING BUT FILM. WHEN YOU ARE LEFT WITH NOTHING BUT FILM OR WHEN IT LEAVES YOU WITH NOTHING BUT (WHAT) REMAINS, IN THE UTTER NOTHINGNESS OF NOTHING YOU REACH INTO THE IMPALPABLE VOID. CALL IT THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE MATERIAL EXCESS OR WHAT HAVE YOU, FILM IS NOTHING AS IT NEVER (EVER) WAS ANYTHING TO BEGIN WITH BUT THE NEARNESS – BARELY THE PRESENCE – OF SHEER NOTHINGNESS. ALMOST NOTHING. CONSIDER THE INTERMITTENT FACTUM BRUTUM THAT FILM IS AND IS NOT. MORE SPECIFICALLY, IS ONLY VIS-À-VIS ITS NOT. THE IS IS NOT WHAT IS MOST INTRIGUING BUT WHAT IT OBSTRUCTS, NAMELY THE NOT. OUR STUBBORN CLINGING TO THINGNESS STIFLES THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY CRITICAL AND ENGAGING CONFRONTATION WITH THE IMPALPABLE NOTHING. THE MORE FILM REACHES INTO THE VOID OF ITS ESSENTIALIST NULLITY THE MORE IT TRANSCENDS AND SHATTERS ITS APPARENT THINGNESS. FILM IS...NOT FILM. IT IS THE ENTRY AND EXIT POINT OF A MOVEMENT IN AND THROUGH WHICH FILM IS IMMANENTLY NOTHING BUT ITSELF BUT ONLY IN APPEARANCE AS ITS REAL MOTIVE IS TO OVERREACH AND THUS OVERCOME ITS PURPORTED LIMITS IN A CONCENTRATED EFFORT TO SURPASS ITSELF IN ITS SELF-EFFACING AUTO-DESTRUCTION. IT IS IN THE WAKE OF THIS IMMANENT CRISIS THAT FILM IS...NOT FILM. A FILM WHICH ASPIRES TO REFLECT NOTHING BUT ITSELF IS A NARCISSISTIC MIRROR WHICH SHATTERS WHEN THE REFLECTION AND THE THING WHICH IT REFLECTS COME HEAD TO HEAD. FILM IS...NOT FILM. IF EVERYTHING

IN FILM IS SO GEARED, IS SO EQUIPPED, SO AS TO RESTRICT THE VIEW OF ITS THINGNESS THEN WE SHALL FURTHER RESTRICT THE RESTRICTION SO AS TO MAKE IT OUR CONSTRICTING VIEW. BY RADICALIZING THE IMMATERIAL PREMISE OF THE MATERIAL APPARATUS PERHAPS WE CAN BETTER ARRIVE AT THE UNCANNY TRUTH NOT ONLY OF THIS ANTIQUARIAN APPURTENANCE THAT WE CANNOT SO EASILY SHAKE OFF (EVEN WHEN WE SO DESPERATELY TRY) BUT OF AN ENTIRE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISPOSITIF. FILM IS NOT NOTHING. (FOR THAT WOULD BE AN UTTERLY NULL THING TO SAY.) FILM IS THE NOTHING PURE AND SIMPLE (WHICH, WE MIGHT ADD, IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING TO ACHIEVE) – WHAT WE ARE CALLING HERE THE NOT FILM, I.E. THE NOT FILM IN THE RESTRICTED SENSE THAT IT IS SHOT THROUGH AND PERMEATED WITH THE EPOCHAL (ESSENTIALIST) FILM IS... FILM IS (NOT FILM) IS (NOT) WHAT REMAINS AS ITS THINGNESS FADES INTO DARKNESS. WHAT REMAINS GLIMMERS IN THE NIGHT. IS THERE AND NOT THERE. (FILM APPROACHES ITS NULLITY.) THE FILM SLOWLY FADING INTO THE OPAQUE NIGHT PUNCTURED BY A STARRY SKY IS THE SLOWEST FILM IN THE WORLD SHEDDING ITS LINGERING LIGHT ON NOTHING BUT THE APOCALYPTIC (THOUGH BY NO MEANS NIHILISTIC) COMING OF THE PROFOUNDTEST NOTHING. ONLY THROUGH THE VEILS OF FILM CAN WE PEER OUT OF FILM IN A COMPREHENSIVE PEERING ALL THE WAY THROUGH FILM TO FILM'S VERY END, NEVER FULLY ESCAPING FILM BUT ALSO (AND THIS IS WHAT IS MOST PROMISING) NEVER EVER FULLY TAKEN IN BY FILM EITHER.⁸

IX.

Motion picture projection and theatre presentation manuals describe an optical aberration that produces unwanted effects of stray light on the screen. What is striking, at least for us, is the industry's insistence in referring to such effects as non-image formations. In one sense they are non-images, if they interfere with the official motion picture of a feature presentation; and yet, in another sense, they are images precisely because they interfere, i.e. images of non-images. *Incident Light* insists on the indecent exposure of the non-image to stray forth and come to light.⁹

8 Gibson + Recoder, 'FILM IS...NOT FILM'.

9 Unrealized project proposal titled 'Incident Light' for Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, 2016.



Figure 3 Gibson + Recoder, *Illuminatoria* (2016). Hand-blown glass, rheostat motors, lighting kit, Lucite, hardware, 114 x 80 inches. Installation view, Exploratorium, San Francisco, CA, 2016. Photo by Gayle Laird.

X.

“The function of the motion-picture screen is to display a world of fantasy and entertainment without the screen being obvious.”¹⁰

The point of departure for this premiere performance is the obliteration, literally the blotting out, of the cinematic object of projection. Projection performance as the art par excellence of obstructing, concealing, masking absolutely nothing but itself. *Obliteration*: in which the spectacle of the apparatus is to be screened, or better screened out, in the negative relief of a self-cancellation vis-à-vis nothing but the disciplinary application of a cinematic standard.¹¹

XI.

An ‘empty frame’ in negative – elements for a collaboration.

What if we loosely structure our collaboration around the idea or concept of a screening space photographed with a large format camera, but limiting ourselves to taking the negative as the thing itself? It is irrelevant whether the film we are projecting is *Snow White* or the white light of the film projector. If the former, then an exposure long enough to overexpose the screen but not the screening space is necessary. If exposed properly, our negative depicts a black rectangular screen against a white screening space.

This negative image is the first stage in developing our latent image of the cinematograph. Our collaboration will devise different ways in which this latent image can be further developed.

A couple of years ago we developed a proposal for a performance titled *Incident Light*. No film and no film projector involved but a pair of high-end studio spotlights with manual aperture and dimming functions. Aside from this, we are currently contemplating an ambitious project that takes the same negative (of the cinema) and blows it up to a life-size walk-in movie theatre. It partially answers your curiosity in light of the flicker and on/off in which you observe the following: ‘As if Sugimoto’s camera could have made a composite temporal image JUST of all the BLACK spaces in between frames.’¹² We have the beginning of an answer to precisely this area of inquiry in the black-and-white photographic negative that frames a

¹⁰ Kloeppel, p. 88.

¹¹ Gibson + Recoder, ‘Obliteration’.

¹² Walley, Email.

homogenous black rectangle suspended in the blinding light of the theatre. Now imagine if we take this photographic negative and blow it up to an actual life-size walk-in movie theatre.

Sugimoto's yet-to-be photographed negative of Kubelka's Invisible Cinema?

The construction of such a light/dark space, ideally a re-gutted abandoned cinema, would be to fabricate a large-scale recessed black rectangle so that the black hovers indeterminately between flatness and depth, surface and void. The illumination of the theatre's interior would of course have to be as bright white as possible, somehow flooded like a studio 'cyc' (which apparently derives from 'cyclorama'). The hollowed-out interior of the recessed rectangle to be treated with a non-reflective black matte.

Our proposal for a negative cinema can perhaps hook up to your proposal for an 'infernal machine' – a model for the conceptual apparatus 'designed to unveil as many levels of intermittency as possible'.¹³ Actually, we conceived the technique of the camera obscura in *Obscurus Projectum* as the prototype for the possibility of an 'intermittentless' cinema in which the negated intermittencies (i.e. Baudry) can be critically contemplated and perhaps even reintroduced, beginning with the intermittent nature of the viewer navigating within the viewing space itself, literally breaking in and out of space so as to rupture the cinematic continuum. (Our more recent work in Chicago, *The Changeover System*, is perhaps as 'infernal' as it gets for us with two movie theatres, a sound artist, dancers, and an audience in constant flux). Your concise and yet poignant Exploratorium essay introduced the figure of breaking- or tearing-apart and wanting to know what is inside, and that this is precisely what the 'digital' prohibits while the 'analogue' facilitates.¹⁴ The camera obscura is already a 'broken' apparatus in the sense that there is a light leak in the architecture of darkness – and this is where the 'cameraless' work of *Available Light* gets its bearings.

So the parameters of the collaboration would be to contemplate in an infernal machine such as the one proposed in the negative of cinema not only a vast collection of subsumed intermittencies, but also a working model for the development of a new body of work existing nowhere but on paper.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Walley, 'Obscurus Projectum'.

¹⁵ Unrealized project proposal in collaboration with Jonathan Walley titled 'Infernal Machine: The Negative of Cinema'.



Figure 4 Gibson + Recoder, *The Changeover System* (2017). Two screening rooms, two multi-reel feature-length 35mm films, four 35mm film projectors, hand-blown glass, rheostat motors, hardware, variable duration. Dance choreography by Douglas Dunn. Sound composition by Brian Case. Performance view, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago, IL, 2017. Courtesy of Conversations At The Edge & School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Photo by Connor Fenwick.

XII.

Conceptual Specificities

The project (if we can call it that) is to question the ‘expanded’ cinematic forms that argue in favour of a certain crisis and perhaps overcoming in the concept of medium specificity. What we desire is nothing more, and nothing less, than to inhabit the concept of medium specificity as if it had never been inhabited before. With our closed-in systems, we imagine that the conceptual–structural integrity of the whole is a simple looping device or mechanism that is by no means *merely* repetitive and boring but *precisely* repetitive and boring. In brief, the concept of medium specificity, when specifying its concept, is a performative contradiction that keeps looping back upon the impossible impasse of its symptomatic aporia as it infinitely approaches the closure of an inexhaustible exhaustion.

Change-Over System

To perform the 'changeover' system in the 35mm theatrical projection of celluloid film is to disclose a performative contradiction that is embedded in the cinematic organization of the materials themselves. What is simultaneously projected and thus superimposed in a kind of double-projection is the intermittent play of cinematic illusion and disillusion. However, the maintenance of this material–immaterial dialectic (perhaps embodied in the figure of the projectionist) quickly transpires in the dissolving forgetfulness of an audio-visual seduction. As there is absolutely nothing to 'grasp' or 'grip' in the conceptual void of an ambiguous theatrical effect, the viewer is automatically rendered helpless to the coming attraction of an enigmatic abduction. An enigma, moreover, whose radical absence is the mere formulaic precondition of an imaginary presence barely hanging on the threads of light and sound waves unthinkable outside the narrow spectrum of a certain projective anthropomorphism. The cinematic effect that discloses the shock of an utterly indigenous heterogeneity entangled in the projective thread is no contradiction at all, but the phantasmagorical persistence of an infernal material–immaterial dialectical machine.

Dark Chamber Disclosure

Dark chamber disclosure performs the concealed contradiction of the cinematic apparatus within the apparatus itself. For it cannot be pried open, teased out, or unveiled in any other fashion. The contradiction resists its representability in a spectacle-within-a-spectacle, as in meta-cinema's catastrophic attempts at medium-specific self-reflexivity, but must be performed within a site-specific domain that is itself the very medium of a fundamental performativity always-already performed. The living agency of medium-specific performative contradictions is merely the obtrusive materiality of a subject slipping into the cinematic caesuras to perform a medium stripped bare to nothing but the specificity of itself which is, paradoxically, everything but specific.¹⁶

16 Gibson + Recoder, 'Performative Contradictions'. Based on a lecture presentation for the 'Expanding Cinema: Spatial Dimensions of Film Exhibition, Aesthetics, and Theory' Conference, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 15 – 16 February 2013.

XIII.

The main subject matter of our work addresses the materials and ideas of projection. Our current fascination with the camera obscura has to do with reimagining and recasting this 'bare' technological apparatus as the earliest, if not the first, projection of the world, or simply world projection.¹⁷

XIV.

The *Matter with Film* is a play on the condition of film-as-matter and its matter-of-factness in the face of emerging technologies. What's the matter with film anyway? Why does it matter? As a matter-of-fact film matters. How? It matters as soon as the maker takes the material at hand. In this meeting between film-as-matter and hand something is grasped. Grasped into matter. In the grasping of matter the latter grasps the hand in return, slaps back, so to speak. Back-and-forth. The objectification of film as matter and the matter of objectifying go hand in hand, catch one another. The *Matter with Film* is a catchy title for a curious game we play with a bit of matter. Once handed, we can matter-the-matter so that it matters. For all the films in this program matter in the face of what does not matter, that is, of that which immatters and relentlessly chatters.¹⁸

XV.

Ride the Light is a programme of live events for the multiplicity of film projection. The doubling, tripling, and sometimes quadrupling up of screens – in short, the *dispersal of cinema* – fragments the always-already fragmented, and in essence redistributes the temporal distribution of temporality. The doubling-up of the mechanical-spectacular releases our time machine from the bond of a manufactured 'ticking-away'. The sequential beat of the framework (of frame-upon-frame) is followed by its doppelganger to be reproduced not as reproduction of the same thing but as *re-production of the dissimilar in simulation*. When twos, threes, and fours converge there emerges a ricochet, a

17 Mad. Sq. Art, 'Artist Interview: Gibson & Recoder'. Interview conducted on the occasion of solo exhibition, *Topsy-Turvy: A Camera Obscura Installation*, Mad. Sq. Art, New York, NY, 1 March – 7 April 2013.

18 Artist statement titled 'The Matter with Film' for a touring film screening series in 2003.

shimmer, a ghost. It is this ghosting that cinema pursues with its 'persistence of vision' only to erase it from vision by thickening the still succession framework in what is called *eidetics*. *Ride the Light* broadens the network of streaks, raises the erasures, re-visions for cinema its indigenous *persist-stance*.¹⁹

XVI.

If our experience of film history is generally thought of in terms of fleeting images on a blank screen in a dark room then how are they to be displayed, exhibited, screened in the overexposed rooms of a museum gallery? How is this unprecedented temporal specificity to be remembered? Or do these immaterial effigies caught in the flow of time utterly rebel against their display? Given this conundrum our working title for Headlands [Center for the Arts], *Film Museum*, might appear somewhat counterintuitive, nay impossible. But is there not an exit strategy somewhere beyond the EXIT sign, in the lobby, in the little chamber above and behind the spectator's head where projection casts a flickering of light and shadow? Questioning along these lines slows down the filmic flow, freeze-frames a tableau imbued with time and movement, brings it closer to painterly and sculptural phenomena.²⁰

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About the Authors

Sandra Gibson + Luis Recoder have been exhibiting their expanded cinema installations and projection performances since 2000. Their works are in the permanent collections of major museums, including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, and Museum Kunstpallast in Düsseldorf. Awards and commissions include The Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center Residency, National Endowment for the Arts U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowship, and Mad. Sq. Art. They are currently featured artists and research associates of RESET THE APPARATUS! hosted by the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria. Gibson + Recoder live and work in New York. www.gibsonrecoder.com

Introduction: On Cinema Expanding

Jill Murphy and Laura Rascaroli

This book is born of a visit to an exhibition. We saw Philippe Parreno's *Hypothesis* at the Pirelli HangarBicocca of Milan in December 2015.¹ A complex, anthological 'choreography' including many works and collaborations by the artist, *Hypothesis* is a deeply cinematic work. The term cinematic, albeit frequently used, requires qualification. While recognizing that it is resistant to definition, Maeve Connolly has explored a range of ways in which it has been used by critics to discuss art that has to do with the activities, materialities, and processes of filmmaking, while being 'located outside or beyond cinema'.² In line with this definition, although including a number of films and videos, the cinematicity of Parreno's *Hypothesis* exists outside and beyond them (and even above them, given that much in his exhibition happens at hangar-ceiling height). But what is significant about our experience of Parreno's exhibition, and generated the reflection at the root of this volume, is that *Hypothesis* struck us as a cinematic artwork that is theoretical. That is, a work that is not only associated with, and draws on, the cinema as imagery, medium, and cultural referent, but one that functions as a theory of it. The whole set up, indeed, powerfully spoke to us not only through, but also of the cinema – seen as a specific, historicized experience, as a constructed space, a set of cultural meanings, and an apparatus. Ideas of film technology, projection, reproduction, spectatorship, narrativity, temporality, historicity, and myth all came to us as if in waves while we explored the vast expanse of the gallery, formerly an industrial hangar. Concrete objects of the cinema (spotlights, marquees, sets, rails, screens, projectors) as well as immaterial ones (the play of light and shadows, the identifications, the mythology) were at the basis of this effect, while not exhausting it.

¹ *Hypothesis* was Parreno's first anthological Italian exhibition and was held at the Pirelli HangarBicocca between 22 October 2015 and 14 February 2016.

² Connolly, p. 85



Figure 5 Philippe Parreno, *Hypothesis*, HangarBicocca, Milan (22 October 2015 – 14 February 2016). Photo Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of the Artist.

It is of course possible to identify the cinema as an inspiration behind discrete works in *Hypothesis*. The rather overpowering installation *Danny the Street* (2006–2015), for instance, is composed of nineteen differently shaped and sized marquees – sculptures in Plexiglas and lightbulbs which, positioned at different heights, form an imaginary, almost sentient avenue under which the visitor walks. Inspired by the marquees common in 1950s America to publicize films, the lights intermittently switch on and off according to the tempo of a powerful score conceived by Parreno and Nicholas Becker together with a number of musicians, and played automatically by two pianos controlled by a master keyboard.³ The marquees not only design a street of the cinema, and beckon to the visitor gesturing to the promise of a marvellous (cinematographic) spectacle to be discovered, but are the spectacle in themselves, independently of the films they are supposed to, but do not, advertise. As such, they represent the activity of cinema-going as the true experience of the twentieth century. *Another Day with Another Sun* (2014), then, realized in collaboration with Liam Gillick, is composed of a cinema spotlight that, travelling along rails suspended from the ceiling, hits the structures and columns of the gallery, projecting an ever-changing game of shadows on the wall, as on to a huge

3 Artists and musicians included Agoria, Thomas Bartlett, Liam Gillick, Ranjana Leyendecker, Mirwais, and Robert AA Lowe.

white screen. Drawn by the marquees into the spectacle of the cinema, thus, the visitor steps inside Plato's Cave, and admires a pre-cinema spectacle of shadows reminiscent of an ephemeral, and filmic, urban skyline. Of the films by Parreno that the visitor can pause and watch on the screens, which are part of the exhibition, *Marilyn* (2012) is particularly emblematic for its reflection on the cinema as a construction founded on the stars, on mythologies, and on the illusions of representation, *mise en scène*, and technology. The images in this video are presented as subjective shots of Marilyn Monroe, whom we hear talking, and whose hand we see writing. The setting is the meticulously reconstructed suite of the Hotel Waldorf Astoria in New York where the diva stayed during the 1950s. The atmosphere becomes progressively haunting, as a sense of confinement and loneliness is evoked by the restricted view, the persistent ringing of an unanswered telephone, and the sound of rainfall striking the window. Eventually, the camera pans backward, revealing the machinery that created the illusion of Marilyn's presence (her voice was reproduced by an algorithm, her handwriting by a purpose-built robot, her gaze by the camera), and the room to be nothing more than a film set.

While many individual pieces in *Hypothesis* are profoundly cinematic in themselves, they are not experienced by viewers individually; rather, they are organized in sequences which form non-linear narratives – a loose and yet organized structure. Visitors walk around beckoned by events of light and shadow, bursts of sound and music, which, like powerful *son et lumière* performances, suddenly grab their attention, drawing them in, only to release them again. Waves of emotional and contemplative engagement push the visitors through the invisible routes of the exhibition, eliciting different degrees of intensity and participation. It is the exhibition as a whole, then, that by curating the works in space, by creating a montage and a sequence, comes across as a theory of the cinema. *Hypothesis* explores the themes investigated by Parreno's individual works – including presence and absence, reality and simulation, mediation and the uncertain confine between illusion and perception – as a product of the cinema, seen as a specific cultural, technological, and ideological construct that has profoundly, irrevocably shaped our consciousness. Inspired by Parreno's *Hypothesis*, the present volume, *Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art: Expanding Cinema*, stems from the observation that contemporary art continues to incorporate, restage and re-present fundamental elements of the cinematic medium and that, in so doing, such artworks raise probing theoretical questions on the ontology of the cinema – which they can now contemplate from the vantage point of a post-medium location.

In commenting on the convergence of the cinema and the museum that has become increasingly evident and significant in contemporary art,

Giuliana Bruno has observed that this convergence was in truth established very early on, and indeed characterized the prehistory and birth of the cinematic medium. She writes:

It is important to remember that there was an actual history of 'installations' that took place at the very origin of film. The convergence of cinema and the museum that was established at the dawn of modernity is rooted in the birth of the medium. Today's artists appear to be winking at this very historic moment out of which cinema was born.⁴

For Bruno, the forms of projection of post-cinematic art (with specific reference to installation art) reconnect with, and repeat, the 'exhibitionary fantasies that emerged at the time of precinema, [...] the culture of exhibition and the art of projection of early modernity'.⁵ Thus, concludes Bruno, artists today, '[i]n some ways, are becoming historians'.⁶ This collection, by focusing on how through their work contemporary artists reproduce, test, and investigate the components of the cinema as an apparatus and a specific form of experience, is equally and even more interested in how artists are becoming film *theorists*. The conceptual movement this book produces, accordingly, takes its point of departure from the encounter with a specific art object, and tracks back to the cinema, in an effort to (re)theorize film through the lens of contemporary art.

The title of the volume alludes to the expanded cinema framework, but our project differentiates itself from that debate by proposing a distinct take. Since its introduction in the 1970s, the term expanded cinema has gained much currency, while remaining a rather vague concept. Gene Youngblood's famous definition legitimized this ambiguity, by proposing that expanded cinema is not 'a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes'.⁷ Accordingly, the term has been applied to a rather diverse range of artistic experiences. Jackie Hatfield's useful definition synthesizes for us the prevailing sense of this complex phenomenon to be found in the critical literature:

Not without ambiguities, expanded cinema as a term generally describes synaesthetic cinematic spectacle (spectacle meaning exhibition, rather

4 Bruno, p. 27.

5 Bruno, p. 29.

6 Bruno, p. 27.

7 Youngblood, p. 41.

than simply an issue of projection or scale), whereby the notions of conventional filmic language (for example dramaturgy, narrative, structure, technology) are either extended or interrogated outside the *single-screen* space.⁸

While this field is relevant to our project, the significance of artists' film to the relationship between cinema and contemporary art has been widely documented, and, as such, exceeds the scope of our inquiry. Key contributions like *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* by Erika Balsom, for instance, among others, have used film theory to analyze contemporary moving-image-based art, and have eloquently examined the ramifications of the fact that film is no longer confined to the cinema theatre and the home, but has extended to the art gallery and the museum (and far beyond them, as demonstrated by Francesco Casetti). Although acknowledging and drawing on this important work, our collection seeks to go in a different direction and examine what the artworks say about film theory, rather than what film theory says about contemporary moving-image-based art. Our investigation is not so much motivated by understanding what happens to cinema in the art gallery as by engaging with artwork that explores the apparatus, the cinema space, the film set, the projected image, or cinematic performance – in short, the objects of cinema and their aesthetic, technical, experiential, material, and ideological coordinates.

At the core of the artworks considered in this project is an effort to understand both the experience of the cinema within the material and the experience of the material within the projected image. The relationship between cinematic and real space is defining in this respect. The contributions in this book focus on artworks that have a strong material presence and tend to coexist with the viewer in a shared space. This sense of materiality is also conferred upon the object or actor within the image and even on the frame of the image or the sound in an artwork. Unpacking the cinematic object in this deliberate way opens out from the moving image to a mediation of the world as told by the narrative structures of film, as presented through its technical structures, as shaped by its economic and ideological frameworks, and as delivered through its conventions of performance and *mise en scène*. Lifting the cinematic from immaterial cinematic space into the gallery space or emphasizing the physicality of the material object or actor on screen challenges film theory, probing and testing if its tenets hold under expanded, reworked criteria. It is worth repeating

8 Hatfield, p. 5 (emphasis in the original).

that our concern is not expanded cinema but expanding cinema. As the century of cinema recedes into the past, and the experience of the cinema has been fully subsumed into our ways of seeing, feeling and thinking, how do film theorists read these twenty-first-century reformulations of the medium and the critique they offer of what cinema is and what it has been? In this respect, the project intentionally confines itself to a limited historical focus, with almost all the works considered in the volume dating from after 1995. Accordingly, the book seeks neither to cover as many artists as possible nor to produce a history of contemporary art that engages with film. Rather, it seeks to think about film through art.

Through their chapters, the accomplished film theorists and experts in this edited collection variously examine artworks incorporating, restaging and re-presenting the cinematic medium's specific configuration of space, experience, presence/absence, production and consumption, technology, myth, perception, event, and temporality, and to address the creation of film theory through practice in contemporary art, the practical illustration of film theory by specific artworks or artists, the testing of specific film theories using examples of contemporary art, and the evolution of film theory to encompass contemporary art.

The different chapters confer on the volume its own internal logic, which organically divides into 'materialities', 'immaterialities', and 'temporalities'. This is not to suggest, however, that each chapter fits neatly into one of these classifications. Instead, the various chapters tend to shift between these headings, inevitably, giving rise to a significant amount of slippage between the material, the immaterial, and the temporal. Nonetheless, it is possible to establish a sliding scale that progresses from one concept to the other, and that leads to a closing section that contemplates what might possibly come next for the image, in all its multiple forms, whether analogue or digital, moving or static, material or projected.

Firstly, though, it seems entirely appropriate to commence the collection with artists' input as they have sown the seeds for this research. The work of Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder almost embodies the idea of expanding cinema by theorizing it through artistic praxis. Indeed, it also demonstrates, as Volker Pantenburg points out in his chapter on Gibson + Recoder's work, how within cinema-inspired artwork the concepts of materiality, immateriality, and temporality can coexist. In their foreword, Gibson + Recoder have assembled together an anthology of their artists' statements on their work, which provides a fascinating insight into the creative impulse and thinking that typifies the different work considered in the collection.

The first chapter in the book proper is one that perhaps best exemplifies the impetus behind the collection while also foregrounding the notion of the materiality of cinema in the gallery. In 'Cinema as (In)Visible Object: Looking, Making, and Remaking', Matilde Nardelli considers 'the material turn' of cinema towards the gallery, which has led artists and scholars to shift their attention to the physical qualities of cinema, particularly cinema's objectness, in both its digital and analogue forms. In contrast to the current tendency to extol cinema's increasing dematerialization, Nardelli examines how art has become a privileged place for testing alternative, even opposing claims, and through the consideration of work by the artists Runa Islam and Tobias Putrih, she analyses how the evolving 'objects' of cinema in the days of its obsolescence, cross-media transformation, and digital metamorphosis are theorized. She also suggests that these artists are putting cinema into art practice in such a way that cinema is *re-made*, transformed, and metamorphosed into something which, if not entirely new, is nevertheless something else that what it was before.

Likewise, Alison Butler, in her chapter 'Objects in Time: Artefacts in Artists' Moving Image', discusses the ambiguity of the object in film – again evidencing the slippage between the material and the immaterial – and how the relationship of film with the object has been transformed in the transition from analogue to digital, using as examples Tacita Dean's *Day for Night* (2009), about the studio of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, and Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* (2016), based on the collections of the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums. Butler examines the de-contextualization of objects by museums and films, extracting them as they both do from their original location in space and time. However, she suggests that films unlike museums possess an inner temporality within which time is invented through the encounter between the artefact and the medium, which rather than dematerializing, rematerializes the object.

In 'Materializing the Body of the Actor: Labour, Memory, and Storage', Maeve Connolly considers a different type of cinematic materiality in which artists seek to materialize the acting or performing body within the physical space of the gallery, using overtly sculptural means, combining the moving image with material objects, props, or supports. Focusing on specific works by Cécile B. Evans, Nathaniel Mellors, and Clemens von Wedermeyer, Connolly considers the use of sculptural media (such as digital 3D modelling, scanning, or animatronics) to actualize acting bodies in the gallery, and explores how these media function, either explicitly or implicitly, to articulate aspects of the actor's labour, memory, and storage mechanisms that remain relatively undertheorized in film studies.

As mentioned above, Volker Pantenburg in his chapter on Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder identifies how immateriality and materiality exist side by side in the artists' work. In 'How to Spell "Film": Gibson + Recoder's Alphabet of Projection', he considers their object-based work and their projection performances, using Hollis Frampton and Peter Gidal as theoretical touchstones. Pantenburg discusses how Gibson + Recoder restages and updates practices and techniques originating in experimental cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. However, rather than characterizing Gibson + Recoder's work as simply revenants or museological adaptations of their historic models, Pantenburg instead presents the works he discusses as a playful and deeply ironic investigation of questions of medium specificity and obsolescence.

Jill Murphy in 'The Magic of Shadows: William Kentridge's Distancing and Exposure in *More Sweetly Play the Dance*' also examines the shifting nature of the material and immaterial in the cinematic as presented in the gallery, in relation to a recent work of William Kentridge. Murphy examines how Kentridge uses and then thwarts Plato's Cave allegory to tease out the power inherent in giving the audience both agency and work to understand, choosing to locate his images in the shadows that are most reminiscent of a moving-image tradition dating from Plato's time to the pre-cinematic practices of the nineteenth century. Using theoretical concepts put forward by Jean-Luc Nancy in relation to the distance of touch and the spacing of the world, Murphy traces how Kentridge uses this technique to address current world issues while connecting them to historical traumas.

The immateriality of vision and imagination is the subject of Sarah Cooper's analysis in 'Douglas Gordon and the Gallery of the Mind'. Looking at works such as *Phantom* (2011), *100 Blind Stars* (2002), and *Self-Portraits of You + Me* (2003), Cooper suggests that experiencing these works is akin to the perceptual reflexivity of seeing and being seen that Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes, and that Vivian Sobchack relates to the cinema, but with an essential imaginary layer added, one that is actually constitutive of the cinematic image – an imagination-image – and that the gallery space allows Gordon to explore in all its dimensions.

'A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance' by Kirstie North also locates itself between the material and the immaterial. North investigates how Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* (2002) telescopes back to film's origins from the point of its obsolescence as Dean returns, through Broodthaers, to the era of silent film. In his *Section Cinéma* (1971–1972), Broodthaers draws attention to the affinity between analogue film and chance. While searching for traces of Broodthaer's former cinema, Dean herself comes across a *trouvaille* in the form of model ships that are

visually similar to the one depicted in Broodthaer's film *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1974). Using this chance encounter as a departure point, North examines the status of film as a medium – its emergence and its history – presenting chance as its most enduring, most affective, and now most threatened capacity.

At this point in the collection, a subtle shift occurs in focus with the following three chapters focusing on the temporality of film through the stasis of photography. Ágnes Pethő looks at how the 'photographic', the 'pictorial' and 'the cinematic', or even the 'architectural', fold together in a convergent post-media art, focusing on the use of the diorama in contemporary cinema, photography, and video installations. With examples ranging from Jeff Wall's light boxes, to Gregory Crewdson's cinematic photographs, to a case study of Gustav Deutsch's film/installation *Shirley: Visions of Reality* (2013), the chapter traces the inflections of such a photo-filmic diorama, revealing the imbrication of different art practices as an expansion of the tableau vivant into a versatile 'cubicle aesthetic', which fuses narrativity and visual attraction and reconfigures the traditional dynamic of Michael Fried's concept of absorption and theatricality of the tableau form (and dispositive) in art.

Stefano Baschiera suggests a film-archaeological approach to the dispositive in the digital era in his chapter on the photographic work of Hiroshi Sugimoto. Using Giorgio Agamben's archaeological method as a point of departure, Baschiera specifically considers Sugimoto's photographic series *Theaters* as a reflection on time and the ontology of cinema itself. Taking a cinematic perspective, Baschiera examines the regenerative aspect of the photographic medium in its after-shot, which Sugimoto refers to as a 'resurrection', arguing that Sugimoto's approach leads to a new understanding of the area of film theory linked to the ontological realism of the medium and promotes a new reflection on the question of the apparatus in the moment of its disruption and 'relocation', as Casetti describes.

In 'Time/Frame: On Cinematic Duration', Laura Rascaroli uses Stan Douglas's photographic reconstruction *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* (2008) as a point of departure to consider the role of the frame and of the function of framing in determining questions of temporality in film versus photography and painting. Rascaroli examines how Douglas's intermedial artwork operates as 'stilled cinema', before moving on to discuss the neglected relationship between frame and filmic temporality in the moving image, particularly with respect to duration and ideas of the long take and slow cinema, using Eric Baudelaire's gallery video *Sugar Water* (2007) as a revelatory, Bergsonian case study.

In the final part of the volume, we turn our attention to what might lie ahead, given cinema's emergence into both black box and white cube of the gallery – and beyond – with three insightful and probing contributions.

Firstly, in 'Interactivity without Control: David O'Reilly's *Everything* (2017) and the Representation of Totality', Andrew Uroskie discusses the quasi-interactive model of spectatorship the game employs, exploring its ontology, and identifying ways in which it can help in thinking beyond models of spectatorship and genre whose validity has become debatable. As Uroskie observes, formally and thematically *Everything* refers to a significant cultural moment in post-war visual culture in which the representation of totality is central. Uroskie traces the dynamic, scalar perspective of the work back to Charles and Ray Eames's *Powers of Ten* (1968), which purported to describe the entirety of the known universe from the smallest particle to the largest galactic supercluster, and examines how it confounds concepts of anthropocentric mastery by taking its theoretical cue from the philosophical thinking of Alan Watts, thereby adopting a perspective that is partial and fluid. As such, Uroskie argues, *Everything's* focus is on radically non-anthropocentric forms of space, time, and subjectivity.

In 'Post-Cinematic Unframing', Lisa Åkervall poses the question what happens to cinematic framing in an era of post-cinematic media? In traditional cinema the frame has a specific relation to the space both on- and off-screen that allows for an expansion of supplementation of what's on-screen through processes of reframing. In post-cinematic media, however, the role of the frame has changed significantly; it no longer operates in relation to a pro-filmic space, neither absolute nor relative, real or fictive. Post-cinematic frames are instead imploded from within, and the image is unframed. Using two post-cinematic artworks, Camille Henrot's single-channel video installation *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) and Kevin B. Lee's video essay *Transformers: The Premake (a desktop documentary)* (2014), and reconsidering seminal theories of the cinematic frame from André Bazin to Gilles Deleuze, Åkervall examines the transformations of the frame in post-cinematic media.

Finally, in a profound meditation on the ontology of the image in the early twenty-first century, D. N. Rodowick discusses how to give form and expression to what he calls a critical Image within the vast proliferation of reproduced images and images of reproduction that are a norm in daily life. Rodowick deals with this in terms of style, organization of forms, and construction, using Theodor W. Adorno as a theoretical point of departure, and suggesting that central to the critical Image are the technologies of sighting in which everyone is 'envisioned and produced as images', and proposes that new techniques be created to critically interrogate images.

Exhibitions have stimulated much of the writing in this collection: as explained at the beginning of this introduction, the idea for the collection originated in a visit to an exhibition; the book is prefaced by Gibson + Recoder's artists' statements from their exhibitions; many of the chapters in the book refer to one or several exhibitions; D. N. Rodowick's closing meditation on the future of the image germinated in an exhibition appropriately entitled *Images*. It is thus fitting that we conclude our introduction with reference to an exhibition we visited three years after seeing Philippe Parreno's *Hypothesis* in Milan, when the *Expanding Cinema* collection had already taken its final shape. In December 2018, we visited the Ryoji Ikeda exhibition at the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam.⁹ A key figure in electronic music, the Japanese artist makes sublime audiovisual art drawing on mathematics, quantum mechanics, and big data. Upon entering the first room and viewing *data.scan* (2009) and *4'33"* (2010), we felt we had encountered contemporary art that had absolutely nothing to do with the cinema. Pure post-cinematic, new-media art. A novel world of computer graphics, an entirely abstract view of encoded information, digital data, automated graphs, pixels, and coded time that owed nothing to the cinema as imagery, as a medium, and as a form of experience of space and time. As if the cinema had never existed. The fact that *4'33"*, a homage to John Cage's silent 1952 composition, consists of a blank 16mm film strip that is exactly four minutes and 33 seconds long did not seem so relevant within the context of an overwhelmingly digital art. Also the use that, in the next room, *data.gram* [*no 1*] (2018) and *data.tron* [*3 SXGA+ version*] (2009) made of projection seemed at first quite disconnected from the cinematic. But then we encountered *point of no return* (2018). A black circle in the middle of a white square is fixed at the centre of a projected vortex of light that creates a strong stroboscopic effect, accompanied by, or seeming to produce, a barrage of white noise. The fixity of the black circle and the rotation create the impression in the viewer of being inexorably attracted to, almost swallowed up by the black hole. The metaphysical intensity of the experience, the shape and features of the work, the loud noise, and the entranced reaction of the viewers all brought to mind the totemic apparition of the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), with its accompanying high-pitched sound, and the mesmerized apes staring at it. As we finally managed to detach ourselves from the black hole, and walked behind it, we discovered the back of the work: a perfectly still, blindingly bright circle, projected by an ARRI lamp in use on film sets. Positive and

9 Held from 15 September to 2 December 2018.



Figure 6 Ryoji Ikeda, *point of no return* (2018). Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, December 2018. Photo Laura Rascaroli.

negative. With the cinema now fully back in the picture, we moved to the next room, where *radar* [*3 WUGXGA version A*] (2012–2018) struck us as being eminently filmic. Immersed in the darkness of the room, we sat and looked in subjective shot, as if through the screen of a flying spacecraft, at the visualizations of star systems and the cosmic images scanned by a radar projected onto a wide screen. As Jim Supanick has written in a review of Ikeda's *the transfinite* (2011), which included some of the same work in the Eye Filmmuseum exhibition: '[b]y deriving material from astronomy and genetic mapping, *the transfinite* acts as a kind of conceptual zoom lens, fulfilling cinema's dreamed-of union of inner and outer space, an aspiration shared by contemporaries Luis Recoder and Sandra Gibson, and Bruce McClure'.¹⁰ From the purely digital back to the cinematic.

Philippe Parreno, Gibson + Recoder, and Ryoji Ikeda show, in their diverse ways, how the cinema has finally separated into its material objects, but is still pervasively shaping our understanding of both inner and outer categories of space and time, the whole of our human and post-human experience. By examining film theory as a blueprint for the moving image,

¹⁰ Supanick, p. 16

and juxtaposing it with artworks that render cinema a material object, the aim of *Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art: Expanding Cinema* is to unfold a complex relationship between a theory and a practice that in the past have been deemed to be virtually incompatible. In doing so, we hope that this book will enhance our understanding of each medium and, more pertinently perhaps, their interaction.

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About the Authors

Jill Murphy is an independent scholar. Her research interests focus on the relationship between film and art history, particularly as regards human figuration. She has published articles, book chapters, translations, and reviews in various journals and edited collections and is an editor and Secretary of the Editorial Board of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.

Laura Rascaroli is Professor of Film and Screen Media at University College Cork, Ireland. She is the author of five books, among which *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (Wallflower/Columbia UP

2009) and *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford UP 2017), and the editor of collections including *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (BFI/Palgrave 2011, with John David Rhodes). Her work has been translated into several languages. She is General Editor of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.

1 Cinema as (In)Visible Object

Looking, Making, and Remaking

Matilde Nardelli

Abstract

Through a focus on Runa Islam's installation *Cabinet of Prototypes* (2009–2010), but drawing on the work of Tobias Putrih, Janet Cardiff, and George Bures Miller among others, this essay explores the commitment to displaying the objectness of historical cinema and its filmic apparatus in contemporary art. It argues that in setting up tangible, specific ways to look at the medium of cinema, the artistic practice of artists such as Islam effectively offers a theorization of cinema itself for the age of its obsolescence. Art practices, such as Islam's, that are simultaneously a kind of curation of cinema constitute not only a way of reflecting on the medium's historicity, but also of experimenting with its possible reemergence as something other than its historical self.

Keywords: Obsolescence, cinema architecture, materiality, film installation, contemporary art, film theory

In the first half of the twentieth century, critics and historians including Walter Benjamin, André Bazin, and Lewis Mumford were enthused by the relatively new medium of cinema and saw it as part of technological developments augmenting and transforming – if not, even more radically, replacing – the function of the museum as a venue for the preservation and exhibition of art and artefacts.¹ In its supple, reproducible, and transportable materiality, cinema might, so to speak, give wings to the cumbersome materiality of unique works of art and grant them wider

¹ See, for example, Benjamin; Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, esp. p. 244; Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, esp. 'The Death of the Monument', p. 433ff.; Bazin, pp. 164–169.

circulation and greater visibility: it might contribute to engender what André Malraux, referring to photography, famously described as a 'museum without walls'. Yet, by the close of the last century, it seemed that, rather than taking the place *of* the museum and overcoming its walls, cinema had, by contrast, firmly taken its place *in* it – installing itself with particular prominence in art museums and galleries in the wake of a turn towards the cinematic in contemporary art practice. If the situation contradicted early-twentieth-century forecasts or hopes, it was also somewhat paradoxical. By some accounts, cinema itself was now deemed to be in the throes of obsolescence – losing, in the wake of the diffusion of digital formats and portable devices, its original filmic materiality and its traditionally collective, yet anonymous, mode of consumption. Yet, the once-new medium seemed to have found a way not only of remaining 'current' through its alliance with contemporary art, but also of fostering the vitality of those very institutions which, at its emergence, it seemed likely to render obsolete.

This turn of events is compellingly encapsulated by British artist Runa Islam's installation *Cabinet of Prototypes* (2009–2010), now in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. On a broader level, the work is part of that 'cinematic turn' of art that has seen the enthusiastic and prominent adoption of the moving image, in its different technological manifestations, including the most recent digital ones, on the part of contemporary artists in the last couple of decades.² Additionally, Islam's work offers both an allegory and a *mise en abyme* of the condition of cinema's historical incarnation in contemporary art and culture and, more specifically, of its filmic (or analogue) incarnation. It is this, as a significant presence in the art museum and gallery, that this chapter will consider.

In *Cabinet of Prototypes*, a filter covering the windows of the room hosting the installation tinges the cinema with yellow, the colour of time's patina. Furthermore, cinema is prominently encased in a museum vitrine (Figure 7). Contained in the glass case are not only a 16mm projector and a (relatively) small screen, but also the process of projection itself, so that the projected film is seen through the mediation of this device that simultaneously protects and displays. The silent colour film projected on the screen features an array of longitudinal forms – 'things', for sure, which however are not easily identifiable as specific objects. They are in

2 For accounts of this 'turn' see Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*; Leighton; Elwes; Trodd. I have considered this 'turn' with regard to celluloid cinema in 'Moving Pictures: Cinema and Its Obsolescence in Contemporary Art'.



Figure 7 Runa Islam, *Cabinet of Prototypes* (2009–2010). Installation view. 16mm colour film, mute, vitrine, projection materials and light filter. Duration: 7'. © Runa Islam. Photo: © White Cube (Ben Westoby).

the shape of sticks or tubes (some straight, some curved or bent), in mostly neutral tones (whites, beiges, light blues, greys). The images are often slightly blurred or in soft focus, while the camera restlessly tracks along or zooms into the seemingly chaotic display, as if browsing or searching. As the film progresses, these moving shots begin to alternate with static ones in which an individual object – or a small group of objects – is singled out to be displayed in full view against a clear background. As Islam herself has explained, the objects on display in her film, which was made during a residency as an artist fellow at the Smithsonian Institution's Freer and Arthur M. Sackler Galleries, 'are in fact intended as armatures for the artefacts of a museum and are designed to be supports or bases that are not meant to be seen [...]'. In this installation, we retrieve them from their status as invisible objects'.³

This 'microcosm of objects on display', as Islam has described the piece, makes visible and presents as objects to-be-looked-at in their own right not only these hidden supports or carriers (the material 'mechanisms' that are usually concealed beneath the objects they support), but also, and this is the

3 Islam in Senova, p. 143.

allegorical thrust of the work, cinema itself.⁴ For not unlike the objectness of the supports that Islam's film makes visible, cinema's objectness and mechanics, generally invisible to the spectator, who focuses on the images projected on the screen, rather than on their underlying support, are literally captured by the installation within the display mechanism of the museum vitrine. Through the display cabinet, another often-inconspicuous apparatus, the generally overlooked apparatus of the cinema – here in its composite object-like materiality: a projector, a reel of film, a screen – is effectively brought into relief. Through this layering, Islam's installation reflexively displays the way in which it is itself a device or *dispositif* for showing – and inviting the viewer to look at – the cinema. In turn, such a demonstration device also functions as a mise en abyme of the reframing (Francesco Casetti might call it 'relocation') that the art museum and the gallery have offered to the cinema in recent decades – including, though not exclusively, to the celluloid cinema that is specifically at issue here.⁵ In this sense, *Cabinet of Prototypes* is not only part of that extended, loose body of contemporary artwork that has contributed to bringing analogue cinema's material apparatus to visibility at the moment of its obsolescence, but it is also a work that elicits an awareness of that other apparatus, the museum or the gallery, through which such visibility has been obtained. Celluloid cinema's conspicuous entry into the art institution has contributed to seal the medium's current 'dualism', as Islam has put it, 'as both revered art form and outdated relic'.⁶

What I want to explore in what follows is how such commitment to displaying the objectness of historical cinema and its filmic apparatus in contemporary art is a form of material practice that, in setting up tangible, specific ways to look at the medium, effectively offers a theorization of it ('*theoria*' in ancient Greek encapsulated the action of viewing, contemplating) for the age of its obsolescence. In fact, as I argue, art practices, such as Islam's, that are simultaneously a kind of curation of cinema constitute not only a way of showing and reflecting on the medium's historicity and oldness, but also of conjecturing and experimenting with its possible re-emergence as something other than its historical self.

4 Senova, p. 142.

5 Jacques Rancière in *Aesthetics and its Discontents* considers art, more generally, as a 'reframing' of experiences and objects in which the usual coordinates of our encounters with them are suspended (pp. 23–24).

6 Keynote by Islam. See also Islam's short untitled essay in Cullinan, where she refers to film's 'double status as both revered art form and apparent anachronism' (p. 86).

Obsolescence, Materiality, and Objectness

Chairing a roundtable discussion on the notion of the artist as archivist, collector, or curator occasioned by an exhibition at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art titled *The Artist's Museum*, curator Lynne Cooke started off by pointing out that perhaps a question to ask is 'not when did artists start collecting things that weren't considered valuable, but when did other people become interested in artists collecting things that weren't valuable'.⁷ Against the background of examples such as the Surrealists' interest in the expended and discarded (as in the dried-up toothpaste or the rolled-up tickets photographed by Brassai in his 1933 *Involuntary Sculptures*), or Andy Warhol's 1970s *Time Capsules*, the 610 cardboard boxes in which he collected everyday items, the term 'non valuable' needs to be understood with regard not only to what might traditionally be seen to lack value in art, or in commercial exchange more broadly, but also to what may seem to have ceased to possess everyday functionality and use value. In this respect, while the concerns of *The Artist's Museum* were not exclusively cinematic, the question raised by Cooke brings into relief the alignment that has occurred in the last couple of decades between contemporary artists trawling for, working with, and exhibiting cinema in its historical forms and the public's attunement to such endeavours. The 'when' of such an alignment coincides, to a significant extent, with the beginning of what might be considered film's definitive phase of obsolescence following the diffusion of digital means for both the production and exhibition of moving images (from cameras and projectors to digital video discs) from the mid-1990s onwards.⁸ On the one hand, it was precisely such a digital revolution that, somewhat paradoxically, fostered a wave of 'cinematization' of the art gallery or museum – above all with the availability of digital projectors that, dispensing with some of the material impediments of film projection in these contexts (film wears out quickly when continuously projected, and can jam and overheat in such circumstances), facilitated the exhibition of large-scale moving-image work.⁹ On the other hand, these digital innovations prompted some artists to (re)turn to celluloid cinema.

Indeed, in the mid-1990s it was precisely filmic cinema's looming obsolescence that made it attractive – and affordable. As Islam has recounted, at the time, with the transition from film to digital alternatives fully under

7 In Cooke, Schaffner, and Byers, p. 31.

8 See, among others, Rodowick; Mulvey; Cherchi Usai.

9 See Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*; Arrhenius.

way in both the movie industry and the consumer market, 'a surplus of film equipment that was already tagged as obsolete' became available: film materials and second-hand cameras and projectors could be obtained easily and cheaply from flea markets or institutions that were upgrading their resources.¹⁰ Such affordable abundance has, however, been replaced by rarity and preciousness in the past few years, as the production of film stock has all but stopped, developing labs have closed down, and vintage equipment has become increasingly harder and costly to track down, let alone repair or maintain, as replacement parts and specialist technical expertise have started to disappear too. Arguably, this interval of time during which filmic cinema has passed from *obsolescent* to *obsolete* has coincided with – or facilitated – its definitive elevation as art within the museum. Back in the early 1970s, when cinema made its first, if timid, entry into the art gallery while also being faced with competition as a mass medium by television, video and early computers, artist filmmaker Hollis Frampton predicted, with a mixture of frustration and hope, that 'no activity can become an art until its proper epoch has ended and it has dwindled [...] into total obsolescence'.¹¹ Ostensibly, that moment came to pass in the first decade of the new millennium. This is perhaps most succinctly represented by the assignation of Tate Modern's prestigious Unilever Series commission to Tacita Dean in 2011, who undertook her monumental installation *FILM* precisely at a time when the future of film as a medium seemed most uncertain following announcements about the discontinuation of stock production (notably, by Kodak) and processing facilities.¹²

In the context of the rhetoric of 'immateriality' surrounding digital media and technologies, especially in the first decade of their mainstream diffusion, such interest in filmic cinema at the moment of its obsolescence was strongly linked to an awareness of its physical, concrete materiality.¹³ As with Dean, in the work of Islam and other contemporary artists who use film either regularly or occasionally (such as Rosa Barba, Rosalind Nashashibi, Matthew Buckingham, Aura Satz, Daria Martin, and Rodney Graham), the specific material qualities of celluloid cinema are emphasized

10 Islam, untitled essay in *Film/Tacita Dean*, p. 86. See also Zimbardo, p. 1.

11 Frampton, p. 135. For discussions of cinema in the gallery in the 1960s and 1970s see, among others, Iles; Uroskie.

12 Still and movie film manufacturers such as Fuji and Kodak have more recently reinstated or guaranteed the continuation of production of selected stocks. See Kodak's announcement of resumed production of Kodak Ektachrome film in September 2018, following a deal with Hollywood studios guaranteeing substantial continuing demand; see also Beaumont-Thomas.

13 See, for example, Rosen, pp. 301–350.

and explored. Dean, for instance, has talked of the importance of film's physical presence as a kind of 'resistance', a set of very tangible limitations against, and out of which, her work emerges.¹⁴ Artists such as Dean and Nashashibi seem to value such materiality in particular with respect to the constitutive and aesthetic traits of the filmic image (e.g. the specific attributes of its representational function, or what is generally described as its 'indexicality', its grain, etc.).¹⁵ For Dean's *The Green Ray* (2001), film's photochemical properties were charged with the task of capturing the elusive greenness of the last ray of the setting sun as it refracts at the horizon line – a phenomenon, Dean reported, commenting on the failure of others attempting to record the event with digital cameras, whose fleetingness 'proved itself too elusive for the pixilation of the digital world'.¹⁶ Islam too is interested in filmic cinema's material properties. *This Much is Uncertain* (2009–2010), for instance, filmed on the Italian volcanic island of Stromboli, works with the visual (and semantic) affinity between grains of sand and film grain to draw attention to such materiality – indeed, using metaphor and abstraction as a conduit towards the literal and concrete attributes of the medium. But, together with other artists (such as, from the list above, Barba in particular and Graham), Islam has also been developing a slightly different focus. Through an overt engagement with cinema's multi-part apparatus – or what Rosalind Krauss has described as the 'medium's aggregate condition' – such focus has worked to bring into relief not only the material qualities of this composite apparatus, but also, as I have started to suggest, its status as object(s) – now newly prominent *in*, if not indeed *as*, art.¹⁷

Reducing and Reframing: Architecture as Object

The art critic Gregory Battcock wrote in the early 1970s of his perception of a shift towards a 'mobile culture'. The epitome of such a shift, in his view, was television, which he understood in terms of a move away from the 'heavily architectural medium' of cinema from which the newer audiovisual form in some sense derived. While cinema might show movement in its images, it was also, essentially, according to Battcock, an immobile architecture, unlike

14 See the short documentary and interview with Dean by Tate (Hayes).

15 See the short documentary and interview with Nashashibi by the Turner Prize (*Rosalind Nashashibi*).

16 Tacita Dean, quoted in Smith. See also Balsom, 'A Cinema in the Gallery'.

17 Krauss, p. 24.

television, whose user's apparatus – the TV set – was an object, detached from the wall and relatively portable. While Battcock's juxtaposition of architecture and object is intriguing, it could of course be argued that it does not correspond in any hard and fast way to the media of television and cinema. In many ways, cinema had already been the more mobile and (trans)portable object, rather than the immobile, fixed architecture Battcock evokes, not only in its infancy, when it was initially set up as a makeshift, transient spectacle, but also at the time of Battcock's article, when portable sound film equipment had already proved to be a catalyst for new cinematic movements such as the New Wave, and artists had started to make and display cinema in galleries and other venues, offering its multi-part apparatus as objects to be looked at in the round. In this respect, Guy Sherwin's 1976 performance *Man with Mirror*, though taking place a few years after Battcock's article, succinctly encapsulates how that portable and mobile culture of which the author speaks had come to apply to the medium of cinema itself: for, here, even the screen itself is a portable, hand-held object, rather than a more fixed, architectural element mounted on a wall, if not a wall itself.

Encased in its museum vitrine, with its screen away from the wall, cinema is also 'portable' in Islam's *Cabinet of Prototypes*. In the installation's particularly compact articulation (with the modestly sized screen, and a relatively short distance of projection), it almost seems to have been subject to a process of miniaturization or condensation; one that focuses attention on its object-like qualities rather than its architectural ones.

Yet, in the course of the cinematic turn of art that commenced in the mid-1990s, cinema has come to reside in the gallery or museum as something ostensibly quite close to architecture. Cinema theatre-type structures abound in contemporary art. Display solutions for moving-image work, such as black-box environments (wall partitions, insulating curtains, seats) have become commonplace in modern and contemporary art museums and biennales. Art historian Gregor Stemmrich has labelled these often-provisional environments 'Trojan Horse[s]', structures smuggling cinema (e.g. darkness, and more or less comfortable seating) into the context of art while also pointing, as he suggests, to a certain inadequacy of the context of the art institution for the presentation of the moving image.¹⁸ This picture of inadequacy and expedience is, however, put under a different light when one considers the appearance of cinema theatre-type structures in the gallery not simply as curatorial frameworks *for* works but as, themselves, part and

18 Stemmrich, p. 434.

parcel of – if not *the* – works on the display, as in Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *The Paradise Institute* (2001) or Runa Islam's own collaborations with artist Tobias Putrih in 2008. While processes of miniaturization are operative here too, these habitable, life-size structures or environments designed to 'contain' viewers' bodies are of a larger order of magnitude of size and scale than the compact demonstration of cinema in vitrine in Islam's *Cabinet of Prototypes*. Even as the objectness of cinema ostensibly veers towards the architectural here, what is crucially at stake in these instances, however, seems to be that the architecture of cinema – cinema as architecture – is made the *object* of display.

Take, for instance, Cardiff and Bures Miller's *The Paradise Institute*, a 'mini', yet habitable, cinema able to host an audience of about sixteen people. Made of plywood on the outside, the structure reveals a classic, old-fashioned cinema on the inside, complete with red carpets and velvet-covered seats, on which viewers sit to watch a thirteen-minute black-and-white film. Rather than an expedient to dispense with the inadequacy of the art institution, a cinema such as this attracts attention to itself and its location. It does not so much try to surmount or fill the gap between cinema and museum (as in the curatorial black boxes discussed by Stemmrich) but exploits it and plays it out: indeed, it brings it into relief theatrically – or, in very concrete and literal terms, by means of a 'theatre'. For, just as it hosts viewers within its walls, the cinema theatre of *The Paradise Institute* brings into relief, and hinges on, its *hosted* status within the larger structure that contains it: a small architecture – or, perhaps, something between both architecture and (art) object – inside the museum. Through a slightly different focus than Islam's *Cabinet of Prototypes*, a work such as this, then, would seem to invite us to think of cinema not so much in terms of its moving-image apparatus, its projection technology, but, rather, in terms of architecture, as architecture. Architecture here might in fact be seen to refer both to the physical, material architecture of the cinema theatre and the less palpable architecture of viewing (the mode of spectatorship and consumption, the activity of going to the movies) generated and promoted by the cinema theatre itself.

To speak of cinema as architecture – and, moreover, as architecture in this dual sense – obviously brings to mind the various discourses on cinema as apparatus circulating between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. So-called 'apparatus theories' (by, for example, Jean-Louis Baudry and others) as well as some strands of structural and expanded cinema (especially in the previously mentioned work of Sherwin, and William Raban and Anthony McCall, among others) were also critiques of cinema as architecture in this

dual sense, analyses of the set-up of the cinema auditorium and situation, of the modes of viewing and reception these generated, and their ideological implications.¹⁹ The 1960s and 1970s form indeed a significant precursor to the cinematic turn of contemporary art, because, as already mentioned, they witnessed the entry of the moving image in the institutions of art; it is also true, however, that artist filmmakers such as Raban and McCall often thought of the cinema theatre – however informal, alternative, or minimal it might be, such as, for example, the spaces of New York’s Millennium Film Workshop and the London Filmmakers’ Cooperative – as providing the ideal set of conditions for their work.²⁰ So, for instance, even though McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) is now (with the artist’s agreement) often presented within a gallery context, the work’s initial incarnation was as a beginning-to-end screening in a cinema-like environment. It was thus, in its conception and early presentations, a piece which aimed to operate as a critique – if not, indeed, a subversion – of the architecture of cinema, and cinema as architecture, from within an instantiation (however alternative) of this architecture itself, rather than, as is the case with *The Paradise Institute*, as a recreation of the architecture of cinema – as an object of and for display – within the museum.²¹

Pitting *Line Describing a Cone* against *The Paradise Institute* offers a particularly dramatic way of contrasting the artistic moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s with that of the last couple of decades. The minimalist materiality of McCall’s work could not be more different than the rich, sensuous materiality of Cardiff and Bures Miller’s. *Line Describing a Cone* is stripped down to essentials and operates with minimum material requirements. By contrast, *The Paradise Institute* is striking for its solid material presence and, even, the redundancy and excess of its materiality. It puts a building inside a building; it confronts the viewer with the bulky severity of its exterior and the sensuous tactility of its carpeted and velvet-covered interior. In fact, as viewers wear headphones to hear a layered, surround soundtrack, even sound becomes somewhat tangible – you almost think you can turn around and ‘catch’ a voice as if it were an object. Here, then, cinema as architecture, even in its dual sense of actual building and mode of consumption or reception, is intensely physical.

This different emphasis on materiality – or rather, perhaps, this emphasis on different materialities – of cinema as architecture in McCall’s and Cardiff

19 On expanded cinema, see: Rees, Curtis, and White.

20 See Reynolds.

21 See Godfrey and McCall.

and Bures Miller's works speaks, I believe, of a changed mood or tone in their respective explorations of cinema. In the 1970s, experimental practices aimed to dismantle the 'architecture' of cinema, to strip it bare to reveal its contamination by (bourgeois) ideology. In this respect, one of the key aspects of *Line Describing a Cone* is that the standing audience would also be able to look back – to look into the projector beam and towards the projector rather than away from it, towards the screen. Even when artists such as McCall, Raban, and others made works for the gallery, they brought this stance of critique and dismantlement there. It was not so much a re-making of cinema in the gallery, but an un-making of it: a way of using the different exhibition context as a venue for cutting it open and cutting it down to the bone to reveal its structure – physical and ideological. And, of course, in the 1970s this critique of the architecture of cinema was similar to, and intersected with, the critique of the architecture – in the dual sense – of the gallery itself: these are the years of conceptual and so-called 'institutional critique' art practices (by artists such as Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and Marcel Broodthaers), as well as of the publication of Brian O'Doherty's incisive and influential series of essays on the ideology of the white cube.²² In the past couple of decades, by contrast, artists have seemed to strive to rebuild cinema – even, indeed, to rebuild it by physically setting up cinema theatres in the gallery. From a stance of scepticism and suspicion towards cinema and its architecture, we seem to have shifted to one of fascination and longing.

No doubt, this shift to a more loving mood has in great part to do with how the digital revolution's increasing momentum since the 1990s has not only hastened the technological obsolescence of film but also increased preoccupations about the state and fate of cinema as a form of moving-image consumption (and, indeed, one that requires specific places, movie houses). The patient re-making of cinema in the gallery, the attention to detail, the attempt to create a more or less immersive environment in work such as *The Paradise Institute* speaks of a warm appreciation of cinema – if not, even, a nostalgia for it – rather than cold-blooded criticality towards it. To a greater or lesser extent, contemporary work such as Cardiff and Bures Miller's evokes the oldness and obsolescence of the architecture of cinema. And, as I mentioned earlier, the 'architecture' evoked as old is not only the physical, material one of the auditorium as such, but also that of cinema's mode of viewing and spectatorship, which the work also puts on display, makes visible. The sense of oldness, if not pastness, this work

22 The essays were originally published in 1976 in *Artforum*.

exudes pertains to the type of cinema theatre it recreates (inspired, in the interior, by those of Hollywood's heyday in the 1930s and 1940s). But it also pertains to the communal mode of consumption characteristic of the cinema theatre – whether this communality was a way of being actively social or simply a way of being alone together, watching the same screen with others. The very fact of becoming an audience is underlined here, as viewers enter an enclosed, purpose-built or prepared space (not unlike, in some sense, the miniaturized work of children's playhouses). Additionally, the communal architecture of reception is structurally underlined by the work, remade fictionally, as it were, in the audio component of the piece, since viewers hear through the headphones not only the soundtrack of the film they are watching, but also a medley of recorded voices and snippets of conversation by fictive audience members. Even the disturbances inherent to collective viewing receive a loving gaze.

The interest of contemporary artists in constructing cinemas in the gallery as objects to be looked at, whether compact and under vitrine like *Cabinet of Prototypes* or as a small theatre-type architecture like *The Paradise Institute*, is different, as I have suggested, from that of artists and filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s. Where the latter aimed to reveal and unpack cinema and its mechanisms, the impulse to bring cinema's historical material objectness to visibility in contemporary practice seems to be entangled with a quest for its protection (within the walls of the museum, inside the display cabinet) at a point of perceived or actual precariousness and obsolescence. In this context, the work of Putrih – who collaborated on two exhibition projects with Islam in 2008 – appears slightly different, and I conclude by returning to this work, and Islam's own.

Remaking, Differently

Putrih also makes cinema – and indeed, in his cinema making, cinema is both architecture and (art) object, or oscillates between the two. Some of Putrih's cinemas appear overtly as objects: small-scale models displayed on a pedestal (as in *Harmonie, Berger, Cineplex* of 2002).²³ Others, not unlike Cardiff and Bures Miller's *The Paradise Institute*, veer more towards the architectural. They are cinema theatre-type structures that viewers can enter to watch a screening, as in *Venetian, Atmospheric* (2007), which Putrih created for the Venice Biennale, and the *Auditorium* and *Screening Space*

23 For more on Putrih's cinema projects, see Collins and Krimko.



Figure 8 Tobias Putrih, *Auditorium* (2008) for *CINEMATOGRAPHY* (2007–2008) by Runa Islam. Installation view at Galleria Civica di Modena. Scaffolding, OSB plates, 16mm projector, screen. Dimensions: approx. 11 x 6 x 6m. © the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Gregor Podnar, Berlin. Photo: Paolo Terzi.

he constructed for two of Islam's films, *CINEMATOGRAPHY* and *What Is a Thought Experiment, Anyhow?* (both 2007–2008), in the context of Islam and Putrih's collaborative exhibition at *Lost Cinema Lost* in Modena, Italy, in 2008 (Figure 8).²⁴ Described by Putrih as 'viewing mechanism[s]', these latter structures resonate with *Cabinet of Prototypes*, and the manifestation of cinema as display mechanism and of cinema on display around which Islam's installation revolves. (Furthermore, as we recall, the film in *Cabinet of Prototypes* makes objects for display, the museum 'armatures' objects on display.) In Putrih's *Auditorium* and *Screening Space* too, if in different ways, cinema is both 'artwork' and 'armature', a mechanism or *dispositif* for seeing, which is part of what is on view.²⁵

Again, as with Islam's *Cabinet*, materiality and, indeed, objectness are key. The look of Putrih's works, however, is very different. Unlike in *Cabinet*, what is generally at stake in this artist's work is not simply the fact that it is put on display as (architectural) objects, of various sizes and scales, to be looked at in their concrete materiality, but also the fact that their very made-ness – the fact of having been made, and how – is flaunted. If cinema

²⁴ See Farronato.

²⁵ Farronato, p. 69.

is articulated in what may be called a 'literal' materiality in work such as *Cabinet of Prototypes* and *The Paradise Institute* – bringing velvet-covered chairs into the museum, for instance – the materiality brought into relief by Putrih (even though his structures may themselves host film projectors and the like) is of a different order. To be sure, cinema's history – and historicity – informs the work, since Putrih's small and life-size models are often inspired by the architectural styles of existing cinemas, from the palaces of the 1930s to post-war 'cinémathèques' and 1990s multiplexes. *Venetian, Atmospheric*, for instance, first presented at the Venice Biennale in 2007 (and subsequently on the roof terrace of the Hayward Gallery, London in 2008), directly refers to the ornate, extravagant cinema palaces designed by John Eberson; in particular, Eberson's Loew's Paradise Theatre in the Bronx, NY, which aimed to recreate a sense of being outdoors and was initially called 'The Venetian'.²⁶ However, Putrih's structures and their materials markedly diverge from the ones from which he takes inspiration. Unlike the immobile architectures to which they in part refer, these cinemas embrace mobility: they are site-specific, transient structures whose provisionality is also, perhaps above all, in the materials used. These are certainly solid and concrete, but also, in crucial ways, 'soft'. In addition to *Auditorium* at the Galleria Civica in Modena, another cinema Putrih made for Islam's film *CINEMATOGRAPHY*, on the occasion of a show at the White Cube in London in 2008, was made of 35mm strips of film (from prints of the very film being projected by Islam), hung from the ceiling to form a kind of alcove within the larger space of the gallery (while also, of course, making visible – and displaying – one of analogue cinema's generally unseen objects). More often, the materials are cardboard, polystyrene, plywood, steel tubes, and adhesive tape. These give Putrih's cinemas at once a provisional and a makeshift quality, that may make them seem more like work in progress than finished works. Putrih's *Auditorium* in Modena had the look of scaffolding; and the *Screening Space* for *What Is a Thought Experiment, Anyhow?* was made of opened-out cardboard boxes taped together.

Such materials evoke the world of play, of make-do and improvising, of trying things out. Talking of his practice, Putrih has said that, initially, he 'simply didn't know why [he] should produce another object', and that turning to these type of things and kinds of materials was the only way in which he could bring himself to doing so: a sort of compromise, to obviate the fear, as he put it, that 'I would end up with big, heavy objects and that

26 See Manacorda, p. 123.

eventually I would be stuck with them'.²⁷ These materials also assign a strange temporality to Putrih's cinemas. For, indeed, as rich in historical references as they are, at the same time they seem to belong to a phase prior to the building of the actual thing. These cinemas are models even in the sense of being 'prototypes', as Francesco Manacorda, who curated several of Putrih's projects, has described them.²⁸ However inspired by the old if not the past, by the existing if not the historical, both the materials of which these cinemas are made and the way in which their made-ness – as precarious and as provisional as it appears – is exposed makes them look not futuristic, but for the future in some way. In many ways, they appear like attempts to catch an idea or a thought and turn it into matter, into a thing, before it disappears, in order to have something to return to at a future point, when work on the project can begin in earnest.

As different as Islam's and Putrih's work is, then, their collaboration is obviously not incidental. In fact, as it illuminates crucial common ground between them, it also points to affinities of perspective shared more widely by contemporary artists engaging with cinema, to the way in which contemporary art has become an active arena for reflecting on the medium, and indeed, I believe, for contributing to its theorization through a different lens at a moment of significant transformation. If theory, as the Greek origin of the word suggests, is a kind of looking, then those artistic practices (such as Islam's and Putrih's, among others) where cinema is set up, in different ways, as an object to be looked at, are kinds of theories: theories, indeed, where not only the materiality of cinema is crucial, but where the status of 'theorizing' itself more generally as 'a material practice' (as Karen Barad among others has recently argued) is brought into view.²⁹ Arguably, in the last couple of decades, such practices have worked alongside film theory, if not even, perhaps, contributed to steer film theory's focus towards 'expanded' accounts of cinema in terms of material cultures and archaeologies of media and technologies.

At first sight, the main point of contact between Putrih's and Islam's practices (and the central concern of others with which these artists' practices also share obvious affinities), may seem to be their interest in the materiality and objectness of cinema in its historical, or traditional, incarnation before the advent of digital technologies and media – even if this interest is pursued through concentration on different, though perhaps complementary, aspects

27 'Tobias Putrih – *Paradise*'.

28 Manacorda, p. 123.

29 Barad, p. 55.



Figure 9 Runa Islam, *Anatomical Study (Instruments)* (2013). Silver recouped from film processing. Ø1 15/16 x 2 3/4 in. (Ø5 x 7 cm). © Runa Islam. Photo: © White Cube (George Darrell).

of the apparatus of such cinema (films and the projecting apparatus in one case, the architecture of movie houses in the other). Yet, the occurrence of the word ‘prototype’ in both cases – as a description of Putrih’s work, and in the title of Islam’s installation – offers an important, if neglected, clue for considering the kind of looking-at-cinema that these artists propose. Their reframing of cinema within the gallery or museum, as well as through the display mechanisms, or ‘interpretive filters’, of their works themselves, seems to offer, somewhat counter-intuitively, a perspective of mobility and change, rather than of solidification and congealment, and a temporal tense that is not one of pastness but of futurity. Putrih has called his reframing of cinema a ‘hijack[ing]’: ‘What does it take to love a mechanism so much that you are able to play with it and use it to express a different message?’³⁰ One is reminded of art historian Henri Focillon’s sense of form as essentially mobile, metamorphic. ‘Form is always’, he wrote in *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934), ‘not the desire for action, but action itself’.³¹ The most straightforward and intuitive interpretation of such statement may be, as Focillon suggests,

30 ‘Tobias Putrih – Paradise’.

31 Focillon, pp. 119–120.

that even though form itself may not change, 'as old meanings are broken down and obliterated, new meanings attach themselves' to it, as is arguably the case with some of the re-presentations of cinema in the museum that have contributed to seal its 'new' meaning as at once 'revered art form and apparent anachronism', as Islam has put it.³² Yet, there is also a more intriguing interpretation of Focillon's view: one where form does actually change, physically, because it is, like matter, in constant movement. With regard to historical, filmic cinema, this interpretation would seem to be confirmed by work such as Putrih's, but also, even more intriguingly, by sculptural work such as Islam's *Anatomical Study* (2013–2014), a series of cast objects – including the lens of the 16mm camera she used for most of her films, in which their very solidity, fixity, and lack of movement, speak of filmic cinema's continuous becoming (Figure 9). For, cast in silver recouped from film processing, these objects are, paradoxically, cinema's form in action: a way of making cinema without or after film, with its recycled residue.

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About the Author

Matilde Nardelli is a Senior Lecturer in the London School of Film, Media, and Design of the University of West London. She is the co-editor of the volume *Bruno Munari: The Lightness of Art* (Peter Lang, 2017), and is completing the monograph *Antonioni and the Aesthetics of Impurity: Re-Making the Image in the 1960s* (forthcoming, Edinburgh University Press, 2020). Her essays on photography, cinema, and the visual arts – on topics including obsolescence, waste, and 'the end' – have appeared in *Tate Papers*, *NECSUS*, *The Journal of Visual Culture*, *Photographies*, *The Soundtrack*, *The Oxford Art Journal*, as well as in a number of edited collections.

2 Objects in Time

Artefacts in Artists' Moving Image

Alison Butler

Abstract

As artists' films have become more common in museums, artists have begun to film the museum and its objects with increasing frequency. The artists' museum film opens up a dialogue between the moving image and the museum object, in which the medium's capacity to preserve and remodel time resonates with the object's power as a repository of past time. Through two examples, Tacita Dean's *Day for Night* (2009) and Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* (2016), this essay explores the ways that these artists' understanding of the temporalities of analogue film and digital video underpin their poetic expression of the temporality of objects. Rather than dematerializing its objects, the museum film is rematerialized by them, through the encounter between their specific temporalities.

Keywords: Museum film, indexicality, materiality, temporality, Tacita Dean, Elizabeth Price

In his well-known essay 'On the Museum's Ruins', Douglas Crimp offers a provocative criticism of André Malraux's *Museum Without Walls*:

Malraux makes a fatal error near the end of his *Museum*: he admits within its pages the very thing that had constituted its homogeneity; that thing is, of course, photography. So long as photography was merely a *vehicle* by which art objects entered the imaginary museum, a certain coherence obtained. But once photography itself enters, an object among others,

heterogeneity is reestablished at the heart of the museum; its pretensions of knowledge are doomed.¹

Something similar has happened with artists' film, but in reverse: having been admitted to the museum, artists have begun filming there. To name a few, films have been made in museums and galleries by Isaac Julien (*Baltimore*, 2000; *Vagabondia*, 2003), Gerard Byrne (*A Thing Is a Hole in a Thing It Is Not*, 2010), Fiona Tan (*Inventory*, 2012), Tacita Dean (*Section Cinema*, 2002; *Darmstädter Werkblock*, 2007), Heinz Emigholz (*Zwei Museen*, 2013), and James Benning (*Natural History*, 2013). Maya Deren's *Witch's Cradle* (1943) is an early precursor of the genre. A broader history of the museum in art cinema would include *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues Also Die*, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker, 1953), *Russkiy kovcheg* (*Russian Ark*, Alexander Sokurov, 2002), and *Museum Hours* (Jem Cohen, 2012). When artists' films enter the museum, they become objects among other objects, and their encounter with these objects is necessarily recursive. Sometimes commissioned by the institutions concerned, they reflexively figure their own institutional relocation from the cinema to the gallery and explore what moving images can do that other exhibition strategies cannot. While they may be shown *mise en abyme*, within the museum that they depict, they are generally also exhibited more widely, relocating the museum to other sites. They tend not to be made with the intention of augmenting the museum's displays, as this would relegate them to the status of audiovisual aids, rather than artworks in their own right. Artists' museum films create dialogical relationships with curatorial practices of interpretation and display, asserting their independence by doing something besides explicating these practices. As interventions, they are positioned both as possible additions to the collection and institutional critique. In these works, the stance taken by artists towards their medium is as important as the stance taken towards their subject matter: the self-conscious construction of the work as a media object determines how the museum object is represented in the film. In the two examples I will discuss here, Tacita Dean's *Day for Night* (2009) and Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* (2016), the artists' understanding of the temporalities of analogue film and digital video underpin their poetic expression of the temporality of museum objects.

Museums deal with actual pieces of the physical world, extracted from their context. A great deal of critical debate ensues from this extraction, regarding the ownership and provenance of objects, their enmeshment in cultural and

1 Crimp, p. 51 (emphasis in the original).

political systems, including colonial expropriation and the unequal distribution of wealth, their interpretation and explication, and their overvaluation and fetishization. Within museum studies, the understanding of physical objects has been framed and reframed by intellectual fashions from poststructuralism to the 'material turn', as pieces of information, embedded in cultural systems, and as the stuff of human sensory experience.² But while the work of curators involves the contextualization of objects, their fundamental appeal may depend precisely on their decontextualization, as Andreas Huyssen suggests:

Objects that have lasted through the ages are by that very virtue located outside of the destructive circulation of commodities destined for the garbage heap. The older an object, the more presence it can command, the more distinct it is from current-and-soon-to-be-obsolete as well as recent-and-already-obsolete objects. That alone may be enough to lend them an aura, to reenchant them beyond any instrumental functions they may have had at an earlier time. It may be precisely the isolation of the object from its genealogical context that permits the experience via the museal glance of reenchantment.³

Museum and film share a spatio-temporal stance towards the object: both remove it from its original time and place. Both André Bazin and Roland Barthes have theorized photography – and by extension, film – in such terms. Bazin says that photography gives us 'the object itself, but liberated from its temporal contingencies',⁴ to which film adds duration, 'the mummification of change'.⁵ Barthes claims that the photograph testifies not to reality but to the passage of time; although this is also true of film, the flux of images in a film is protensive rather than retentive, giving past time a future.⁶ Drawing on Bazin, Stanley Cavell offers a lucid account of the dynamic of presence and absence in film, which derives from film's photographic basis:

[O]bjects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances. Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their

2 See Dudley.

3 Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p. 33.

4 Bazin, p. 8.

5 Bazin, p. 9.

6 Barthes, pp. 89–90.

physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place.⁷

This last proposition is inherently reversible: their absence refers to their former presence, in another time and place. In different ways, museums and moving images are characterized by a tension between presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, time and timelessness. Paradoxically then, in the presence of material culture, what moving images have to offer is the absence of the object. Abstracted from its material continuity, the object takes its place in time, as something that used to exist, will exist in the future, and could, potentially, exist in other ways.

Speculating on what might constitute a new 'object-oriented filmology', Volker Pantenburg proposes three basic categories of film objects: the objects used in filmmaking, the object of the film itself, and the objects in films. With regard to the first two, he quotes Hollis Frampton on the immateriality of film:

The act of making a film, of physically assembling the filmstrip, feels somewhat like making an object: that film artists have seized the materiality of film is of inestimable importance, and film certainly invites investigation at this level. But at the instant the film is completed, the 'object' vanishes.⁸

When films made on celluloid are shown in galleries, their objecthood may be foregrounded by the inclusion of the projector in the space, setting up a tension between the film as an object and the objects in the film, or a doubled relationship between them. This reflexive quality is one of the key characteristics of the work of Tacita Dean.

Dean is an artist who makes films, rather than an experimental filmmaker, showing work primarily in galleries and only occasionally in cinemas. Museums of various kinds have featured in her work, and her involvement with museums reached its apogee in the spring of 2018, with the coordinated organization of three shows – *Landscape*, *Portrait*, and *Still Life* – at the Royal Academy, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery in London. Dean, who has made over 40 works on 16mm film, has been a prominent campaigner for the preservation of analogue film in the last few years, and speaks forcefully about its importance as an artistic medium. At

7 Cavell, p. xvi.

8 Frampton, p. 138, cited by Pantenburg, pp. 20–21.

the same time, she also describes her films as 'painterly' and makes work in a way that is clearly intermedial, not only through its internalization of the conventions and concerns of painting, but also through a multimedia practice that crosses boundaries and challenges curatorial divisions in museum exhibition.⁹

In an important analysis of Dean's films, Erika Balsom argues that her deployment of celluloid serves a number of purposes, including thematizing obsolescence, mining past or passing time for the indexical traces of forgotten or failed futures, and establishing the claim of the work to be included in a museum 'as a precious remnant of a cinema in ruins, with the film print elevated to the status of a collectable objet d'art'.¹⁰ The two key concepts in Balsom's analysis are the semiotic category of the index and Walter Benjamin's theory of 'aura'. Indexicality is understood, via Mary Ann Doane, not as the guarantor of realism but as a pointer to past reality: 'Dean makes use of the indexical image and the nonsynchronous temporalities that reside within it'.¹¹ As for the aura, that almost indefinable form of authenticity and uniqueness, for this to be discerned in Dean's films requires a reversal of the effects of reproducible media as described by Benjamin, which Balsom suggests comes about as a result of technological change – the displacement of analogue media by digital – and engineered scarcity, in the form of limited edition production, so that film now becomes 'a privileged locus of historicity and takes on something it was once said to destroy: aura'.¹² While Balsom argues that there are several conceptions of aura, one linked to cultural value and traditional aesthetics, the other – explored by Miriam Hansen – evoking history and contingency, it is equally possible to see the relationship between index and aura in Dean's work as a progressive gesture and its recuperation, extracting cultural value from recovered time.

Dean's engagement with relics and the transient time they evoke is organized in a variety of ways throughout her work. An early group of films responding to the tragic misadventure of lone yachtsman Donald Crowhurst is structured around the notion of disappearance. *Disappearance at Sea* (1996) and *Disappearance at Sea II (Voyage de Guérison)* (1997) address their topic obliquely, through images of – and taken from – lighthouses. With their revolving Fresnel lenses casting a beam of light into the dark, these films place maritime technology in dialogue with the cinematic apparatus.

9 See 'Film as a Medium'.

10 Balsom, p. 414.

11 Ibid.

12 Balsom, p. 423.

The motif of circling circumscribes an absent centre, the missing body of Crowhurst, which was never found, and gestures towards the nature of his enterprise, attempting to circumnavigate the world. *Teignmouth Electron* (2000) engages more directly with Crowhurst's story, documenting the wreck of the trimaran that he had built for his ill-fated attempt to win the *Sunday Times* Golden Globe race, but again, seems structured by an absent centre, as static shots plot a circular tour around the boat, marking the absence of its captain. The theme of absence appears early in Dean's work, in the short film *Ztráta* (*Loss*, 1991–2002), shot in a classroom in postcommunist Prague. In the film, a teacher writes the Czech words for 'absence' and 'presence' with chalk on a blackboard, then wipes them off. The terms seem like a knowing nod in the direction of psychoanalytic film theory, in which they feature significantly.

As Dean's body of work has grown, the theme of absence has given way to that of passing time. *Palast* (2004) and *Kodak* (2006) document phenomena as they enter obsolescence – communist architecture and analogue film. A series of portrait films, including *Michael Hamburger* (2007), *Merce Cunningham Performs STILLNESS (in Three Movements) to John Cage's composition 4'33"* (2007), *Craneway Event* (2009), and *Edwin Parker* (2011), document elderly men, mostly artists, in the last years of their lives. With these films, Dean's conception of her medium seems to pivot from its capacity to evoke a sense of loss to its preservative potential. In *JG* (2013), however, the motif of absence returns: the film pays posthumous homage to the writer J.G. Ballard, a friend of Dean's, and the artist Robert Smithson, whom they both admired; the encircling form of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) again evokes the idea of turning around an absent centre. The structuring absence in these films is not the object, but the subject associated with it. The films do not attempt to recreate a point of view for their missing subjects, so much as leaving a space to show where they might have been.

The film *Day for Night* was made in the studio in Bologna where Italian painter Giorgio Morandi lived and worked for over 50 years, meticulously painting careful arrangements of the same objects, over and over again. After being discharged from the army following a breakdown in 1915, Morandi lived quietly with his sisters in the family home for the rest of his life. He was a prolific painter, but with very little variety in his work, producing countless versions of the same landscapes and still lifes throughout his career. Minimalist but figurative, his pallid pictures resist inclusion in the international modernism of his day, without clearly opposing it either. Dean gained access to the studio just after its restoration and before its opening to the public as part of the Museo Morandi. Although the studio

was reconstructed to look, as much as possible, the way it did during Morandi's lifetime, Dean approaches it with an awareness that it is essentially a reconstruction; this awareness is also evident in the showing of the film in exhibitions that have placed it alongside Morandi's pictures, acknowledging the poetic parallelism of the project and inviting comparison.

The film is composed of 20 different static shots, each about 30 seconds long, showing old domestic objects displayed in a seemingly random order: ceramic vases, glass bottles, metal pots, bowls, boxes, jars, oil lanterns, and dried flowers. The static camera stands in for the stillness of still life but is not exactly equivalent. Morandi's art derives much of its charm from the suggestion of time stopped, whereas Dean's film draws attention to its movement. The duration of each shot is long enough to make time itself perceptible, but short enough to suggest its momentary passage. Relics of another time, having now outlived their owner, the objects are glimpsed in a fragile medium which grasps the transience of the moment, and which, ironically, they may also outlive.

Dean filmed the objects singly and in groups, without rearranging them (in contrast to the photographer Joel Meyerowitz who photographed each object on its own in a carefully composed setting for his exhibition and book in collaboration with Maggie Barrett, *Morandi's Objects*). The objects are framed closely to resemble the painter's compositions, with no establishing shot to orient them in relation to each other (although there is some overlap between the spaces of some shots). In other respects, the film does not resemble Morandi's paintings, which are distinguished by their flatness and pallor; Dean's compositions have greater depth and tonal range, more light and shadow, and a distinctive, soft, grainy appearance that calls attention to her medium as much as Morandi's pastel colour blocks call attention to his.

Although Dean's film adopts the painter's proxemics, their meaning is subtly altered by the photographic medium. To cite Cavell again, 'a painting is a world; a photograph is of the world'.¹³ The world of a painting is contained entirely within its frame, whereas a camera cuts a portion from a larger field, and, in doing so, implicitly acknowledges the existence of a larger world beyond the frame. The tight framing of the image, cutting out the rest of the studio beyond the tabletop, constitutes an explicit exclusion of the rest of the world. In other words, Dean's film amplifies Morandi's decision to reject the wider world in favour of a *mise en scène* entirely under his control.

While making the film, Dean discovered that what she had taken for stylization in Morandi's depiction of the objects, simplifying their forms, was

13 Cavell, p. 24.

actually a property of the objects themselves, as styled by the artist – boxes had been rewrapped and shiny bottles painted to reduce their reflectiveness. As Dean explains:

It seems Morandi liked to paint what he saw. He did not choose, as I had always imagined, simply not to paint anything about an object that he did not deem necessary, but instead transformed them beforehand, making them the objects he wanted to see. It was not about denying detail because the detail he liked, he kept. The miraculous opacity of his painted objects is already there in the objects themselves. His was a double artifice.¹⁴

This was a gift to the filmmaker in several respects: most obviously because the objects' actual resemblance to their painted likenesses lends support to the film's representation of the painter's world; but also because the artist's intervention has left a visible trace on the objects themselves, a material residue of his vision which can be captured on film. As Ed Krčma suggests: 'The paint that Morandi applied to his small bottles and jars comes to seem like attention materialized: an encrusted layer that makes manifest all the hours of extraordinary care and scrutiny he devoted to these objects'.¹⁵ That this is one of the main concerns of Dean's project is confirmed by *Day for Night's* companion film *Still Life* (2009), which shows pencil tracings on sheets of paper that were used by Morandi to mark the position of the objects he painted. Just as the pencil line indicates the position of an object that has been moved away, so Dean's two films indicate the place of a gaze that has been withdrawn.

Morandi's still lifes have an enigmatic quality that derives from the paradoxical relationship between the object and the gaze: the humble, everyday household items he painted have no intrinsic meaning or value, but as the objects of his enduring attention, they acquire importance. In a genre rife with symbolism, however, Morandi's still lifes obdurately resist signification: his things are just things. In a body of work that goes against the tide of art history, returning to figurative representation after the inception of abstraction, Morandi continually re-encounters the irreducible opacity of the object. The obverse of this is the constant renewal of the gaze, as a vector of meditative subjectivation. Hence John Berger's claim that 'what interests the artist is the process of the visible first becoming visible, before the thing

¹⁴ Dean, p. 105.

¹⁵ Krčma, p. 966.

has been given a name or acquired a value'.¹⁶ The continued existence of Morandi's objects in a museum context poses an art-historical problem, as Krčma points out:

Indeed, the status of Morandi's objects is itself quite complex with regard to questions of purpose and purposelessness: once at the service of domestic routine and decoration, then living a different kind of life in the painter's studio, and now repurposed as part of a museum display as signifiers of authenticity.¹⁷

Tacita Dean's two films about the artist form part of the Museo Morandi's programme of temporary exhibitions by living artists in dialogue with his legacy, implicitly acknowledging the need for an artist's gaze upon the objects. Dean's is one of the more subtle interventions: rather than imposing her own point of view, she imposes the ontology of her medium, delicately drawing attention to the absent gaze of her predecessor.

From this analysis, we can infer that Dean's understanding of the medium of analogue film is closely related to the human experience of time. Even when there are no human beings in her films, the material registration of objects measures their enduring existence against the time of the human subject who used them. Morandi's things are constructed in her film as 'memory objects' in the sense described by Huyssen: 'memory in and of objects is always based on a reciprocal interchange between self and object world, affective human perception, and the thing in question'.¹⁸ In this reciprocal exchange, both subjects and objects project onto each other but the human gaze is necessary to activate memory and meaning as dimensions of the object: 'The object, as Benjamin had it in his Baudelaire essay (2003 [1939]), only opens its eyes once it has been touched by the human gaze'.¹⁹

My second example, by contrast, uses digital technology to explore the existence of objects in a posthumanist perspective, positing an alliance between ancient artefacts and contemporary technology that almost bypasses human agency. Elizabeth Price began making HD video installations as a way of working with large and varied collections of research material, including moving and still images, sounds, and texts. Her first works were conceived as part of an ongoing series entitled *The New Ruined Institute*,

¹⁶ Berger, p. 144.

¹⁷ Krčma, pp. 974–975.

¹⁸ Huyssen, 'Memory Things and Their Temporality', p. 108.

¹⁹ Ibid.

evoking an imaginary or virtual museum in which each video constitutes a room. This imaginary museum is modelled on the artist's working methods, which in turn are shaped by the digital tools she uses. Price collects research materials around a topic or idea in folders on her computer, and piles them on top of each other on a timeline in Final Cut Pro. In the final edit, most of the assembled materials are invisible, covered over by later additions but, unusually, Price does not clean up the timeline, leaving these caches of research as reservoirs of hidden meaning. Her artistic method is thus deeply enmeshed with digital technology.

User Group Disco (2009) is exemplary of this project. It is set in the virtual museum's Hall of Sculptures, although there is no visible architecture and nothing that would conventionally be recognized as sculpture. In high definition black and white, it presents a series of everyday objects from the recent past (domestic gadgets and utensils, executive toys, erotic ornaments, a vinyl record, and a single doll's leg). The objects appear against a black background, often in extreme close-up, making it hard to identify or distinguish them, with a soundtrack of electronic music (including the 1980s synth-pop hit single 'Take on Me' by A-Ha), while a narration appears in written text on the screen. This narration – woven together from a wide variety of found texts collected by Price – purports to come from 'the Human Resource' and addresses the viewer in the first person plural, in language that combines bureaucratic and technical jargon. In the absence of human actors, the narration seems to emanate from the classificatory system of the virtual museum itself – as if human civilization were being examined, after the fact, by an artificial intelligence. Price describes her narrational strategy as the deliberate creation of a disembodied, collective, and potentially nonhuman perspective:

I tend to think of the narrators as plural, as in a group of voices, a chorus. That's partly because they have usually been derived from a group of varied texts, created by different authors. Also, if I conceive of the narrator as a 'chorus', as multiple voices, it can shift in logic or dynamic in a disturbing way that is not entirely human. In one work I thought of the 'chorus' as a committee, ... in others it was a spectral girl group... or a group of professional mourners.²⁰

In *A Restoration* (2016), Price engages with the actual collections of two real museums, the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums in Oxford. The Contemporary Art Society commissioned the work after Price won its Annual

20 Chi, p. 46.

Award in 2013. Price's two-screen HD video draws on the photographic and archival records of the two museums, particularly those relating to Arthur Evans, the archaeologist who, beginning in 1894, undertook the excavation of the Minoan palace at Knossos in Crete. The restorations carried out on the palace under Evans's supervision have been criticized for interpreting archaeological evidence too permissively, including commissioning artists to complete frescoes from small fragments, which they did in a distinctly Art Nouveau style. *A Restoration* responds to this 'complicated, febrile mix of different historical moments'.²¹

The film brings together a range of materials, including photographs from the Evans archive, images of objects from the collections of the two museums, and animations developed from the restored frescoes. A choral voiceover speaks on behalf of the notional Administrators, who seem to exist in a purely digital realm: 'We are cultivating a garden in a remote corner of the server', says a synthetic 'female' computer voice at the opening of the film. The words appear simultaneously on-screen, as animated text, on pale pink or blue panels, over a dense flow of images. The narration describes how the Administrators assemble flora and fauna to make a garden and populate it, then an architectural structure, of labyrinthine form, into which flow objects from the two museums' collections, beginning with finds made at Knossos in the early twentieth century. A sequence towards the middle of the work shows a set of desktop folders filled with archival images. Documents float out of the folders and layer into stacks of images. This direct reference to the visual rhetoric of the virtual desktop links the museum intermedially with the computer, on the basis of their common approaches to collection and classification.

This classificatory approach is evident in a sequence devoted to the museum's huge collection of fertility goddesses: small, unfired clay figures, believed to have been used in marriage rituals for thousands of years from Eastern Europe through to Mesopotamia. These figures, we are told, were made to be broken, to signify the making of a contract. Classification is accompanied by reconstruction, as the Administrators explain that they are rebuilding Europe's oldest city, 'in satire and with love'. Departing from curatorial propriety, they fill the ruined palace with drinking vessels promiscuously gathered from across the museum collections, as if they are organizing a party. Among these is a fragile seventeenth-century glass goblet commemorating the moment in 1651 when Charles II hid in an oak in Boscobel Wood after the Battle of Worcester to evade the Roundheads – an

21 Chi, p. 41.

act that led to the restoration of the monarchy. In the concluding sequence this symbolic object falls through the air and smashes on the ground.

Like the museums from which it takes its subject matter, Price's *A Restoration* confronts the problem of interpreting an anthropological collection, bringing objects to life through an understanding of their use value. Price's solution, a fanciful flight into a digitally enabled alternative reality, condensing histories and cultures into a single syncretic narrative, is in equal parts a satirical comment on the two museums and a celebration of the creative freedom of interpretation, or misinterpretation – a freedom that extends to the breaking of precious objects, although only in a virtual sense, for as the title of the work suggests, in a digital museum this is a reversible action. The work thus turns on the difference between real objects and virtual objects, to which only part of the definition of the term object applies – they have no material substance, but they can be acted upon. As if to emphasize the different orders of materiality at stake, when *A Restoration* was shown at the Ashmolean Museum in 2016, it was accompanied by a small exhibition in a glass vitrine, placed just outside the screening space, of documents from Evans's Knossos restoration, ancient Mesopotamian artefacts shown in the film, and the Boscobel goblet itself.

Price's response to the improprieties of Evans's reconstruction is to go a step further. As the Administrators say: 'It is unusual, we think, for a restoration to be quite so indiscreet. But, we have resolved to extort its ribald energy, for our very own ends, and cultivate a further germination.' Her imagery extrapolates fecund and feminine forms from the frescoes, suggesting that the hypothetically female Administrators may be enacting a gendered revolt against the taxonomic order of the museum. The breaking of the Boscobel goblet also hints at other kinds of political radicalism. But perhaps the most subversive possibility suggested here is that objects themselves could stage a rebellion. As Marina Warner remarks: '*A Restoration* gathers up all its marvelous energies of sense and sight and sound against the comfortable security of humanist epistemology.'²²

By comparing an analogue film with a digital video and finding distinctive and medium-specific ways of engaging with museum objects in each, I may seem to be arguing that the representation of the object is technologically determined. This would be an oversimplification. The rise of thing theory in the early 2000s may be a reaction to the supposed dematerialization of objects in digital media, but as Huyssen points out, this is analogous to an earlier moment in the twentieth century when Walter Benjamin, the Surrealists, and others turned their attention to things as a defence against the effects of a

22 Warner, 'A Restoration'.

burgeoning consumer culture, including cinema. In fact, both Dean and Price embrace the dematerializing and rematerializing effects of film and video as a way of representing objects in time.²³ Both artists engage with the museum object's special temporality, remediating it according to their understanding of their chosen medium. 'However fragmentary its condition', George Kubler writes, 'any work of art is actually a portion of arrested happening, or an emanation of past time'.²⁴ As an art historian, Kubler is primarily concerned with objects in time, but he also has some suggestive thoughts about time in the object, comparing artworks to stars, whose light travels from the past to reach us in the present. Barthes makes the same comparison between starlight and photography.²⁵ As a filmmaker, Dean mines the medium of analogue film for its expressive potentialities, which she shapes into poetic analogies between form and subject matter. Price is also interested in artefacts as markers of time but uses digital video to construct virtual time. She foregrounds both the archival materiality of her sources and the digital tools with which she manipulates them, even as she proceeds to dissolve temporal and spatial distinctions, extrapolating future possibilities from past time. Museums and films both de-contextualize objects, extracting them from their original location in space and time, but unlike museums, films produce their own temporality. In artists' films about museum objects, time is not recovered but invented, on the basis of the encounter between an artefact and a medium. While this might be described as the dematerialization of the object by the medium, it may equally be considered as a rematerialization of the medium by the object. Perhaps bringing heterogeneity into the heart of the museum, to borrow Crimp's words, is a project worth pursuing.

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About the Author

Alison Butler is an Associate Professor in Film at the University of Reading. She is the author of *Displacements: Reading Space and Time in Moving Image Installations* (Palgrave 2019). She is an editor of the journal *Screen*.

3 Materializing the Body of the Actor

Labour, Memory, and Storage

Maeve Connolly

Abstract

Actors, extras, and models, engaged in scripted or staged performances, have featured prominently in artists' film and video since the 1990s. But some artists have also used more specifically sculptural means to materialise acting bodies within the physical space of the gallery. Focusing on works by Cécile B. Evans, Nathaniel Mellors, and Clemens von Wedemeyer, this chapter explores how artists have articulated changes in the imagination of the human body, within the realm of acting and the performance of emotional labour. Their works suggest an emerging tension between the body conceived as an organic store of experience, following the logic of Method acting, and the body conceived as a surface for the display of signals, to be scanned and recognised by non-human things.

Keywords: Method acting; emotional labour; data storage; materiality; memory technologies; non-human bodies

Introduction: Bad Copies of Actor's Bodies

'I'm just a bad copy [...]. My voice is wrong and it's not even connected to my face.' This confession emanates from 'PHIL' a computer-animated character in Cécile B. Evans's video *Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* (2014), which revolves around questions of authenticity. PHIL bears a very strong resemblance to Philip Seymour Hoffman, a celebrated exponent of Method acting techniques, who died before completing his contribution to the *Hunger Games* film series, prompting rumours of possible CGI use.¹ PHIL

¹ Brody.

is evidently anxious about his own digital status in common with other non-human entities (spambots, CGI objects, robots) that exhibit ostensibly human attributes in numerous works by Evans. However, I am specifically interested in the figure of the actor in her practice, and in specific works by two other artists – Clemens von Wedemeyer and Nathaniel Mellors – that share a concern with the corporeality and materiality of acting bodies. These works articulate changes in the imagination of the human body as source and store of emotion, both within the realm of acting and the wider context of performance. In particular, they articulate a dissonance between the body conceived as an organic storehouse of experience (following the logic of ‘sense memory’ within Method acting) and the body conceived as exterior, which functions as a surface (even a screen) for the display of signals that can be recognized and mediated by non-human things.

In this chapter I focus on projects by Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer using choreographed robots, animatronic installations, and sculptural objects to explore the materiality of acting and performing bodies, both human and non-human. While Evans directly invokes the figure of the Method actor through the character of PHIL, it is important to note that she, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer are all interested in a much broader realm of performance, extending well beyond the domain of professional acting into multiple contexts of labour. These artists are attuned to the fact that while Method acting occupies a distinctive place within the popular cultural imagination of memory work, sense memory techniques are also deployed well beyond the context of professional dramatic performance, in the training of service workers. All three artists engage with cinema, with von Wedemeyer in particular drawing from the industrial and social history of film production in addition to filmic narrative conventions and acting techniques. But although these artists clearly acknowledge cinema’s cultural significance, in terms of the imagination of memory and shared public experience of emotion, their work engages with a much broader economy of screen media consumption and production.

The performing body, whether belonging to a trained actor, celebrity, or amateur, is a well-established object of artistic investigation. Key figures within the history of artists’ moving image, including Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter, and Stuart Marshall, were drawn to explore aspects of the culture, craft, and institutional apparatus of screen acting in the 1970s and early 1980s.² The celebrity performer returned to prominence in the subsequent decade, most notably in Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2002) and

2 See Carroll (on Yvonne Rainer); Potter; and Elwes (on Stuart Marshall).

in the work of various 'young British artists'.³ This was however followed by a shift in focus toward the body of the amateur performer, theorized by Claire Bishop as an 'outsourcing of authenticity', in which artists delegated the task of performance to non-professionals, sometimes cast as the representatives of specific, marginalized socio-economic groups.⁴ Yet it is also possible to trace an ongoing interest in the craft of acting, as practiced by professionals rather than amateurs. This focus is apparent in Sam Taylor-Wood's *Method in Madness* (1995), in which a distressed man is revealed to be an actor. It is equally evident in subsequent moving-image works by artists such as Gerard Byrne, Christian Jankowski, Jesse Jones, and Joachim Koester, many of which explore acting traditions that specifically counter the Method.⁵ Other artists such as Pierre Huyghe have addressed the rights of professional performers, most notably in *Blanche-Neige Lucie* (1997), which centres upon a lawsuit pursued by the actress who voiced the French-language version of Disney's *Snow White* (1937). Huyghe's *One Million Kingdoms* (2001) features the manga character Annlee (purchased by Huyghe and Philippe Parreno as part of the collaborative project *No Ghost Just a Shell*) walking through a landscape that is generated through the processing of a recording of Neil Armstrong's voice, speaking from beyond Earth.⁶ Legal rights are also at stake in Huyghe's *The Third Memory* (2000), in which John Wojtowicz oversees a dramatic reconstruction of the robbery he helped to commit, as a corrective to the event's portrayal in *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975).

In many of these works, the acting body becomes a means not just to explore changing economies and practices of media production, but also to investigate how bodies, data, and memories are mobilized as technologies of storage, to be used in the performance of required behaviours. Harun Farocki's exploration of 'operational images' is also clearly relevant here, since he directly addresses the pervasive modelling, simulation, and scripting of behaviours, on- and off-screen. Christa Blümlinger and Thomas Elsaesser have examined how Farocki's analysis was developed through the use of images drawn from archives and collections associated with bureaucracy,

3 Fowler, p. 243.

4 Bishop, p. 111.

5 Specific works include Gerard Byrne, *Untitled Acting Exercise (In the Third Person)* (2010); Christian Jankowski, *Crying for the March of Humanity* (2012); Jesse Jones, *The Struggle Against Ourselves* (2011); and Joachim Koester, *Maybe One Must Begin with Some Particular Places* (2012). In contrast, Gillian Wearing's documentary *SelfMade* (2010) centres upon a Method acting class taught by Sam Rumblelow and attended by a group of amateurs recruited by Wearing with the promise that they can star in a film focused upon their own experiences.

6 See McDonough.

the military, education, and public relations, sources that were deliberately made accessible and visible in the circulation of his work. As Elsaesser points out, Farocki's interest in the transformation of 'lived experience into scripted situations, and scripted situations into live-action training exercises' led him to film in a wide range of institutional contexts, including 'schools, offices, maternity clinics, in strip clubs, shelters for the homeless, management training centres, police stations, and while observing child therapists and army field exercises'.⁷

The operational image offers an important vantage point from which to revisit Arlie Russell Hochschild's seminal 1983 study of emotional labour in the service industries, which revealed how workers are encouraged to draw upon their memories in order to manage their own appearance, for the benefit of customers, and their employers. Significantly, Hochschild demonstrates how the training of service workers involves the repurposing of emotion memory techniques associated with Method acting, to elicit more 'authentic' performances. I am especially interested in the Method's construction of memory as a resource that, although it is often imagined to be located 'within', must also be conceptualized and visualized in an externalized form (the house, the filing cabinet, the warehouse) so that it can be effectively accessed, managed, and put to work. This process of externalization is, I argue, made manifest in the work of Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer, in which actor's bodies acquire material forms that are often compromised or unstable. While these artists focus on supposedly 'professional' performers, they are engaging with forces and processes – of distribution and exteriorization – that impact upon a much wider range of workers. In contrast to an earlier generation of (typically projected) moving-image works that seemed independent of material supports, these artists rely upon the material supports of the physical exhibition space. Their work derives added weight from the history of the public gallery and museum as a privileged site for the modelling of approved behaviours.⁸

Acting Methods, Memory, and the Exteriorized Body

[We] cannot hinder ourselves from asking *where* memories are stored up.
We understand that physiochemical phenomena take place *in* the brain,

7 Elsaesser, p. 223.

8 On the importance of public museum or gallery as site of embodied learning, structured around the collection and narrativization of objects, see Bennett; and Preziosi.

that the brain is *in* the body, the body is *in* the air which surrounds it, etc.; but the past once achieved, if it is retained, where is it? To locate it in the cerebral substance, in the state of molecular modification, seems clear and simple enough because then we have a receptacle, actually given, which we have only to open in order to let the latent images flow into consciousness. But if the brain cannot serve such a purpose, in what warehouse shall we store the accumulated images?⁹

In *Matter and Memory*, originally published in 1896, Henri Bergson identifies an impulse to locate the storage site of memories, modelled after an existing physical entity such as, for example, the warehouse. Actors, and others who are trained in the accessing and storage of memory, may use different metaphors but they are often equally mundane. In a *Guardian* interview from 2014, Patrick Stewart explains that actors ‘have this thing called a “sense memory” which we draw on for particularly emotional moments. We have these things stored away in a vault and we can draw them out when we need to’. The interviewer suggest that this ‘vault’ might operate ‘[l]ike a filing cabinet of emotions’ and Stewart concurs, reasserting the importance of efficient management: ‘[t]hat’s right. [...] We were taught how to store emotions. It means no experience is ever wasted’. An imaginary vault of sense memory is just one of many storage mechanisms that an actor might use to construct and realize a successful performance. The term ‘repertory’, which describes a specific economy of theatre production, actually means ‘list, catalogue, or index’, thus implying an infrastructure of storage. But the ‘sense memory’ described by Stewart refers specifically to individualized bodily techniques, originally devised to assist actors who were struggling to perform a required emotion.

Popularized (among screen actors) by Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio in New York, the Method was adapted from the ideas of Constantin Stanislavski. It requires the actor to identify a specific circumstance in his or her past experience, which is the basis for the mental recreation of an atmosphere or scene, and the associated bodily senses, thereby creating more favourable conditions for the production of the necessary emotion. Stanislavski used various metaphors to describe how such memories might be accessed, encouraging his students to ‘imagine a number of houses, with many rooms in each house, in each room innumerable cupboards, shelves, boxes, and somewhere, in one of them, a tiny bead. [...] That is what it is like in the archives of your memory. It has all those divisions and

9 Bergson, p. 148 (emphasis in the original).

sub-divisions. Some are more accessible than others'.¹⁰ According to Philip Auslander, Stanislavski often tends to treat the subconscious as 'a repository of retrievable data', but, at the same time, he accepts that 'memory distorts [and] the information we retrieve is not the same as the data we store, adding that distorted memories are of greater use to the actor than accurate ones because they are purified, universalized, and, therefore, aesthetic in nature'.¹¹ Auslander's research forms part of an extensive critical literature on memory in acting, which extends much further than techniques associated with the Method, and includes the use of acting 'scores', and exercises that function 'like amulets, which the actor carries around' as sources of energy.¹² I am especially interested, however, in the application and popular perception of emotion memory techniques well beyond the realm of professional acting.

Informed partly by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the analysis of everyday behaviour, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's 1983 study *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* analyzed a growing requirement for service workers to perform emotional labour in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Such labour occurs when workers need to either 'induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'.¹³ Hochschild demonstrates that airline attendants were trained not simply to appear caring, welcoming, hospitable, etc., but also to experience (and exhibit) 'authentic' feelings. *The Managed Heart* differentiates between 'surface acting', involving the use of the body to merely exhibit gestures, and 'deep acting', which draws more specifically on emotion memory techniques, observing that both can be demanded of workers in the service industries. Borrowing and repurposing metaphors of mining from Stanislavski, she emphasizes the difference between the imagination of memory and personal experience as a 'precious resource' in the training of professional actors, and its relatively casual exploitation as a raw material for the performance of service-oriented emotional labour.¹⁴

In recent decades, Method acting has 'fallen from grace' in both academic performance studies and in actor training because of 'the rise of post-modern theories; mistrust of Freudian views of psychology and humanist-modernist views of identity' as Rhonda Blair, cited by Lisa Bode, observes.¹⁵ Crucially,

10 Stanislavski, pp. 188–189.

11 Auslander, p. 31.

12 Barba, p. 128.

13 Hochschild, p. 7.

14 See Elsaesser's discussion of the pro-filmic world reduced to 'raw material', p. 218.

15 Bode, p. 59.

however, Bode notes that the Method remains prominent in popular understandings of acting because it confers a 'sense of authenticity and intentionality upon the figures we see on the screen', which is increasingly important when digital technologies can supplement actor's bodily capacities and even enable posthumous 'performance'.¹⁶ This view is bolstered by Mihaela Mihailova's analysis of the erasure of the labour of animators and visual-effects artists in promotional discourses around screen performances that use motion capture. Andy Serkis, she notes, is frequently described as a Method actor, in ways that tend to downplay the labour of others contributing to the performance.¹⁷ This disparity in accreditation is partly due to the fact that actors have better union representation than visual-effects artists, but Mihailova also reads the focus on Method technique as an attempt to assuage widespread anxieties about the 'replication and obsolescence of humans', which are especially acute for actors yet clearly relevant to much larger masses of workers facing the threat of automation.¹⁸

Method acting techniques have come to serve, in popular discourse, as a guarantee of authentic human emotion, manifesting the presence of interior reserves that can be accessed through the mining of personal experience and memory. Screen actors and their representatives seek to promote the integrity of acting as a (distinctly human) craft process. Yet actors also have the capacity to adapt their practices to new processes and technologies of storage and visualization and can even assert their own agency by engaging with these processes. In an interview cited by Deborah Levitt, Serkis describes an exteriorized relationship to his own body, in which the monitor acts both as a memory aid and as a tool of prosthetic extension. Addressing his comments towards aspiring motion-capture actors, Serkis explains that '[f]or digital roles, the actor is manipulating their character like a puppet. It's really useful to have time on a monitor to work with the CG model. It's like having a third eye on yourself. Actors have to learn to demand that time'.¹⁹ Actors working with motion-capture technology constitute a very specific, and relatively privileged, category of workers. Yet for Levitt the motion-capture actor is of interest because they are acutely exposed to a condition that is experienced much more widely generally. She observes that 'our very selves are turned inside-out, becoming increasingly distributed' through the use of pharmaceuticals, psychotropic

16 Bode, p. 60.

17 Mihailova, p. 44.

18 Mihailova, p. 45.

19 Serkis, quoted in Levitt, p. 190.

drugs, biomedical manipulations and imaging technologies, such as MRI scans, involving ‘multiple and differing kinds of exteriorization’.²⁰

How are these forces of distribution and exteriorization to be reconciled with the long-standing desire (evoked by Bergson) to envisage the brain as a physically bounded form of storage, imagined as a receptacle or as a more complex entity, potentially accessed and managed like a warehouse? In an analysis of works by artists that include Ed Atkins, Mark Leckey, Ryan Trecartin, and Lizzie Fitch, Melissa Gronlund identifies the recurrence of an anxiety that was once articulated in Gothic literature, whereby the boundaries of the home (and, by extension, the human body) are transgressed by new technologies. In theorizing this ‘return of the Gothic’, Gronlund focuses on the use of CGI in moving-image works by Ed Atkins, such as *A Primer for Cadavers* (2011) and *Us Dead Talk Love* (2012). Atkins often devises monologues that are delivered by ‘animate-inanimate’ characters, digitally modelled upon the surfaces of the artist’s own body. In these works, ‘the digitally rendered dead look back on what the world was like when bodies had materiality and all that comes with it: hair, nails, and object bodily functions’.²¹

The ‘digitally rendered dead’ that populate Atkins’s CGI narratives covet a physical interiority that they can never possess. They exist only as surfaces. But the human body and the domestic dwelling are not the only fragile, porous, and unstable containers to be evoked in Gronlund’s analysis of ‘digital anxiety’. She cites an interview with Atkins, who frames his exploration of the body very specifically as a meditation upon cinema:

Cadavers became the best way to look at representation and, in particular, recent technologies of representation. There is the push in industrial cinema towards high definition and 3D, and at the same time the body of cinema is falling away: there is no celluloid, no tape, no DVD. All you are left with are these reams of code, which, to a certain extent, simply haunt different media.²²

In Atkins’s work, there is no attempt to materialize the actor’s body within the physical space of the gallery. Digital anxiety has, in fact, given way to an acceptance of loss because the acting body has been replaced by a set of data points, merged into the ‘reams of code’ that now constitute

²⁰ Levitt, p. 178; pp. 191–192.

²¹ Gronlund.

²² Atkins, quoted in Gronlund.

cinema. Artists such as Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer are similarly attuned to technological transformations in film and media production. But, to a much greater extent than Atkins, they use the figure of the actor to explore how the body, and memory, of cinema is being disarticulated, reassembled, and reconfigured within a wider economy of distribution and exteriorization.

Activist, Animatronic, and Automated Acting Bodies

Like Nathaniel Mellors and Cécile B. Evans, Clemens von Wedemeyer tends to realize multifaceted installation projects, which are often created (or substantially reconfigured) for a specific context of exhibition. Von Wedemeyer's 2013 solo show *The Cast* was devised for one of the upper floors of the MAXXI in Rome, designed by Zaha Hadid. The exhibition utilizes the distinctive architecture of this building (including a floor that is raked, not unlike a cinema) to structure a complex spatio-temporal narrative that draws from the history of epic film production at Cinecittà, the iconography of classical myth, local traditions of religious procession, and dialogues with activist theatre practitioners. *The Cast* is structured as four interconnected 'chapters', interweaving distinct yet interdependent timelines. The first work to be encountered is *Afterimage*, a six-minute animation generated from a laser scan of a physical space, projected onto a huge free-standing curved screen. *Afterimage* depicts the interior of the artisan sculptural workshop of Cinears, the oldest company located in the Cinecittà complex, in which four generations of the De Angelis family produced sculptures and props for the Italian film industry, ranging from the epics of the early twentieth century to objects created for Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975). The workshop gradually mutated into a storehouse, preserving not only the objects made by Cinears but also material from other sculpture workshops.

In a discussion with von Wedemeyer, which appears in the book accompanying *The Cast*, theorist Avery Gordon describes the spectral vantage point offered by *Afterimage*, in which the surfaces of objects are rendered as semi-transparent 'point clouds'. She imagines a 'ghostly figure that moves through the workshop rooms [which are] filled with body part moulds and resting statues [...] as if he or she were in a computer game. The ghost in this machine, however, has a will to create something out of the surplus of hands and heads and arms and legs resting or waiting in the workshop', and von Wedemeyer concurs that this ghost 'would like to have a body of

its own, not just an eye'.²³ So, while *The Cast* is filled with 'bodies', they tend to lack agency and coherency, existing only as a dispersal of parts. Yet the exhibition refuses to project an imagined wholeness onto Italian cinema's past, and instead focuses attention upon the fissures and instabilities that have persisted throughout its history.

The next chapter consists of *The Beginning: Living Figures Dying*, a work literally embedded into the floor of the gallery. Devised for a series of glass-covered screens that extend from one wall to the other, resembling an enormous filmstrip, this moving-image installation is composed of sequences from the history of cinema, depicting objects (many of them human-like in form) being brought to life.²⁴ Stepping over the screens, the visitor approaches another free-standing structure, this time with seating, onto which is projected the film *Procession* (2013), which collides two distinct histories and modes of labour activism. Members of Teatro Valle Occupato, an activist group that claimed collective ownership of an Italian theatre to prevent its privatization in 2011, reflect upon (and loosely re-enact) fragments of an ad-hoc 1958 protest by thousands of aspiring *Ben-Hur* extras, who were lured to Cinecittà by the promise of paid work. The soundtrack features Mino Argentieri, an influential critical commentator on the Italian film economy, reading from his own contemporary report on these events, condemning the exploitation of the workers by underworld organizations posing as labour unions.

In moving through the various chapters of *The Cast*, the visitor is progressing closer and closer to a sculpture of a headless naked male figure. This entity stands, holding a rock above the place where a human head might be, looking out through a wall of glass onto the city below. Around this figure lie fragments of bodies, and the moulds used in their construction, transposed from the workshop of Cinears. The headless figure is an allusion to the myth of Deucalion (son of Prometheus) and Pyrrha. Fleeing from Zeus, Deucalion and Pyrrha were told by an oracle to cast behind them 'the bones of the mother', which they interpreted to mean rocks from the earth's surface; these rocks grew to be men and women. Von Wedemeyer's Deucalion is, however, caught mid-gesture and seems to materialize the exhibition's central question, also articulated in the movements of the disembodied eye of *Afterimage*. This is the question of how to make a new body that might

23 Gordon and von Wedemeyer, p. 90.

24 The films excerpted include *Viaggio in Italia* (*Journey to Italy*, Roberto Rossellini, 1954), *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, Jean Cocteau, 1946), *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), and *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963).



Figure 10 Clemens von Wedemeyer, *Remains, Deucalion and Pyrrha* (2013). Installation view, *The Cast*. Photo: Matteo Monti (MAXXI). Courtesy of Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; KOW, Berlin.

both incorporate and give new life to the remains of cinema, engaging with radical transformations in the organization of memory, labour, and storage. Crucially, *The Cast* figures the cinematic ‘acting body’ as a composite, rather than an organic entity. It presents a body that is assembled from multiple components, including stop-motion special effects sequences, choreographed re-enactments, the scanned surface of a prop house interior, as well as oral and written histories of Cinecittà,²⁵ and it is manifest materially and socially through the complex architecture of the exhibition.

Italian cinema – specifically Pasolini’s *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968) – is also referenced in Nathaniel Mellors’s multi-episode work *Ourhouse* (2010–), which dramatizes the transgression of social and bodily boundaries following the arrival of a mysterious stranger into a middle-class home. Played by the accomplished, but not particularly svelte, performance artist Brian Catling clad in white casual sportswear, Mellors’s stranger bears little resemblance to the elegant character Terence Stamp plays in Pasolini’s film. The entity embodied by Catling is not even recognized by his hosts as human. Designated as ‘The Object’ or ‘Thingy’, he does not speak but rather ingests words, taking up residency in the family library and devouring pages from books such as E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). His motivations are never explained but the texts and images that he draws into his body seem to dictate the course of the narrative, structuring

25 Gordon and von Wedemeyer allude to Cinecittà’s use as a post-war refugee camp, pp. 94–96.

interactions between family members, their employees, the inhabitants of the local village, and, in later episodes, a group of mysterious ‘medievalists’ who encroach upon the family’s territory, seeking ancient artefacts endowed with unspecified powers.

Episodes from *Ourhouse* have often been installed alongside prop-like objects, sculptural assemblages, or tactile modifications to the viewing environment, suggesting a kind of prosthetic extension from the screen into the space of the gallery.²⁶ These installations sometimes include animatronic busts modelled upon (and voiced by) actors who appear in the series. The sculpture *Hippy Dialectics* (2010), for example, consists of two heads that have been cast from the body of the same actor, Richard Bremmer, who plays the part of Charles ‘Daddy’ Maddox-Wilson in *Ourhouse*. Within the narrative world of *Ourhouse*, Daddy is a disgruntled and opinionated patriarch – an amplified version of a stock character commonly encountered in British and US television sitcoms. In *Hippy Dialectics*, however, Bremmer/Daddy is disarticulated from this narrative and his head is doubled. The two busts (one of them painted blue) are displayed upon separate plinths, with their electrical and mechanical supports clearly visible. But they are also physically bound to each other, by a length of dark artificial hair that hangs from their cheeks. Offering a direct contrast to the acts of ingestion performed by The Object in *Ourhouse*, these entities spurt words into the space of the gallery, jerking and juddering, engaged in an absurd dialogue that is obliquely yet inescapably reminiscent of Samuel Beckett. As (partial) acting bodies, the heads in Mellors’s *Hippy Dialectics* can be read as primitively automated performers, forming part of a test to see if human-made things are adequate to the task of ‘surface acting’ as described by Hochschild. These ‘actors’ have no interiority beyond the cables and code that entirely determine their movements and words.

The automation of feeling, while only a peripheral concern for Mellors, is integral to the work of Cécile B. Evans, including online projects such as *AGNES* (2013), the first digital commission by Serpentine Galleries. Hosted on the gallery website, *AGNES* is a ‘bot’, modelled after the automated computer programmes that gather personal data online, inviting visitors to interact by selecting from a menu of images, answering questions about their feelings and memories, and by completing various CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart), to prove and perform their own humanity. *AGNES* also meditates upon the history of human–computer interactions in popular culture, drawing from Wikipedia entries and video-sharing sites to harvest key moments, such as

26 This aspect of Mellors’s work is explored in Connolly, pp. 66–77.



Figure 11 Nathaniel Mellors, *Hippy Dialectics* (2010). Photo: Steve White. Courtesy of the artist, Matt's Gallery, London, and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

the 2011 *Jeopardy* quiz show contest featuring a computer called Watson. Evans has continued to develop scenarios that involve interactions between human and non-human participants, but her work has taken an increasingly material form, often incorporating architectural or sculptural elements.²⁷

Evans trained as an actor and she voices many of the characters in her work, including the entire cast of *Sprung a leak* (2016). This work, which was devised for Tate Liverpool, is a play in three acts performed by two humanoid robots and a robot dog that move around the gallery interacting with three screens, each displaying a video of a pole-dancer. As the narrative unfolds, these characters join forces in a struggle against another non-human entity – the multichannel screen system that forms part of the exhibition's infrastructure. The robots are all designed to function socially, as evidenced by physical gestures they display in their scripted interactions with the pole-dancers. But all of these 'actors' speak with Evans's own voice, underscoring their total containment within a world that she has designed and choreographed. Increasingly, Evans has sought to materially manifest her own labour by exhibiting interim stages in the production of specific works (in performances

27 See Daoust.



Figure 12 Cécile B. Evans, *Sprung a leak* (2016). Multi-channel video, raspberry pis, cables, humanoid robots, robot dog, custom fountain, privacy shades, lamps, dog pen, bookshelf, assorted books, prints, miscellaneous items, Solar vitamin bottles. 16:45 (looped). Installation view, Cécile B. Evans, Tate Liverpool, 21 October 2016 – 19 March 2017.

and installations) and by incorporating project management aesthetics into the design of her website. So while she asserts her former identity as an actor, her memory architecture is clearly dislocated from the individual human body, and much more closely aligned to the cloud than the filing cabinet or vault.

In an interview with Chris Fite-Wassilak for *Art Monthly*, Evans answers questions via personas drawn from her video *Amos' World* (2018), a multichannel work structured as a series of monologues, all delivered by entities connected to a single building. They include Gloria (an actress-turned-secretary), Amos the architect, a trio of dancing CGI daffodils, and several figures that remain off-screen, including Time Traveller, Building Manager, and Weather. Gloria, the former actress, is absent from the interview scenario but she is framed as an object of fascination and speculation for the other characters, and also a possible model for learning. According to the entity known as Weather, Gloria's 'voice is still rooted in her body', unlike the other tenants, who continually project themselves onto others. Time Traveller observes that Gloria sees projections of others as 'a part of herself. She does not deny their authenticity or the meaning they have for others'.²⁸ Expanding upon the issue of embodied knowledge, interviewer Fite-Wassilak observes that

28 Fite-Wassilak, pp. 4–5.

Evans explores many different categories of container or vessel, from 'meat bodies that hold brains and maybe souls' to 'ships, buildings with tenants, computer servers that hold bots and AI'. His observation underscores the fact that although the actress may occupy a privileged position, she must deploy the insights derived from her 'meat body' within an environment shared with multiple non-human sensing and storing entities.

Conclusions

Acting bodies take many different forms in the works of Clemens von Wedemeyer, Nathaniel Mellors, and Cécile B. Evans. They exist as inanimate objects, either whole or fragmented, as social beings that are capable of self-organization and activism, as animatronic assemblages of mechanical gesture and recorded speech, as automated virtual entities seeking interaction, as computer-generated models of dead people, and as scripted characters that are imagined as sources of embodied knowledge. While some of these acting entities are bound to the screen, other bodies take an explicitly material form and extend partially or wholly into the physical space of the museum, temporarily inhabiting these spaces in choreographed and scripted configurations. Von Wedemeyer, Mellors, and Evans do not use the museum to preserve cinema, or to restore its lost materiality. Instead, they engage in a more open-ended mining of its forms and histories, presenting unfamiliar manifestations of acting bodies. Attending to the matter of acting seems especially urgent at a time when scripted and simulated behaviours proliferate beyond the screen, yet the actual labour of performance is very often erased or obscured. These works also suggest that analysis of the actor's body, in all of its contradictory manifestations, might illuminate how the body of cinema is itself being reconfigured.

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About the Author

Maeve Connolly co-directs the MA in Art & Research Collaboration at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dublin. She is the author of *TV Museum: Contemporary Art and the Age of Television* (Intellect, 2014) and *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Intellect, 2009). Recent publications include contributions to the anthologies *Artists' Moving Image in Britain since 1989* (Paul Mellon Centre and Yale University Press, 2019), *European Women's Video Art* (John Libbey Publishing, 2019) and *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices* (Bloomsbury, 2019). Her current research focuses on artists as agents and analysts of infrastructural change.

4 How to Spell ‘Film’

Gibson + Recoder’s Alphabet of Projection

Volker Pantenburg

Abstract

In their performances and installation work, Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder address the specificities of cinema by investigating the event of projection. Modifying film projectors by removing essential parts and subverting the protocols of projection, the artists foreground the basic elements of cinematic articulation. Focusing primarily on *Light Spill* (2005) and *Reduction Print* (2014) and comparing them to canonical contributions to structural film, the chapter argues that the object-based and performance-based trajectories in Gibson + Recoder’s work as two distinct strategies of circumscribing the media complex ‘film’ and the cultural technique of cinema. In doing so, they also provide a genuine way to re-negotiate the peculiarities of the cinema and contemporary exhibition spaces.

Keywords: Projection; structural film; medium specificity; exhibition space; modernism

I.

Today, the term ‘moving image’ designates a confusing variety of different forms and practices. It covers analogue film in different manifestations and gauges between 8 and 70mm, a plethora of electronic video technologies, from 1960s reel-based early technologies via U-Matic to BETA, and, for at least twenty to twenty-five years, digital files of different resolution, various modes of compression, and manifold forms of circulation.¹ The fact that

¹ If we consider ‘movement’ in a wider sense, we would have to enlarge the scope to include older media like flipbooks and optical toys, or even serial drawings that evoke rather than

the word 'film' serves as an umbrella term for all these formats is not very helpful since it tends to conflate the most diverse practices and economies.

If moving images were taken as a species, they would most likely drive biologists crazy since a new specimen within this expanding family seems to pop up every day. As soon as they get hold of an 'image' and want to start seizing and analyzing it, it multiplies and proliferates, generates sub-species, changes its form, size, and character. This situation is not new, but it has gained momentum during the last decade with digital modes of production, circulation, and reception. Everyone, it seems, now has their own moving image laboratory at home, or even in their pocket; everyone is the producer, disseminator, and recipient of moving images, everywhere, 24/7.

What, then, could the function of traditional institutions like the museum and the gallery, but also cinema, be in a time when the notion of perpetual movement, and its corollaries of variability, flexibility, and change, have become the default mode of existence and permeate our lives so recklessly? In this chapter, I would like to think about this question by focusing on one particular element in the film/cinema/museum complex, namely the analogue film projector.

Since I am not a biologist, I have chosen a different concept to describe today's situation. I propose to speak of 'aggregate states' to account for both the differences and similarities between different types of images. I should add, however, that I use this term rather loosely and not in a rigorous adaptation of its scientific meaning. It is meant to highlight the fact that we encounter moving images in very dissimilar material forms and environments, a fact that recent debates around media ecologies have emphasized.² What I find appropriate in this metaphor is that it immediately implies different modes of circulation and mobility – from the ephemeral, almost immaterial diffusion of data that effortlessly transcend borders to the solid, hard state, which remains firmly connected to a given space and resists easily being moved from A to B. The perplexing fact, however, is that different aggregate states of water (i.e. H₂O) – ice and steam, for instance, remain identical in their elementary structure whereas their appearance differs radically. In the realm of images, it is quite the opposite: a digital image in 8k resolution might look almost identical to an image projected in 35mm but their elementary structure is radically different.

contain or actually reproduce motion. Erika Balsom has addressed the question of circulation comprehensively in her book *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation*.

2 In a German language context, see a recent issue of the journal *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* (No. 14) on media ecologies, ed. by Petra Löffler and Florian Sprenger.

Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder have addressed the question of aggregate states explicitly in a performance piece called *Untitled* (2008). In it, a pair of electric humidifiers is used to direct steam onto a piece of glass, in some cases the window of the projection booth. The light that is cast by two 'filmless' film projectors thus has to pass through a surface of ever-shifting fields of vapoury condensation, which is flexible since the humidifiers react to the ventilation and natural air currents of either the theatre or the projection booth. Gibson + Recoder describe the effect as follows:

The hard edges of projected light (the white light of the frame-within-frame or nestled framework) are dispersed, scattered, blurred, etc. by the diffracting medium of water on glass, an ebb-and-flow or push-and-pull of something on the verge of nothing (or nothing on the verge of something).³

II.

A projection event like *Untitled* shows that, no matter what aggregate state we speak of, changing, maintaining, or stabilizing it requires machinery, tools, technology. One way of getting hold of and temporarily stopping the moving image is to focus on the pieces of apparatus that participate in the generation and transformation of images. For at least ten to fifteen years, analogue film projection in white cube galleries has formed part of our everyday experience of solo and group shows, biennials, and art fairs. We are accustomed to encountering the sound of 16mm projectors in shows by Matthew Buckingham or Tacita Dean; a complex and elaborate system of reels evoking a spiral staircase defines Simon Starling's *Wilhelm Noack oHG* (2006); a bulky, quite noisy 35mm projector with enormous reels dominated Rosa Barba's fifteen-minute loop *Bending to Earth* at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Maria Eichhorn's *Filmlexikon sexueller Praktiken*, a project echoing the vast *Encyclopedia Cinematographica* project undertaken in Göttingen, began in 1999. It is a constantly growing compendium, where the gallery visitor needs to address the personnel to watch short, three-minute-long 16mm reels that are presented 'upon request'. The alphabetical list from which to choose starts with *Anal Coitus* and goes on to *Ear Licking*, *Milk Bath*, and *Wax Play*.

What is the aggregate state of these images? How do they relate to the relative obsolescence of analogue film material and to our contemporary,

3 Gibson and Recoder, 'Comments'.

mostly digital landscape? To address these questions, let me continue with a small excursus.

III.

A 'reduction print' is the print of a film that has been transferred from its original support to a narrower film strip. The term was coined in reaction to the standards and limitations of industrial distribution and presentation that became the norm in the US around 1910. Historically, the most common form of the reduction print is the 16mm version of a film that was originally shot and distributed on 35mm. In the mid-1920s, soon after the successful introduction of this sub-standard, the transfer to 16mm not only followed the profit-driven logic of being able to supply smaller cinemas with prints. It also entailed the promise that films could now be shown at other locations and in other contexts than the movie theatre – in schools or army barracks, but also in everybody's cosy living room. As Haidee Wasson has shown, all kinds of 'Protocols of Portability' resulted. Practices as diverse as the foundation of the film collection of the Museum of Modern Art, far-reaching initiatives of film education in schools, military training, and indoctrination all depended on the existence of mobile projectors and the 16mm standard.⁴ Hence, what the early 1930s brought about was nothing less than an early form of what Francesco Casetti has called the 'relocation' of cinema.⁵

Reduction Print (2014) is also the title of a work by Luis Recoder and Sandra Gibson. It consists of a 16mm projector that holds the first reel of the movie *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (Mel Stuart, 1972). However, something is strange about this projector. Its reels do not move. Just like the projected image that is produced, they stand still and remain immobile for the duration of the exhibition. Under normal circumstances, the film strip would instantly melt in the heat of the projector's lamp but not in this case. This machine is a standard film projector which allows for the instantaneous complete interlocking of the image. By switching the projector to 'STILL', the image comes to a stand-still while the film is protected from melting by a heat-absorbing douser. And yet the actual punch line of the work is the miniaturized presentation format. Just like its material support (the film print), the projected image has the gauge of exactly 16mm. Moreover, it is

4 See Wasson.

5 Casetti, 'The Relocation of Cinema'.



Figure 13 Gibson + Recoder, *Reduction Print* (2014). 16mm modified projector, 16mm film, reels, sculpting tool, hardware, 27 x 35 x 12 inches. *Still Film*, March 24 – May 28, 2016, Young Projects Gallery, Los Angeles, California. Photo: Rachel Hamburger.

not projected onto a screen but, as specified in the work's description, onto a 'sculpting tool' that is conventionally used to shape stone or clay. Now, what happens in this simple operation? Let me point out three aspects that are, I think, paradigmatic of Gibson + Recoder's work.

Firstly, compared to the cinema situation, the projector quite radically changes its character. Transported from the darkness of the projection booth into the white cube of the gallery, it shifts from an invisible tool that effaces itself in a smooth and unnoticed act of image production to an exhibit with sculptural qualities. This impression is emphasized by the choice of the sculpting tool as the site of the projected image.

Secondly, *Reduction Print* is the result of understanding (or rather misunderstanding) a standard of film technology literally: 'The micro-cinematic gauge is projected on a scale that stages the literalization of the miniature format', Gibson + Recoder write in an accompanying statement.⁶ What is performed, then, is the deliberate mix-up of material support and projected image. This form of 'literalism' gives an ironic twist to the projective power of the apparatus by replacing monumentalization with miniaturization. Cinema, as we know it, is about encountering images that exceed us in size. Here, this effect is reversed. However, this manoeuvre might also hint at a potential confusion of historical and systematic aggregate states of the image. By shrinking the projected image to thumbnail size, it is distanced from the cinematic experience and approximated to smartphones and other portable devices of today's media landscape. In all its solid immobility and bulkiness, the projector produces an image that mimics the liquid and flexible aggregate state of contemporary networked images.

Finally, *Reduction Print* does away with the temporality and performative character of cinema. The film image takes on the durational character of a stable object and thus fits nicely into the temporal register of the museum exhibition. It performs, we might say, yet another act of mimicry by simulating the temporality of other, less ephemeral image types: drawings, paintings, photographs, and sculpture.

IV.

Reduction Print restages and updates practices and techniques that originated in experimental cinema in the 1960s and 1970s and have a complex history. Explicitly, Gibson + Recoder refer to Peter Gidal's concept of 'structural/materialist film' that the filmmaker and theoretician introduced in polemical confrontation to P. Adams Sitney's notorious term 'structural film'. At a key point in his 'Theory and Definition of Structuralist/Materialist Film', from 1976, Gidal states: 'Structural/Materialist films are at once object

6 Press Release for *STILL FILM: Gibson + Recoder*.

and procedure.⁷ Gibson + Recoder quite systematically unfold these two aspects – object and procedure – but they do so in separate trajectories of their work, emphasizing the object character in museum and gallery work, and stressing the procedural in the ‘projection performances’.

The British tradition around the London Filmmaker’s co-op, such as work by Malcolm LeGrice or Guy Sherwin, Peter Gidal or Annabel Nicholson, is relevant here since it often combined the minimalist, conceptual tendencies of the American cinema with what, one might think at first glance, are the contradictory practices of expanded cinema and live performance. Rather than the reproducible, standardized product ‘film’, the cinema *event* with all its coincidences and contingencies was supposed to be highlighted. Apart from the experience of the event and potentially some photographic documentation, nothing remained that could circulate or be bought and sold. Annabel Nicholson’s *Reel Time* (1973) is a good example. In this performance, the artist used her sewing machine, placed in the light cone of the projector, to perforate and successively destroy the extensively long film loop that was running through the projector at the same time. This chance encounter of a sewing machine and a film projector in the gallery space provided a revealing confrontation between the labour of sewing – traditionally coded as female – with the apparatus of cinema, which tends to be dominated by men. It almost goes without saying that the sewing machine prevailed.

In its playful proximity to industrial standards and in its title, Gibson + Recoder’s *Reduction Print* also evokes Morgan Fisher’s manifold works of film research that quite similarly circle around the terminology and practices of the film industry. Fisher’s films *Production Stills* (1970), *Cue Rolls* (1974), or *Standard Gauge* (1984) are, just like Gibson + Recoder’s *Reduction Print*, ironic and rigorous investigations of the Hollywood system and its apparatuses and routines. Moreover, Fisher’s 1976 work *Projection Instructions*, ‘a score to be performed by the projectionist’ which consists of the instructions to test all the basic functions of the apparatus, is quite an obvious precursor to the projection performances of Gibson + Recoder.⁸ In *Projection Instructions*, just like in Gibson + Recoder’s projection performances, it is not only the auditorium and thus the space of the spectators that is activated but also the projection booth.

Despite these affinities and continuities, it would be wrong to characterize Gibson + Recoder’s work as simply revenants or museological adaptations of their historic precursors. As Genevieve Yue remarks, ‘however much

7 Gidal, p. 14.

8 Fisher, p. 54.

concerned with the idea of a cinematic medium, their installations, performances, and texts – never “films” – depart significantly from the materially-determined medium essentialism of structural film.⁹ There can be little doubt that, in 2020, it means something entirely different to employ analogue film material and film projection than in 1976. The differences are located on several levels: filmmakers of the 1970s still acted within the confines of a media history predicated on the dominance of 35mm film. By contrast, the choice of film material today reacts to the successive elimination of analogue technology from most realms of exhibition and presentation. In an essay for *October*, Jonathan Walley has emphasized the critical situation that contemporary practices of expanded cinema are faced with: ‘In the wake of digital media’s ascendancy,’ he writes, ‘the “dismantling” of the film machine may no longer be an artistically generative metaphor for expanded cinema, but a reality that threatens an entire artistic tradition’.¹⁰ When Walley was writing this in 2011, a number of practitioners, most prominently Tacita Dean, tried to mobilize forces to prevent this artistic tradition from extinction. On the occasion of her Tate installation *FILM* (2011), Dean gathered prominent voices from Martin Scorsese to Christopher Nolan to Leonardo di Caprio to advocate the necessity of keeping film material alive.¹¹ The online campaign ‘Save Film’ and a petition to UNESCO to include analogue film practice in the list of languages menaced by extinction were the most visible components of this endeavour.¹² A decade later, the separation into two distinct worlds, the digital realm of regular film exhibition and the partially analogue one of cinémathèques and art museums is confirmed, regardless of Kodak announcing that it would reopen analogue film labs in several major cities around the globe in summer 2017. Every artistic practice resorting to analogue film material does so against the backdrop of this situation.

Another difference to the situation in the 1970s lies in the insistence with which Gibson + Recoder have made the projection apparatus their primary concern. Artist/filmmakers like Ken Jacobs or Anthony McCall notwithstanding, the majority of engagement with media specificity in the 1970s was targeted rather at the film strip and the camera as the recording device. Think of the countless attacks on the film strip by means of optical printers or other tools, which turned the film material itself (for instance

9 Yue, p. 67.

10 Walley, ‘Identity Crisis’, p. 50.

11 See the accompanying publication *FILM: Tacita Dean*, which gathers many statements by artists, directors, cinematographers, photographers, and other professionals under the heading ‘Film and the Importance of Analogue in the Digital Age’.

12 See www.savefilm.org for further information on this [accessed 30 August 2018].

the sprocket holes) into the protagonist instead of creating a diegetic world on screen. Or think of the zooms and pans and other camera operations that Michael Snow investigated over and over around 1970 to replace the film illusion by the work of film.

Gibson + Recoder, in contrast, have made the projector the gravitational centre of their work by carving out its different features and analyzing them repeatedly and in great detail: the mechanics of film transport, the optical system of the lenses, or the protocols of the projection event. One reason for this rigorous focus could be that the projector is an interesting, albeit neglected relay in the continuum between production and reception. Mistaking it for a purely reproductive device since it 'only' shows what has previously been recorded, developed, and distributed, underestimates what is at stake in this categorical shift from the material to the projected image, from film strip to light, shadow, and movement. And yet there is more to the projector than meets our contemporary eye. If we look back past the 1960s and 1970s and the heyday of modernism, we will find another important prototype for the versatility and multi-dimensionality of projection. Film history teaches us that the Cinématographe Lumière of the 1890s was not only a projector, but a versatile apparatus combining all the phases of film production. It served as a camera to record images, as a printing machine, and, finally, as a magic-lantern film projector. Hence, at one of the birthplaces of cinema, before the division of labour dissected this process, production, postproduction, and exhibition were integrated into one single, multifunctional machine. This legacy of the cinema projection is explicitly addressed when Gibson + Recoder called a solo show *Cinematograph* (2012) to evoke this early apparatus. Yet an echo of it is also present in Nicholson's *Reel Time* if we take into consideration that the Lumière Brothers based their invention of the Cinématographe on the mechanics of a sewing machine.

V.

Let's introduce a few more of Gibson + Recoder's works to get a better impression of the spectrum of their interventions. In *Light Spill* (2005), maybe their best-known piece, the artists have applied two small but consequential modifications to the film projector. On the one hand, the intermittency mechanism of the projector has been removed. The projected image thus loses its contours and transforms into a nervously stammering visual artefact; an artefact, I should add, that only an analogue film projector can produce. On the other hand, the projector is missing the take-up reel.



Figure 14 Gibson + Recoder, *Light Spill* (2005). 16mm modified projector, 16mm film, screen; dimensions variable. *Borderline Behaviour: Drawn Towards Animation*, January 25 – March 18, 2007, TENT, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Curated by Edwin Carels for International Film Festival Rotterdam. Photo: Roel Meelkop.

For the period of the exhibition, the projected film material simply drops down to the gallery floor and piles up to an increasingly big mound of celluloid. To show *Light Spill*, the respective gallery or museum has to procure enough footage to make sure the projector can continuously be fed with film material by the personnel. 'For a one-month exhibition,' the artists say, 'it is recommended that at least one hundred (100) films with the minimum footage length of eight hundred (800) feet each be secured. The films should preferably be spooled onto a film core for loading onto a split-reel. There is no restriction on the footage content (i.e. positive, negative, leader, etc.).'¹³ It is easy (perhaps too easy) to understand *Light Spill* as a comment on the 'death of cinema' and its material corollary, analogue film material. Is this the film that we see and – if that's the case – cinema sees at the moment of death? Gibson + Recoder suggest a more optimistic reading:

It's like the projectionist left the theater – forgot to reel up the film and left. It's like our freedom, a version of our freedom. This precious film, that

¹³ Gibson and Recoder, *Light Spill*, p. 11.

we worked so hard on, that we learned about in school and projected for years – now we just let it go on the floor, like who cares, and just walk away. It's our filmmakers' freedom to walk away [...]. It's a whole letting go.¹⁴

Apart from this sense of freedom and emancipation (but also comic relief, if we think of Buster Keaton in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924)), it is also important to know that the film material that is used in *Light Spill* consists of discarded, deaccessioned footage, mostly from schools or archives. What appears like a 'death', therefore, is rather an artistic act of resurrection and recycling: an act, moreover, that publicly performs the act of discarding material. As much as this may be about death and decay, it also is about the resurfacing of material that had already once left the realms of visibility and circulation.

VI.

The aggregate state that Gibson + Recoder's images hint at is inevitably linked to questions of objecthood. What kind of peculiar object is film? How does it relate to other, more established and stable kinds of objecthood that we encounter in galleries, museums, and art fairs? Where is its place in the spectrum between notions of the 'thing' and the 'event', between 'object' and 'process', to use Gidal's terms?¹⁵

Reduction Print demonstrates that any determination on one single component – the film strip, the projector, the image on the screen, the filmic text, or the projection event – does not really do justice to film's peculiar ontology: its defining element is exactly the combination of these components. There is something futile in attempts at defining medium specificity in the horizon of modernist concepts. The history of experimental cinema shows us how each identification of elements of specificity – the film material, the sprocket holes, the light beam – inevitably led to a proliferation of such elements. Jonathan Walley speaks of 'laundry lists' that were compiled over and over to enumerate the most specifically 'filmic' elements. Walley tells us:

What is striking about these 'laundry lists' of uniquely filmic 'elements' is not how often such lists have been formulated, but how much they vary and how many different types of elements they incorporate, ranging from the resolutely material (emulsion grains, sprocket holes, the

14 Ed Halter, 'Interview with Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder', quoted in Gorfinkel, p. 229.

15 For a useful differentiation, see Casetti, 'Objects on the Screen'.

shutter) to the elusively ephemeral (light, time, ideas, and spectatorial experience). One might expect the itemization of film-specific elements to be a simpler matter: just list the parts of the film stock, camera, and projector, identifying these as the neutral material ground upon which a medium-specific aesthetic can be based. But once a list of film's specifics begins, it quickly proliferates – expands, in fact – suggesting, once more, that cinema is 'always already expanded.' In doing so, these ontologies open up onto much more heterogeneous conceptions of cinema than one would anticipate from a medium-specific theory or practice.¹⁶

We therefore have to deal with an ambivalence or dialectics that characterizes the medium. Its specificity necessarily turns into something quite unspecific; notions of medium identity and concentration are inextricably linked to ones of difference and expansion. In retrospect, this is one of the most striking contributions of the British variety of 'Expanded Cinema' in the 1970s. Over and over, the desire to pinpoint 'pure' elements of medium specificity found itself confronted with decidedly 'impure' elements of the other arts – especially performance art – that seem to reject the question of specificity altogether.

What, then, is the role of projection and, particularly, the projector in this landscape of theory and practice? First of all, it is one of the sites where the dialectics between contraction and expansion, between object and process can be studied and enacted. It is the moment where the materiality of mechanical and physical components and immaterial ones like light and colour meet and crystallize. Other projection performers like Bruce McClure have tended to mystify this moment by privileging the projector over the camera:

The movie camera engraves light traces on silver lockets. I prefer the giving company of a movie projector that can paradoxically transubstantiate still births reviving them in the minds of the living. [...] I am fortunate to share the reciprocity of this fascinating machine.¹⁷

As you see, McClure does not shy away from evoking transubstantiation and the return of the dead. A whole repertoire of animism and anthropomorphism is part of his perspective.

16 Walley, 'Identity Crisis', p. 31.

17 Bruce McClure, quoted in Walley, 'Materiality and Meaning', p. 24.

In Gibson + Recoder's work, I detect less mystification and more sobriety. It seems as if their work consists of reverse engineering, removing parts from this system or rendering them dysfunctional so that the complete complex 'film' is invoked. The 'working system', as it has been called in a different context, is stopped, redirected and deviated, used against itself, and in so doing addresses the complex interplay between object and process, materiality and immateriality.¹⁸

In his canonical text 'For a Metahistory of Film', Hollis Frampton has given a fascinating, albeit enigmatic description of this situation. As we know, Michael Fried had accused Donald Judd's sculptures and other minimalist work of transforming the museum into a space of theatricality. Four years later, Frampton defined the elements of the complex 'film' in their irreducible tension to the notion of the object. 'We are used to thinking of camera and projector as machines, but they are not. They are "parts." The flexible filmstrip is as much "part" of the film machine as the projectile is part of a firearm.'¹⁹ From this diagnosis, Frampton develops the rather hyperbolic idea that all existing cameras, projectors, and filmstrips are nothing but elements in one huge complex:

Since all the 'parts' fit together, the sum of all film, all projectors, and all cameras in the world constitutes one machine, which is by far the largest and most ambitious single artifact yet conceived and made by man (with the exception of the human species itself).²⁰

Even if we do not share the idea of one giant machine, dubbed 'The Last Machine' by Frampton, it is possible to subscribe to the most crucial part of his diagnosis: 'it occurs to me that film meets what maybe, after all, the prime condition of music: it produces no object'.²¹ At first glance, we might think of this as an updated version of Lessing's thoughts on *Laocoon*. Film, just like music, would be aligned with the register of time and duration, whereas painting and sculpture would pertain to the regime of the spatial. However, we could also reformulate the same claim in the terms I introduced above:

18 During his time as the director of the Austrian Film Museum, Alexander Horwath constantly emphasized that film museums need to realize the fact that the tasks of preservation, collection, and presentation cannot simply focus on film copies. The work of a Film Museum/Archive has to focus on all the machinery and knowledge that assures the cinema situation as a specific experience to be performed. Horwath, p. 85.

19 Frampton, p. 137.

20 Ibid.

21 Frampton, p. 138.

the solid form that other objects manifest is absent from the medium film. A well-known figure of thought to address this is the concept of 'distributed agency' proposed by Bruno Latour and Actor–Network Theory. Put differently, we could also define 'film' as an energy or liquid that runs through different stations on its itinerary between film strip, projector, and screen.

From this vantage point, one of the components of Gibson + Recoder's effort is to approximate the moving image to an object, to emphasize the sculptural element of the machinery, just as they emphasize the performative aspect of the machinery in different work. Indeed, this operation produces something that lends itself to be exhibited, sold, or bought, and to enter into a private or museum collection, and yet it does so by exactly pointing to the futility of this operation. Film, we could say, enters the system of the visual arts by no longer being film. Or, to be more precise: in migrating from the black box to the white cube, it reminds us of the time when the object of film was first and foremost the act of projection.²²

VII.

Light Spill and *Reduction Print* are conceived for a gallery or museum setting. However, black boxes and their implications and protocols are just as much on Gibson + Recoder's aesthetic agenda as the white cube. Again, the projector is at the centre but this time, it is not addressed in its object-like, sculptural quality but as the site of a performative complex. In Hollis Frampton's beautiful phrase, the projector is 'the mechanical virtuoso performer'.²³ Again, this quite obviously evokes the 1960s and 1970s with their desire to expand the scope of cinema by multiplying its screens and venues and shifting it from an economy of distribution to an economy of the single event. This type of work is much harder to speak or write about than the gallery-based pieces I have dealt with before. As a result of its fleeting,

22 I thank Luis Recoder and Sandra Gibson for insisting on the complicated history of projection as object. Responding to an earlier draft of this chapter, they wrote to me: 'To complicate matters, the "object" is by no means "absent" from the medium of film projection, or is "absent" insofar as the medium itself "performs" such an act of disappearance. [...] Also, it marks a reprise of that moment in which film projection itself and *not* necessarily the film material itself was the object, the event, the performance *par excellence*, of nothing but its own functioning.' Gibson and Recoder, 'Comments' (emphasis in the original).

23 Frampton's phrase is 'The phantom work itself transpires upon the screen as its notation is expended by a mechanical virtuoso performer, the projector'. Frampton, 'For a Metahistory', p. 138.

ephemeral character and its character as light, colour, and (sometimes) sound, it poses a challenge to the act of description, and the establishment of a discursive framework.

To outline a few parameters of projection performance, I turn to Hollis Frampton one last time. In *A Lecture* from 1968, we find an elegant characterization of the act of projection. It should be noted that *A Lecture* is not a text or even a lecture, but a projection performance in which the text, read by Michael Snow, is played from an audio tape. While we hear reflections about the peculiarities of the film medium, Frampton himself manipulates the projector lens with a red gel and a pipe cleaner. The projector is addressed as the agency at the origin of whatever appears on the screen: 'The rectangle is generated by our performer, the projector, so whatever we devise must fit into it.'²⁴ From this basic observation, Frampton proceeds to a definition of film that is non-semantic and purely functional in nature: 'Then the art of making films consists of devising things to put in our projector.'²⁵ We are most familiar with the convention that these 'things' happen to be *film strips*, and that the world on screen shares a good many qualities with our everyday world. In Frampton's framework, just like in Gibson + Recoder's performances, we see what projection looks like if it is stripped from all representational concerns.

This in itself is not special. On the contrary, for a long time it has been part of the repertoire of avant-garde cinema to distance and free itself from the burden of diegesis or narrative. This is a subtractive process. What remains is a framework, a set of devices, a system of light, movement, colour, and, sometimes, sound. In this respect, John Hanhardt has described Gibson + Recoder's agenda as being to 'transform the entire filmmaking system into a dismantled found object, an object discovered as a lost language of image making'.²⁶

There is a simple observation that the projection performances depart from: every film projection is a performance. This was common sense in early cinema with its live narration and musical accompaniment, but it has quickly been marginalized in film history. The ideal of 'perfect projection', advocated in manuals and handbooks for projectionists in the 1910s and 1920s, requires projection to be entirely transparent and invisible. The projection booth is the black box within the black box and, in film-theoretical adaptations of Althusser, it was the place where ideology was produced. In the 'projection performances', on the contrary, our attention is directed to

24 Frampton, 'A Lecture', p. 126.

25 Ibid.

26 Hanhardt, p. 101.

nothing but projection. Things happen on screen, but all of it refers us back to the mechanical virtuoso performer behind our backs.

In their conceptual writing, Gibson + Recoder have elaborated the idea that 'projection performance' is a term that is in itself tautological: 'the concept of projection performance becomes a tautological concept in which "performance" merely doubles and thus foregrounds the specific functioning of the projective apparatus'.²⁷ They add: '[t]o work as an artist within a certain tautological understanding of projection-as-performance is precisely to perform and re-perform ad infinitum the already performed'.²⁸

It would need some time to disentangle the notion of 'tautology' operating here. I assume that it is closely linked to what I have mentioned in passing as the 'ironic' character of their work. Suffice to say that repeating a gesture, 'performing performance' as it were, establishes a difference and a distance, a reflexive gap. A gap that is at once the site of epistemology, irony, and the historiography of the film apparatus.

VIII.

At the risk of oversimplifying, I would like to describe the object-based and performance-based trajectories in Gibson + Recoder's work as two distinct strategies of circumscribing the media complex 'film' and the cultural technique of cinema. Both approaches are located at the fringes of what usually counts as cinema, but they use one of its indispensable components, the projector. They veer towards the formal rather than semantic aspects (a dichotomy that is far too simple to grasp their work), they are less about diegetic worlds than about the material world of the apparatus producing images. Quite obviously, these two aspects, the object-oriented one and the performative one, are linked to one another. *Light Spill* is not only a sculpture, but also a performance that involves both the projector and the gallery personnel. Likewise, we could more generally say that Gibson + Recoder's work is constantly focusing on 'a certain dialectical slippage between materiality and immateriality'.²⁹

The piece 'Untitled', which I mentioned at the beginning of this text, is the perfect example to subvert the dichotomy between black box and white cube and to point to the dialectical movement between the two.

27 Gibson and Recoder, 'Projecting Projection', p. 61.

28 Ibid.

29 Isabella.



Figure 15 Gibson + Recoder, *Atmos* (2006). 16mm projector, humidifier, glass crystal, hardware, dimensions variable. *Transparency*, November 14 – December 28, 2013, Robischon Gallery, Denver, Colorado. Photo: Courtesy of Robischon Gallery.

In different iterations between 2005 and 2008, this work has seamlessly migrated between gallery versions and cinema versions. Its installation version is called 'Atmos'. It comprises a 16mm projector placed in the gallery space, glass, and an electric humidifier. Since it only uses the projector as a light source and does not imply film material, it suits the temporal regime of the museum. The cinema version of the same title premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2007. It was shown in a movie theatre where all the seats had been removed. The setup is similar to the gallery version, but the projector is placed in the projection booth and the glass is the one separating the booth from the auditorium. The piece was 'screened' for approximately seven hours, accompanied by music composed by Daniel Menche.

In its shifting motion between cinema and museum, 'Untitled'/'Atmos' is maybe the most paradigmatic work produced by Gibson + Recoder. Yet on closer inspection, it turns out that all of their practice acts as a constant reminder of the manifold dialectics between object and event, humour and seriousness, materiality and immateriality, expansion and concentration, concreteness and ephemerality.

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About the Author

Volker Pantenburg is professor for Film Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. He has published widely on essayistic film and video practices, experimental cinema, and contemporary moving image installations. Book publications in English include *Farocki/Godard. Film as Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 2015), *Cinematographic Objects. Things and Operations* (Berlin: August 2015, Editor) and *Screen Dynamics. Mapping the Borders of Cinema* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum 2012; Co-Editor). In 2015, he co-founded the 'Harun Farocki Institut', a platform for researching Farocki's visual and discursive practice and supporting new projects that engage with the past, present and the future of image cultures.

5 The Magic of Shadows

Distancing and Exposure in William Kentridge's *More Sweetly Play the Dance*

Jill Murphy

Abstract

This chapter examines how William Kentridge develops his investigation of Plato's allegory in *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), unravelling it and testing the limits of his commitment to it. It is proposed that Kentridge's use of pre-cinematic techniques to conceal the image and keep it at a distance reflects Jean-Luc Nancy's understanding of the image as distanced and separate. Nancean thinking can work in conjunction with the artist's imagery and conceptual logic because it considers the personal and corporeal in conjunction with community and commonality, in other words, how we coexist in the world. The Nancean singular plural is visualised in Kentridge's winding procession in which singular and plural coexist in a spaced intimacy.

Keywords: Shadow play, Plato's cave, Jean-Luc Nancy, distancing, exposure

The magic and illusion involved in the creation of an image – moving or otherwise – is central to William Kentridge's work. Whether making a charcoal stroke or employing rudimentary animation and projection, Kentridge locates himself within the earliest forms of both mark-making and the moving image. Conceptually, much of his later work takes as its starting point Plato's allegory of the cave dwellers in conjunction with the ancient form of the procession. Lateral images of the procession date back to lines of beasts moving linearly across the caves of Lascaux and Chauvet, progressing, via Goya's processional paintings – which Kentridge cites as an influence – to contemporary images of lines of displaced people, travelling on foot to escape famine, oppression,

or war.¹ As Kentridge observes, '[t]he image of a procession of people pulling or carrying their baggage is both a contemporary and immediate image and one deeply rooted in our psyches'.² His use of primitive forms creates a continuum, a sort of Benjaminian now-time, as Huyssen suggests,³ that links, via the procession, the ancient art of shadow puppetry and the allegory of the cave – both dating back to the pre-Christian era – to pre-cinematic attempts to project and animate an image and to the magical illusion of early cinema.⁴ In this chapter, drawing on these elements in tandem with Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas on the image and the singular plural, I focus on the processional imagery of Kentridge's 2015 video installation *More Sweetly Play the Dance* and the distancing and exposure it evokes.

The pre-cinematic, shadow play, animation, procession, and Plato's cave are cornerstones not only of Kentridge's aesthetic but also of the related literature. Rosalind Krauss's important analysis of the artist's unique hybrid medium examines how it incorporates and is defined by the aforementioned aspects. While many scholars, including Krauss, have examined the role of the shadow in Kentridge's work, Andreas Huyssen sees it in terms of memory politics, particularly in relation to South African apartheid and the Holocaust.⁵ Huyssen also takes into account the relationship of the artist's work to early cinema, as does Harmon Siegel, who carefully elaborates on Kentridge's use of the cinematic and pre-cinematic. Likewise, Huyssen and others refer to the relevance of Plato's cave, inevitably so, as Kentridge himself consistently uses the allegory both as a touchstone to locate his work, and as a point of departure.

In relation to the procession, Joseph Leo Koerner traces its development from the torn figures of *Shadow Procession* (1999) to the computer-generated animation and live-action figures (which now coexist alongside cardboard cut-outs) of *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (MSPD), highlighting how progressive iterations of the procession all add an extra layer to Kentridge's thinking. One of these iterations is seen in *The Refusal of Time* (2012), a multi-media installation comprising several parts, one of which is a processional video

1 Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 25.

2 Ibid.

3 Huyssen, p. 77.

4 Plato (c. 427–347 BCE) wrote *The Republic*, in which 'The Simile of the Cave' features, in approximately 375 BCE. The exact origins of shadow theatre are unclear, however it has existed in some form in Asia, particularly India, China and Indonesia, since the first millennium BCE (see Reusch and Gotz).

5 See, for example, Ann McCoy on *The Head and the Load* (2018); Jane Taylor on the 2010 production *The Nose (Being Led by the Nose)*; and Ferdinand de Jong on *Black Box/Chambre Noir* (2005).

that combines cut-outs and human figures. *MSPD* continues to develop this process in that the procession of rough-hewn paper or cardboard figures has also, to a certain extent, become flesh in the form of actors. In doing so, Kentridge seems to extend his now-time to include more recent incarnations of the moving image, while constantly reasserting the connection to older forms. This is not only true in the use of his human figures in *MSPD* but also in his reference to the processional danse macabre of medieval times through Walt Disney's *Skeleton Dance* (1929), which he describes as 'one of the greatest moments of animation history' and visually cites in the form of a cardboard cut-out line of skeletons on a trolley.⁶ Kentridge's observation in this regard might usefully be considered in tandem with Sergei Eisenstein's identification of 'plasmaticness' in Disney's work, as cited by Krauss, which is described as 'an elasticness of form', a quality equally applicable to Kentridge's hybrid medium.⁷ In this elasticness of both time and medium, he sets up a tension between ancient forms and human experiences that still apply and resonate today. Even in the twenty-first century, as he states: 'human foot power is still the primary means of locomotion and we are still locked in the manual labour of individual bodies as a way of making the world', in an echo of the manual processes he employs and foregrounds.⁸

Rosalind Krauss, Joseph Leo Koerner, and Leora Maltz-Leca, among others, have identified that the communal, large-scale processional aspect inherent in the artist's work is accompanied by the individual movement of the artist in the more intimate setting of his studio as he creates his art. This walking laterally from one side of the screen to the other is another recurrent feature of Kentridge's work, as for example in *Journey to the Moon* (2003), his homage to Georges Méliès; he also discusses the process in detail in his Charles Eliot Norton Lecture Series given at Harvard University. Maltz-Leca relates this ambulatory thought – or what she terms 'walking/stalking' – to Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of the 'step of thought', a phenomenological outlook that relates walking to thinking. Employing this Nancean physicality of thought, she proceeds to examine what Nancy calls the 'weight at the heart of thought' in relation to Kentridge's walking/stalking.⁹ Elsewhere, she returns to the physicality of Kentridge's work in the Nancean idea of *exscription*, in which thought assumes materiality and weight by means of the drawn line (and, although less relevant here, the spoken word). This externalizing and

6 Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 17.

7 Krauss, pp. 14–16.

8 Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 25.

9 Maltz-Leca, p. 136.



Figure 16 William Kentridge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015). Courtesy of William Kentridge Studio and Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam. © William Kentridge Studio.

materialized thinking, as Maltz-Leca observes, is enacted by 'Kentridge's embodied epistemology of action'.¹⁰ Maltz-Leca is one of the few authors who teases out the connections between Kentridge's and Nancy's respective bodies of work in some detail, there being little sustained analysis of this relationship in the literature. Taking a somewhat different approach to the overlap between artist and philosopher than Maltz-Leca, I consider Kentridge's imagery in *MSPD* through the lens of Nancy's thinking on absence/presence, and the image as separate, or set apart. While Maltz-Leca examines the notion of distancing in Kentridge, she looks to Agamben and Derrida as theoretical support. I suggest instead a correspondence to Nancy's distinct-ness of the image: 'a thing that is not the thing'.¹¹ I explore how Kentridge's concealing and distancing of the imagery in *MSPD* is reflected by Nancy's understanding of the image as distanced and separate, rejecting notions of hapticity that may seem more readily associable with Kentridge's work.¹² I examine how Nancy's thinking allies to the artist's imagery and conceptual logic through its consideration of the personal and corporeal in conjunction with community and commonality – in other words, how we coexist in the world. The singular plural that defines Nancean thinking, I also suggest, is visualized in Kentridge's

¹⁰ Maltz-Leca, p. 249.

¹¹ Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, p. 2.

¹² This coincides with Joseph Koerner's view. He comments that while 'some have termed *More Sweetly Play the Dance* immersive [...] Kentridge's video installation does not aim to envelope you in a complete, consistent illusion'. 'Tummelplatz', p. 79.

winding procession in which singular and plural coexist in a spaced intimacy. Looking at these aspects of *MSPD* on the basis of Nancy's writings, I consider how it at once exposes its subjects and distances the viewer and discuss how Kentridge's dismantling and reassemblage of pre- and early cinematic tropes tests the boundaries of cinema's potentialities, both new and old.

Before proceeding to the analysis as outlined above, it is first necessary to examine how Kentridge unravels and tests the limits of his commitment to Plato's allegory in *MSPD* through the aforementioned pre-cinematic tropes. As observed by Krauss, Koerner, and Siegel, among others, the moving image in Kentridge's work is firmly located in the pre-history of cinema. His interest however is a studio-based one: quite simply, how does one make the image move without obvious recourse to a surfeit of technology? Kentridge has experimented with the zoetrope (in studio work for his Charles Eliot Norton Lecture Series at Harvard), the phenakistoscope (*Phenakistoscope*, 2000), the flip book (*Journey to the Moon*, 2003), anamorphic projection (in his exhibition *What Will Come*, 2007), and, of course, in the majority of his animated work, with stop-motion animation and cut-out silhouettes. In addition, his more recent processional work incorporates a panoramic format that stretches out laterally across the exhibition space, referencing that pre-cinematic form. What is the attraction of the pre-cinema for Kentridge? His fondness for Georges Méliès, the latter's magic theatre, and his role as film magician is an indication that the illusion and magic of pre- and early cinema is key. Kentridge seeks to recreate the delight that early viewers took in the animated image, not as incredulous ingénues but possessed with the knowledge of 'sophisticated urban pleasure seekers', as Tom Gunning makes clear; this early audience revelled in the 'trompe l'œil play of give-and-take, an obsessive desire to test the limits of an intellectual disavowal – I know, but yet I see'.¹³ Thus, as we shall see further on, Kentridge credits his audience with a similar agency, which is absent in Plato's cave dwellers, at once seeking to re-instil the novelty of witnessing the image in motion by foregrounding tropes of pre- and early cinema while employing digital technology as an infrastructure to facilitate his artistic vision. It is not therefore the naiveté of early audiences that makes Kentridge focus on these nascent stages of cinema; what interests him, rather, is the point where filmmaking is located in the interstice between magic and industrial production. As Siegel observes,

Kentridge [...] returns to a time when film was new [...] for he recognizes that, as Gunning writes, 'the cycle from wonder to habit need

13 Gunning, p. 117.

not run only one way. The [new] reception of [old] technology allows re-enchantment through aesthetic de-familiarization.' With his adaptations of proto-cinematic technologies like the phenakistoscope and the zoetrope, [...] and with his constant attempts to master the forms of illusion so intriguing to early filmmakers, Kentridge discovers the new in the old.¹⁴

As shall be discussed below, Kentridge uses this 'aesthetic defamiliarization' to create a distance and a distinction that obliges the viewer to reconsider the image and its subject and to find in them something both new and distinct.

More Sweetly Play the Dance (MSPD) was created specifically for the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam and shown there from spring through to late summer of 2015. In the EYE version of *MSPD*, eight screens, forming a 40m frieze, wrap three quarters way around the gallery, curling around the audience, obeying the dimensions of the gallery.¹⁵ The long, slightly circular format, suggestive of the panorama, facilitates the depiction of the lateral procession moving almost consistently from left to right, with the exception at the beginning of a dervish-style dancer, Dada Masilo, who appears unexpectedly on the right and whirls to the left, before the parade proper begins.¹⁶ Slightly larger-than-life-size figures parade in a chaotic march across the frieze, with a brief disconnection from screen to screen, to the accompanying music of a brass band. On first evidence, the experience seems an immersive one. However, through the use of black cut-out props and human actors shown in semi-silhouette, the screen appears to act as a barrier, seemingly separating the viewer from the action that takes place on it – or, from the viewer's perspective, behind it – thus creating an artifice that blurs the lines between shadow, silhouette, and projection.

The images portrayed on screen depict a line of people passing through a charcoal landscape in Kentridge's familiar palimpsestic style of drawing, photographing, erasing, and redrawing.¹⁷ People are carrying cut-out shapes, held above their heads, sometimes on sticks. They pull trolleys behind them, old carts, there is a clear sense of the displaced about the people who move through the landscape. We see patients attached to IV drips,

14 Siegel, p. 167.

15 Other versions of the work have been shown in Bad Rothenfelde, Germany (where it was projected on an external wall made of whitened blackthorn brushwood); Marian Goodman, London; LUMA Arles, France; and Cincinnati Art Gallery, Ohio.

16 Masilo previously worked with Kentridge on *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

17 Rosalind Krauss refers to the palimpsest as Kentridge's 'form of expression' (p. 23).

wheeling them along. None of the figures, however, are fully visible, while, as stated, not being merely silhouettes either. We see details and sometimes a hint of colour. This effect was achieved during filming by floodlighting the white screen behind the actors as they moved along a ramp in the studio. The overall effect is of ghostly figures moving through a bombed-out, apocalyptic landscape in a strange, compelling atmosphere that is a hybrid of desperation and elation.

The music of the African Immanuel Assemblies Brass Band, whose band members are silhouetted on screen, pervades *MSPD*. Indeed, sound is dominant but intentionally discordant, as Margaret E. Koerner points out; audible from outside the gallery, its slightly manic, relentless rhythm drawing the viewer in.¹⁸ Once inside, the viewer is all the more overwhelmed by sound because of the darkness of the gallery – the images on screen offering little illumination. The viewer feels more informed about the musicians than the other figures in that we can hear, if not their voices, the music they make. Thus, it seems that the musicians are present, and the music is live, another throwback to early cinema, while also forming part of the narrative/procession that unfolds on the screen. While the figures move across the screen in sporadic groups, the music remains constant.

Distancing

Rudimentary megaphones – another staple of the artist, as are the dove, the typewriter, the trolley, which appear as cut-outs – are scattered around the floor of the gallery heightening the feeling of aural hapticity that Kentridge engenders. For all the sonic sensations created, however, together with the sense of visual authenticity that almost convinces the viewer that the figures are proximate, they remain out of reach in the shadows, with the screen appearing to form the principal barrier between the viewer and the procession. Touch evidently is not possible. One might argue that this is true of any image. Here, however, no attempt is made to suggest that touch is possible. ‘Touching distance’ remains just that: a distance that cannot be traversed. Kentridge both tempts and taunts the viewer with what might be described as the absence of full vision.¹⁹

¹⁸ Margaret E. Koerner, p. 37.

¹⁹ In an interview with Kentridge, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev refers to how Kentridge distances landscape and the body by representing them as constructs, in addition to distancing the narrative through his hybrid style of drawing and pre-film techniques (p. 10).

Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy privileges touch as a distance or spacing; a gap that is unbridgeable but that helps us understand the image, which he terms 'distinct'.²⁰ As he writes, '[t]he distinct [...] remains at a distance: just at the distance of the touch, that is, barely touching the skin [...]. It approaches across a distance, but what it brings into such close proximity is distance'.²¹ Equally, Nancy understands the image as requiring shadow and distance to be fully comprehended, describing the artist as reaching 'towards the darkness that shares with the light its concealment from representation, toward a canvas and a motif that repeats [...] "Do not touch me"'; adding that '[i]t is essential that the image in general not be touched'.²² Nancy also speaks of the underside of the image, which we might think of as aligned to Kentridge's shadows:

Such is the image: it must be detached, placed outside and before one's eyes (it is therefore inseparable from a hidden surface, from which it cannot, as it were, be peeled away: the dark side of the picture, its underside or backside or even its weave or its subjectile), and it must be different from the thing. The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially.²³

Indeed, in addition to shadows, this could also be allied to the palimpsestic residue that lies underneath the image.²⁴

Laura Marks's theory of haptic visuality envisages a film being rendered almost tactile, 'as though one were touching a film with one's eyes'.²⁵ If this enhanced form of perception is made possible by the eyes operating 'like organs of touch', then, in *MSPD*, visual hapticity can be deemed to be denied by the almost complete silhouetting of the figures.²⁶ Here, the screen becomes an obstacle rather than an entry point. The profilmic action ostensibly takes place behind the screen, rather than on it. While the viewer is enveloped in the work, both aurally and physically, they are simultaneously refused visual access. At the core of the work is a visual withdrawal and distancing, working to contradict the viewer's initial perception of immersion.

20 Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 2.

21 Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, pp. 3–4.

22 Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere*, p. 49.

23 Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 2.

24 Krauss, pp. 21–24.

25 Marks, p. xi.

26 Marks, p. 162.

In terms of the cinema screen, Stanley Cavell also claims that it acts as a barrier or screen, in the sense of concealment:

The screen is not a support, not like a canvas; there is nothing to support, that way. It holds a projection, as light as light. A screen is a barrier. [...] It screens me from the world it holds – that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me – that is, screens its existence from me.²⁷

In Cavell's view, the materiality of the screen can be seen as something that both withholds and protects. Likewise, Kentridge, in relation to drawing practice, describes the sheet of paper as 'the membrane between us and the world' and, when that membrane becomes almost invisible, it creates a *trompe l'œil* in which 'we think we see the world directly'.²⁸ As in pre-cinematic projections, we can, if willing, be convinced of the illusion. In *MSPD*, we have the illusion of being immersed, albeit as bystanders, in the experience of the procession and we feel a 'being-in-common' with the processional figures; however, both body and image are withdrawn into the shadows using the screen as a membrane.²⁹ The *trompe l'œil*, as Kentridge describes it in relation to the page, is to convince us that the membrane doesn't exist. Here, the *trompe l'œil* is not to convince us that the screen exists (as it obviously does), but that it is acting as a membrane and to make us believe that the bodies before us exist not as projected image or shadow but as silhouette. This forms a contrast to pre-cinematic shadow theatre in which our sense is that the *representation* exists behind the screen, i.e. the cut-out image of the thing rather than the thing itself; thus, what the viewer sees on screen is a mediated representation of the object. In Kentridge's earlier shadow play work such as *Shadow Procession*, this also holds true in that the figures made of torn-out paper are two-dimensional and representational, although the viewer, suspending disbelief, can imagine them as the silhouettes of human figures. Before proceeding to analyse how the use of actors advances this practice, we must first consider the role of Plato's cave in Kentridge's work, most specifically in *MSPD*.

Plato's allegory of the cave dwellers, which has been frequently and broadly applied to the medium of film, imagines prisoners attached to a wall who believe the shadows projected on the wall of the cave by the flames of a nearby fire to be real. Plato's limits of light and shadow are, on

²⁷ Cavell, p. 24.

²⁸ Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 19.

²⁹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 55.

the one hand, the minimal images the prisoners can see with ‘their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads’;³⁰ and, on the other, the experience of one prisoner who emerges into the light, slowly becomes accustomed to it, and is eventually able to look at the sun and understand that ‘it produces the changing seasons and years and controls everything in the visible world, and is in a sense responsible for everything he and his fellow prisoners used to see’.³¹ Kentridge, however, challenges this notion of total enlightenment and speaks in praise of shadows, asking: ‘Can it work in reverse – someone blinded or bewildered by the brightness of the sun, unable to look at it, familiar with the everyday world and the surface, choosing to descend, not just for relief, but also for elucidation, to the world of shadows?’³² He further counters Plato’s certainty by asserting ‘a “belief” in uncertainty and ambiguity. A belief in the gaps between the words, the hesitation’, as Jaap Guldemonnd describes.³³ Indeed, Kentridge deems that this refusal of light can have a positive outcome on perception: ‘The very leanness of the illusion pushes us to complete the recognition – and this prompts an awareness of the activity, recognising in this activity our agency in seeing, and our agency in apprehending the world.’³⁴ Therefore, in contrast to Plato, Kentridge places both his limits within the realm of shadows: one, like Plato’s, the full shadow on the cave wall, as represented by the cut-outs in *MSPD*. The other, however, is formed according to Homi K. Bhabha, where the ‘double-edged payoff between projection and perception’ can best take place.³⁵ The human actors in *MSPD* represent a limit of ideal ‘leanness of shadows’, where the image can be best apprehended, where the work of the artist and the work of the viewer and their ‘agency in apprehending the world’ are balanced,³⁶ almost in contact, ‘aware of the gap between the object and its representation [...], the gap we fill in, in the shift from the monochromatic shadow to the color of the object, from its flatness to its depth and heft’.³⁷

30 Plato, p. 241.

31 Plato, p. 243.

32 Kentridge, ‘In Praise of Shadows’, p. 71.

33 Guldemonnd, ‘More Sweetly’, p. 9. Huyssen, discussing *Shadow Procession* (1999), also looks at this passage in Plato in relation to Kentridge’s Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. His interest lies most particularly in how Kentridge sees ‘a pedagogical and epistemological value’ in these shadows that are discounted by Plato (pp. 79–80).

34 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 29.

35 Bhabha, Introduction, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures.

36 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 29.

37 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 31.



Figure 17 William Kentridge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015). Courtesy of William Kentridge Studio and Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam. © William Kentridge Studio.

The 'leanness' at stake in *MSPD* seeks a different limit than Plato's two-dimensional binary simplicity of shadow and light. Plato's cave wall represents the image at its most basic, untextured, monochrome, and two-dimensional, but still an image; in this respect, Kentridge and Plato concur. While Plato privileges the sun as the source of all enlightenment, the fire that burns in the caves also provides light – in Kentridge's opinion sufficient to glean the image, to make the viewer's eye and mind do enough work to apprehend it. Thus, in terms of the image, the idea of a total enlightenment both literally and metaphorically, as Plato envisages, is not desirable. Rather, the image is best understood in terms of a spacing or withdrawal, in accordance with Nancy or, in Kentridge's case, as a retreat into the shadows to the optimal point of payoff between projection and perception, to paraphrase Bhabha.

In seeking a limit at which the viewer can best apprehend the image, Kentridge moves towards the light from the ultimate leanness of complete shadow. Thus the figures in *MSPD* convey greater visual information than in previous shadow play works such as *Shadow Procession*. In the earlier work, the processional figures were created by tearing up black paper, assembling the torn pieces into human shape, and articulating them with simple metal pins. As stated above, the figures' two-dimensionality is evident. In *MSPD*, while the cut-outs held by the figures also fulfil this purpose, the human actors wear costumes made out of plastic, such that there is:

a sense of an enveloping shell around the figures. There is a question of the presence or the absence of the figures, how much they are translated

into shadows [...] to keep a sense of a thickness of figure but to allow them to float in and out of being silhouettes against the wall.³⁸

The slight emergence of the figures from the shadows allows the viewer to see that they are real people, with solidity, some colour, some discernible texture. This is quite deliberate on Kentridge's part, a distancing from the cave allegory:

Plato writes about the shadows of things cast up against the wall. But in the procession we are working with silhouettes of figures. If one takes all light off the actors and puts all the light on the back wall, they appear as shadows – completely without substance, a trace of something else. But if we put a side light at the end of the long walkway, traces of colour in their costumes emerge. The figures are more than shadows.³⁹

By revealing traces of colour and light in the procession's figures, Kentridge contradicts their purely allegorical status and emphasizes that they are more than merely a reimagined version of Plato's cave dwellers. In choosing to represent them in pre-cinematic terms of shadow and circularity, he highlights their connection to age-old traditions – and traumas – that have been familiar to humanity for millennia and that, paradoxically, make the viewer engage and work to understand the image, more so perhaps than if presented in a standard digital HD format. The ideal point between projection and perception creates an interstice or touching distance, within which the image can be best understood. Kentridge observes that the process of making sense – the apprehension or grasping of the image – must be pushed 'beyond one's own boundaries, onto the drawing, the film, the essay, to find the mediated space between "it is" and "it seems to me"'.⁴⁰ More generally, it is clear that, despite availing of twenty-first century digital technology in *MSPD*, Kentridge's formal preference for identifying this point is located squarely in the mechanisms of pre- and early cinema. Twenty-first century viewers, subject to a proliferation of images, are aware – even more so than their nineteenth-century counterparts – that the magic of artifice does not present, as Nancy says, 'the thing itself', but rather the Nancean image, which cannot be touched and exists across the gap or space where 'our

38 Kentridge, *MSPD*, p. 35.

39 Ibid.

40 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 25.

moving towards the image' occurs.⁴¹ Importantly, Kentridge confers great agency on the viewer in another point of departure from Plato's allegory.

The use of the cave allegory in relation to cinema ultimately fails in this respect, as Kentridge's work highlights, because cinema-goers – from Gunning's 'sophisticated urban pleasure-seekers' of the nineteenth century to twenty-first century viewers – understand the illusion and, indeed, the magic of an image. Rather than being led out of the cave, they are willing to be led back into the shadows, and do so, in contrast to Plato's prisoners, with great awareness of both conditions – light (as represented by outside the cave) and shadow (inside the cave). Kentridge chooses shadow and encourages the audience to do so too in order to experience the magic and illusion of the semi-darkness and, as stated at the outset, to regain that sense of illusion and magic of pre- and early cinema. As he observes, the pleasure of the *trompe l'œil* is that of being tricked and not tricked at the same time, the pleasure of our own self-deception.⁴² Through the use of these tropes that weave back through the pre-cinematic era of the nineteenth century to Plato's era, Kentridge reintroduces the viewer to the distinctness and separateness of the image.

Exposure

Paradoxically, in light of the distancing of the viewer and the ostensible barrier to touch that Kentridge makes of the screen, the figures in *MSPD* are hopelessly exposed. Although they are not fully visible and appear to be screened, or out of reach of the viewer, we see them dragging trolleys and belongings behind them; in particular, we see the march of the sick, carrying their drips with them. William Kentridge has said that these figures are a response to the Ebola crisis of 2014.⁴³ Thus the plastic in which some of the figures are wrapped becomes a further protective membrane, echoing the media images of health workers leading Ebola patients in the final stages of catastrophic illness. In addition, the caravan of human figures, marginalized and at their limit, albeit accompanied by musicians, dancers, and saints, references refugees fleeing Rwanda, Sudan, and the Balkans.⁴⁴ Indeed, while Kentridge's procession predates Europe's most recent refugee crisis, it also strikingly prefigures it.

41 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 19.

42 Ibid.

43 Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 47

44 See Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 25.

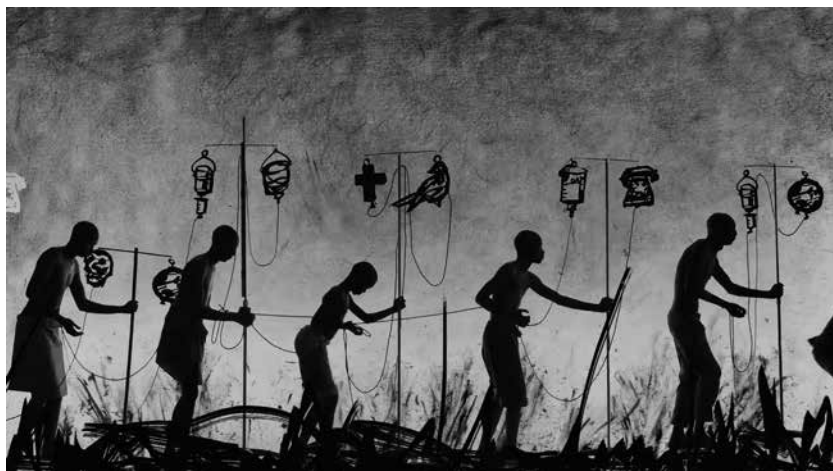


Figure 18 William Kentridge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015). Courtesy of William Kentridge Studio and Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam. © William Kentridge Studio.

The human tickertape of deprivation, misery, and, to a certain extent, a manic hysteria moves through the landscape. While the overriding atmosphere is actually one of resilience – Kentridge in this regard refers to the ‘talismans of hope’ represented by cut-outs of familiar, reassuring objects: telephones, birds, baths, human heads, and even planet Earth – these figures remain exposed in public spaces, mimicking the lived experience of refugees who are suddenly unprotected by the traditional symbols of security such as house and home.⁴⁵ They are at their most vulnerable – as already stated, attached to drips or pulling enormous trolleys behind them – an ‘informal army of desperate people’, as Kentridge describes them.⁴⁶

These bodies suffer real exposure. Around them the dance carries on, relentless and unmoved, the relative pomp and ceremony of the uniforms of the brass band members emphasizing further the state of undress and exposure of the Ebola patients. They move through the landscape holding their drips, the attached cut-outs of household objects highlighting how their interiority has abruptly transformed into a violent exteriority. This exposure draws empathy and understanding for these bodies that are screened and set apart: we are aware of them in their rawest state, but,

45 Kentridge, ‘If We Ever Get to Heaven’, p. 47.

46 Kentridge, ‘If We Ever Get to Heaven’, p. 29. The figures are modelled on recycling trolley pullers in Johannesburg who wear ‘plastic garbage bags [...] to keep out the rain at night and to give some measure of protection against the cold’. Kentridge, ‘If We Ever Get to Heaven’, p. 35.

again, through the shadow play of pre-cinema, Kentridge protects them, showing just enough for us to know that these bodies certainly exist. The openness and separateness of the body, its vulnerability and exposure, as explored by Nancy in *Corpus* (which includes a philosophical reflection on his own heart transplant in the closing essay, 'The Intruder') are encapsulated here by the bodies seemingly protected by the membrane of the screen but exposed, naked and literally opened to allow the IV drip penetrate their skin but not reachable by us, still intact in their singularity.

While emphasizing the importance of being open to the world and in the world, Nancy makes it clear that there is not a unified community at the heart of existence. Indeed, what gives existence its richness is our being singular plural – in other words the plurality of singularity.⁴⁷ In relation to community, he states:

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other.⁴⁸

Although they retain their separateness and distance, bodies live in the world adjacent to each other – their touching distance being the distance that separates them. Kentridge effectively visualizes this by what he calls the 'inventory of human form' in the spaced intimacy of all his procession making.

This division or *partage*, as Nancy describes, highlights the distinction of the image. Discussing a literary image of a girl standing on the threshold of a door, Nancy outlines the perspective of the reader, which seems to encapsulate the viewer's experience of *MSPD*, as being

on the very line that divides the outside and the inside, light and shadow, life and art, whose division [*partage*] is at that moment traced by something that makes us cross it without eliminating it (the distinction): a world that we enter while remaining before it, and that thus offers itself fully for what it is, a *world*.⁴⁹

47 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 28–47.

48 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 5.

49 Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 5.

By placing us on a similar threshold where we apprehend the image, Kentridge makes us both regard and have regard, in terms of respect, for the image and its subject. Nancy comments that 'looking is regarding and consequently *respecting*. The word *respect* also has to do with regard (*respicere*) [...]. A rightful look is respectful of the real that it beholds, that is to say it is attentive and openly attending to the very power of the real and its absolute exteriority'.⁵⁰

This brings us to another aspect of Kentridge's interpretation of Plato's allegory. Kentridge considers Plato's instinct to obliterate with light a power-based one that links to authoritarianism, control, colonialism, and finally capitalism.⁵¹ In this regard, he echoes Kara Walker, an artist who also works with animated cut-outs and whose subject matter deals with historical racism in the southern states of the US. Walker tells how, questioning her need to master oil painting, she realized, as a woman of colour, how she associated the form 'with a kind of power, a masculine power, that goes hand in hand with discovering new worlds and colonizing them', and chose instead to situate her work in the shadows, in the form of the cut-out and silhouette, whose dialectic of positive and negative and the ability to see both sides, appealed to her.⁵² We might extend this analogy of the egalitarianism of the silhouette further by recalling the popular appeal of shadow- and silhouette-based forms in pre-cinematic entertainment. Thus, the use of shadow or semi-shadow facilitates the reconsideration of a time when magic existed in the image, but also encourages the consideration – in its dual meanings of both thinking and mindfulness – of collective trauma and struggle. The rightful or respectful look for Kentridge involves a measured exposure to both image and, consequently, subject. Thus his chosen form seems here not only to seek the distinct and the magical but also the democratic.

Bhabha describes how the figures in *MSPD* become 'the ghost of the image', being tantalizingly close but always out of reach, like dreams or ghosts.⁵³ The image, like the figures, is simultaneously exposed and protected – Kentridge instinctively appears to search for a point where these two distinct phenomena might almost come into contact. At its core, Plato's cave allegory is also a question of degrees of exposure of the image – or exposure of the cave dwellers to the image. Kentridge, in his reading of the allegory,

50 Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, 38. Emphasis in the original.

51 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, pp. 26–27.

52 Kara Walker, 'Kara Walker at the MAC Belfast 2014'.

53 Bhabha, 'The Rights of Strangers', p. 130.

seeks his own limit, a limit where the image can be most fully understood. This is not equivalent to where the image is clearest or presented in greatest detail; rather, where the limit between the visual information provided and the work that the viewer has to do in looking and understanding reaches a point of maximum symbiosis. This is a point where they are at their closest but still spaced, in order to create that maximum tension or pressure that will allow the image to pull and draw, as Nancy describes.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The image cannot be touched in Nancean terms or, in Kentridge's thinking, cannot be fully brought into light. By placing the image in shadow but still allowing its three-dimensional form and solidity to be seen, Kentridge 'screens' the image, as Cavell describes.⁵⁵ Thus, in terms of Nancy's spacing and distance, he convinces the viewer of the separateness of the figures in *MSPD* while making us aware of our 'being-with' them in the world. In contrast to the pioneering efforts of pre-cinematic practitioners, Kentridge, working in the twenty-first century with all the technological potential of digital media, actively chooses to limit the visual availability of his images, effectively communicating to the viewer that, while they can feel immersed in the experience of the marginalized and the vulnerable represented on the screen, they cannot live or participate in that experience. The screen acts as a protective membrane but also forms a distancing device that reminds the viewer that the figures we see are distinct. In doing so, he represents what he describes as the 'muchness of the people in the world'.⁵⁶ And in this spacing, the viewer is afforded the opportunity to watch the world, and 'the strange familiarity of all the worlds' within it, unfold.⁵⁷ In achieving this by referring to the tropes of early cinema and pre-cinema, Kentridge obliges the viewer to look with fresh eyes, as if we were encountering the moving image for the first time, not as Plato's prisoners who are without agency, but as willing participants in the illusion, at once aware and unconscious of the artifice involved, and thereby better able to apprehend the reality of what we perceive.

54 Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 4

55 Cavell, p. 24.

56 Kentridge, 'If We Ever Get to Heaven', p. 25.

57 Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, p. 111.

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About the Author

Jill Murphy is an independent scholar. Her research interests focus on the relationship between film and art history, particularly as regards human figuration. She has published articles, book chapters, translations, and reviews in various journals and edited collections and is an editor and Secretary of the Editorial Board of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.

6 Douglas Gordon and the Gallery of the Mind

Sarah Cooper

Abstract

Made in collaboration with Rufus Wainwright after the loss of his mother, Douglas Gordon's *Phantom* (2011) engages gallery-goers in an embodied perceptual experience of the darkness of grief, which is felt as well as seen. And yet the titular phantom points to what ghosts embodied vision, making space for images of the mind's eye. Lost love, mourned but also conjured back through memory, dream, or imagination, extends beyond the personal to include a bygone era of classical film. *Phantom* draws from and returns us to cinema, expanding the experience of the moving image through its insistence upon the importance of both what is present or visible in the gallery space and what exists in the liminal state of mental vision.

Keywords: Douglas Gordon, *Phantom*, perception, mental image, vision, blindness

'When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see'¹

The blink of an eye is among the quickest of anatomical movements: the lids descend and rise without challenging the persistence of vision. Slow this motion down considerably, though, and that briefest of disruptions to visual perception becomes more remarkable. This is precisely what Douglas Gordon does in his installation *Phantom* (2011), which features a human eye, filmed in close-up and in extreme slow motion, looking out from a screen that bisects the stage on which it is positioned and illuminates the darkened room. The eye is at once familiar and strange: it is heavily kohl-rimmed

¹ Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 43', p. 91.

with thick false lashes, moving but only just, appearing as a black oval that opens and closes within alabaster skin. Occasionally, a tear wells, swirls, and rolls around and down: the darkness of the eye and the room is that of intense sadness, which the plaintive music of a male voice and piano fuels and palliates. The voice and piano playing are those of musician Rufus Wainwright, Gordon's collaborator on this piece and the person to whom the made-up eye belongs. The music is from the album *All Days are Nights*, released after the death of his mother, and the sorrow is caused by grief. Wainwright borrows the album title from Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 43' in which days are nights in the absence of seeing his love, whereas nights become days when his love appears in his dreams. Gordon and Wainwright are gesturing here towards what might be seen with one's eyes closed, remembered or imagined as a phantom presence in the light of the mind. There is more to this installation than meets the eye, then, and indeed more to this artwork than the on-screen eye.

My opening lines have placed emphasis on the cinematic aspects of this gallery installation: the darkness of the room, a screen on which a moving image appears, and emotive music suggest conditions closer to the black box than the white cube, albeit without any of the other familiar trappings of a cinema auditorium space. Moreover, the camera that Gordon used to film the eye lends its name to the entire piece, the 'Phantom' enabling him to shoot slow motion in real time at speeds of two thousand frames per second. But Gordon's practice positions the moving image in a discursive space that lies between the black box and the white cube, and this is by virtue of its relation to other elements within the gallery room.² A black Steinway piano sits alongside the burnt debris of another Steinway piano on the stage in front of the screen, and a monitor, placed on the floor facing upwards at some distance from the stage, shows images of a piano burning when the main screen image disappears.³ The grieving eye and music are thus not

2 See Uroskie. In his work on expanded cinema and post-war art of the 1950s and 1960s, Uroskie considers the novel discursive and institutional location of works that lie between the black box of cinema and the white cube of gallery space. My interest in the 'in-between' space of Gordon's distinctive and more recent work lies in its implications for expanding the experience of moving images.

3 The set-up that I am describing is that of the exhibition of *Phantom* at the Gagosian New York, 11 December 2014 to 17 January 2015. The Gagosian press release lists its staple elements as 'a stage, a screen, a burnt Steinway piano, a black Steinway piano and a monitor, dimensions variable'. The piano stool visible in the images accompanying this chapter does not feature in every exhibition of the piece. Exhibited originally in 2011, the images in *Phantom* of piano burning pre-empt Gordon's *The End of Civilisation* (2012) in which a grand piano, one of the potent symbols of western civilization, is set alight and filmed.



DOUGLAS GORDON: *Phantom* December 11, 2014 – January 17, 2015

GAGOSIAN GALLERY 821 PARK AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021

Figure 19 Douglas Gordon, *Phantom* (2011). © Studio lost but found / DACS 2020 / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2018. Photo Robert McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.



DOUGLAS GORDON: *Phantom* December 11, 2014 – January 17, 2015

GAGOSIAN GALLERY 821 PARK AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021

Figure 20 Douglas Gordon, *Phantom* (2011). © Studio lost but found / DACS 2020 / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2018. Photo Robert McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

the only conveyors of the devastating loss, which stretches well beyond the cinematic screen and links the different facets of the installation. Moving in and around this space engages gallery-goers in an embodied perceptual

experience of the darkness of grief, which is felt as well as seen. And yet, the titular phantom points to what ghosts embodied vision, making space for images of the mind's eye. While the gallery is the locus of all of the artworks that I discuss here – and I will range more widely across Gordon's oeuvre before returning to *Phantom* – the dynamics of being part of and moving through that space will forge a relation between eye and mind that will lead us from the installation space back to the cinema, connecting gallery-goers to spectators in the process.

Between Eye and Mind

Across a number of Gordon's artworks, the human eye is a central feature, although it is not its ability to see that interests him. Gordon's *100 Blind Stars* series (2002), for example, is a collection of individual black-and-white publicity shots of mid-twentieth-century film stars with their eyes replaced by black, white, or mirrored surfaces. The windows to the soul are covered over in these images to reflect the beholder or just reveal blankness. There is an eeriness to these figures who are so recognizable in their posed and poised glamour and yet alienating in the absence of eyes that should look back or look on. The removal of their gaze questions that of the viewer or produces an encounter with a void. For art historian James Elkins, seeing has blindness as its constant accompaniment, and these still-life companions on gallery walls seem a reminder of this.⁴ Furthering this removal of the stars' eyes, the series *Self-Portrait of You + Me, After the Factory* (2007) burns out eyes and sections of the face of portraits by Andy Warhol and frames them, leaving smoky, charred, jagged edges, with the gaps filled by mirrors. The ocular aggression chimes with a long avant-garde tradition that has a corollary in cinema too, exemplified arrestingly in the opening sequence of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1929) through the slicing of a woman's eye with a razor. Less violently, and tied to the form of (analogue) film, the necessity of temporary blindness for all sight that film scholar William Brown speaks of with reference to the black leader that sits between frames, lies at the very heart of cinema.⁵ Here, though, the apparent assault on sight is a jolt for the gallery visitor to see and be seen differently, as part of the images they look at. In Gordon's mirrored revisioning of star/self-portraiture, portraits reflect in other portraits as other walls of

4 Elkins, p. 13.

5 W. Brown, p. 22.

the gallery do, as do the onlookers. His images point not only to a levelling of difference between the stars and the gallery-goers, or the 'you' and 'me' of the other portrait series, but also to a hinterland of sight brought to light through ambulatory encounters with the artworks. In the first instance, this engagement relies on the dichotomy of what is seen and not seen, but moving beyond what is seen with the eyes involves a journey into the mind's eye. The relation to what lies out of sight but not out of mind as one moves through a space and navigates its objects recalls but also opens up some notable twentieth-century philosophical accounts of embodied experience.

In the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, differing elaborations of the phenomenology of perception in the visible world nonetheless broach a relation to what cannot be seen, and it is a cube that is one of the emblematic objects for their explorations.⁶ Whereas the white cube of the gallery space – like the black box of cinema – is a hollow space that people enter, the cube of the philosophers' accounts is a solid, three-dimensional object. For Merleau-Ponty it is by conceiving of his body as a mobile object that he is able to interpret perception and construct the cube whose sides are not visible to him without moving around it.⁷ Merleau-Ponty does not rule out mental visualization in his constitution of the cube, it is just that the possibility of carrying out this embodied mental activity for him relies upon knowing that the same embodied subject can view successively from various positions, and the latter knowledge of experience is where he places his emphasis in his own phenomenology of perception.⁸ For Sartre too the perception of a cube, like other objects, signifies '[t]he necessity of *making a tour* of objects, of waiting, as Bergson said, until the "sugar dissolves".⁹ Perception involves moving through space in time around such an object. Although Sartre locates the mental image "on the side of" perception' and aligns it with the learning activity of apprenticeship, rather than with thought and knowledge, he writes of the simultaneity of seeing everything at once when one imagines an object, contrasting this with perception: 'If you turn a cube-image in thought to amuse yourself, if you pretend that it presents its various faces to you, then you will not be more advanced at the end of the operation: you will not have learned anything'.¹⁰ More recent neuro-scientific studies of mental rotation – of

6 Sartre, p. 9; Merleau-Ponty, pp. 235–239 and pp. 306–308.

7 Merleau-Ponty, p. 236.

8 Merleau-Ponty, p. 235.

9 Sartre, p. 8 (emphasis in the original).

10 Sartre, p. 9.

cubes, among other objects, which one imagines and turns in the mind – are pre-empted here but dismissed as fun and make-believe.¹¹ What was real and necessary in perception (making the tour around the cube in space and time) is only pretend for Sartre in the mind since the mental image is always already immediate and complete. By transporting Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's thinking into the experience of walking through gallery space and re-entering the (white) cube now, rather than going around a shrunken version of its outside, my interest lies in asking how Gordon's work might appeal to perception and the mental images of memory and imagination in equal measure, rather than privileging perception as these philosophical accounts do. An answer to this question can be glimpsed if we continue to look at Gordon's treatment of eyes.

In *Self-Portrait of You + Me (Signoret)* (2008), holes in a photograph of French actor Simone Signoret's face where her eyes once were suggest the possibility of seeing through her eyes, from behind, and a mirror reflects viewers as they might be seen. When I look at her image and stare into her absent eyes, gazing at the mirror that reflects me in fragmented fashion, I see from behind and in front of Signoret perceptually but also imaginatively. A spatialization of the image occurs not simply because it is located in gallery space, but because it obtains fullness and gains dimensions beyond its ostensible flatness thanks to a mental space that is given external form. That this space is one filled with visual images is clear from the reflective logic of the set-up, and the viewer's imagination accompanies perception to flesh this out. Moving through any gallery is clearly an embodied experience and imagining what lies beyond the immediate perceptual space is just as bound up with bodily memory, as Merleau-Ponty would concur, especially if the route through the gallery is repeated and people get to know what is on the other side of the walls.¹² Yet there are blind spots, and these are the spaces for the imagination, scored into Gordon's haunting images and resonant with a broader inscription of the relation between perception and imagination in the traversal of space. On the basis of this relation between perception and mental images of imagination, as well as memory, the experience of being in and walking through the gallery can be related to the specific encounter with the moving image within this space. Catherine Elwes talks of moving-image installations embodying the 'perceptual doubleness' of

11 For a classic discussion of studies in mental rotation, see Kosslyn.

12 Gordon's Melbourne exhibition *The Only Way Out is the Only Way In*, 31 May to 3 August 2014, was a direct reflection on such movement through the gallery, but this time through a labyrinthine space in which one can get lost. See Gordon, 'Artist Interview at ACCA'.

the spectator able to 'entertain two realities simultaneously'.¹³ The viewing of moving images in the gallery may be fleeting or sustained, but in either case it is possible to open out further the already complex perceptual field.

Philosopher Elie During has theorized what he terms the constitutive virtual volume of the moving image through recourse to the work of artist-filmmakers who take viewers behind and around what are essentially flat images on screen and that are exhibited in gallery spaces. For During, Canadian artist-filmmaker Mark Lewis offers salient examples in which viewers encounter this virtual voluminosity. Distinct from discussions of depth in relation to the filmic image, the volume image permits movement around the images to their other side. During notes that 'the back [...] is neither the material reverse side of the screen [...] nor the off-screen,' and argues further that it is 'less material than the actual setting of the screen and more literal than the imaginary field extending off-screen'.¹⁴ The motion behind and around images enacted through Lewis's works can be compared with movement through a gallery space and around its many objects in which perception from the other side of the image or the object is made possible. It is indeed such movement upon which Gordon's aforementioned gallery work also reflects but, as we have observed, the emphasis is less on perceiving objects from all sides in this case than on perceiving what is seen, in addition to imagining or remembering what is not.¹⁵ In the encounter with Gordon's work, the virtual volume of the moving image is not only felt or seen but appeals to mental visualization too. Gordon recognizes the importance of the mental images that his own film and video installations stimulate, and the virtual volume of the moving image emerges in his case between the on-screen and the mental space.

When interviewed about the first presentation of the *Feature Film* (1999) video installation in London for which Gordon made a film but used an existing piece of music from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), he said: 'While you might be looking at my *Feature Film*, you're always conscious that this is music from another film [...] there's an image in front of your eyes and

13 Elwes, p. 2.

14 Elie During, 'Materiality of the Image'.

15 My focus on mental images here is based on something always being out of view, but there is a link nevertheless to the three-dimensionality of film installation that Erika Balsom refers to when discussing the 'sculptural quality' of Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) (Balsom, p. 139). Gordon's remake of the Hitchcock classic was projected without sound on a translucent screen that showed images on both sides, making it an object that gallery-goers could walk around. The later installation *Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake)* (1997) also uses a transparent screen.

an image inside your head'.¹⁶ This interest in the images in one's head in addition to those in front of one's eyes stretches into the film collaboration with artist Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006). In the 'Making Of' documentary, Parreno notes that one of their aims was to set off the imaginary state of daydreaming, affirming: '[t]he most beautiful images ultimately are those that people have in their head'.¹⁷ This returns us to Gordon's collaboration with Wainwright in *Phantom* and echoes through Wainwright's debt to Shakespeare in 'Sonnet 43' that proclaims the superiority of the closed eyes of the night for seeing his love. In the expansive mental space of dreams or daydreams, the absent loved one can reappear – the material reality is one of loss, destruction, and grieving but the songs join with a history of virtual presence longed for and re-found in the images of the mind.

Through Wainwright's Shakespearean reference, the desired encounter with the mentally expanded virtual volume of the on-screen image in *Phantom* is very explicit from the outset. Furthermore, *Phantom* alludes to particular classical film images – in addition to art historical and literary references – all of which are invisible to the viewing eye if not to the mind's eye and which will not necessarily form part of the experience of all visitors, even the ardent cinephile. The point nonetheless of working through *Phantom's* specific allusions in what follows is to emphasize the strong relationship that this artwork establishes between the gallery space and that space behind the eyes when they 'most wink' – to quote 'Sonnet 43' – that links the realm of dreams to the world of memory and imagination. Regardless of what individual gallery-goers may actually see and feel, remember and imagine as they walk through or pause within this installation, the references that inform it have cinema at their heart, constituting the virtual volume of the barely moving image of Wainwright's tearful eye, and expanding cinematic vision.

Phantom Images

The gallery space of *Phantom* is replete with ghosts. The material presence of the charred aftermath of one burnt Steinway piano alongside another that remains intact objectifies the more specific grieving process evoked

16 Gordon quoted in K. Brown, p. 94.

17 Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, 'Making Of' Documentary, on Artificial Eye DVD, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*.

by the slow motion of Wainwright's crying eye and the mournful song, lending it spatial form and summoning a sculptural and painterly legacy that it also challenges. The pianos perform a secular reworking of the figure of the Pietà through which the positions of mother and son are exchanged. The tragic scene of Christian art in which Mary cradles the lifeless body of her son is reversed: Wainwright grieves the loss of his mother in his vocals and piano music as the physical object of the silent and still grand piano hovers over its own ruined kin. It is the mother who has died in this case, and the son who is consumed and destroyed by the occurrence. The cycle of the installation that moves through on-screen visuals of the eye to the extinction of this image and the coming to life of the burning images on the monitor at the feet of gallery-goers is complicit with this death and destruction, and yet the fact that everything will begin again suggests rebirth too. Returning to life after the death of his mother, Wainwright's revival is not however akin to the resurrection. Occupying the position that the Madonna traditionally grieves from, rather than that of the son, involves the crossing of genders. This aspect of the transformation of art-historical religious heritage relates to silent cinema history through the tragedy and melodrama of the tearful on-screen eye.

The wrecked scene of the piano on the jagged-edged stage in front of the screen hints that the tears may also be for a bygone classical film era in which the piano would accompany the black-and-white images of silent films. Unlike several of Gordon's film and video installations that work with classical cinema and remake it for gallery exhibition, the on-screen images of *Phantom* do not derive from experimentation with found footage. But the estranged, slowly moving filmed eye, viewed in close-up yet writ large, relates to the eyes of classical cinema from the silent films of the 1920s to the sound era of the 1940s. Gordon speaks in interview of what he was aiming for in his filming of Wainwright's eye: the tears of *Phantom* hark back to those of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928).¹⁸ In this film, Renée Maria Falconetti's eyes are unadorned as they cry and her face tells the silent black-and-white tale of Joan's journey to martyrdom. The classical period is famed for its valorization of the close-up and this film is the apotheosis of this formal element. The on-screen eye of *Phantom* bonds the grieving male singer to the invisible images of the Catholic martyr through the extreme close-up of the eye alone and the slowing down of the passage of tears. But the charcoaled shading adds a further virtual filmic layer

18 Gordon, Artist Interview Series, *Phantom*.

and shifts the points of reference from the sacred to the profane. Gordon draws on Wainwright's own passions and identifications in this regard, and the singer's love of the silent film star Louise Brooks is also incarnated in the eye along with the music that saturates the space of the installation. Dreyer's filmic passion thereby undergoes a similar secularization to the art-historical figure of the Pietà.

The subtitle of the album composed upon the death of Wainwright's mother is 'Songs for Lulu', a tribute to the figure Louise Brooks plays in G. W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*, 1929). The hedonistic seductress Lulu, murdered by Jack the Ripper at the end of the film, is a tragic heroine of a different order from the deeply religious Joan who was burned at the stake but she still communes with death from her own silent-film context of the late 1920s. Lulu's blackened eyes are the source of Joan's tears in Gordon's framing of Wainwright's grief, which also draws from the singer's own performances. When Wainwright toured with *All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu*, he would dress up in a feathered black cape and heavy black eye makeup in the first half of the concert when he would perform all of the songs from the album in order. Wainwright confesses to wanting to be Brooks.¹⁹ He speaks of Lulu as 'very much a spirit or a phantom or a ghost who [*sic*] I channel or am trying to channel away from', noting that she represents his dark side.²⁰ When he dresses as Lulu he embraces this other self, and it is this duality that speaks to Wainwright-Lulu's presence in this collaboration with Gordon too.²¹ Wainwright's gender-crossing identification with Lulu offers a counterpoint to the virginal Joan – and Mary – and *Phantom* deconstructs conventional oppositions – day-night, sacred-profane, male-female – through the multilayered spatial and imagistic dialogue between what can and cannot be seen.

Prior to *Phantom*, Gordon made the visuals for Wainwright's tour in 2010, to which the installation also alludes.²² The single eye becomes multiplied across the screen, each of the eyes a different size as a result of a play of distance, opening and closing just as slowly but at different times. The surrounding for the many eyes turns totally black, and they successively open up or close to seal the darkness. The many eyes call forth a further

19 Wainwright quoted in Gladysz.

20 Wainwright quoted in Lyndal Martin.

21 Gordon's fascination with duality in his work is signalled frequently through his use of mirrors or split and dual-sided screens. In the *Phantom* installation at the 19th Biennale of Sydney, 21 March to 9 June 2014, mirrors feature, even though other staple components remain the same.

22 Gordon, 'Making Eyes'.

DOUGLAS GORDON: *Phantom* December 11, 2014 – January 17, 2015

GAGOSIAN GALLERY 821 PARK AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021

Figure 21 Douglas Gordon, *Phantom* (2011). © Studio lost but found / DACS 2020 / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2018. Photo Robert McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

cinematic reference point that echoes distantly the swapping of day for night in Shakespeare and Wainwright's desire. The virtual volume lent to the on-screen image of the eye here is the Surrealist dreamscape that features in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), a reference that continues Gordon's obsession with Hitchcock in his film installations, from *24 Hour Psycho* to *Feature Film* and beyond.²³ The Hitchcock film also fits with Gordon's interest in doubling and the duality of which Wainwright speaks when he dresses as Lulu. In *Spellbound*, Dr. Anthony Edwardes/John Ballantyne (Gregory Peck) is an amnesiac trying to recover his memory and uses psychoanalytic techniques to help him do so. When he sits down to recount a salient dream, a camera movement towards his reclined head dissolves into images that illustrate that dream, and the motion takes viewers into his mind. Free-floating eyes on black backgrounds give way to curtains with eyes painted on them and a man walks around cutting the curtains before a half-naked girl enters the scene. Dalí did the set design for the narrated dream that continues for several minutes, the cutting of the eye curtains with scissors recalling the opening sequence of eye and razor in *An Andalusian Dog*.

23 Gordon, Artist Interview Series, *Phantom*.

Gordon does not refer to this early avant-garde film when talking about *Phantom* and, like the others that he speaks of openly as reference points, it remains invisible in the space of the installation. But the cutting or slicing of eyes that segues into dream logic ripe with sexual symbolism takes us back nonetheless to Gordon's filming of Wainwright's eye.

For the eye is not only an eye. Gordon comments on its functioning in its unfamiliar speed and isolation as a corollary for another part of the anatomy that opens, closes, and secretes fluids, noting how the female stars of the silent era were cast and their eyes lit in such a way as to suggest this overlap. He also makes reference to Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (*L'Histoire de l'œil*).²⁴ Bataille's Surrealist pornographic classic, the first edition of which was published in 1928, tells the story of an object, the eye, which passes from image to image. As Susan Sontag has noted, Bataille understood better than any other writer that pornography was not ultimately about sex but about death.²⁵ The oval shape of Wainwright's blackened eye in Gordon's installation is the limit of any comparative transition through similar shaped objects that occurs at greater length in Bataille's text, the first and most notable being the slippage from eye to egg that Roland Barthes uses as a point of departure for exploring Bataille's metaphors of the eye. Barthes notes how the Surrealist image from Pierre Reverdy through to its reformulation by André Breton disrupts conventional associations – we put out an egg (rather than an eye); we break an eye (rather than an egg) – but shows how Bataille is more concerted and constrained.²⁶ For Barthes, Bataille's eroticism is essentially metonymic insofar as it transfers meaning from one chain to the other at different levels of metaphor – 'the eye sucked like a breast'; Simone virtually 'drinking [the narrator's] left eye between her lips'.²⁷ In *Phantom*, the on-screen eye that contorts and secretes may be eroticized metaphorically, but in the broader installation space the chain of relations is more metonymic as the eye weeps like a silent film star for its loss.

Gordon does not 'put out an eye' but the phantom presence of films that do recalls the fascination with blindness that we have witnessed in some of his other artworks, the gendered and sexual implications of which now loom larger after the brush with psychoanalysis and Surrealism occasioned by reference to the *Spellbound* dream sequence and Bataille. The Oedipal undertones of the relationship between mother and son that is imbued with

24 Ibid.

25 Sontag in Bataille, p. 106.

26 Barthes in Bataille, p. 124.

27 Barthes in Bataille, p. 125.

identification as well as desire and through which blindness might bear a more normative association with castration do not however hold sway here. Wainwright's cross-dressed eye gives a knowing wink to the fetishizing of women in classical film, but it is not in a fetishistic state of disavowal of what it sees and knows. His eye reaches through the sightlessness that results from its closure to the endless possibilities of seeing in the mind, accepting the all-too-painful reality of the mother's death and yet ceaselessly summoning her still.

Phantom draws from and returns us to cinema, expanding the experience of the moving image, as it has that of the slowly moving tearful eye, through its insistence upon the importance of not only what is present or visible but also of that which exists in the liminal state of mental vision. The virtual volume of this expansive moving image is born of the space between the black box and white cube, which *Phantom* occupies through the ghostly challenge to the primacy of perception that it performs in the gallery of the mind.

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About the Author

Sarah Cooper is Professor of Film Studies at King's College London. Her books include *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006); *Chris Marker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); *The Soul of Film Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and *Film and the Imagined Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

7 A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance

Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema*
(*Homage to Marcel Broodthaers*)

Kirstie North

Abstract

Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema* (*Homage to Marcel Broodthaers*), 2002, signals towards the changing nature of artists' mediums in an age of digital ascendancy. Marcel Broodthaers is a key figure for a younger generation of artists who are registering the shift from analogue mediums to digital ones. Despite the presence of an affiliation between analogue film and chance in numerous projects by Broodthaers, it has gone unnoticed in much of the discourse that surrounds his work. When we view Broodthaers cinema through the lens of Tacita Dean's film, an openness to chance and contingency emerges as the most promising, and most threatened specificity of analogue film.

Keywords: Chance; Tacita Dean; Marcel Broodthaers; film; analogue; cinema

The title of this chapter references Marcel Broodthaers's *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* (*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*, 1969), which pays homage to Stéphane Mallarmé's 1887 poem of the same name about a shipwreck. Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema* (*Homage to Marcel Broodthaers*) (2002) also centres on the motif of a shipwreck that is connected to the workings of chance. Her homage to Broodthaers takes the form of a thirteen-minute, 16mm colour film depicting the basement that once housed Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* (1971–1972). This was one of twelve sections of his fictive museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, which

ran from 1968 to 1972 in various locations.¹ Occupying and registering a significant moment of technological transition, Tacita Dean's homage is also a lament on the changing nature of artist film in an age of digital ascendancy.

Throughout her oeuvre, Dean consistently connects the workings of chance with the indexical specificity of film, and this is also the prevailing concern of *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)*. This film is almost documentary in style, as Dean appears to be surveying the basement in the aftermath of an event. The space is now a storeroom for the Stadtmuseum in Düsseldorf; however, many traces of its previous function remain. Dean's camera stalks the space, taking in wide views of the rooms, one of which is now filled with piles of stacked-up chairs (Figure 22). Her film emphasizes the haunted nature of the place by zooming in on these objects, and by lingering on the stencils painted by Broodthaers, which remain on the walls. A sense of stillness permeates *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)*; this can be attributed to both the unfrequented storeroom that Dean films and to the structure of the film, which is composed of a series of locked shots reminiscent of a sequence of still photographs. Although the flicker and wobble of the projected celluloid are important, this stillness speaks to the underlying structure of analogue film and its origins in photography.

Through a photographic silence and stillness, Dean draws parallels between herself and Broodthaers, who also probed the photographic nature of film by using it to animate a still image. This happens most prominently in two of his films, *Analysis of a Painting* (1973) and *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1973–1974), both of which focus on the same found painting of a nineteenth-century sailing ship. Broodthaers describes this painting as a type of Surrealist *trouvaille*, an object often spotted amongst the detritus of the flea market, which would have an emotive or affective impact on the finder.² In his novels *Nadja* (1928) and *Mad Love* (1937), André Breton deals explicitly with this notion of the chance encounter, or chance find, as it relates to love or unconscious desire in semi-fictional dramas which are set on the streets of Paris. Broodthaers suggests that his painting of a ship is a *trouvaille* as he writes that he purchased it 'in a shop on the rue Jacob in Paris. Afraid it might slip through my fingers, I dared not bargain

1 The first section of the museum, Section XIXe siècle, was made up of empty packing crates and postcard reproductions of master works and was located in Broodthaers's own home in Brussels, where it remained for one year. See Haidu, p.108.

2 In Broodthaers, Jenkins, and Royoux, eds., *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma*, p. 329.



Figure 22 Tacita Dean, *Section Cinema, Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (2002). 16mm film, colour with optical sound. 13', continuous loop. Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.



Figure 23 Tacita Dean, *Section Cinema, Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (2002). 16mm film, colour with optical sound. 13', continuous loop. Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.

for it and paid a high price – that of love at first sight – even though it was unsigned'.³ Coincidentally, whilst searching Broodthaers's former cinema

3 Ibid.

for its still remaining traces, Dean's camera happens upon a number of model ships belonging to the museum, which are visually similar to the one depicted in Broodthaers's found painting (Figure 23). These ships are also *trouvailles*, as through this chance encounter Dean connects with Broodthaers and, via him, investigates the status of film as medium, its emergence, its history, and its capacity from the moment of its inception to the point of its obsolescence.

Marcel Broodthaers is a key figure for a younger generation of artists, who, like Dean, are registering, by resisting it, the shift from analogue media to digital ones. This is due to his prescient emphasis on obsolescence and the outmoded in film. Through Broodthaers and his interest in early film, *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* telescopes from the start to the anticipated end point of the medium of film, as Dean focuses upon the temporal stages in which the qualities, complexities, or promises offered by the medium of film burn brightest. According to Walter Benjamin, the illumination of the promise encoded at the birth of a technological support comes to light most effectively as it falls into obsolescence.⁴ This chapter asks what promise was encoded in the medium of film at its inception, which is again relevant, or in any case more apparent, at the time of its impending obsolescence.

Dean's engagement with Broodthaers hinges on the fortuitous find of the model ships, as *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* presents chance as the most promising and now most threatened aspect of the medium of film. It has been well established that analogue film's indexicality privileges a more physical connection between the medium and the material world than digital reproduction. As Mary Ann Doane writes in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (first published in 2002, the same year as Dean's film), 'the technical assurance of indexicality is the guarantee of a privileged relation to chance and the contingent.'⁵ This chapter furthers this discourse by demonstrating that the indexical specificity of film makes it more receptive to chance. With its openness to chance film promises to reveal unconscious psychic impulses and desires as they inscribe themselves onto its material surface.

4 Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', p. 210. Benjamin also touches upon the idea of the redemptive potential of the outmoded in a number of texts including *The Arcades Project, 1927–1940*, and *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the End of High Capitalism*.

5 Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 10.

The Emergence of Chance

The first manifestation of Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* was sited and active in a cellar at 12 Burgplatz, Düsseldorf from January 1971 to June 1972. Broodthaers then closed down *Section Cinéma* before modifying it and reopening it again from June to October 1972. *Section Cinéma* was made up of two rooms. The outer room housed a painted projection screen onto which Broodthaers's had stencilled 'Fig. 12', 'Fig. 2', 'Fig. 1', and 'Fig. A' in black paint. Inside this room were two director-style canvas chairs with arm rests, a film projector, a standing lamp, and a darkened room, inside which was a photography table that alluded to the origins of film. In *Section Cinéma* Broodthaers screened three of his films: *Promenade* (1968), *Une Discussion inaugurale* (1968), and *Un Voyage à Waterloo* (1969). Three other found films were then added, which consisted of cheap outtakes or leftovers: from Charlie Chaplin's movies in *Charlie as Filmstar* (1971), outdated newsreel materials in *Belga Vox – Mode – Twentieth Century Fox* (1971), and a commonplace tourist guide to Brussels in *Brussel Teil II* (1971).

Dean's film starts with a shot of a white wall, which was the entrance point to Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* and still bears one of his stencils that reads 'section cinema' boldly rendered in red paint. This opening shot of text provides immediate orientation and also acts like a sort of title card that refers to silent film presentations and the origins of film. In the first cinemas, audiences would gather to watch slapstick comedy which would show everyday life as a litany of errors, accidents, and failures. It is this history that Broodthaers revisited with *Section Cinéma*, screening his *Charlie as Filmstar* in order to align cinematic practice with the revelatory force of chance and accident. He continues this project with the persona that he presents in many of his films, who, like Chaplin, is often hilariously and tragically impotent.⁶ Broodthaers's interest in early film and slapstick comedy draws attention to the affinity between analogue film and chance because,

6 Chaplin's form of social commentary critiqued the faults and excesses of the Capitalist system, perhaps most notably in *Modern Times* (1936). This portrayal of wealthy capitalists and oppressed workers corresponded to leftist stereotypes in the 1930s. Broodthaers harboured his own leftist sensibilities being a member of the Communist Party from 1943 to 1951. Despite this fact, Broodthaers's comedy persona is often aligned with the more stoic Buster Keaton due to Broodthaers's adoption of the former's deadpan expression, and perhaps because Keaton's political affiliations are less pronounced. The significance of these early figures of silent comedy in Broodthaers's work is only ever afforded a cursory mention in much of the secondary literature that surrounds it, yet this is an important and interesting area that would benefit from more research. For a more detailed account of Broodthaers's involvement with the Communist Party see Schultz, p. 25.

as Siegfried Kracauer wrote of early cinema, 'film comedy did not highlight the performer's proficiency in braving death and surmounting impossible difficulties; rather, it minimised his accomplishments in a constant effort to present successful rescues as the outcome of pure chance'.⁷ For Kracauer, '[a]ccidents were the very soul of slapstick'.⁸ Walter Benjamin also celebrated chance and accident as something revelatory in relation to silent film, as he explored the changes early film heralded in modes of perception. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' he writes:

Fifty years ago, a slip of the tongue passed more or less unnoticed. Only exceptionally may such a slip have revealed dimensions of depth in conversation which had seemed to be taking its course on the surface. Since the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* things have changed. This book isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception of film has bought about a similar deepening of appreciation.⁹

Sigmund Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* famously put forward the thesis that forgetfulness, slips of the tongue, inadvertent actions, errors, and mistakes are indicative of suppressed psychic material, which, although displaced from consciousness, finds expression through failures and accidents. Freud argued that such inadvertent actions or unintentional expressions, often assigned to the realm of clumsiness or carelessness, actually reveal some hidden factor in a subject's mental life. These revelatory phenomena bring concealed or unconscious wishes or desires to the surface, aiding a subject's sense of self-awareness. Such inadvertent actions are often violent, jerky, and at times very well aimed. Freud cites many examples of his own personal experience. In one such account, he tells the story of a visit from his sister, who had come to his study to admire the new acquisitions of ornaments and sculptures he had recently added to his already extensive collection. Admiring this collection, his sister then added that the inkstand on his desk did not suit the rest of the room and he should buy a prettier one. Later that day, Freud writes, 'I sat down at my desk to write, made a curiously clumsy, sweeping movement with the hand holding my pen and knocked

7 Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, p. 62.

8 Kracauer, 'Silent Film Comedy', p. 31.

9 Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 229.

the lid of the inkwell, which was already lying on my desk, to the floor'.¹⁰ Freud argues that this apparently clumsy movement, which condemned the old inkstand by breaking it, expressed his desire to have his sister buy him a new one, adding that the clumsy gesture 'in reality was both dextrous and purposeful, since I avoided all the more valuable items standing close to the inkstand'.¹¹ Through anecdotes such as this, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* paints a humorous picture of ordinary life interspersed by slips and errors that are gags aimed at the Self by the unconscious.

Film can be similarly revelatory as it can capture the operations of chance, a force that operates from outside conscious control. Broodthaers gestures towards this capacity of the medium in *La Pluie (projet pour un texte)* (1969), a two-minute 16mm black-and-white film in which we see Broodthaers sitting beside a crate in a garden, trying to write with ink from an inkwell – a connection to Freud's story is not lost here – while fake rain continuously washes his words away. If conscious thought exists in words, this is silenced in *La Pluie* – the rain – by something outside of the author's control. As both Broodthaers and early cinema show us, the actions of the performer/creator are subject to outside forces such as chance events, or the weather, and this outside can operate on the medium of film itself. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Gilles Deleuze agrees that the camera can show us the operations of chance and give material form to a space where inner potential is being realized. Deleuze's term 'movement image' describes the way that an image can suspend itself between background and foreground, objective and subjective vision, what's inside the frame and what lies outside it. In relation to Broodthaers's *La Pluie*, the activity of writing, which is the main focus of the film, is being disrupted by water which comes from a place outside the frame. Early cinema was always conscious of this receptiveness to an outside, here figured as chance, as personified by the hero of slapstick comedy who is propelled forward in the plot by forces beyond his or her control. In Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* the intrusion from the outside is less comedic. Here, Dean's camera is focused on the closed space of Broodthaers's former basement; however, the space of the film is then intruded upon by the chance appearance of the model ships which, as we shall see, open the film out into new territory. The meaning of *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* comes about through happenstance, which then becomes the film's primary focus. Whilst chance events and occurrences can permeate

10 Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p. 160.

11 Ibid.

everyday life, it is analogue film's materiality that allows it to capture, and give material form to, the ephemeral movements of chance.

The Denigration of Chance

Marcel Broodthaers's evocation of early cinema attests to the connection between film and chance through the comedic accidents, slips, and chance events that permeated slapstick comedy. Dean also uses cinema to frame her claims for film and chance, yet she refers to the end of this cinematic magic as the recent changes undergone by cinema moving from analogue to digital technology have caused a denigration of chance. She writes:

'Fix it in post' is the song of the digital. It has been the great advance in image-making in recent years, but it has also created an inert visual tidiness and uniformity. Crews have become less technically invested in a project because the image gets adjusted after the event. The atmosphere of the film shoot has changed. The move from making things in production to making them in post-production has been one of the most underestimated and radical shifts that has happened with the advent of digital cinema. Mistakes were often magical but we no longer see them.¹²

As Dean observes, the digital has allowed for greater creative control in post-production. Its innate strength lies in its accelerating capacity to produce stunning visual effects. However, the digital diminishes chance as the increase in creative control is also an increase in censoring and erasing. This fundamental shift has to do with the fact that the digital can be simultaneously watched back while being recorded. Instantaneous decisions can be made and the unforeseen accidents, slippages, and mistakes that can imbue film with a quality that could not have been envisaged have less chance of making it through the process. While digital media's increasing capacity for manipulation and creative control is largely seen as a positive development, Dean argues that the affective potential of chance is beyond conscious control and so stands opposed to these strengths of the digital. This fundamental difference makes the digital less affective for Dean, who says: 'for me, it just does not have the means to create poetry [...]. I wonder if this is because it is not born of the physical world but is impenetrable and intangible'.¹³

¹² Dean, *Film*, p. 29.

¹³ Dean, *Tacita Dean: Analogue: Drawings 1991–2006*, p. 8.

Dean's homage to Broodthaers is poetic because in it chance is given physical form. It is the medium of film that allows this to happen. Dean's film also pays homage to the origins of the medium as this work is almost photographic, being composed from a series of locked shots. Dean's film, like Broodthaers's nautical films, is self-reflexive as analogue film is composed of a series of still frames. Analogue film, then, carries with it the linguistic message of photography, which is important to Dean's project. In 'Rhetoric of the Image', Roland Barthes demonstrates that there is a linguistic message present in every image, however, a photograph's indexicality conveys a particular type of message that differentiates it from all other types of images.¹⁴ The meaning of a painting or drawing relies upon specific readable codes and rules, such as the use of perspective. The photograph is different being 'a message without a code', as its maker does not intervene, or translate the reproduced object in the same way as an artist composing a painting or drawing does.¹⁵ Barthes writes that 'only the photograph is able to transmit the (literal) information without forming it by discontinuous signs and rules of transformation'.¹⁶ The photograph, then, has an implied relationship with reality and is perceived as a true recording.

All lens-based images are, to some extent, perceived in this way. As Dudley Andrew writes in *What Cinema Is!*, 'in whatever manifestation or period, real cinema has a relation to the real'.¹⁷ This is because, 'while all the arts project our dreams and desires, cinema is unique in doing so through the material world itself'.¹⁸ It can be argued that analogue film is in closer proximity to the material world because of its indexicality, a fact noticed by André Bazin in 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. Here, Bazin claims that the invention of photography was the most 'important event in the history of the plastic arts' as '[t]he photograph as such and the object itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint'.¹⁹ In recent years, media archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst has discarded written historical narratives in order to concentrate solely on the purity of the historical code embedded in the technology.²⁰ Ernst's approach to photography and film is a product of photographic discourse on the index, as the analogue anticipates physical contact by being receptive to the light that touches both the body of the

14 Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', p. 38.

15 Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', p. 43.

16 Ibid.

17 Andrew, p. xxv.

18 Andrew, p. xvi.

19 Bazin, pp. 8–9.

20 Ernst, p. 49.

referent and film's celluloid surface.²¹ In contrast, the digital file employs a uniform numerical code, which transfers data into vast sequences of binary 1–0 combinations.²² Digital photography and video align more closely with the limitations of self-conscious human subjectivity, as files can be viewed and deleted instantaneously, just as they are now more susceptible to manipulation. Ernst observes that the idea of the photograph as a 'technologically neutral code' collapses through digital manipulation, which returns 'images to a prephotographic quality of painting: that characterized by the painterly brushstroke'.²³ Ernst, like Dean, warns that, on a fundamental level, 'digitising technologies are absorbing the photographic. Thus photography as a visual technology in its own right could vanish'.²⁴ This is because digital files are not photographic, in the sense that 'the photograph is, in fact, an inscription of the real, in physical (a unique moment of light) and in chemical (emulsion as storage) terms'.²⁵ Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* remembers the photographic origins of film as she shows us that film's indexicality lends it the potential to put us in touch with unconscious aspects of our subjectivity through unintended and ephemeral chance events that are given material form. Bazin also recognized that the index could open onto an unconscious register when he aligned the medium of photography with the Surrealist movement, which is also an alignment with Freudian psychoanalysis: 'photography ranks high in the order of Surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, a hallucination that is also a fact'.²⁶

The Promise of Chance

Tacita Dean, like Bazin, frames film's openness to chance in the context of a Surrealist legacy and the movement's practice of 'objective chance', a term introduced by André Breton to describe the experience of material reality

21 Ernst's 'media archaeology' also draws upon the writings of Michel Foucault. Ernst writes, '[p]hotography did what Foucault demands in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: it liberated the past from historical discourse (which is always anthropomorphic) in order to make source data accessible to different configurations' (p. 48).

22 Manovich, p. 27. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between analogue and digital mediums, and the proximity each maintains with older techniques of image making such as drawing in the work of Tacita Dean, see Krčma.

23 Ernst, p. 47.

24 Ernst, p. 41.

25 Ernst, p. 48.

26 Bazin, pp. 8–9.

charged with psychic energy.²⁷ Dean writes: 'I concur with André Breton when he spoke of the objective chance process being about external circumstances acting in response to the unspoken desires and the demands of the human psyche.'²⁸ Breton's chance object, the *trouvaille*, functions as both an indicator of repressed desire and a solution to a question that the subject is unable to formulate as such: 'It is really as if I had been lost and they had come to give me news about myself.'²⁹ Objective chance seems to happen to a subject from somewhere outside conscious thought and intent. *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* documents this happening. Dean writes that she visited Broodthaers's former cinema to try to connect with him; but, she adds, 'I couldn't feel his presence there as I wanted to, and as you do so strongly with his art. In truth, those figures and words were really just the traces; the remains of the work – the spirit having left and gone elsewhere.'³⁰

Despite being unable to connect with Broodthaers through what remained of his work, the chance find of the model ships seems to answer her desire for connection. Dean spends significant time focusing upon a number of these antique model ships, which eventually come to dominate the work. Many of these models are in a state of disrepair, displaying broken masts and ripped sails as they lie covered in dust and sinking into the shadows and recesses of the shelving around the edges of the storeroom. In a succession of shots, Dean pays particular attention to the most distressed, aged ships with their sails and masts ripped or hanging down. Approximately three minutes into the film we see the first of these shots that juxtapose the ship with the word 'silence'. This word is shown in close up, engulfed by a shadow, which is cast by what appears to be a model ship covered by a sheet. The second shot of this word happens a minute later and this time the pairing is more obvious. Firstly, we see a wide shot of a shelving area, which is then shown in close up. The word 'silence' is visible on the far wall at the back of this alcove (Figure 24). The letter 's' is slightly obscured by a model ship covered in plastic, which is resting on the shelf to its left, while the letter 'e' is obscured by a cabinet on the right. This narrow enclave is illuminated by a light bulb that silhouettes the wooden masts and sails of another model ship, which is situated in front of the light bulb in the foreground of the shot. Just as the word 'silence' is cropped at the edges by the surrounding objects, Dean has also cropped the model ships that are coming out of the

27 For a fuller discussion see Cohen, p. 40.

28 Dean, *An Aside*, pp. 4–5.

29 Breton, *Mad Love*, pp. 8–9.

30 Dean, 'Section Cinema', p. 55.



Figure 24 Tacita Dean, *Section Cinema, Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (2002). 16mm film, colour with optical sound. 13', continuous loop. Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.

edges of the frame. This shot is immediately followed by a closer view of the same scene; the word 'silence' is now clearly seen, as is the intricate model ship on its left and the masts and ropes of the ship occupying the bottom right of the foreground.

The juxtaposition of the word 'silence' and the model ships could be nothing more than a coincidence, as most of these models are stored in this area of shelving. However, the next time we see the word 'silence', about six minutes later, it is again accompanied by a model ship. In this later shot, the ship seems out of place. It looks as if Dean herself has deliberately placed it alongside the word in order to draw attention to the juxtaposition. In this shot we again see a close up of the word 'silence' bookended by the legs of an upturned chair. Directly underneath this stencil, at the bottom of the frame, is the top part of a model ship. This model differs from the others in that it is based on a fuel-powered ship without sails. An illegible label can be seen inside the hull and a model Spanish flag on the bow. This model is in much better condition than the others and, furthermore, it is not dusty like the others. It appears to have been recently placed in the storeroom, or recently taken out of its protective covering. For this reason, it seems deliberately composed; it stands out amongst the other shots in the film, giving the impression that the space has been untouched for some time. The next shot zooms out from the last and we now see a full view of the ship, clearly out of place, resting on an

upturned table. Dean deliberately pairs the ship, indicative of chance, with the word 'silence' disseminated across the basement's walls. The meaning of this stencilled word evokes traditional cinema houses, while making reference to silent film and its emphasis on chance. The model ships also have an innate quietness that Dean has elsewhere called, after Breton, 'the silence of the lost object'.³¹ Although they are unrelated to Broodthaers's work, these found ships bring with them, into the space of the film, a constellation of connections between Dean and Broodthaers that spin out from the ship's muted and unexpected presence in the space.

The web of associations between analogue film, chance, and the sea voyage that flood *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* continues outside of the film. Dean's *Chère petite soeur* (2002) is a diptych of blackboard drawings which appropriate a found postcard of a boat in a storm that belonged to Broodthaers and was the subject of his four-minute, 16mm black-and-white film of the same name, *Chère petite soeur (La Tempête)* (1972). This film was produced in the same year that *Section Cinéma* was active. Dean's 2002 work and Broodthaers's 1972 film are postcards that address each other across time. The inscription under the image of Broodthaers's found postcard, translated into English, reads: 'Dear Little Sister, to give you this, an idea of the sea during the storm...' We could imagine that this address comes from Broodthaers himself, responding to Dean's repeated attempts to connect with the older artist whose legacy she seeks to preserve or in whose footsteps she follows. Broodthaers's *Chère petite soeur (La Tempête)* is one of several films based on postcards.³² Like *A Voyage on the North Sea*, this film is made from a still image. Broodthaers uses the inscription on the front of the card as a basis for the subtitles that accompany the single image in the film. As with the other works discussed, the ship in Broodthaers's film is a recurring cinematic motif, which combines an emphasis on the found object or *trouvaille* with close attention to the underlying support of film as a series of still frames, a condition Broodthaers amplified by creating films from one still image. As mentioned previously, Dean evokes this process in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)*, which is composed of a series of still, locked shots that reflect the underlying photographic structure of analogue film, animated as much by twenty-four gaps per second of blackness as it is by the individual frames. Dean, through Broodthaers, pays close attention

31 Dean and Ridgewell, 'Floh', p. 50.

32 This film was reprised twice in the same year in *Trois cartes postales* and *Rendez-vous mit Jacques Offenbach*. Other filmic works also based on postcards include *Le Mauritania* (1972). See Haidu.

to this condition of the medium in order to highlight the properties that differentiate digital from analogue film, and to articulate that chance is intrinsic to the analogue process and that the indexicality of the medium gives chance a material presence that is lost in the rise of the digital.

The chance presence of the ships in Dean's film on Broodthaers are not only poignant in terms of Broodthaers's nautical films, they are also meaningful in relation to Dean's own series of films on sea voyages, which received critical acclaim resulting in her nomination for the Turner Prize for *Disappearance at Sea* (1996). This film belonged to a body of work on doomed sea voyages beginning with *Girl Stowaway* (1994) and continuing with Dean's trilogy on doomed amateur sailor Donald Crowhurst, made up of *Disappearance at Sea*, *Disappearance at Sea II (Voyage de Guérison)* (1997), and *Teignmouth Electron* (1999). Other nautical works by Dean include *How to Put a Boat in a Bottle* (1995) and *The Green Ray* (2001). Furthermore, Dean's nautical works all establish an intrinsic connection between analogue media and chance through the motif of the sea voyage. This link between the sea and chance is long established, as in the figure of the ancient Roman Goddess, Fortuna, who represents both luck and chance and is often depicted holding a billowing sail.³³ Dean connects her interest in doomed sea voyages and sinking ships to the specificity of analogue film, as abandonment at sea is a fantasy belonging to 'the analogue world: the world where you could still get lost'.³⁴ The possibility of loss is also the promise of re-finding, and Dean finds chance itself in her homage to Broodthaers.

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers), therefore, telescopes back through time, from film's anticipated end to its beginnings in early cinema, through Broodthaers. Of photography, from which film originates, Margaret Iversen writes:

one could argue that analogue photography has only recently become a medium in the fullest sense of the term, for it is only when artists refuse to switch over to digital photographic technologies that the question of what constitutes analogue photography as a medium is self-consciously posed.³⁵

It is the temporal positioning of Dean's work that highlights film's enduring receptiveness to the mysterious operations of chance. It is poignant that this fortuitous find takes place in Broodthaers's former cinema, given that

33 See Iversen, p. 815.

34 Dean, 'Tristan da Cunha', p. 78.

35 Iversen, p. 796.

Broodthaers used this space to celebrate chance by appropriating early film. The slapstick accident and the Freudian slip of the tongue inform the way film is being presented here as a medium that can capture and give material form to the elusive operations of the unconscious. Chance gives Dean's homage to Broodthaers, which is also a homage to the early promise of film, a heightened affective charge as the clear parallels between the two artists' work are brought into focus by the ships discovered by chance, as if by some twist of fate. The meaning of Dean's film resides in this unanticipated event that gifts us analogue film's enduring promise. It can turn the uncertainty of chance – the possibility of something happening – into the fact that it did happen.

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About the Author

Kirstie North is an independent curator and art historian based in the UK. She has published writing on Ailbhe Ní Bhriain, Tacita Dean, Brian O' Doherty, Sean Lynch, Jeremy Millar, and Lucy Skaer. Recent research projects include a survey of the 1990s for Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.

8 The Photo-Filmic Diorama

Ágnes Pethő

Abstract

The chapter focuses on a particular type of tableau construction in which the image is built like a glass case display, encapsulating an entire world of its own, combining 2D and 3D effects. With examples ranging from Jeff Wall's light boxes, Gregory Crewdson's and Hiroshi Sugimoto's cinematic photographs, to a case study of Gustav Deutsch's film/installation *Shirley: Visions of Reality* (2013), the chapter traces the inflections of such a photo-filmic diorama as a versatile "cubicle aesthetic" which reconfigures the traditional dynamic of "absorption and theatricality" (Michael Fried) of the tableau form and reveals the imbrication of different art practices. The diverging features of such a *dioramic tableau* in photography and film are interpreted in terms of intermediality and defamiliarization.

Keywords: Diorama in contemporary art, intermediality, tableau vivant, cinematic photography, photofilmic image, defamiliarization

In an exhibition dedicated to the rediscovery of the versatile forms of dioramas and their influence on contemporary art organized in the summer of 2017 at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, among the encyclopaedic collection of artworks on display was a photograph composed by the Mexican artist Dulce Pinzón entitled *Nostalgia* (in fact, a piece from her *Historias del Paraíso* series, made in 2011–2012).¹ In this picture, also reproduced in the poster of the exhibition, there is a young couple, dressed in the style of the 1950s, kissing in front of a painted canvas background showing a mountainous landscape, which blends in seamlessly with the rocks and dirt under the

¹ The exhibition was curated by Claire Garnier, Laurent Le Bon, Florence Ostende, and was organized in partnership with the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

couple's feet (Figure 25).² The whole scene, appearing as a museum display, is being 'watched' by taxidermied deer standing in the foreground. With the figures of the embracing couple appearing in the middle of a luminous screen and the deer standing in the shadows as the audience, the whole set-up resembles looking at a cinema screen or being in a theatrical or fairground setting with a revolving stage. Moreover, the spotlight directed at the image may also evoke the technique of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's diorama theatre, the nineteenth-century invention that preceded cinema and photography, in which people sitting in pitch darkness could marvel at large semi-transparent paintings, superimposed and lit alternately from the front and back, revealing different portions and layers of the images, and thus producing the illusion of movement, or transition from day to night. In this way, the composition combines elements faintly resembling Daguerre's original diorama tableaux along with the so-called habitat dioramas that we see in natural history museums, but it reverses the roles of spectators objects on display. Pinzón's picture is both a homage to traditional nature or ethnographic dioramas, and a critique of the colonizing and objectifying gaze embodied by these, thus intriguing the viewer on many levels. Apart from the reversal of humans and animals, the picture captures a series of other ambiguities, for example, between natural and artificial, familiar and strange, while merging features of photography, film, painting, theatre, sculpture, and installation art in an amalgamation that unites the proto-cinematic spectacular with the post-cinematic or post-photographic intermedial, i.e. with a kind of 'expanded mediality' through which the sensations, experiences traditionally linked to one medium, become perceptible in another medium.

I have singled out this picture because I am less interested in the kind of installations in contemporary art that use the wildlife diorama format and openly engage with the ideas associated with it by creating boxed-in arrangements of mixed media, and more interested in the way in which photography and film have appropriated the tensions inherent to the diorama, and transposed them onto a unique fold between the 'photographic', the 'pictorial', and the 'cinematic' (or the 'architectural'). Pinzón's *Nostalgia* harnesses these tensions and highlights these media folds in an overt, self-reflexive manner by making the diorama the subject of the artwork, while at the same time, the picture itself, placed behind a glass pane, materializes in the exhibition as a photo-diorama encapsulating a

2 See the official website: <<https://www.palaisdetokyo.com/en/event/dioramas>> [accessed 12 January 2019].



Figure 25 Dulce Pinzón, *Nostalgia* (*Historias del paraíso* series, 2011–2012). Reproduced with permission of the artist.

strangely lifelike but lifeless world of its own. As such, it is an example of a particular type of tableau composition that we see in photography, cinema, and in certain video installations, in which the image is built like a glass case display, combining flat surfaces and impressions of space in a versatile ‘cubicle aesthetic’ which fuses narrativity and visual attraction, reshaping the tableau vivant, and the dynamic of ‘absorption and theatricality’ of tableau images in general, into an uncanny, intermedial diorama effect.³ In speaking of the dioramic image as a kind of tableau that can be observed across different art practices (photography, cinema, installation art), I am proposing a different approach to interpreting the legacy of dioramas than Scott MacDonald’s idea of ‘dioramic cinema’. In his book of in-depth interviews with a series of contemporary filmmakers entitled *The Sublimity of Document: Cinema as Diorama*, MacDonald identifies a combination of detailed, precise documentation of reality and a panoramic vision that characterized the habitat dioramas of natural history museums in a variety of films throughout the history of cinema, and accordingly emphasizes the dioramic quality of films that allow the viewer to visually study the world through images which are ‘sometimes almost too beautiful, sometimes

3 See Fried.

terrifying, often powerfully educational'.⁴ Instead of such a pairing of artistic sophistication and documentary value, I will focus on multiple tensions and ambivalences inherent to tableau images amplified by the diorama-like construction, and foreground both the convergence of the dioramic template in the arts and its diversity emerging through different media. Although, in essence, this dioramic tableau seems to be transportable from one medium to another, there are also significant differences in what it 'exhibits' in photography and film. In what follows, I present the diverging inflections of such a photo-filmic diorama in photography and film through a set of examples. The first part of my chapter considers artists creating so-called cinematic photography who employ this format through an in-betweenness of photography, film, and the visual arts. It examines the multiple layeredness of representations in such dioramic images and unravels the complex experience of liminality that they convey. The second part looks at the expressiveness of the photo-filmic diorama from the reverse angle: in a cinema marked by photographic stillness and constructed of shots built as a world in a box. Both of these vantage points reveal different aspects of the dioramic image and different possibilities for exploring interart and intermedial relations, as well as for reflecting on the relationship between art and reality.

The Dioramic Image in Cinematic Photography

Jeff Wall and Gregory Crewdson are the most prominent artists to have introduced this type of image into contemporary photography. Both of them reject capturing moments from real life, and prefer instead to make elaborately constructed, staged pictures which are shot in the same manner as movies are made, with actors, repeated takes, an entire crew of assistants, and sets assembled for the sake of a single image. Wall refers to such works as 'cinematographic' but the manner in which they are made – with careful preparation – is in fact, as he himself has emphasized, a characteristic for most forms of art outside the tradition of candid photography.⁵ Cinematographic shooting is merely the more immediate model for their realization. There is also a deeper, less overt connection with the construction of the diorama (i.e. the creation or re-creation of an environment), the influence of which has been pivotal for both artists. Wall's first major work,

4 See MacDonald, p. 14.

5 Rondeau, p. 154.

The Destroyed Room (1978), borrowed some of its compositional elements and the colour palette from a painting by Eugène Delacroix (*The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827), but, on a more conceptual level, the arrangement placed into a wooden box-like set was also influenced by Marcel Duchamp's last major work, an enigmatic, surreal diorama hidden behind a heavy wooden door.⁶ Meanwhile, Crewdson, inspired by the same image seen through Duchamp's door, at the beginning of his career in the early 1990s composed and photographed a series of small-scale actual dioramas containing eerie combinations of flora and fauna in typical suburban backyards.⁷

Moreover, Wall's unique technique of presenting his photographs as transparencies mounted on large light boxes makes use of a diorama-like *dispositif* as the viewer is confronted with a vitrine that is illuminated from within. The light box fuses connotations of two very different worlds: the permanence of the display case of the museum, which preserves its content as a valuable object⁸ – an allusion further reinforced by the frequent references to masterpieces from the history of art – with the ephemerality of the visually captivating street advertisement or shop window. The first-ever exhibition of *The Destroyed Room* was in the front window of the Nova Gallery in Wall's hometown of Vancouver, clearly signalling this duality. Subsequently, we can trace an evolution in Wall's display method moving from site-specific installation forms (gallery window, being built into the wall), to using a shallow metal box for his silver dye bleach transparencies, and finally to hanging printed photographs with less prominent framing, which strengthens even more the connections of his art with the tradition of easel painting, and with the *dispositif* of the tableau. Yet, despite the fact that the light box display has remained his signature method, abandoning it has not brought a considerable change in his aesthetic. It only demonstrates, therefore, that the showcase is not the most important element of what we may consider a dioramic image; rather, it is the tableau format, a single, relatively large picture framed and hung on the wall, with its 'characteristics

6 *Étant donnés*: 1. *la chute d'eau*, 2. *le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*) is the title of the diorama that Duchamp secretly worked on from 1946 to 1966, and which was exhibited posthumously following his detailed instructions. Wall discussed the influence of this work on his art in a lecture delivered at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (the permanent home of Duchamp's diorama) in 2009 (published in Wall).

7 See Crewdson.

8 Some of the titles of Wall's works even resemble the scientific precision of labels of museum exhibits (e.g. *Adrian Walker, Artist, Drawing from a Specimen in a Laboratory in the Dept. of Anatomy at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver* (1992); *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947* (1990)).

of bounded autonomy and confrontational frontality',⁹ that is enough to command a distance between a beholder and the picture-object, and that may absorb features of the diorama on an aesthetic level. In a sense, the dioramic image that we see in many of Wall's and Crewdson's photos only exaggerates features that Jean-François Chevrier and Michael Fried describe with regard to the photographic tableau descending from the tradition of painting.¹⁰ It is a carefully devised composition, which, even if presented in a series (as in Crewdson's photos), strikes us with its autonomy, staging a self-contained world, showing people who are often absorbed in their activities, unmindful of the spectator.¹¹ Or if they face the viewer, as we see in modern painting, beginning with Édouard Manet's female figures gazing at us, they strike us with the blankness of their gaze which further embodies what Fried has described as the 'facingness' of the picture itself that commands the viewer to look at it, and that 'makes the beholder register, subliminally or otherwise, his or her own structurally secondary character relative to the contents of the image'.¹² Moreover, they amplify the 'fundamental tension between the inherent temporality of posing, the heldness and stillness it implies, and the rapidity or instantaneousness of visualisation and execution' that Manet's contemporaries idealized in painting, as Fried explains, and that has since become one of the defining features of photography.¹³ Figures are usually stationary with gestures suspended into poses and, even when they are caught in movement, each detail is in sharp focus, brought into relief by a combination of artificial and natural sources of light. If Fried found Monet's models represented on the canvas as frozen or petrified, Wall's and Crewdson's bodies acquire a stiff, wax-figure-like appearance, which may be inflected to look either like glossy porcelain figurines – as Wall intended, for example, in *A Woman and Her Doctor* (1980–1981), or seem 'hallucinatory', 'spectral',¹⁴ even corpse-like in paleness, aggravating the poses of melancholy or exhaustion (as we see in many photos from Crewdson's *Twilight* (1998–2002); *Beneath the Roses*

9 Chevrier, 'The Museum: A Permanent Crisis', p. 32.

10 See Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*; and Chevrier, 'The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography'.

11 See Fried's analysis on the absorptive, or partially absorptive features of Wall's pictures (*Why Photography Matters*, pp. 37–62; *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*, pp. 18–22).

12 Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws*, p. 11.

13 Fried, *Manet's Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, p. 340.

14 Wall stated in an interview with Arielle Pélenec (De Duve and others, p. 40) that bodies like these are the direct result of his cinematographic approach to photography, and his later works like *Dead Troops Talk* (*A Vision after an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986*) (1992) are just extensions of this approach that is fundamental to his art.

(2003–2008); or *The Cathedral of the Pines* series (2013–2014)). The absorptive features that Diderot and Fried admire in a painting are combined in this way with the more ostentatious ‘theatricality’ of a staged dioramic scene.¹⁵

Resembling both the tableau-staging practices of cinema, and the arrangements in a diorama, these figures are placed in boxed-in spaces that are opened up for us on one side so that we can behold the scene in its entirety, usually packing in a lot of details that need careful, overall scrutiny, such as a room, like in Wall’s *After ‘Invisible Man’ by Ralph Ellison, The Prologue* (1999–2000); *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999); *A View from an Apartment* (2004–2005), and *The Card Players* (2006). Such images require, just like the diorama, a contemplative beholder, able to scrutinize the image as a self-enclosed container of details from different angles. Crewdson often uses windows or doors to frame people, but these two-dimensional frames are actually embedded in an architecture of spaces boxed into one another, expanding through openings towards other spaces, mirrors, windows, or doors, through which the spectator’s gaze is invited to roam. Boundaries are blurred, interiors open towards the exterior, and exteriors find their way inside through vegetation or snow, and – unlike Wall’s *A View from an Apartment*, which contrasts the view from the window with that of the room – their interpenetration reveals basically the same world inside and outside contained within the image. The refined arrangement of details and the studied compositions are additionally ‘polished’ or ‘wrapped’ up as beautiful both by the glow of Wall’s light boxes and the fogs and vapours that envelop most of Crewdson’s pictures.¹⁶ This veiling of mist gives Crewdson’s scenes a touch of mannerism and the impression of looking at them through a slightly opaque glass wall behind the shiny glass pane of the picture frame. Consequently, intensifying the strangeness that Charles Baudelaire considered an essential feature of beauty, even in its ‘simple, unintended and unconscious’ form, the beauty of these images strikes us as a result of their artificiality (their made-up-ness) and something that places the image in the domain of the uncanny, introducing a tension between representation and reality.¹⁷

Although the uncanny has become a rather overused concept emerging from Sigmund Freud’s writings, its original meaning deriving from the

¹⁵ See Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*.

¹⁶ Both Wall’s and Crewdson’s aesthetic is consistent with Charles Baudelaire’s idea that a tableau, as a well-composed picture, should always give the impression of beauty (see Baudelaire, *Art in Paris*, p. 152). As Wall declared: ‘I always try to make beautiful pictures’ (quoted in De Duve and others, p. 10).

¹⁷ Baudelaire, *Selected Writings*, p. 119.

German word, *unheimlich*, negating what is 'homelike', 'belonging to the house', captures the strange 'unhomeliness' of the dioramic image that uses familiar locations and interiors of rooms and populates it with ambivalent figures that appear both alive and inanimate (the reversibility of which Freud describes as the most typical form of uncanniness). Conscious of this uncanniness of his staged pictures, Wall has described them as *tableaux morts*, instead of *tableaux vivants*.¹⁸ This connection between the animate and the inanimate in these pictures, however, goes beyond a superficial impression of 'cinematographic' set-ups seamlessly merged with real landscapes filled with waxwork-like beings, which prompted David Company to declare that 'Jeff Wall's work is on some level an art of zombies'.¹⁹ The ambivalences perceived in such images highlight, in essence, photography's uncanny relationship to reality, the uneasy sensations resulting from its powers of objectification, and its underlying intuition of death, something that Roland Barthes pointed out by describing photography as 'a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of tableau vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face, beneath which we see the dead'.²⁰ A diorama only makes this relationship more visible and palpable. 'Being models of nature, dioramas include many of the world's constituent parts. The only thing absent is life itself. Time comes to a halt, and never-ending stillness reigns', writes the Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, who made the diorama the 'muse' for his conceptual photography interrogating questions of representation and ontology.²¹ His two series entitled *Dioramas* (2014) and *Portraits* (2018) were meant to challenge the assumption of life being rendered inanimate in a photographic representation. Yet, by photographing scenes from natural history dioramas and not showing the glass container housing them, or taking portraits of wax figures removed from museums in a *trompe l'œil* manner, what he exposes is, in fact, the same uncanniness of photography only revealed from a reverse angle, by making dead subjects look alive: 'however fake the subject, once photographed, it's as good as real', he states in an often-reproduced caption to his photos.²² Gregory Crewdson's *Sanctuary* (2010), a series of photographs depicting abandoned film sets in Rome's legendary Cinecittà studios, is similar in concept to Sugimoto's work. In these pictures, the fake buildings appear as 'real' architecture, as melancholic

18 Barents, p. 95.

19 Company, 'A Theoretical Diagram in an Empty Classroom', p. 25.

20 Barthes, p. 32.

21 Sugimoto, p. 4.

22 See, for example: <<https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-54/>> [accessed 12 January 2019].

ruins of the historical Rome and not just of the movies made there, blurring the distinction between fiction and reality.

The diorama or the wax figure cabinet, appearing as a museum within a museum, does not only seem like a sculptural, three-dimensional transposition of a photographic or pictorial representation; most of the time, it is actually based on a photograph or painting. Thus, Sugimoto's works do not 'revive' their taxidermied or long-dead subjects, but recover a representation beneath a representation. In a similar manner, the dioramic tableau can be seen as a picture bringing to life another picture. Gregory Crewdson's *Untitled (Sunday Roast)* from the series *Beneath the Roses* (2005), achieves this by framing a photo within a photo in a mise-en-abyme structure.²³ What puzzles the viewer here is the fact that we cannot tell whether the picture on the wall shown in the image is a photograph or a photorealistic painting. Beyond the fact that it does not offer 'a momentary glimpse of reality, a link to the world', as Peter Galassi observes regarding Wall's pictures, and presents 'a timeless, self-sufficient image – a world in itself', this ambivalence captures a very important aspect of this type of image, namely that it is always an uncanny comingling of the arts.²⁴

Wall's photographs, in fact, most of the time are re-enactments of his own impressions of scenes seen in real life, but not photographed. The snapshot is thus both rejected and preserved, 'embalmed' in his art while it is combined with motifs, compositional and stylistic techniques appropriated from painting and film. Suspended between reality and artificiality, haunted by movement in their stillness and estranged by their own fixity, to paraphrase Company's words, these images make their 'unhomely' home between the arts.²⁵ Like the great canvases of figurative painting, they suggest a whole narrative within a single frame, while they look like oversized single frames extracted from a film.²⁶ They are therefore not only 'cinematographic' in the way they are created, but also 'cinematic' and 'painterly' in their appearance, often directly shaped by influences from painting or cinema, which provide the necessary familiarity, the 'homeliness' subverted by media ambivalence. This influence can be felt in a more generic way (similarly to

23 The photo shows a picture hanging on the wall in which we see a dining room with mother and son sitting at a table in a frontal composition, behind the woman there's an open door leading to the kitchen, reframing the window in the back, through which part of another house is visible, and yet another window.

24 Galassi and others, p. 36.

25 Company, *Photography and Cinema*, p. 138.

26 Mounted on a lightbox, Jeff Wall's pictures look literally like individual frames cut from an unusually large, transparent filmstrip.

the *Untitled Film Stills* series made between 1977–1980 by Cindy Sherman) in photos presenting scenes and moods that seem to be extensions of the fictional worlds created by certain authors. As some of Crewdson's works demonstrate, this can be enhanced by employing well-known film actors as models. More recently, we see a similar quality in the photography of Alex Prager whose pictures push the dioramic tableau, on the one hand, towards a more prettified dollhouse effect (bordering on the uncanniness of lifelike robots, or 3D animations), and, on the other hand, tie in with cinema more directly through ostensible imitations of the visual style of directors, like Alfred Hitchcock and Douglas Sirk, and the use of Hollywood actors.²⁷

The representation recovered from beneath the representation that provides a vague sensation of familiarity is also effective (and effectively challenged) in pictures based on concrete works of art. For example, *Picture for Women* (1979), perhaps Wall's most conceptual work, is a reworking of Manet's painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882), and in some ways of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), with the figures shown as reflections in a mirror: the photographer taking the picture with a remote shutter release and a woman facing the viewer much like the barmaid in Manet's painting. The self-reflexivity of the act of photography, which places the reflection of the camera in the very centre of the picture, has been widely analysed. It is also remarkable how it makes photography into the primary 'exhibit' in the middle of what looks like an overblown glass case (in a clear dioramic structure, enclosing a frozen scene), and uses the set-up of photography to display a network of gazes spun between the artist, his female model, the viewer, and the camera, in order to engage with the power relations they reflect – relations that have been continually questioned and redefined in modern art. As Hans Belting wrote, 'it sums up the spectacle of the gaze without recognizing the perspective view as the only option', while 'all layers of time and boundaries between media become permeable'.²⁸ Furthermore, through connecting what we see as a photo displayed in a glowing cinematic form with a pictorial composition that we recognize from the history of art, and a subject matter that was brought into renewed spotlight by narrative

27 See the press release to her exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery in London in 2018, <<https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/press/current-press-releases/press-release-alex-prager-silver-lake-drive>> [accessed 12 January 2019].

28 Belting, p. 163. Belting points out the parallels of Jeff Wall and Hiroshi Sugimoto's art with Duchamp's *Étant donnés* marking the end of perspective in modern art by creating an artwork that does not depict a three-dimensional space, but operates in such a space from the onset, in which vantage points are multiplied through the fourth dimension of time as well as the crossing of media borders.

cinema,²⁹ the picture in the picture (the image in the mirror) is ambiguously caught not only between physical reality and its photographic reflection, or the perceptual and the conceptual, but also between media, and exposes the essential uncanniness of intermediality.

The uncanny is most often associated with the uncertain, the oscillation between ontologies (reality or fiction) and states of being (life or death).³⁰ As Nicholas Royle explains, it 'has to do with strangeness of framing and borders, the experience of liminality'.³¹ It is something impossible to pin down, and, as such, it 'is (the) unsettling (of itself)'.³² Therefore, intermediality – which also means sensations oscillating between media, the perception of the characteristic of one medium in another like a strong sense of *déjà vu*, like an 'otherness' or an 'interworld' that is suddenly revealed to us but resists total unravelling – always has the potential to appear to us as something deeply uncanny.³³ The dioramic tableau in photography is one of the most condensed forms to reveal this uncanniness.

Moving Images Fixated on the Diorama

If dioramic images in photographic tableaux appear uncannily cinematic, looking at the reverse angle of cinema we find that, conversely, tableau compositions in moving images may appear to us as uncannily static, reminding us of photos or paintings in the most general, uncertain way: we know that we are watching a movie but we cannot shake the feeling that what we see looks like something else. Cinema may absorb in this manner properties from its predecessor, the diorama (with its legacy of shifting from still images and illusions of movement to a three-dimensional model of reality), through the quality of photographic stillness and a similar combination of pictoriality, sculptural plasticity, and architectural scenography that we saw in photography. The image in this case is also not simply shot but first of all built as a (theatrical) set, and presented as a box that houses a world of its own even in a sequence of scenes in narrative cinema, a world that is meant to be a representative fragment, a 'snapshot' of a larger reality,

29 Campany ('A Theoretical Diagram in an Empty Classroom', p. 21) has pointed out the influence of Laura Mulvey's famous study on the role of the male gaze in classical narrative cinema.

30 For example, in Jentsch; Todorov.

31 Royle, p. 2.

32 Royle, p. 5.

33 See in this respect intermediality interpreted on the model of Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the figural (e.g. Pethő, p. 169).

showing people in their 'natural habitat'. Additionally, the dioramic effect is usually provided by characters who are for the most part inactive, pensive, or immersed in activities that require little movement, and shown for a considerable length of time, inviting a more contemplative viewing. The scene is presented in a frontal or semi-frontal single shot with a static or barely moving camera, emerging in relative isolation from the rest of the film, giving the impression of a *tableau vivant*, with or without additional painterly effects or appropriations from paintings. The sense of isolation and disconcerting media ambivalence is further increased in the case of actual reproductions of paintings. This may resemble the autonomy of pictures in photography or painting but films are rarely composed exclusively of such sequences.

One such rare example is *Shirley: Visions of Reality* (2013), a feature-film-length work by the Austrian experimental filmmaker and multimedia artist, Gustav Deutsch. The film consists of a series of stand-alone scenes, each imagined around a painting by Edward Hopper, and 'stitched' together to offer glimpses into the life of a single, fictional character, Shirley. For each sequence, clearly separated from the next one by a black screen and an intertitle, an elaborate set was built reproducing one of Hopper's paintings in a careful combination of theatrical scenery, costumes, lighting effects, and painted backgrounds. Always detached and poised, Shirley's movements are limited to a few steps and gestures within these sets transposing the typical Hopperesque space. Hopper's most famous picture (which is not reproduced in the film, as it does not feature a sole female protagonist), *Nighthawks* (1942), is the prototype for this space, a brightly illuminated glass-walled container isolating the people in it, and, at the same time, displaying them as if they were in a shop window.³⁴ Many of his paintings, and, accordingly, the scenes in Deutsch's film, consist of rectangular spaces which are sharply lit and conspicuously framed and reframed through windows and doorways, with figures who are immersed in solitary activities (Figure 26), giving the impression of being trapped in the light circumscribing the liminal area of contact between the inside and the outside. In this way, each scene in the film appears as an enclosed *tableau-vivant* diorama that Shirley inhabits. In each scene, there is a moment when she stops moving, and the shot becomes an exact replica of the composition we see in the painting. These 'snapshots' from her life show her on the same day, 28 August, of the year the paintings were made. There is a fragment of a radio broadcast

34 Hopper's paintings had a profound influence on the style and themes of Gregory Crewdson's 'dioramic' photography as well.



Figure 26 Gustav Deutsch, *Shirley, Visions of Reality* (2013): a tableau vivant diorama conspicuously framed around figures immersed in solitary activities. Screenshot.

announcing the news of the day, placing the scene into context, and we listen to her inner monologue in which she reflects on current events and her life. Through these vignettes, we traverse four decades from the 1930s to the early 1960s (the Second World War and its aftermath in the US, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, the avant-garde art scene, etc.), yet Shirley remains ageless, 'living' within the bounds of the tableau scenes created around her figure. History and time unfold off-screen and are evoked through sounds and texts, while the pictorial world itself remains the same despite the changes in locations.

Moreover, the series of scenes are bookended, self-reflexively 'sealed up' by the same shot at the beginning and the end of the film, in which we see Shirley sitting in what looks like Hopper's *Chair Car* (1965). The image confuses the otherwise clear, linear chronology of the scenes, and reveals that the whole journey of the protagonist's life seen in the film should not be interpreted as a string of memories but, as Shirley herself points out in her musings about how it feels to be on a train, framed between dream and reality. This frame is reinforced by a mise-en-abyme repetition of the photograph of Shirley on the cover of an Emily Dickinson book she is reading on the train, brought into close-up through a Ken Burns effect applied to a photograph-like still image in the film, followed by a dissolve into a blur, as a marker for this liminality. The photo on the cover of the book is from the scene reproducing Edward Hopper's painting *Western Motel* (1957), shown in the middle of the film and acting as a kind of gravity centre of the whole self-enclosed world. Suggestively, the scene itself is centred on the acts of posing and photography:

Shirley's long-time photographer boyfriend, Steve, is taking pictures of her. She is looking straight into the off-screen camera (merged with the one shooting the film), flirting with it and him, and speaking about the ambivalence of estrangement and erotic attraction produced by the presence of the camera, her own role-playing in front of it, and the man looking at her through the lens.

Much like Wall's *Picture for Women*, which raises questions of the gaze by focusing on the manner in which an image is being made in photography, and framing this image between the arts, Deutsch's *Shirley* also draws attention to photography through the intersection of male and female gazes with the mechanical eye of the lens, and within a palimpsestic overlay of media. In a work that seems to be concerned primarily with the relationship between painting and cinema, the somewhat surprising inclusion of photography, accompanied by the explicit verbal reflection, highlights, however, not a 'theoretical diagram' of the agency of the gaze,³⁵ but a media archaeology of cinema at the core of the mise-en-abyme structure of the film (connecting it to pre-cinematic forms of creating/staging an image), and a deconstruction of the tableau vivant into its noncinematic components, i.e. a still 'image' produced, or reproduced, by a posing body, the use of a theatrical and painterly décor, and so on. The film, which presents each painting as a cluster of thought, emotion, and traces of history, expanding the rich array of associations through, for example, poetry, music, and film clips in the scenes at the movie theatre, thus also dissects its own devices.

This expansive, associative, and reflexive methodology was then continued through several multimedia installations, some of which were conceived in preparation for the shooting of the film by Gustav Deutsch and his art director collaborator, Hanna Schimek, others derived from the film, and accompanying its presentation as intertwined art projects. In 2014 at the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, for example, there was an exhibition entitled *Associative Image Atlas*, illustrating the various influences on the film from the history of art, including the dioramas and panoramas of the nineteenth century, connecting the aesthetic principle of the film to Aby Warburg's famous unfinished project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–1929), in which the German art theorist created his own history of ideas in the form of an associative montage of images. In the installations presented earlier, in 2008–2009, in Vienna and New York, visitors could see the anamorphic sets and furniture made for the film, which would appear identical to Hopper's paintings if viewed from a certain angle, and thus experience the complex relationship between reality and cinematic trickery. They could enter the film sets and, as their movements were video-recorded

35 These are the words used by Wall to describe his work (see Barents, p. 96).

and screened on site in real time, they could 'become part of the diorama and at the same time remain outside observers'.³⁶

These installations drew attention to the paradoxical duality of immersiveness and alienating effect of Deutsch's film itself. On the one hand, despite all the artificiality, these 'visions of reality', emerging through the filter of Hopper's paintings, absorb the viewer, who gets used to the uncanny fusion of the arts after a certain time, and accepts it as a conceit. As *Shirley* aptly demonstrates, art can speak about reality even with figures exhibited in a fake universe of a cardboard world. On the other hand, however, the film never ceases to keep the viewer at a distance through the dioramic effect of the scenes. In this way, the central character only replicates the impression of the spectators when she says in the tableau preceding the episode about photography: 'although I knew the surroundings so well, the park, the trees, the houses, the people, I somehow felt isolated from it, as if I was looking into a diorama at the Museum of Natural History'. The dioramic image in the film appears, accordingly, as a vision that places not Hopper's paintings, but, as the title already suggests, reality itself under observation by employing the sensual mediation of the arts. Its effect is, therefore, closer to what the Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky described as *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, i.e. seeing reality in a new way through art, a resurrection of the power of perception against recognition, or, as he writes, giving back 'the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make the stone stony'.³⁷ As such, this is a device that does not only separate artistic vision from the everyday, but one that mediates between art and life, offering a heightened and even critical perception of the world.³⁸ Through this sensation, Deutsch provides a powerful support for his emancipated heroine, who has a strong opinion about everything she encounters in life.

We also see the potential for a critical undertone, a 'politics of estrangement' in the use of dioramic scenes in less experimental works in contemporary cinema. The diorama-style tableaux used by Roy Andersson in his trilogy, *Songs from the Second Floor* (*Sånger från andravåningen*, 2000), *You, the Living* (*Du levande*, 2007), and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (*En duva satt på en gren och funderade på tillvaron*, 2014), are perhaps the most relevant examples in this respect. By constructing sets on a

36 See the description of these installations on the director's website, <<https://www.gustavdeutsch.net/en/installations>> [accessed 12 January 2019].

37 Shklovsky, p. 80.

38 'Almost every example from Tolstoy provided in "Art as Device" serves as a critique of society', notes the Shklovsky scholar Alexandra Berlina (p. 25). See also Boym.



Figure 27 Ulrich Seidl, *Safari* (2016): adapting the dioramic tableau to the genre of staged documentary. Screenshot. © Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion.

sound stage for each scene and displaying people with minimum movement, often in a state of apathy or loneliness (not unlike the pale, lethargic figures in Gregory Crewdson's photos),³⁹ placed in box-like spaces, Andersson offers a tangible sense of the absurdities of human existence in the world created by the welfare state, that we can observe, due to cinema's temporality, as Shklovsky would have it, in 'a slowed-down, attentive examination'.⁴⁰ Ulrich Seidl's two films *In the Basement* (*Im Keller*, 2014) and *Safari* (2016) deliver riveting portrayals of humans in their self-enclosed world of eccentricity through an inventory of the odd practices of people who build their own isolated private spaces in their basements and through revealing the brutal theatricality of the hunts for exotic animals in Africa. With scenes of deadpan interviews showing people posing in immobile frontal shots that pack them together with their taxidermied trophies (Figure 27), the Austrian filmmaker adjusts the dioramic tableau to the genre of documentary with an even more direct critical edge.

In a form that absorbs photography into film and vice versa, the dioramic image may always fuse the unsettling effects generated by both; nevertheless, we can still trace the differences in their inflections. In the original sense, a diorama is always an invitation 'to look into' (as the etymology of the word, composed of the Greek *'diá-'*/'through, across' and *'hórama'*/'view', suggests)

39 Julian Hanich, who analyses the complexity of the *tableau* construction in Andersson's films, also notes this similarity (Hanich, p. 48).

40 See Boym, p. 110.

with the promise of offering a window onto the world, but bounces back the gaze with the rigidity of a still-life composition. In the case of photography, this still life is painterly, statuesque, and cinematic, revealing the uncanny way that features of the arts are fused and confused in intermediality. In the case of cinema this stillness, despite occasional reproductions of paintings, is ultimately not about the relationship between the arts, but about the perception of the real. What it can best 'exhibit' is not intermediality made uncanny, but life made strange. The reversibility of the dioramic display that we see in the opening scene of Andersson's film from 2014, in which two waxen humans stare at stuffed birds in the vitrines of a museum, or appear to be observed by a taxidermied pigeon, just like Pinzón's inanimate deer looking at the mannequin-like kissing couple in the photo featured in the Palais de Tokyo exhibition, only emphasizes the estrangement effect that the photo-filmic diorama may employ for nothing less than contemplating existence.

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About the Author

Ágnes Pethő is Professor of Film Studies at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) where she is currently head of the Department of Film, Photography, and Media as well as the executive editor of the journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies*. She is the author of *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (2011), and the editor of the volumes *Caught In-Between: Intermediality in Contemporary Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2020), *The Cinema of Sensations* (2015), *Film in the Post-Media Age* (2012), *Words and Images on the Screen* (2008). She has also published several essays about the relationship of painting, photography and film and the aesthetic of the tableau vivant in cinema.

9 The Cinematic *Dispositif* and Its Ghost

Sugimoto's *Theaters*

Stefano Baschiera

Abstract

This chapter will engage with the work of the artist and photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto in order to reflect on the nature of the cinematic apparatus in the digital era. Sugimoto's photographic work *Theaters* consists in a series of photographs of cinema theatres taken by the artist from the 1980s applying a wide-open aperture and an exposure as long as the film itself, capturing de facto an average of 170,000 frames in a single shot. The result is a 'film in a single frame', and a profound reflection on the role that time, lights, and the space of the audience play in the cinematic experience. The chapter looks from a cinematic perspective at the regenerative aspect of the photographic medium in its after-shot, a question called by Sugimoto a 'resurrection'.

Keywords: *Dispositif*, Agamben, Sugimoto, Sugimoto's *Theaters*, ruinophilia

From photography to site-specific art, the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto is characterized by a profound reflection on time and space, in particular with reference to the theatricality of his photographic practice. Looking at his decades-long career, scholars and critics have thoroughly examined his approach to the medium and the peculiarities of the objects portrayed in his work, focussing on the ways in which his black-and-white, long-exposure photography expands our understanding of the photographic apparatus. Sugimoto's work, in fact, arguably presents a series of affinities with, and reflects on, other arts, in particular performance art and the cinema. Giuliana Bruno, for instance, discusses the relationship between Sugimoto's photographic series such as *Dioramas* and *Wax Museums* and the origins of

cinema. She points out that, from a cinematic perspective, the photographer's portrayals of movie theatres, wax statues, dioramas, and seascapes represent an itinerary through the genealogy of cinematic space, to the extent that Sugimoto's 'work pictures the hybrid, spatial archaeology of the cinema'.¹ Michael Fried, comparing Sugimoto's work with Cindy Sherman's and Jeff Wall's, suggests that, with specific reference to the question of theatricality,

one way of understanding Sugimoto's *Movie Theaters*, Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, and Wall's *Movie Audience* is as responding in different ways to the problematic status of movies in this regard by making photographs which [...] also provide a certain essentially photographic distance from the filmic experience.²

These photographs provide this distance by allowing the theatricality 'to come into focus', which seldom happens in narrative cinema.³

According to Kevin Riordan, the visual clarity of Sugimoto's photographs is occasionally 'more lifelike than their profilmic objects', to the extent that 'the images oddly begin to lose some of the artificiality of the objects they capture'.⁴ In particular, Riordan focuses on Sugimoto's signature use of long exposure, and on his photographs of dioramas from the American Museum of Natural History. In this series, Sugimoto successfully 'blurs the distinctions between stillness and motion and between the living and the dead'.⁵ Riordan observes that the 'expansion' of Sugimoto's photography from the camera's 'click' typically referred to by Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes to 'reckon with the tenuous separation between life and death' reveals a materialistic practice in common with the theatre as well as a common feeling of 'ghostliness' between the two media.⁶

Cinema and 'ghostliness' will be key elements of my discussion of Sugimoto's work, particularly in relation to his photographic representation of cinema theatres. In fact, his series *Theaters* not only presents a collection of cinema places, but, in its reflection on time and space, offers an investigation on the relationship between cinema and photography. Such a reflection necessarily intertwines with film theory approaches focusing on the time-based nature of the cinema, while the long exposure

1 Bruno, p. 51.

2 Fried, p. 13.

3 Ibid.

4 Riordan, p. 102, 104.

5 Riordan, p. 102.

6 Ibid.



Figure 28 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Akron Civic, Ohio* (1980), gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto. Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi.

challenges the idea of instantaneity associated with photography. I will argue that Sugimoto's diachronic photographic portraits of film theatres invite an engagement with the ontology of the medium and its *dispositif*, promoting a retrospective look at the question of the cinematic apparatus in the moment of its disruption and 'relocation'.⁷

Theaters: Space and Time of the Dispositif

If Sugimoto's series such as the already mentioned *Dioramas* and *Wax Museums* show signs of a reflection on the photographic medium with reference to elements of cinema genealogy, it is with *Theaters* that the artist directly tackles the relationship between the two media, focusing on time and light as the key common denominators of their ontology.

Theaters, featuring long-exposure photographs of film theatres' interiors, began in 1979 and continued for almost 40 years, inviting consideration of the work both in its seriality as a diachronic look at the cinematic *dispositif*

7 See Casetti.

(understood in its architectonic, technological, and discursive dimensions) and as a single synchronic 'snapshot' embodying the duration of the cinematic experience.⁸ In fact, the photographic process employed by Sugimoto for this series is in itself a meditation, firstly, on the technological ontology of the two media and, secondly, on the projection of the film within its traditional architectural space. Employing a large-format camera, Sugimoto photographs the film theatre using the projection of the film on screen as the only source of light. The camera's exposure time is set to the length of the running film. The result is a mesmerizing, glowing white screen whose brightness reveals monochrome details of the surrounding space. Sugimoto's intentions are lucidly stated in the preface of the book collecting 40 years of photographs from this series: 'I wanted to photograph a movie, with all its appearance of life and motion, in order to stop it again [...]. My dream was to capture 170,000 photographs on a single frame of film. The image I had inside my brain was of a gleaming white screen inside a dark movie theatre'.⁹

While the goal of capturing in a single frame an entire film projected on a screen reveals, as I shall discuss later, Sugimoto's desire to dwell on the photographic medium in its relationship with the cinematic 'appearance of life and motion', the images of dark movie theatres caught the attention of viewers, critics, and scholars alike. Discussions and analyses carried out over the years have engaged not only with the crucial coordinate of time in his work, but also with the space portrayed: the architecture and space uncovered by the screen light, and in particular what this kind of spatial portrayal reveals about memory, identity, experience, and materiality.¹⁰ The series offers, in fact, a unique perspective on a collection of movie palaces and their architectures, from American 1920s theatres and drive-ins, to theatres in Japan, France, and Italy. Bruno dwells on this aspect in *Atlas of Emotions*, stressing in particular how Sugimoto's work draws attention to the movie house itself as the essence of the cinematic experience, and to an 'emotional topography'.¹¹ She argues that, '[w]hen he pictures film, Sugimoto pictures an architecture, making tangible the geography of cinema in the architectonics of its reception. Here, we inhabit pure film theatre space, which becomes the essential experience of cinema – the laboratory

8 See, for instance, Parente and De Carvalho.

9 Sugimoto [n.p.].

10 On the temporal dimension, see Wittman; on the representation of places, see Friedberg, and Bruno.

11 Bruno, p. 52.

of movie-going'.¹² At the same time, Bruno points out how such a spatial experience is portrayed in a transient moment, where the long exposure underlines its 'accelerated decrepitude'.¹³

This is even more relevant if we think of the role his photographs play as witnesses to the memory of those places. The diachronic reading of the series invites us to move, photo by photo, through a sequential representation of spaces that look similar but are in fact different and, in several instances, no longer exist. In the 1990s, the series focuses on drive-in theatres, portraying the white screens suspended in places subtracted to their original purpose, turning them into impossible cinematic *dispositifs*. Not only are there no spectators to be seen, but there also are no cars, or speakers. The white frame of the screen illuminates playgrounds and parking lots, to the extent that, without knowing the titles of the photos, we wouldn't realize they are drive-ins.

Diachronically, *Theaters* shows an increasingly evident distancing from the traditional cinematic *dispositif*, underlining a feeling of temporality and, to some extent, nostalgia. As I shall discuss later, the few spectators that appear in some of the photographs from the 1970s completely disappear in the rest of the series, showing a conscious desire by Sugimoto to subtract the audience from the spaces of the cinema. Moreover, in the most recent works in the series, the cinematic screen appears to be 'out of place', an alien element in the places where the film projection was 'staged' so as to be captured by Sugimoto's camera: from opera theatres to derelict sites. Recent additions to the series portray abandoned theatres (shot in 2015) with the light emanating from the screen revealing magnificent ruins – embodying at a different level the ghostly nature of the work and the impermanency of the places portrayed.

Before engaging with the ruinophilia of the series,¹⁴ further consideration must be given to how the link between place, experience and the ephemeral nature of these architectures also informed analyses on the relation between architecture and cinemagoing, underlining, in this case, the experiences of film theatres and the ensuing compression of time.¹⁵ If, as Anne Friedberg states, the cinematic experience frees the spectators from the limit of material space and from the restraints of time, Sugimoto's photographs 'return us

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bruno, pp. 52–53.

¹⁴ On the concept of ruinophilia, see Boym. On how such concept can be applied to the 'film ruins' and expanded cinema, see Balsom.

¹⁵ On the relationship between the idea of place and the experience of time in architecture see the seminal work by Tuan.

to the tension between the bodily stasis of the cinematic spectator and the virtual mobilities presented on the screen'.¹⁶ They lead back to debates of the 1920s and 1930s on the effects of architecture on spectatorship, such as the seminal essay by Siegfried Kracauer on Berlin's picture palaces. According to Friedberg, Sugimoto's work helps us to grasp the role of the screen in the architectural context of the filmic experience, and in particular reveals the key feature played by darkness in the framing process: 'the frame of the screen forms either a tableau-like proscenium, forcing our vision to center its gaze or it implies a continuum of space lingering just off-screen/off-frame'.¹⁷

Interestingly, the question of time in Sugimoto's photography leads back to early film theory's definitions of the two media; for instance, to Kracauer's writings on photography and his distinction between the evolvment in time generated by cinema and the moment of time created by photography.¹⁸ However, Sugimoto challenges the instantaneity of the medium and uses its temporality at once to reveal the photographic essence of cinema movement and to condense the time of the cinematic experience.¹⁹ The compression of time in Sugimoto's photographs, in fact, adds to the portrayal of the screen/frame the element of the duration of the filmic experience, transforming the latter into a relationship between light and darkness. In doing so, it underlines the 'impossible' vision of the surrounding architecture during the screening, almost encouraging the viewer to take their eyes off the screen/frame, and therefore challenging the purpose of the architectural space itself.

It is noteworthy that Sugimoto's *Dioramas* series, by restoring taxidermied animals in natural history museums to a lifelike state, also underlines, albeit from a different perspective, the ontological aspects of the medium. Questions of indexicality, framing, temporality (through the goal of freezing time) emerge from the series, inviting also a meditation on spectacle and the genealogy of photography. Kitty Hauser, for instance, points out how photography replaced taxidermy in the context of representation of the natural in Western culture, and in its Bazinian aim to defend life from the reality of death.²⁰

Sugimoto's *Dioramas* created a photographic lifelike illusion by *removing* the frame and the theatrical display of the dioramas. His *Theaters*, conversely,

16 Friedberg, p. 188.

17 Ibid.

18 Kracauer, *Theory of Film* and *The Mass Ornament*.

19 See Thoma.

20 Hauser, p. 9.

and in spite of the clear attraction and fascination of the luminescent screen, draw attention to what is usually in the background during a film screening, to the place surrounding the frame. In doing so, the medium does not 'give back life', but removes it. In fact, such a revelation of the theatre's architecture does not just expose the 'zero degree of cinema' as suggested by Bruno.²¹ The perceptibility of the theatre during the screening also challenges our understanding of the cinematic *dispositif* and, crucially, reveals the problematic absence of a key component of its apparatus: the audience. Fried rightly addresses this question by pointing out the 'photographic distance from the film experience' emerging from Sugimoto's series.²² While the fascination for the shiny object that is the screen is undeniable, the camera's point of view introduces a significant distance from it, leading to a feeling of detachment and disinterest in the viewer. This becomes even more evident when we consider the care taken by Sugimoto in progressively removing from his post-1970s photographs any sign of an audience or traces of human intervention in the space.

The condensation of the time of cinematic experience produced by these images creates a selection of the technological components which define the cinema. Light and architecture are picked over audience, using the screen lighting device to illuminate spaces of spectacle that are not always intrinsically cinematographic (as is the case of the photo *Teatro Farnese, Parma*, 2015). What is left from the long exposure is a ghost.

The Ghost and the Gesture

The ghostly nature of Sugimoto's *Theaters* has been at the centre of different analyses, including the already mentioned work by Riordan, which underlines the relationship between theatre and photography in light of the representation of eerie spaces and the life/death duality as understood by Barthes. However, I would argue that such ghostly characterization emerges also within the long exposure employed by Sugimoto, and the gesture that it captures.

In the essay 'Judgment Day' (featured in the book *Profanation*), Giorgio Agamben engages with the long-exposure photograph *Boulevard du Temple* shot in 1838 by Louis Daguerre, the first photograph to depict human figures. Because of the long exposure the boulevard crowd cannot be seen, with

²¹ Bruno, p. 52.

²² Fried, p. 14.

the exception of one man having his shoes shined, and therefore standing still during the exposure. As Agamben points out, '[t]he crowd of humans – indeed all humanity – is present but it cannot be seen because judgement concerns a single person, a single life'.²³ In this case, the life and crowd of the boulevard are present, albeit invisibly, because of their movement and the impossibility to impress the film. As Janet Harbord argues in her work on Agamben, in the *Boulevard du Temple* '[w]hat is not registered is the animistic movement of bodies, or transport. What *is* registered however is motion, either as absence, blurred form, or gesture'.²⁴ The latter for Agamben is a prerogative of humanity, a gesture as an act in its own term, '[g]esture rather than image is the cinematic element'.²⁵ In this regard, the photographic image always implies potentiality of movement and cinema releases such potential, charging images with movement and therefore bringing the gesture to film's ontological centre.

In Sugimoto's *Theaters* the film screened is the movement that is present by its absence. Like the streets imply the presence of a crowd, the cinema theatre implies the action on the screen, the gesture, and humanity. The emptiness of the place reminds us that, if, at the time of taking the photograph, there was a gesture, if there was humanity, it was on the white screen. In this case, what *is* registered in the screen, in fact, is motion as light form. Like in the dioramas, there is no life in front of the camera lens. Humanity is in the signs of the film's indexicality; its lifelike nature is registered in its absence.

Janet Harbord argues that, considering Agamben's gesture and its implication of movement, 'the photograph calls up a moment that is not an instant within a continuum, but a paradigm of heterogeneous times that breaks from the concept of the image as a sealed surface containing an historical truth'.²⁶ This point is very important since it features a different understanding of the ontology of the photographic medium, challenging its role as witness and its ability to freeze time. Instead, as I shall discuss later, a focus on gesture in photography underlines the tension towards movement and the representation of different temporalities, beyond the sole instantaneity. Sugimoto's work arguably 'opens' the image by offering a perspective on the relationship between stillness and mobility, single image and film strip, 'life' and 'death'. The description that the artist provides of his intentions

23 Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 23.

24 Harbord, 'Gesture, Time, Movement', p. 78. Emphasis in the original.

25 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 138.

26 Harbord, 'Gesture, Time, Movement', p. 78.

in approaching the photographic ontology of the cinematic medium can be considered in relation to core concepts in film studies – among others, Laura Mulvey's argument, presented in *Death 24x a Second*, that '[t]he photograph's freezing of reality [...] marks a transition from the animate to the inanimate, from life to death. The cinema reverses the process, by means of an illusion that animates the inanimate frames of its origin'.²⁷ In his short text 'My Inner Theater', Sugimoto, in fact, seems to tackle this very aspect of the relationship between the cinema and photography when he writes:

I was thinking a great deal about the invention of photography. A photograph fixes dead reality in the form of an afterimage. But when you are shown a series of those same afterimages, dead reality seems to come back to life – that is what a movie is. To watch a two-hour movie is simply to look at 172,800 photographic afterimages. Through sheer excess, the dead afterimages seem to come alive again. Since ancient Egyptian times – no, since the birth of civilization itself – the human race has been fascinated by the idea of resurrection. I wanted to photograph a movie, with all its appearance of life and motion, in order to stop it again. What I felt was a sense of vocation: *I must use photography as a means to shut away the ghosts resurrected by the excess of photographic afterimages.*²⁸

The bright screen and the empty theatres bring the animated frames back to an inanimate status. However, I would argue that the ghosts are not completely shut away but are trapped in the implied gesture of the framed screen. The image, which has now become just light, is pure potentiality of its condensed time; for the still photograph, it is an ungraspable idea of resurrection surrounded by death. Sugimoto's photographs, in fact, experienced the film, captured its duration, witnessed the resurrection of 172,800 afterimages, and, in the attempt to bring them back to their original stillness, leave a trace of light, of movement, of humanity.

In the short essay 'Notes on Gesture' Agamben expands on the work of Gilles Deleuze on the movement-image in order to argue that cinema is gesture and not image; he writes: 'every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the *imago* as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamis* intact'.²⁹ As an example of the latter, Agamben

27 Mulvey, p. 15.

28 Sugimoto [n.p]. Emphasis in the original.

29 Agamben, *Means Without End*, p. 54.

refers to Eadweard Muybridge's snapshots and sport photography. The idea is that such an image always refers 'beyond itself to a whole of which it is a part'.³⁰ Therefore, cinema leads the images back to the reality of gesture. I argue that Sugimoto's long exposures, by capturing the duration, work within such antinomic polarity; in their reification of a gesture they compromise the *dynamis* to the extent that it is the revelation of the space of experience and *dispositif* (revealed by the ghostly light of the projection) that leads the framed screen back to the homeland of the gesture.

Harbord reminds us how Agamben uses the gesture to view cinema 'not as a series of moving images but as a mode of communication and historical transmission', as ex-centric cinema.³¹ The ghostly gesture of screening, then, captured in its duration by *Theaters* as a reflection on cinema and its apparatus, is able to bring the theoretical argument back to its *dispositif*.

The Zombie *Dispositif*

In their essay 'Cinema as *Dispositif*: Between Cinema and Contemporary Art', André Parente and Victa de Carvalho invite a reflection on the role played by the concept of *dispositif* in film theory, in particular by considering how 'new technologies and contemporary art are transforming the cinema'.³² Their analysis reveals two key reasons why the *dispositif* has been at the centre of several contemporary theoretical investigations of the cinema; the first is 'to show that cinema can produce an image that eludes traditional representation', and the second is to analyse 'the alliances cinema establishes with other *dispositifs* and means of image production [in order to] sketch the displacement process cinema operates with respect to its dominant forms'.³³ The latter point is of particular interest here, considering Sugimoto's work between cinema and photography, as well as other visual art practices.³⁴ I would argue, however, that *Theaters*, with its systematic engagement with the different dimensions of the cinematic *dispositif* – revealing, subverting, and challenging it at each of the architectonical, technological, and discursive levels – invites an investigation from a different perspective. Sugimoto's work brings us back to the necessity of engaging with the notion

30 Ibid.

31 Harbord, *Ex-Centric Cinema: Giorgio Agamben and Film Archaeology*, p. 14.

32 Parente and de Carvalho, p. 38.

33 Parente and de Carvalho, p. 45.

34 Sugimoto's work has increasingly involved the making of site-specific arts such as the *Glass Tea House 'Mondrian'*, Venice, 2014–2016.

of *dispositif*, which has been central to the development of film theory. This means acknowledging the shifting nature of the cinematic apparatus and the need to retheorize it. Parente and de Carvalho suggest that:

Rereading cinema as a *dispositif* that can be reinvented seems to be a way of uniting expanded cinema (which concentrates on happenings and performances while allying projection with other types of artistic expression), the cinema of attractions (a filmic practice that constantly interrupts narrative flow) and cinema of exhibition (characterized by a particular spatialization of image and the diversification of temporal flows, on film and in the space of reception).³⁵

On the one hand, practices linked to the cinema of attractions, and in particular the question of a static image in the cinematic flow (like the extreme immobility in the 'acinema' theorized by Jean-François Lyotard, or the pensive image in the already mentioned work by Laura Mulvey) can surely be helpful in approaching *Theaters*. However, on the other hand, it is noteworthy that contemporary discussions regarding the cinematic *dispositif* mainly focus on its displacement and the tension between its dominant forms and the heterogeneous experiences it generates. For instance, the movement of cinema practices away from film theatres to galleries, museums, and even smartphones is at the centre of reflections involving intermedialities, hybridities, and new forms of temporalities.³⁶ From this perspective, Sugimoto's work is of particular interest because, despite being photographic, and intended for serialized exhibition in a gallery space, it invites a reconsideration of the discourse on the cinematic *dispositif* by bringing it back to its traditional *lieu* of exhibition. *Theaters*, in other words, directly deals with the same arguments to be found in the literature inviting a rereading of the cinema as *dispositif*, but it does so from a different perspective. For instance, it indirectly addresses experiences such as those of expanded cinema, cinema of attractions, and cinema of exhibition.

More specifically, the question of expanded cinema can be seen within Sugimoto's 'staged' screenings in places that are no longer (or never have been) devoted to cinema exhibition, like abandoned theatres and opera houses.³⁷ The theme of the cinema of attractions is relevant to Sugimoto's

35 Parente and de Carvalho, p. 48.

36 See, for instance, Bellour.

37 This also points to an understanding of the performance and theatrical qualities of Sugimoto's work, as addressed by Riordan.

disruption of the normal screen temporality, which almost reverses the much-discussed 'frozen frame'. Sugimoto offers an intermedial approach where the photographic ontology of cinema is revealed in its basic components of time, space, and light. Finally, the cinema of exhibition is reflected in the way Sugimoto's 'one-shot films' and their places of consumption are presented sequentially in art galleries, inviting the visitors to reflect on film temporality and on the transient nature of its most institutionalized *dispositif*. However, I would argue that Sugimoto's work does not open the cinematic *dispositif* to new opportunities and to a heterogeneity of experiences but points out its ruins and its (prolonged) moment of crisis. In contrast to video arts, which move elements of the cinema to the gallery context in order to provide new modes of subjectivization and open new opportunities to the *dispositif*, away from its most canonical and dominant understanding, *Theaters*, from its conception to its exhibition, reflects on death and resurrection – of the image and of the *dispositif*. As Sugimoto states, '[t]he light created by an excess of 170,000 exposures would be the embodiment or manifestation of something awe-inspiring and divine; perhaps that something was the "excess of death"'.³⁸ Such an excess of death, alongside a nostalgic view of the theatres and ruinophilia, ideally locates the representation of cinema theatres made by Sugimoto within the 'post-medium, post-mortem condition'.³⁹ Such a condition stresses the obsolescence of the filmic ruins in a period of media convergence, challenging to the notion of 'medium specificity' and the hegemony of the cinematic apparatus. I would argue that the debates surrounding the 'post-mortem condition' in the case of Sugimoto lead to what we can define as a 'zombie *dispositif*'.

According to Jussi Parikka, zombie media are those obsolete media that should no longer linger in our technological landscape, but still do. With zombie *dispositif* I refer to Sugimoto's conscious representation of a *dispositif* which, in its technological essence, is increasingly in jeopardy of obsolescence, but is still present. Without going into the decades-long debate regarding the death of the cinema, Sugimoto's work, with its goal of shutting down the ghosts 'resurrected' by the cinema, reveals another ghostly image: that of a cinematic *dispositif* in its 'bare-bone', elemental condition. The temporality of the long exposure sets the photograph back to a realm between the death of the still image and the resurrected life of cinematic motion: in other words, it becomes a 'zombie'. The resurrected life, albeit present in the white screen,

38 Sugimoto [n.p.].

39 Balsom, pp. 70-75.

is reduced to its technical dimension, revealing spectral, fascinating spaces built to accommodate a human life that is no more. The ruinophilia aspect of *Theaters*, which reaches its peak in the photographs of drive-ins and abandoned theatres, reveals a traditional *dispositif* that has been brought back to life by Sugimoto's work, where the only space for the 'living' (for the audience) is the detached one of the large-format mechanical camera.

The zombified dimension of the traditional cinematic *dispositif* in Sugimoto's work becomes more evident if we compare the analogical reflection on cinema temporality emerging from *Theaters* with a similar but digital approach, for instance Jim Campbell's *Illuminated Average #1: Hitchcock's Psycho* (2000), where the artist created again a single image for the entire film but, in this case, by layering each scanned frame. The result is a single image containing all the data of the film through digitalized layers. Similar to the photographic results obtained by Sugimoto, *Illuminated Average #1* is an image dominated by a white tone but with dark edges at the corners. Interestingly, however, because of the digital nature of the work and, consequently, its deterritorialization of the medium, what we have here is only an image, unable to generate light, and decontextualized in respect to the traditional cinematic *dispositif*. It is a portable image of compressed time. It reveals a very different kind of gesture, and a different kind of afterimage.

Conclusion

In Jim Jarmusch's film *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) the two-centuries-old vampire lovers travel by car through a nightly and deserted Detroit until they reach the ruins of the Michigan Theater, a former 4,000-seat movie house built in 1926 and closed in 1976. The two protagonists admire the beautifully decorated ceiling, look at the remains of the magnificent architecture, and discuss the decline of the place over the years, culminating in its current use as a parking lot. In 2015 Sugimoto repurposed the Michigan Theater site for one of his abandoned theatres shots. The white screen reveals the lines of the parking spots on the floor and the uncanny magnificence of the arches surrounding the stage.

This photo is reproduced, among others, in the most recent publication collecting Sugimoto's *Theaters* works. However, it was first exhibited in September 2016 at the Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco alongside other photos of abandoned theatres under the title 'Remains to Be Seen'. Interestingly, in the 'Remains to Be Seen' series of *Theaters* the films screened by the photographer are of a certain importance, as they were all personally

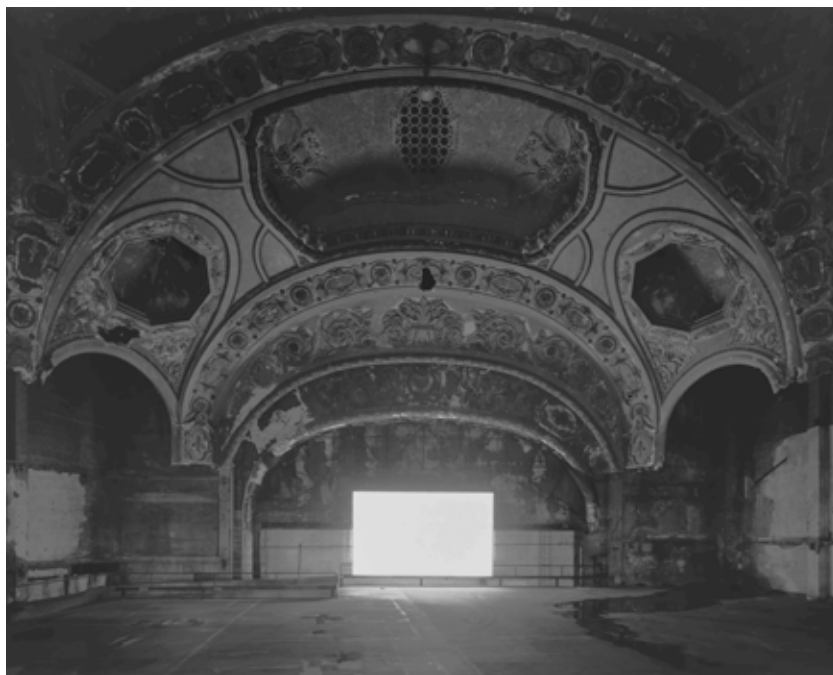


Figure 29 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Michigan Theater, Detroit* (2015), gelatin silver print.

© Hiroshi Sugimoto. Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi.

chosen by him to 'fit' the mood of the space: from *Rashômon* (*Rashomon*, Akira Kurosawa, 1950) to *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968). For instance, the post-apocalyptic *On the Beach* (Stanley Earl Kramer, 1959) was screened digitally with a portable projector and a laptop against an improvised screen in the derelict Paramount Theater in Newark. *Rashomon* was instead screened at Franklin Park Theater in Boston to mirror the fact that rain was running through the ceiling.⁴⁰ These photos of abandoned theatres invite a series of reflections: first of all, regarding the agency of the role played by Sugimoto in his reterritorializing of the cinematic *dispositif*, bringing it back to its original location. The digital tools that contribute to the relocation of the cinema are here used to rebuild a dismissed 'traditional' *dispositif*, by linking the computer to a projector in a still-standing though ruined architectural space originally allocated to such activity. However, such an attempted resurrection of the place only reveals its decayed status, beyond recovery and beyond hope. It's a zombified place, which still offers a glimpse of its original nature but which also mirrors the ineluctable passing

40 Genova.

of time. Secondly, the choice of the films screened draws the attention back to what is invisible, to the implicit gesture. In this case, the image on the white screen implies the gesture of the film screened and leads back to its narrative meaning and understanding.

In his short interventions dedicated to the cinema of Guy Debord and to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989–1999), Agamben addresses the messianic role of cinema and how it relates to the photographic stills of which the cinema is made.⁴¹ In particular, it addresses it by focusing on montage as the key element for the 'transcendental conditions' of the cinematic medium. In fact, according to Agamben, montage articulates repetition and stoppage, the latter working 'on the image itself, that pulls it away from the narrative power to exhibit it as such'.⁴² Montage reveals the image for what it is, in its mediality, creating through repetition 'the return as the possibility of what was' and a consequent indiscernibility between past and present.⁴³ In Godard's *Histoire(s)*, images extracted from different films, free from recounting a narrative, exhibit themselves just as images, an 'imagelessness' manifesting their messianic power.⁴⁴ From a different perspective, such imagelessness quality appears in *Theaters* too. Rather than in its isolation from a narrative context, as in Godard, it appears from the image's bringing together of 170,000 images and, therefore, revealing again an image which is just an image, outside the transcendental condition of editing, and back to the ontological nature of the medium. However, it is in the analysis of the use of the black-and-white screen in Debord's cinema that we can find a more interesting reading with reference to the work of Sugimoto. Agamben engages with it, pointing out that such black-and-white screens employed by Debord through the use of repetition and stoppage are 'the ground where the images are so present that they can no longer be seen, and the void where there is no image'.⁴⁵ A void within a void, the presence of 170,000 images can no longer be seen. What is left are ruins, and time in action.

To conclude, Sugimoto's *Theaters* invites a reconsideration of the question of *dispositif* as paramount in film theory, particularly in regard to its understanding within the medium ontology and in its relationship with other media practices and *loci* of performance. The reflection on time

41 Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's Films' and 'Cinema and History: On Jean-Luc Godard'.

42 Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition', p. 317.

43 Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition', p. 315–316.

44 Agamben, 'Cinema and History: On Jean-Luc Godard', p. 26.

45 Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition', p. 317.

and space implicit in his work, in fact, allows the role that the presumed instantaneity of photography has played in the theoretical understanding of cinema to be considered; simultaneously, it challenges it by revealing the temporality of photography and cinema, and by opening up a reading of the image as gesture. The white screens which dominate Sugimoto's *Theaters* add a ghostly dimension to the architecture of the cinema theatres revealed by the projection light. They draw attention to the key features of the cinematic apparatus, in a moment in which this is shrouded in loss and nostalgia.

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About the Author

Stefano Baschiera is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Queen's University Belfast. His work on European cinema and the film industries has been published in a variety of edited collections and journals including *Film International*, *Bianco e Nero*, *Italian Studies*, and *New Review of Film and Television Studies*.

10 Time/Frame: On Cinematic Duration

Laura Rascaroli

Abstract

The role of the frame in determining filmic temporality has rarely been discussed. Time in the cinema emerges from diegetic, formal, and symbolic elements organized by the frame, but the prominence of montage and the movement of the filmic frame have tended to obscure the latter's importance in creating a mediated temporality. This chapter engages with Stan Douglas's photograph *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* (2008) as a form of theory of filmic temporality. It then compares the role of the frame in determining the temporality of photography, painting, and film, drawing on works such as Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water* (2007), and André Bazin essay on Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Picasso Mystery* (*Le Mystère Picasso*, 1956).

Keywords: Temporality, frame, Stan Douglas, Eric Baudelaire, duration

The art of Stan Douglas is strikingly cinematic. The Vancouver-based artist has found inspiration for much of his work in the world and culture of the cinema. Some of his films and videos explicitly adapt famous movies, though, as Lisa Coulthard has written, 'Douglas's film and video installations are not remakes but pieces that modify and engage with source materials thematically and formally'.¹ *Subject to a Film: Marnie* (1989), for instance, is the recreation of a scene from Hitchcock's *Marnie*, more precisely the looping of a scene in which the kleptomaniac character played by Tippy Hedren steals from her employer. While photographed in black and white, the sequence looks 'updated' on account of its modern setting. The DVD installation *Suspiria* (2003), on the other hand, mimics the visual style of Dario Argento's 1977 cult horror film (recently remade by Luca Guadagnino),

1 Coulthard, p. 4.

while exploring the properties of Technicolor. *Inconsolable Memories* (2005) is based in part on *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968), the landmark Third Cinema Cuban film by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in its turn based on a novel by Edmundo Desnoes titled, like Douglas's work, *Inconsolable Memories*. A six-hour single-channel video loop projection, *Luanda-Kinshasa* (2013) is also inspired by a film, namely Jean-Luc Godard's *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968) – more precisely, its interweaving of shots of the Rolling Stones recording their hit single of the same name with seemingly unrelated clips of Black Panther militants. Also relevant is Douglas's multimedia project *Helen Lawrence* (2014), inspired by film noir and combining live theatre with live-action footage and computer-generated recreations of historical backgrounds.

While these and other film and video works by Douglas establish his interest in the cinema as apparatus, as cultural history, and as experience, here I will scrutinize his treatment of the cinematic in his non-cinema-based work. The term cinematic is resistant to definition, but, as Maeve Connolly has indicated in a programmatic survey essay on conceptualizing the cinematic in contemporary art, it has been used by critics in a number of ways in relation to art that, while being 'located outside or beyond cinema', takes as a point of reference the activities, materialities and processes of filmmaking and of the cinema as a medium and apparatus.² The cinematic, which is not limited to works that involve the moving image, can be associated with 'the activity of thinking about or moving toward an artwork rather than necessarily being bound to the work's own properties'.³ Also, it can be seen to relate to the past and to authority, for 'it is linked to knowledge and prior experience of cinema'.⁴ Finally, it can manifest itself in exhibition-making, through processes of staging and planning but also through 'the eliciting of knowledge on two levels, relating to cinema experience and crucially to reflection upon this experience'.⁵ All of these features of the cinematic can be traced in the use I will make of the term in my examination of and engagement with a photograph by Stan Douglas, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* (2008).

The use made of the photographic medium by Douglas, indeed, is often intensely cinematic. Many of his photographs draw their subjects from the world of the cinema or from specific films, and directly comment on the

2 Connolly, p. 85.

3 Connolly, p. 86.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

medium. Consider, for instance, *Hair, 1948* (2010), an image that presents what would appear to be a hairstyle of the late 1940s, while being an obvious reference to an iconic sequence from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), made a full decade later. *Hair, 1948* is also at once a reference to Chris Marker's experimental time-travel science-fiction film, *La Jetée* (1962), which in turn pays homage to Hitchcock's masterpiece. Made up almost entirely of still photographs, *La Jetée* is famous for relinquishing the fundamental property of the cinema as the medium that added time to photography, while still coming across as a film. But Douglas's *Hair, 1948* is not cinematic because its subject is a homage to two films; it is so because, by situating itself in between Hitchcock's 1950s classic cinema, Marker's 1960s experimentalism, and 1940s photographic styles, *Hair, 1948* is a reflection on the differences between technologies of mechanical reproduction and between the particular temporalities of film and of photography. What is striking in *Hair, 1948* is how it comments on time and its imponderability as a subjective category, drawing on our experience as film spectators and a complex shared exposure to the cinema.

Mediated temporality is, in fact, a crucial theme throughout Douglas's oeuvre, and my interest here is in how his cinematic photography works as a theory of concepts of time in the filmic medium. My starting point will be, as mentioned, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935*, a digital Chromogenic colour print mounted on an aluminium composite panel. *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* is the photographic reconstruction of a historical, repressed dockers' strike in Vancouver, which is considered to have paved the way for the unionizing of dockworkers in British Columbia. The image belongs to Douglas's *Crowds and Riots* series, which also includes works such as *Hastings Park, 16 July 1955* and *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* (all 2008). As Seamus Kealy has written with regard to *Crowds and Riots*, 'in composing and establishing the scenarios, actions, and details of each image, Douglas has applied his study of photographs from different periods, as well as, where available, film footage, newspaper clippings, police reports, affidavits, interviews with observers and participants, and other archive materials'.⁶ The whole series is, indeed, temporally layered, not least for how it works as a discourse on a plurality of media, on past visual styles, on the texturing typical of specific technologies of vision, and on historical documents.

Like all the other images in the *Crowds and Riots* series, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* was realized as a re-enactment, namely of a scene from the Battle of Ballantyne Pier which was staged by Douglas using cinematic techniques. More precisely, as Kealy notes: 'The photographs were created

6 Kealy, p. 17.

in the same manner as motion pictures, using either purpose-built sets or real locations and casting, dressing, and preparing actors for each historical period.⁷ Each of the pictures in *Crowds and Riots*, as a result, looks like a still from a (non-existing) film. For David Company, for example, 'so arch and prepossessing is Douglas's mise-en-scène, and so manicured are the color palettes, that each looks like a still from one of Hollywood's recent attempts to make a "quality" historical movie'.⁸ In truth, Douglas's *Crowds and Riots* evoke much more than contemporary quality period films. They are too loaded with meaning to be reduced to that – they strike us with a greater force than that of their manicured mise en scène. Company rightly points to the fact that '[t]hese photographs may alert us to particular moments in history, but they also invite a more generalized and contemplative set of questions to do with the status of reenactment in today's visual culture'.⁹ While this is true, these photographs' status as re-enactments is in fact infinitely complicated by Douglas's layered use of medium and technique. It matters that, as described by Kealy, '[s]eparate images were composited together to form each image'.¹⁰ *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* is an assemblage of eight different shots taken at four locations. In this way, it notably gestures to cinematic montage and its audacious compositional capabilities, as these were famously celebrated by early film theorists such as Dziga Vertov: 'I am a kino-eye [...] free of the limits of time and space, I put together any given points in the universe, no matter where I have recorded them'.¹¹

Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935 is an intensely expressive, emblematic image. A profoundly intermedial photograph with an epic creative impulse, it simultaneously evokes period film, social-realist cinema (and photography), and historical painting. As such, it provides a powerfully synthetic commentary on a range of theoretical issues of great importance for what has been our experience of the cinema that belonged to the big (and wide) screen: temporality, the relationship between mise en scène and indexicality, the function of framing as against the role of narrative. While I will be touching on all these elements, I am particularly interested in bringing into focus the role of the frame and of the function of framing in determining questions of temporality in film – a function that is more often than not neglected. With 'frame', I will not refer to the single frame that is the smallest element of a

7 Ibid.

8 Company, 'The Angel of History', p. 13.

9 Ibid.

10 Kealy, p. 17.

11 Vertov, pp. 17–18.

film strip (except when I do so explicitly), but, rather, to the shape and edge of the film as projected on a screen, as well as to the overall composition of an image – that is, the ‘disposition and balance of figures, forms, colors, lighting, angle, perspective, focus, movements, and subspaces’.¹²

By being interartial, in as much as it incorporates the cinema as an apparatus with its methods and techniques, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* operates at a level of temporality that goes beyond that of photography alone. While photography has many ways to suggest an ongoing temporality that is not limited to the instant captured by the shutter (for instance, the tableau, or the long exposure – not to mention post-production and presentational strategies like ‘the photo-novel, the photo essay, sequences, juxtapositions, montage, collage, the slideshow and all the new modes opened up by electronic technologies’¹³), in *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* Douglas integrates temporal forms that belong more readily to the cinema than to photography. The temporal effect of his picture is not so much a ‘this has happened’, but an extendable narrative temporality that depends on the diegetic components of the image, while certainly not being limited to them. A concise textual analysis focusing on the temporal qualities of the work will provide the basis for a subsequent discussion that, starting from Douglas, aims to broaden the reflection to the cinema.

I will begin my discussion with a rather obvious observation: *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* develops along two planes: horizontal and vertical. The two planes are not just formal/aesthetic, but also distinctly temporal. The horizontal plane is narrative and representational, as well as formal and metaphorical. Through its evidence as mise en scène, we are invited to read the action in it as that of a period film – Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), for instance, comes to mind on account of its noteworthy similarities with *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* in terms of setting, of its understanding of history as an often violent battle between social parts played in the urban streets, its expressive use of the built environment to frame the action, its exploitation of the widescreen, of light, and of the colour palette to epic effects, and its deliberate choreographic disposition. Caught in the middle, the action in *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* suggests a horizontal development from the left to the right, in particular thanks to the forward run of the last man on the right-hand side of the image, who is projected out of frame. The temporality of the horizontal plane is, however, mixed, not least because of the action that takes place near the car on the

¹² Branigan, p. 65.

¹³ Company, *Photography and Cinema*, p. 18.

left, which suggests a repression of the forward movement. The movement is indeed contained and reversed by the capture of one of the strikers, which suggests that the man who is still running might soon also be caught. The numbers over the doors in the background, moreover, read from right to left, backwards, and are therefore in tension with the model of time as a line, as well as with the train tracks and all the elements of the photograph that read as lines, suggesting a forward movement. Horizontality is also evidently contrasted by the verticalization operated by the background of the image. The rows of windows in the building (Vancouver's abandoned sugar refinery) are suggestive of vertical rather than horizontal lines, and thus counteract the direction of the train tracks. Being represented in pairs like the tracks, they function as vertical, upward vectors. This effect is accentuated by the light that hits the building, which is more intense at its top than at the bottom, thus guiding our gaze upward. The golden, somewhat otherworldly light inscribes a different, symbolic, painterly temporality, which echoes another crucial element of the image: the white horse with rider. The duo, caught in mid-action and positioned right at the centre of the picture, is strongly reminiscent of a typical subject of countless historical battle paintings.

By incorporating cinematic, as well as painterly, techniques, the temporality of the image thus gestures towards a complexity that draws on narrative, *mise en scène*, performance and choreography, as well as cultural references, the emblematicity of the historical moment, and the layering of symbolism. What I am particularly interested in, however, is to reflect on the role of the frame in achieving a certain temporal effect, and in elevating this photograph to a commentary on time in the filmic medium.

As already intimated, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* encompasses several conceptions of temporality. If the widescreen and the references to historical painting evoke an epic time, the composition of the scene suggests diegetic development, the buildout of a story, which is also supported by the strong narrativity implicit in the image's horizontality, and in its action projected into the next 'frame'. And temporality here is, indeed, all a matter of framing. While gesturing towards widescreen cinema formats, the size of the photograph exaggerates them; its stretched shape could be said to attempt to include more than one frame within the frame. This impression is also an outcome of the composition of the image, which, as mentioned, was made up of eight shots taken at four different locations. The deliberate framing is carefully constructed to create a temporality of vectors, narrative elements, and cultural and symbolic references. As a result, the dependency of the multi-layered time of the image on the frame becomes wholly evident.

Time in the cinema equally emerges from diegetic, formal, and symbolic elements organized by the frame, but the fact that film is made up of moving images, and the prominence of montage, have tended to obscure the importance of the frame for filmic temporality. For Giuliana Bruno, the cinema and the museum, two public spaces of viewing that jointly 'emerged out of the modern process of mobilization', are 'products of an era that activated the gaze in sequence'.¹⁴ While there is no actualized sequence in Douglas's *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935*, his picture does produce a concentrated temporality that comes to be expanded by the implicit idea of a sequence. A film without motion, *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* is like stilled cinema, in which the question of the frame in creating the temporality of the cinematic experience becomes tangible, precisely because of the subtraction of motion. But how does this help us to think of cinematic time through the frame? What happens if we put motion back into the image?

Framing is often 'invisible' in film, in that, in most accounts, it is rarely perceived by the spectator. As Edward Branigan has argued, the 'invisibility' of the filmic frame has been conceptualized in contrasting ways by film theorists, depending on their position on the fundamental question of realism. He writes:

Jean Mitry argues that characters' movements, camera movements, and continual changes of shot tend to make the spectator 'forget the "frame."' Mitry adds, 'Thus if everything contrives to make us forget the frame as such, everything contrives at the same time to make us feel its effects.' Mitry has it both ways, while Bazin would have us forget the frame in favor of a photographic and phenomenal 'realism' (e.g., through continuous sweeping camera movements that create a 'lateral depth of field') while Eisenstein, Arnheim, and Burch would have us remember the frame as an antidote to 'realism.'¹⁵

In as much as it is a function of realism, the specific temporality of a film may be said to contribute to enhance or obliterate the frame for a spectator. A faster diegetic temporality, with many events and frequent cuts, is generally regarded as productive of a certain type of filmic realism, in which viewers 'forget' that they are at the cinema – or, more simply, are busier following the story than paying attention to formal elements that already tend to disappear by their nature. If we accept this, it logically follows that

¹⁴ Bruno, p. 19.

¹⁵ Branigan, p. 67.

a slow temporality, with fewer events and fewer cuts, should create more opportunities for the frame to gain visibility, while also forging a different type of realism (we could resort to the Deleuzian dichotomy of movement-image versus time-image here to capture the distinction). Without wanting to engage with the long-running debate on filmic realism, however, here I wish to reverse the approach, and ask, as already mentioned, not what time does to the frame, but what the role of the frame is in creating filmic time.

The issue of the filmic medium's treatment of temporality comes into focus most effectively in films in which our attention is more decidedly directed to frame and framing. It is in the limit cases where this becomes clearer. One is Andy Warhol's cinema – in particular, a work such as *Empire* (1964). The temporality of *Empire* has normally been discussed as an effect of the very slowly changing light produced by the actual passing of time as captured by the film camera, fixed on the iconic Empire State Building in New York on the night between 24 and 25 July 1964. Another way in which *Empire*'s temporality becomes tangible, and utterly filmic, is through the fact that, shot at twenty-four frames per second, *Empire* was to be screened at sixteen frames per second – a slow-motion effect that expanded the length of the film from six and a half to just over eight hours. The slow motion of the projection, combined with the enhanced flickering of the film, powerfully redirects our attention from its static subject (the Empire State Building) to the materiality of film itself, to the properties of the medium, and to time passing, with the result that the framing is enhanced, and the film's slow temporality becomes more evidently an effect of it.

If *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* is stilled cinema, then *Empire* is (barely) moving painting. The fixity of the shot and the extended duration imply that the film could be projected on a wall, as Lou Reed sings, voicing Andy Warhol, in 'Style It Takes':¹⁶

I'll put the Empire State Building on your wall
For twenty-four hours glowing on your wall
Watch the sun rise above it in your room
Wallpaper art, a great view

Wallpaper art would not require a material frame around it; a painting, generally, does. Either way, the frame as a material decorative object and as form is an element that tends to disappear even when it is conspicuous.

16 Co-written with John Cale as part of their concept album, *Songs for Drella*.

Thus, Jacques Derrida has written of the frames of paintings in his discussion of the *parergon*:

The parergonal frame is distinguished from two grounds, but in relation to each of these, it disappears into the other. In relation to the work, which may function as its ground, it disappears into the wall and then, by degrees, into the general context. In relation to the general context, it disappears into the work. Always a form on a ground, the parergon is nevertheless a form which has traditionally been determined not by distinguishing itself, but by disappearing, sinking in, obliterating itself, dissolving just as it expends its greatest energy.¹⁷

This is all the more true of the frame of the film, which, being an immaterial edge, expends much less energy than the frame of a painting. Many films, however, include and play with material frames – for instance, paintings, windows, doors, and mirrors – in order to duplicate the screen and bring visibility to its frame. A film that does so in a programmatic way is Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water* (2007), to which I will now turn my attention, as a sophisticated reflection on time and the frame in the filmic medium.

A gallery video, *Sugar Water* is a fixed shot lasting seventy-two minutes and apt to be screened in a loop. The scene is a Paris metro station; the camera is fixed on a wall, dominated by an empty billboard surrounded by a large painting-like, decorative golden frame. The billboard is covered in monochrome blue paper. A billposter arrives, carrying a ladder, work tools, and posters, and begins to cover the billboard using a wheat-pasting technique (Figure 30). He works meticulously, pasting individual posters which slowly come together to compose a large overall image, showing a row of cars parked in a street. When he has finished, he admires his work, smoothens the creases, then takes out more posters, and starts again. Slowly, the next image comes together, and it is exactly the same as before, the camera having taken it from a fixed position; this time, however, one of the cars is in flames, having just exploded. In the next iteration, again taken from the same angle, the air is filled with a dense smoke. In the final version, the smoke has cleared, and the skeleton of the burnt car is still parked in the same spot. Then the billposter covers it again in blue paper, as he had originally found it, and leaves. All the while, the passengers walk past him, wait for the next train, or disembark and exit the station. They mostly ignore him; some of them barely glance at the poster.

17 Derrida, pp. 24–6.



Figure 30 Eric Baudelaire, *Sugar Water* (2007). HD Video, 72'. Courtesy of the Artist.



Figure 31 Eric Baudelaire, *Sugar Water* (2007). HD Video, 72'. Courtesy of the Artist.

The film has been presented as a reflection on documentary photography, news reporting, and the proliferation of images of violence, to which we react with growing indifference, either because we are anaesthetized by them or for self-protection. The work, as Anne Ellegood has noted, is part of Baudelaire's ongoing investigation into the relationship between photography and event, and imposes 'a slow, contemplative consideration of political violence as a counterpoint to the rapid barrage of images that we typically experience in our news media'.¹⁸ But what happens if, rather than focusing on these doubtlessly important issues, and on the violent content of the posters, we shift our attention to the frame that surrounds them?

The billboard's frame duplicates the film's frame as a *mise en abyme*, leaving only a somewhat insignificant background to its sides, so much so that the spectators of Baudelaire's film arguably start by directing most if not all of their attention to the space within it. Because it is often used as an alternative to the green screen in compositing, the blue screen is indicative of the possibilities of digital image creation. The suggestion that comes from the golden frame and blue screen is, therefore, that what is important in the film will take place within that rectangle. Accordingly, we begin by focusing on it, and become mesmerized by the proto-technological creation of images within it. The images very slowly form a sequence, like a disassembled film, which we patch together in our minds. Just as in Douglas's *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935*, a complex sequence is thus evoked within a single frame, though by opposite means – in his photograph, Douglas generates a synthesis, while Baudelaire fragments. The imaginary sequence of images in *Sugar Water* is slowed down to the point of dissolution, yet it also performs various movements: the linear movement of the story, from an ordinary moment of quiet in the street to the explosion and burning down of the car; a vertical superimposition of moments, owing to the physical act of posting sections of the images progressively, where one is glued on top of the other, with parts of the previous images still visible underneath (Figure 31); and, finally, the circularity of the loop, with the zeroing of the event, and its recurrence.

This temporal complexity is invisible to the audience internal to Baudelaire's film. The passengers of the metro are blind to the frame, and its evolving contents are lost on them. They barely notice it (and, when they glance at it, they only see one moment of the longer sequence), while we, the external spectators, only have eyes for the frame and the sequence slowly forming within it – that is, until we start registering that the peripheral activity outside the billboard's frame is more than just 'noise'. We recognize one of the passengers, and realize

¹⁸ Ellegood, n.p.

we have seen her before. We start looking more intently outside the internal frame. Our perspective shifts entirely. We understand that each time a new poster is put up, the peripheral action in the station repeats itself, though not identically: the same passengers appear, the same man asks for the time of the same youth, the same people exit the train and head for the stairs, the same music is briefly heard when the train stops in the station and opens its doors. What we had seen, or had not seen, in the space between the film's two frames (the golden inner frame and the external frame of the image as projected on to a screen) was a loop, rewinding itself, with variations. So the frame of the film suddenly becomes visible and significant, after having been entirely obliterated by the internal picture frame, which now dissolves, precisely at the point of expending its greatest energy. Astonishingly, we also experience a profound mutation in our understanding of the images we have seen in their relationship to reality – as in a Žižekan 'parallax view'.¹⁹ If, at first, we have understood the passengers to be real people (whether aware or not that a film was being made), and the billposter to be an actor and performance artist, the relationship is now reversed. In fact, the commuters are actors, while the billposter is a real billposter, who was hired to perform his job. Porte d'Erewhon (the latter word an anagram of 'nowhere'), the fictional Paris metro station, now looks more like Plato's Cave, with its prisoners observing shadows.²⁰ And time changes completely too. Repetition replaces linearity – or, more precisely, shorter loops replace the longer loop of the film as a whole. On the other hand, the loops are not identical. This is emphasized by the key scene of the man with a hat repeatedly asking for the time of the youth with a guitar. At each occurrence, the youth announces a different hour, each time in a different language: French, Portuguese, English, French again, and Spanish. The hours are in no apparent sequence, with the added ambiguity that time could be going backward or forward. And so we come to the Bergsonian realization that time went at different speeds within and between the two frames, and that our experience of it was entirely subjective.

The focus of the film, then, becomes time, and its mise-en-abyme performativity demonstrates duration as a function of the frame. The title of Baudelaire's film is, not by accident, a reference to Henri Bergson, specifically to his use, in *Creative Evolution*, of the example of mixing a glass of sugar and water as a way to experience, and understand, duration. When doing so, writes Bergson, 'I must, willy nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is with big meaning.'²¹

¹⁹ Žižek.

²⁰ The name of the station is borrowed from Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872).

²¹ Bergson, p. 9.

The long take and a stationary camera always force us to wait for the sugar to melt. But, in Baudelaire's film, duration, event, narrative time, and circularity and repetition all coexist, and do so because of two frames, and the relationship between them. As such, *Sugar Water* brings into focus (as both the stilled cinema of Douglas's *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935* and the wallpaper art of Warhol's *Empire* do) the relationship between frame and filmic temporality.

This is a relationship that is rarely discussed, aside from considerations on the rate at which frames are projected. In her contribution to a collection on slow cinema, however, Elena Gorfinkel usefully touches on the role of framing in her discussion of Kelly Reichardt's western *Meek's Cutoff* (2010). Framing is here seen as part of the director's interest in 'omission, restriction, and limited, rigorously structured perspectives' characterizing her contemplative use of the stationary camera.²² She goes on to consider this element more closely:

This element of restriction is also pronounced in her use of a 1.33:1 (4:3) aspect ratio, instead of the customary 1.85:1. To the extent that her aesthetic is organised by scarcity, difficulty, obstruction and impediment across her films, the boxier shape of the frame of 1.22:1 and the avoidance of the widescreen delimits the visual field. Reichardt has commented that the square frame was also an instrument of manipulating narrative time, in that 'you wouldn't see tomorrow or yesterday in the shot' as you could in the wider expanse of the desert horizon.²³

The delimitation (or expansion) of the visual field is but one of the many tools, some of which I have discussed in this chapter, that frame and framing can use to manipulate time (and not just narrative time). These tools are common to painting, to photography, to film, and the audiovisual media – all arts of the frame. A photograph like *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935*, with its extended wide screen, its arrangement of narrative action and of planes and vectors in the frame, and its use of cinematic techniques of montage and re-enactment, is well able to do so, as we have seen. As David Campamy has written of Stan Douglas's images in general:

Photographs can only be made in the present, although they immediately convert that present into something past. But if the past is to enter into

²² Gorfinkel, p. 128.

²³ Ibid.

the photographer's frame it must do so either through the traces it has left behind in the world or through a reimagining. Stan Douglas pursues both approaches.²⁴

Yet, one needs a (slow) film to show duration. André Bazin said so very clearly in an article on Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Picasso Mystery* (*Le Mystère Picasso*, 1956), a documentary showing Picasso as he creates paintings for the camera. Bazin called *The Picasso Mystery* a Bergsonian film, precisely because it makes the question of duration visible. In his discussion, Bazin reflects that 'the dimensions and borders of the painting [...] remind the human eye of the autonomy of the pictorial microcosm, which is forever crystallized outside time'.²⁵ Crystallized by its frame, a painting is but a moment of the duration of the *process* of painting. Such a process for Bazin is not to be intended as the objective time required by the act of creation, but as an additional dimension of the work itself, as its existence in time – a dimension that paradoxically becomes invisible once a painting is finished, and framed. Indeed, for Bazin – and perhaps for us as viewers of Douglas, Warhol, and Baudelaire – it is not painting or photography, but 'only film [that] could make us see duration itself'.²⁶

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²⁴ Company, 'The Angel of History', p. 11.

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About the Author

Laura Rascaroli is Professor of Film and Screen Media at University College Cork, Ireland. She is the author of five books, among which *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (Wallflower/Columbia UP 2009) and *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford UP 2017), and the editor of collections including *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (BFI/Palgrave 2011, with John David Rhodes). Her work has been translated into several languages. She is General Editor of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.

11 Interactivity without Control

David O'Reilly's *Everything* (2017) and the Representation of Totality

Andrew V. Uroskie

Abstract

The contemporary form of David O'Reilly's *Everything* (2017) belies its engagement with the past – specifically, with the origins of both ecological consciousness and our globalized informatic economy in the visual culture and systems thinking of the late 1960s. The work's central formal device is the mode of scalar visualization popularized within the Eames's iconic *Powers of Ten* (1977). That film placed Man at the literal and metaphorical center of its universe, obviating both non-human life and ecological relationality to do so. By contrast, O'Reilly's world solicits our identification with literally 'everything' – living and non-living, from the cosmically large to the microscopically small – *except* the human. A soundtrack featuring the late Buddhist philosopher Alan Watts reinforces its vision of total relationality.

Keywords: Animation, interactivity, perspective, the Anthropocene, ecology, visualization

This world is not your world / *Everything* is a game based on the game you're in / and, if we're being honest, a pretty shabby reflection of it / but, this isn't about giving you something different to see, but giving you a different way of seeing / if you can see that you are neither big nor little – this nor that / you might also see that I am neither real nor unreal, but both!¹

1 Text appearing within *Everything* gameplay. Punctuation as per original.

The Irish artist David O'Reilly has produced a body of aesthetically innovative experimental animation that has achieved rare popular and critical acclaim. Working inside and outside of industry, he has produced short films independently and for Cartoon Network, video walls for the concerts of British-Tamil musician MIA, and animated sequences for Spike Jonze's indie feature film *Her* (2013). His most ambitious project, *Everything* (2017), is a quasi-interactive work of procedural animation utilizing three hours of historical lectures by the late philosopher Alan Watts (from a database of three-hundred hours that had been constructed). Its trailer was nominated for an Academy Award, even though the work itself was marketed and distributed as a video game.

Everything departs from most of the other works in this collection in significant ways. Firstly, its creator does not readily identify as a contemporary artist, and his practice has thus far been somewhat peripheral to established institutions of contemporary art. Secondly, the work was not created with the idea of being situated in a single physical installation. While *Everywhere* has been exhibited in various performance situations, its original and defining mode of exhibition has been as a video game for individuals to download to their personal computer or PlayStation console. Despite these differences, *Everything* should be understood as an intervention into debates around our contemporary post-cinematic condition, in which audiovisual practices once strictly associated with the 'black box' of the classical cinematic *dispositif* now take place across wildly heterogeneous forms of distribution, modes of exhibition, and sites of reception.

Upon its release, *Everything* was subject to an unusual degree of scrutiny within the popular press because it was seen to operate so radically outside of standard gaming conventions.² For a number of reviewers, the work's quasi-interactive structure too closely resembled the putatively 'passive' experience of watching a movie, rather than the 'active' engagement of playing a game. In what follows, I delineate the quasi-interactive model of spectatorship at work not to definitively adjudicate on the game's proper classification, but to explore the ways in which it can help us to think beyond sedimented models of both spectatorship and genre. To do so, it will be necessary to look beyond the work's formal mechanics in the present. For both formally and thematically, *Everything* makes reference to a particular freighted cultural moment in post-war visual culture in which the representation of totality had emerged as a central concern.

2 *Everything* was reviewed by *The Washington Post*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Irish Times*, *WIRED*, and *Ars Electronica*, among others.

The work's dynamic, scalar perspective can be traced to *Powers of Ten*, that seminal animated short by the American designers Charles and Ray Eames, which audaciously purported to illustrate nothing less than the entirety of the known universe, from the smallest particle to the largest galactic supercluster. Popularly known by the more polished 1977 colour version, this purported animation of 'everything' was actually first completed in 1968, when it coincided with the first publicly available images of the 'whole earth' from space. Anselm Franke has described the importance of these images – especially as they would figure on the cover of Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* and Buckminster Fuller's *An Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* – in articulating a vision of the earth as a singular, integrated totality particularly amenable to technocratic administration.³ Yet even as it references these models, *Everything* complicates any conception of anthropocentric mastery through its grounding in the philosophical ideas of the late Alan Watts. By enforcing a perspective that remains as partial and delimited as it is fluid and variable, *Everything* solicits an engagement with radically non-anthropocentric forms of space, time, and subjectivity.

Spectatorship and Play

Everything is far easier to show than to describe, because it intentionally disrupts many of the generic frameworks evoked by common language. Produced and driven by a popular game engine (Unity), distributed and sold through a popular gaming platform (Steam), and at least weakly interactive, *Everything* certainly has to be considered as a kind of game. And yet *Everything* has elicited a conundrum of classification: scores of commentators have stressed their confusion and frustration with the manner of engagement *Everything* solicits. There has been great debate, at least within the gaming community, about whether the work should be considered a game at all, given the peculiar nature of its interactivity. Created in collaboration with programmer Damien Di Fede, *Everything* is a procedurally generated animation, algorithmically rendered in real time for each individual user, either with or without the user's direct input. As such, it can sometimes seem like a movie that unfolds before our eyes, but one that affords users an ability to adjust what we see and hear, when or if we choose to do so. We begin as an animal relatively scaled to the size of a human, such as a common brown cow. We can look around and move within a pastoral

3 Franke, p. 12–18.

setting within which we quickly discover other animals and plants, both larger and smaller than ourselves. After a time, thought bubbles begin to emanate from these other beings which we can read, and others appear in the landscape, providing short clips of audio from philosophical lectures by Alan Watts. After a protracted period of wandering, we eventually gain the ability to inhabit much smaller and larger beings – from bacteria and flowers to clouds and planets – at which point we begin to experience both space and time on a vastly different scale.

Everything modulates the model of spectatorial engagement typically understood to be crucial to the nature of games and their specificity from so-called ‘non-interactive’ forms of art. Familiar habits of classification have accustomed many to code play as active or agentic, in contrast to the ostensibly more passive or receptive audiovisual experience understood to characterize more traditional aesthetic forms, including cinema.⁴ Within such a framework, one ostensibly sits back and watches a movie, while one leans in and engages with a game. Yet the experience of ‘playing’ *Everything* consists almost entirely of audiovisual reception, while both kinaesthetic experience and the reward model are effectively negated: there are no mistakes to be punished, no real skills to be mastered. And while the game affords the player some measure of control over one’s orientation, locomotion, and, eventually, scale of view, this control is by no means absolute. For the one thing we cannot do is stop – if we cease our activity for more than a moment, the game will begin to unfold dynamically of its own accord. There is even a setting by which the player can delegate all control to the game itself. We effectively become an observer rather than a participant in these instances, and yet our experience of the work does not seem drastically altered. It does not suddenly change from a ‘game’ into a ‘movie’, but remains lodged in a curiously hybrid in-between space.

In his canonical study on video games, Espen Aarseth radically distinguishes between the experience of audiovisual ‘reception’ that takes place within a film and the ‘kinesthetic experience’ proper to a videogame. In something between a description and a definition, he declares, ‘the pleasures of visual games are not primarily visual, but kinesthetic and cognitive: your skills are rewarded, your mistakes punished’.⁵ Yet if interactivity is

4 This classification varies greatly according to academic disciplinarity, and is complicated by underlying models of human perception more generally. Both art history and cinema studies have long sought to explore the ‘active’ nature of spectatorial experience. Sobchack and Bruno, for example, both emphasize the interactive and synaesthetic qualities of the cinematic encounter.

5 Aarseth, p. 52.

to have any meaning beyond the banal literalism of physical manipulation, it must reckon with the specific nature and quality of the experience that is being solicited. The cognitive demands of the vast majority of games are minimal, immediate, and strictly local to the game itself, while their kinaesthetic demands are quickly internalized. *Everything* breaks with this model almost entirely. Its kinaesthetic demands may be minimal, and its aesthetics may seem simplistic – even childish – but its cognitive solicitation is both substantive and enduring. In so doing, it helps to recall a more capacious notion of aesthetic play whose formulation predated the emergence of computational interactivity.

Rather than forcing *Everything* into Aarseth's binary classification of 'movie' or 'game', it might be more productive to conceptualize the particular interactivity the work solicits in terms of the older and broader classification of the 'toy'. Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin were both famously drawn to the child's anti-instrumental engagement with the toy, wherein the object's affordances were largely unscripted, and its capacities only unlocked by means of an imaginative intervention.⁶ From Alexander Calder to Nam June Paik, the magic and promise so many twentieth century artists have found within toys lies within their comparatively unstructured form, and the particular quality of engagement this form might be said to solicit.⁷ As a result of the lack of goals or achievements that structure a competitive game, one does not 'play' a toy, but can only imaginatively play *with* one.

David O'Reilly is of the generation that grew up with *SimEarth* (1990), one of the earliest and most fascinating creations of the legendary game designer Will Wright. This work, featuring an introduction by James Lovelock, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who pioneered the 'Gaia Hypothesis' with biologist Lynn Margulis in the early 1970s, demanded an engagement that was primarily cognitive rather than kinaesthetic, and open-endedly experimental and imaginative rather than straightforwardly goal-oriented.⁸ One did not directly control a human character or group such as a kingdom, city, or nation state, but held a somewhat loose control over the entirety of earth's biosphere as a singular, interconnected system. Rather than a competitive 'game' which one might master, *SimEarth* was described as representative of a new genre of work of 'System Simulations' or 'Software Toys' with which to

6 See Baudelaire; Benjamin.

7 An important adjunct to the importance of the toy in general is the nineteenth-century history of the 'philosophical toy' as a peculiar amalgam of art and science, research and play. See Uroskie, 'Precision Optics and Philosophical Toys', in *Between the Black Box and the White Cube*, pp. 94–104, and, more generally, Crary.

8 Lovelock and Margulis. For a more detailed articulation, see Margulis.

model, to experiment, and to learn about the world. *Everything* is similarly invested in modelling a certain perspective to explore, rather than promoting a competitive environment one attempts to master. And it is similarly invested in attempting to visualize the world as a nested imbrication of complex systems. Yet, in a significant departure from *SimEarth* and virtually all the large-scale simulations that would follow in its wake, *Everything* forecloses the possibility of a God's eye view – requiring rather that, at any given time, we inhabit only the singular, limited perspective of an individual being. The interconnected structures of the biosphere never appear before us on a kind of master control board, but emerge only gradually through a process of movement and transformation of perspective. In so doing, *Everything* reveals itself not simply as a product of animation, but as a work that interrogates the animation of perspective as its guiding metaphor.

On its surface, *Everything* appears to be a prototypical work of animation. Its characters and landscapes are not photorealistic, but iconic – intentional abstractions that require our own experience of the world for reference. As distinct from the dynamics of representational indexicality within the photographic image, the abstraction of drawn animation has always had aspects of the model implicit within its production and spectatorship. Within even the most traditional forms of cinematic animation, we encounter things that bear only a superficial resemblance to visual forms of our experience. We judge their fidelity not solely upon their static appearance, but upon the quality of their movement and activity. Thus if a character moves like a duck and quacks like a duck, it matters less whether it seems photorealistically similar to the ducks we have ourselves encountered. The ducks in *Everything* are recognizably iconic cartoons, but their legs are obviated by their gliding movement – whether on water or land. Other animals awkwardly and counterintuitively tumble forward like building blocks: three-quarters of the time, our brown cow has its legs in the air! It's an amusing image, but also a purposeful one. Rejecting the naturalist model of representation allows O'Reilly to foreground a computational ontology, even as it highlights his 'world' as a kind of model. In so doing, he pushes us to see things not for their individual splendour, but as mere parts within an integrated system. For while it may not move like a duck, it does quack like a duck, and, in so doing, engages with ducks and other animals in the immediate vicinity. It also groups into flocks, which subsequently move as one, and these flocks can dance – an abstract rendering of communal reproduction.

The reference point lies not within the individual, nor even the flock, but rather with the larger structures and relationships through which all



Figure 32 David O'Reilly, screen shots from *Everything* (2017). Courtest of the Artist.

beings are inextricably entangled. *Everything's* philosophical foundation is provided through the audio fragments we hear from Alan Watts:

You, as a human being, you grow out of this physical universe in just exactly the same way in which an apple grows off an apple tree [...]. But we have been brought up not to feel that we belong in the world. So our popular speech reflects it: we say, 'I came into this world.' You didn't – you came out of it. [...] The earth is not a big rock infested with living organisms any more than your skeleton is bones infested with cells. The earth is geological, yes, but this geological entity grows people. And our existence on the earth is a symptom of this solar system and its balances, as much as the solar system, in turn, is a symptom of our galaxy, and our galaxy, in its turn, is a symptom of the whole company of galaxies.⁹

And this radically expansive perspective is made tangible in that, soon after progressing from singular animals and plants to whole flocks, we discover that we have gained the ability to inhabit anything whatsoever – passing from bacteria to electrons, stars to galactic nebulae – all of which exhibit similar structures of activity and interaction. Were we immediately made witness to this, we might be tempted to view it as an impudent anthropomorphism: 'clouds and rocks do not move or associate', we might say, 'they do not sing or reproduce'. Yet *Everything* builds slowly to these 'outliers'. We begin safely within what Watts, in one of the audio passages, describes as 'the safety of our human scale' long enough for the universalizing analogy and the nature of its abstraction to take hold. And when we finally do begin to move across levels of magnification, our experience of space changes accordingly. The field of grass and flowers we strode across as a dog becomes immeasurably vast once experienced as a dragonfly. Rather than marking our progress from tree to tree, we navigate between individual flowers and plants. As an aphid, our 'field' has become a singular blade of grass, and trees have become invisible. But additionally, so does our experience of time. There is no master clock with which to reference this changing

9 Watts, *Everything* in-game audio from the recorded lectures, 'What is Reality?' (1965); 'World As Self' (1965); 'Birth Death & The Unborn' (1967); 'We As Organism' (1969); 'Inevitable Ecstasy' (1970); and 'Way Beyond Seeking' (1973). An English-born autodidact, philosopher, and theologian, Watts was perhaps best known for his best-selling introduction to Buddhist Philosophy, *The Way of Zen* (1957). He had a popular weekly radio show for San Francisco Bay Area public radio beginning in 1953 and was an influential figure in the American counterculture until his death in 1973. His recorded lectures have recently been preserved and made available through the Alan Watts Organization, <<http://www.alanwatts.org>>.

temporality, but time quite obviously becomes unmoored from the familiar human scale as our focus shifts. Trees move across the landscape, and can group together and spawn. Unlike deer, however, we begin to understand these activities as taking place not within minutes or hours, but across decades and centuries.

In assuming these varied forms, we are inevitably drawn to their interrelation and codependence within structures rather than their specific individuality. As such, we realize that the work's title is potentially misleading. 'Everything' seems to advertise a god-like status of dominion over the totality – the familiar hubristic conceit of man's unlimited mastery over nature. In reality, however, the manner of agency *Everything* provides is quite severely constrained. Our ability to assume such radically diverse perspectives does not actually impart a sense of 'mastery' over that which we survey. We import into the game our self-assurance about the significance of our actions – and there are many humorous examples of insects and trees articulating the same belief in their own, idiosyncratic ideas – yet we ultimately have no idea what effects our actions might have at levels of magnification much smaller or larger than our own. The chain of causality, at least at the level of the individual, is broken. In its place, however, we begin to gain a different perspective on the systemic nature of the totality. For the kind of movement *Everything* ultimately privileges is not the kinesthetic movement of the individual, but precisely an animation of perspective itself. But to what end? And why, in such a purported representation of 'everything', is a single, crucial species missing: that of *homo sapiens* itself?

The 'Whole Earth' and the Representation of Totality

The atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki had raised the spectre of total planetary destruction for the first time in human history. The ensuing 'space race' saw the Soviet Union launch the first orbital satellite in 1957, and the first human in space in 1961, prompting John F. Kennedy to commit unprecedented resources towards landing the first man on the moon. While originating as an extension of the Cold War, a response to a geopolitical threat, the 'space race' of the 1960s quickly evolved into something more far-reaching: a perspectival shift that would challenge long-standing models of both representation and autonomy.

'Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole earth yet?' This was the rallying cry of a young Stewart Brand, living in Haight-Ashbury, epicentre of American counterculture, in 1966, the year before the Summer of Love.

Years of space exploration had riveted the nation, but the imagery NASA returned featured 'a lot of the moon and [...] chunks of the Earth, but never the complete mandala'.¹⁰ As his reference to the Buddhist mandala suggests, he envisioned such a representation as a kind of psychic talisman, a therapeutic image of unity in the face of war (USSR, Vietnam) and social Balkanization (Conservatives and the New Left). Printed on hundreds of buttons and distributed to scores of universities, politicians, and public intellectuals, it leveraged a popular hunger for conspiracy and longstanding distrust of government to inspire what would become a social movement.

Perhaps someone at NASA was sympathetic, as the next year an unmanned satellite captured just such an image in full colour. It was not publicly released, but Brand worked to secure it for the cover of his 1968 countercultural manifesto *The Whole Earth Catalog*. The timing of his publication could not have been better, for that year, the visualization of the earth from space would emerge as a true mass-cultural phenomenon. The highest-grossing film of the year, Stanley Kubrick's techno-psychedelic *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), featured a NASA image of the earth in its climactic final scene with the 'Star child'. Most importantly, however, in December – on Christmas Eve, no less – a nation would be transfixed by a television broadcast of live imagery from the Apollo 8 mission: viewers saw the earth from space, and heard the crew read from the Book of Genesis, before blessing 'all of you on the good Earth'.¹¹ The poet Archibald MacLeish, featured on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day, spoke to the perceived world-historical nature of the event: 'Men's conception of themselves and of each other has always depended on their notion of the earth', he began. 'The medieval notion of the earth put man at the center of everything. The nuclear notion of the earth put him nowhere – beyond the range of reason, even – lost in absurdity and war.' But 'in the last few hours, this notion may have changed again. For the first time in all of time men have *seen* the earth... seen it whole and round and beautiful and small', a 'tiny raft in the enormous, empty night'. And 'to see the earth,' he concluded, 'is to see ourselves as riders of the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold.'¹²

If the great Allied victory of 1945 had brought the century's most devastating war to an end, the quarter-century that followed had brought

10 Brand, 'The First Whole Earth Photograph', p. 187.

11 Wilford, p. 196.

12 MacLeish, p. 1.

Western prosperity but not global peace. By 1968, even that prosperity was coming unravelled: the assassination of Martin Luther King had brought demonstrations and riots to over 120 US cities, to which marines and a newly militarized police force were introduced. Over a half-million US citizens were shipped off to fight a doomed war in Vietnam, while the Soviet Union annexed Czechoslovakia, and a general strike shut down large sections of France. Together with the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, the violence at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the pro-segregationist speeches of Robert Wallace, these all seemed to signal an America, and a world, poised on the brink of self-immolation. In the midst of this maelstrom, MacLeish – like Brand – hoped that images of the ‘whole earth’ might provide a representational pivot away from the tribal conflicts of individual groups, and even nation states, towards what was presented as a singular and common challenge to humanity as such.

A single photograph from the Apollo mission quickly came to stand in for these universalizing ambitions: ‘Earthrise’, a colour image of the earth ‘rising’ over the moon, in the same way as the sun rises over the earth. The first image of the earth taken by a human being from space, it would quickly become one of the most published images in photographic history. Reprinted on a postage stamp, and used as the backdrop to Walter Cronkite on the Evening News for much of the next year, this image of a ‘clearly living Earth over the edge of a clearly dead planet’, in the words of Stewart Brand, provided a vision of awe and transcendence that might finally surpass the dreaded image of the mushroom cloud.¹³

Yet the reception of ‘Earthrise’, and the many images of the so-called ‘Blue Marble’ that would follow in its wake, were anything but straightforward. Anselm Franke has described their use on the pages of Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog* as a kind of ‘unification machine’, a ‘multistable image’ whose offer of transcendence actually sets the stage for a ‘boundless containment’: ‘all antagonisms, borders, and conflicts “down below” fade into the background and with them history with its contradictions and struggles’, a singular, ultimate frame ‘that no longer recognizes any frames’.¹⁴ Thus the same imagery that would fuel the Californian counterculture in its mission to establish an ‘International Earth Day’ from 1970, was also that which would provide the seedbed for the ‘Californian Ideology’ of neoliberal technocratic management after ‘The End of History’.¹⁵

13 2006 interview with Brand, cited in Jacobs, p. 6.

14 Franke, pp. 13–14.

15 See Fukuyama. For the now classic account of this evolution, see Turner.

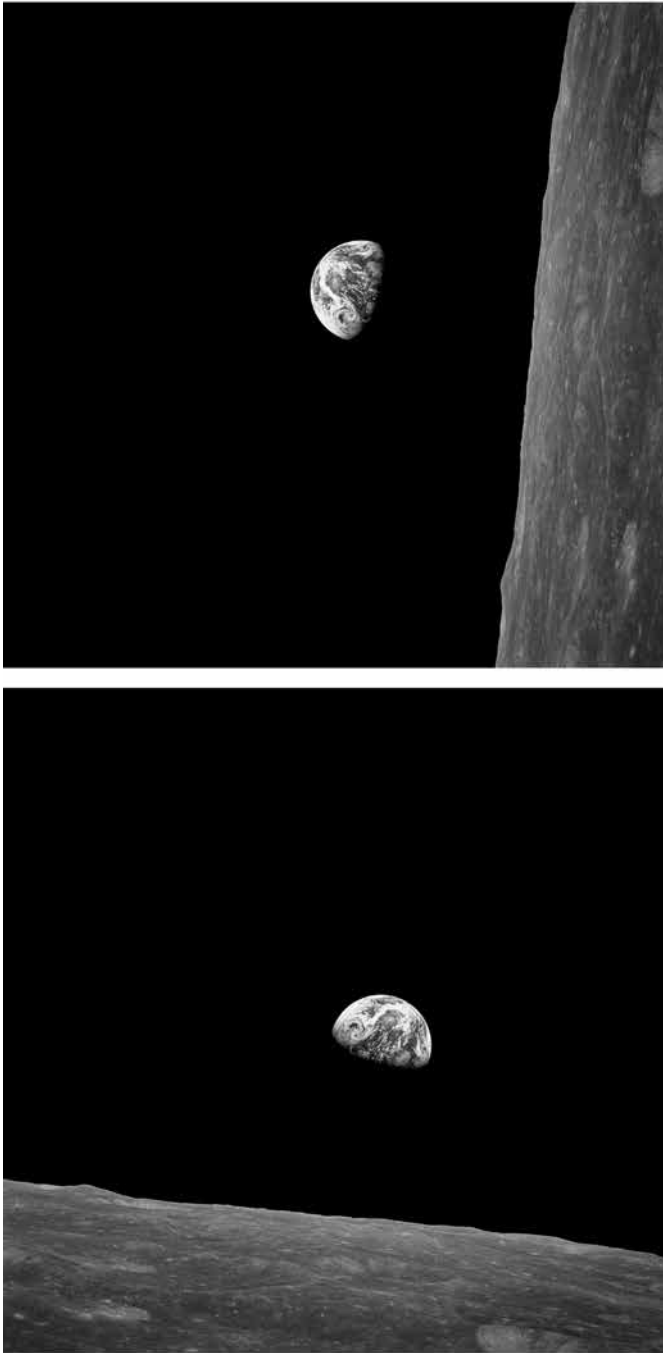


Figure 33 Bill Anders' 'Earthrise' (1968) as originally shot [top], and as originally published and still typically reproduced [bottom].

But here we must return to the question of perspective that serves as the principal engine of *Everything's* form and theme. Franke is doubtless correct about the catalytic nature of the 'whole earth' as a dialectical image of both utopian aspiration and dystopian containment. But it seems important to note that, even at the time of their release, these images themselves were never simply uplifting. They could be equally unnerving, even terrifying, and the existential anxieties to which they would give rise had to be carefully managed and controlled. Photography, like any representational practice, is fundamentally reliant upon the act of framing: what lies in and outside that frame, and how the material within such a frame is oriented and arranged. The famous 'Earthrise' photograph that would be endlessly reproduced, for instance, was deliberately and strategically reoriented for the purposes of distribution. As originally captured, the moon is to the right and the earth 'rises' to the left – an impossible point of view for any terrestrial being. The Earth here is not central, but peripheral – a single planet among many. Without 'grounding', our perspective is one of floating in space – 'sitting in a tin can / far above the world', as David Bowie would sing – within a vast, dark, and thoroughly alien emptiness.¹⁶ By simply rotating the image clockwise, we appear to be once again on stable ground. And even though the image was taken in orbit, the moon's surface comes to appear as if we were standing upon it, as a mere extension of earth, a new continent over which to claim dominion.

The *Whole Earth Catalog* would publish more than a dozen issues between 1968 and 1972, all featuring cover images of the earth from space. Brand associated these images with the books featured in the issues: titles concerning cybernetics, systems theory, and, above all, Fuller's conception of 'Spaceship Earth' as a singular, complex system. But these images of the 'whole earth' could not actually reveal systems or their dynamics – in fact, they negated them, rendering them static and inert. They hinted at continents already known from terrestrial maps, that were mainly covered by clouds. Their visualization of the atmosphere was perhaps their most unprecedented achievement. However, the complex system of weather – the cycle by which water is drawn from the surface, repositioned, and then redeposited in patterns that had managed to turn a near-barren rock into the unimaginable fecundity of our contemporary biosphere – was invisible when rendered as a singular image. Any attempt to grasp this systemic dimension would require a radically dynamic perspective, one that necessitated the element of time, and hence the character of animation.

16 David Bowie's 'Major Tom' was the first track of his self-titled 1969 album.

Brand may have gotten his wish for a singular image of the totality of the planet for the cover of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, but the designers Charles and Ray Eames had set their sights on an even more expansive visualization, one which would gesture towards the possibility of a dynamic perspective on absolutely everything, as far as the limits of human knowledge. NASA's Voyager probe had just been launched to explore the outer planets and eventually move beyond the solar system entirely, and the Eames' intention was to move similarly outward into the cosmos. But they also sought to move inward, towards the invisible depths of the human body itself. Beyond the reach of the unaided eye, into the worlds that had been opened up by the telescope and the microscope, what Marshall McLuhan had recently described as the 'technological extensions' of man.¹⁷

Their idea was taken wholesale from the Dutch educator and peace activist Kees Boeke, who had spent years carefully calculating and illustrating a book he had published a decade before. *Cosmic View: Universe of 40 Jumps* (1957) was intended as a children's book, and was illustrated in large part by his students. It begins with an image of a young girl with a cat sitting on her lap, in a chair, in a yard, at a school, in a small town outside Utrecht in the Netherlands.¹⁸ Over the pages, the frame continues to expand geometrically, as we range from a scale size of $1:10^1$ m in the first image, all the way up to $1:10^{26}$ m in the last. Within the first image, which depicts a square 1.5m in length, the cat's whiskers can be clearly differentiated. When the orbit of the moon becomes visible pages later, at $1:10^{10}$ m we can no longer even differentiate the earth's continents. At $1:10^{20}$ m, as our galaxy becomes visible, we can no longer discern individual stars, and what appear to be stars are revealed as the compression of whole galaxies. After reaching the known limits of outer space, we reverse direction and dive into the inner space of the sub-visible, where we enter the cells of the skin and journey towards the molecule, the atom, and beyond, into spaces just as vast and empty and unknown.

If this all sounds familiar, it is because the book's central conceit would be appropriated for Charles and Ray Eames 1977 film *Powers of Ten*, which would quickly become the quintessential popular representation of scalar visualization. As with Boeke, the outsized premise was to reveal nothing less than the entirety of the known universe – from the subatomic scale of 10^{-16} m (one-millionth of an angstrom) out to the supergalactic scale of 10^{26} m (one hundred million light years) – in a brisk eight minutes. Yet even more than

¹⁷ McLuhan, p. 19.

¹⁸ Boeke, p. 2.

'Earthrise', the content of such a visualization could be profoundly decentring, and the Eameses would employ a similar aesthetic sleight of hand to ensure that the openness of the scalar model and its radically deanthropocentric perspective would be smoothed over for the purposes of mass communication.

Despite having seen the film dozens of times over the years, I had somehow failed to question that the pivotal moment when the 'whole earth' becomes visible to us is precisely framed by the square representing 10^7 m. It was only after reviewing their original 1968 *A Rough Sketch for a Proposed Film...* that I realized this had been a deliberate falsification.¹⁹ In their earlier, unreleased proposal, they had accurately portrayed the earth's 7,900-mile diameter so far outside the 10^7 m square that the two seemed to have no relation to one another. Yet *Powers of Ten* would shrink the earth's size by nearly 25% for the sole purpose of creating this aesthetically compelling frame. Such a significant distortion – within a work of putatively scientific visualization produced by meticulous designers over the course of a decade – leads one to ask why this framing would have been deemed so significant? The film's 'universal' perspective is already centred upon a man (and not a young girl with her cat, as in Boeke's original book), but with this framing, the film seem to intentionally align the newly iconic representation of the 'whole earth' with Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (1490), whose outstretched limbs define both a perfect circle and a perfect square. This model of a universal mathematical harmony – itself a visualization of the Pythagorean inscription *ἄνθρωπος μέτρον* or 'Man is the Measure (of all things)' – cunningly presents the 'whole earth' as a totality, completely given over to man and his dominion by virtue of the 'scientific' perspective.²⁰

Powers of Ten was presented not as a film, but as a 'model', and indeed it was: perhaps the ultimate model of anthropomorphic hubris to date. It imagined a perspective by which we might observe not merely the globe, but the universe in its entirety, as if standing above it, looking down from a position of knowledge and mastery.²¹ It is a perspective aligned with

19 Charles and Ray Eames, *A Rough Sketch for a Proposed Film Dealing with the Powers of Ten and the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* (1968).

20 'At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of "Man", formulated first by Protagoras as "the measure of all things", later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*' (Braidotti, p. 13). 'I cannot count the number of times da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* appeared in the conference brochures for genomics meetings [...]. High Art, High Science: genius, progress, beauty, power, money. The Man of perfect proportions brings both the number magic and the real-life organic ubiquity of the Fibonacci sequence to the fore' (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, p. 7).

21 '[T]he Globe is not that of which the world is made but, rather, a Platonic obsession transferred into Christian theology and then deposited in political epistemology to put a face – but an impossible one – on the dream of total and complete knowledge.' Latour, Ebook.



Figure 34 Illustration depicting the framing of the earth within Charles & Ray Eames’s 1968 *A Rough Sketch...* [top] and their 1977 *Powers of Ten* [middle], with Leonardo da Vinci’s 1490 *Vitruvian Man* [bottom].

Fuller's metaphor of 'Spaceship Earth' as it led inexorably towards the conceptualization of the earth *as* a spaceship: a system designed, built, and ultimately controlled by men – and a small number of them, to boot. If the newfound fragility of this system was understood to necessitate 'hard decisions' about global resources and the fate of human and nonhuman populations, then those were essentially 'engineering' decisions to be made by those few with access to the 'God's Eye' perspective of the master control booth. 'We *are* as gods and we might as well get good at it', as Brand introduced the *Whole Earth Catalog* – though just who got to 'play god' was ever the issue.²²

After 'The Individual': The Earth System in Symbiotic Perspective

In these dreams, he floated over a pristine wilderness as if from the vantage point of a marsh hawk, and the feeling of freedom 'is indescribable. It's as if you took everything from my nightmares and reversed it'. As the dreams progressed and repeated, they varied in their intensity and their viewpoint. Some nights he swam through the marsh canals. Others, he became a tree or drop of water.²³

Perhaps the most dramatic example of anthropocentrism within *Powers of Ten* lay in its complete abolition of terrestrial life beneath the scale of the human. In writing *Cosmic View*, Boeke had taken pains to depict a mosquito, a water mite, five separate kinds of bacteria, and a number of viruses on the surface of the young girl's hand: 'crowded together, as they often actually are on the skin'.²⁴ Over eight separate levels of magnification, Boeke describes direct physical contact between the human and the nonhuman as an ordinary fact of life. Yet within *Powers of Ten*, all reference to nonhuman would be systematically eliminated so as to produce the sterile fiction of an 'individual' (tellingly, a man – rather than a young girl holding a cat) entirely untouched by any other living being. Omitting the flora and fauna that permeate the world at every level, *Powers of Ten* thus reinforced the commonplace ideology that nonhuman life is inessential to the human drama, existing merely in the background within what used to

22 Brand, *The Whole Earth Catalog*, p. 2. On the neo-imperialist biopolitics of this 'we', see Scott.

23 Vandermeer.

24 Boeke, p. 42.

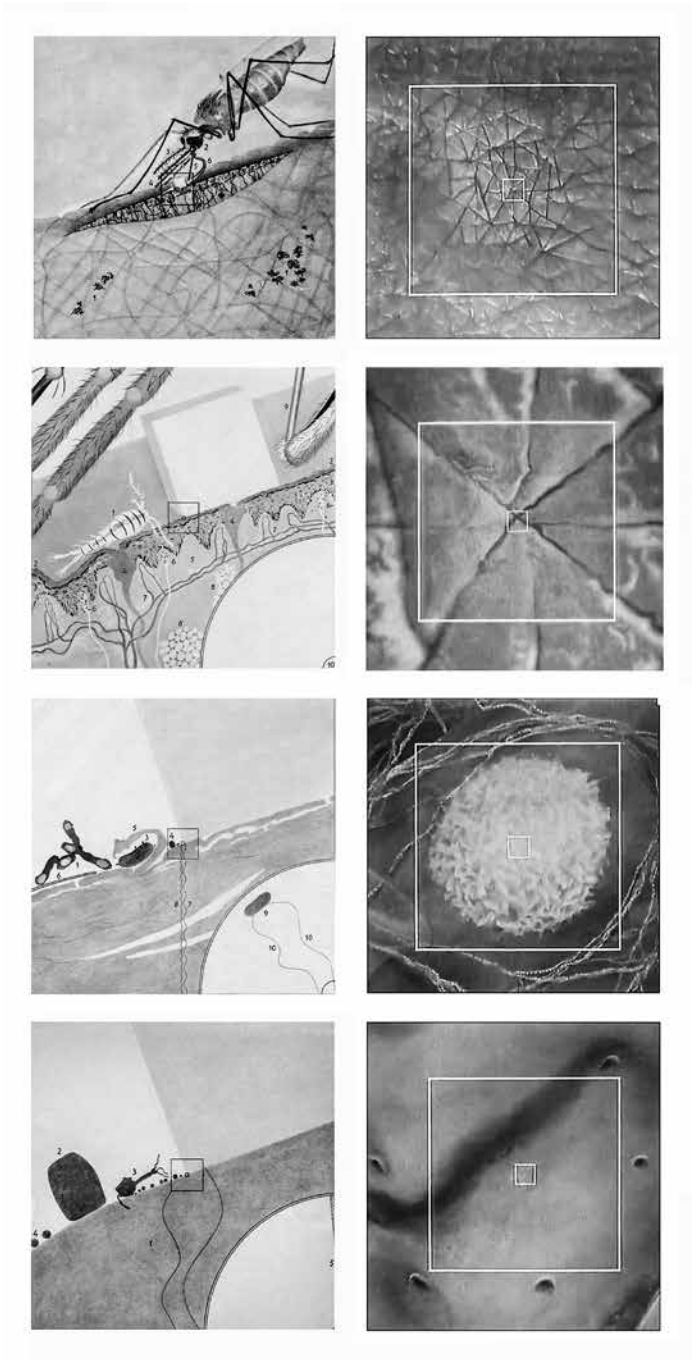


Figure 35 The surface of the human hand at identical magnifications, as depicted in Kees Boeke's 1957 *Cosmic View* [left] and Charles & Ray Eames's 1977 *Powers of Ten* [right].

be called 'the environment'. In its mechanistic, dead universe of colliding billiard balls, Man – the maker of tools – is imagined as the sole active agent.

Yet the contemporary revolution in microbiology has definitively overturned this fairy tale of isolated autonomy, revealing that what we call the 'individual' human being is actually a radically symbiotic constellation of species – a cohabitation with trillions of bacteria and other microscopic entities whose collective genetic diversity vastly outstrips our own, and which collectively affect many of our most basic and vital functions.²⁵ Across the contemporary life sciences, the traditional, essentialist conception of 'the individual' is being replaced by a symbiotic paradigm that now orients research in 'directions that transcend the self/nonself, subject/object dichotomies that have characterized Western thought'.²⁶

Multiplying our frame of reference even as it frustrates our traditional conceptualization of agency, *Everything* has everything to do with the contemporary revolution in ecology and the life sciences that have taken place since the fateful nomination of the Anthropocene. *Everything* certainly invokes the radical expansion of perspective that *Powers of Ten* would so fatefully popularize, yet it breaks radically with its predecessor in refusing to anchor man, or 'his' Earth, as the sole or even principle source of agency within this vast and heterogeneous domain. It does so, somewhat paradoxically, through its principled refusal to represent *homo sapiens* as such.

We may feel like we are playing a children's game in taking the perspective of a bear or a duck, a palm tree, or a cloud. Yet over the course of his lectures, Watts asks us to question the nature of the larger 'game' we are playing. Moving beyond a familiar critique of the Cartesian mind/body split, he asks us to question an even more fundamental bifurcation instituted by our notion of the 'individual':

Your skin doesn't separate you from the world, it's a bridge through which the external world flows into you, and you flow into it. Just, for example,

25 Since, historically, bacteria were originally studied in relation to disease, the idea became commonplace that bacteria simply *were* a form of disease – and this understanding was only cemented by dramatic benefits to medical practice introduced by antiseptics. It is a similar story with viruses, which still tend to be commonly considered merely as something to be eradicated. Yet as a century of microbiology has endeavoured to reveal, bacteria and viruses are not outliers which we might occasionally have the occasional misfortune to encounter – they are part and parcel of our very form of life, and of every form of life that has ever existed on this earth. For an introduction to the contemporary microbiotic revolution and an extensive bibliography of the recent literature, see Yong.

26 Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, p. 326.

as a whirlpool in water. You could say because you have a skin, you have a definite shape, you have a definite form. The whirlpool is a definite form. But no water stays put in it. The whirlpool is something the stream is doing. And in exactly the same way, the whole universe is doing each one of us. [...] But we haven't been taught to feel that way. The myths underlying our culture, and underlying our concepts, have not taught us to feel identical with the universe, but only parts of it, only *in* it, only *confronting* it. And we are, I think, quite urgently in need of coming to feel that we *are* the eternal universe, otherwise we're going to go out of our heads – we're going to commit suicide, collectively.²⁷

As in the symbiotic perspective of contemporary ecology and the life sciences, life here can no longer be understood as 'inhabiting' the world, because that which we call life is but a function of the reciprocal interdependence of species and their environments that collectively constitute the biosphere. More simply put, there is no distance between the two.

As a model, a software toy, perhaps even a philosophical toy, *Everything* solicits a radical transformation of perspective: one which would no longer place man at the centre, with 'nature' at periphery, but which envisions a universe of interconnection at every scale; one in which all the diverse kingdoms of life, along with all the forms of life-sustaining matter, might begin to be understood in their vast and complex forms of symbiotic relation. And by providing an always partial and constantly changing perspective, *Everything* ultimately works to solicit a transformation in our conception of agency itself. It is not simply that we alternate between activity and passivity in the literal mechanics of the game, but that in destabilizing the notion of individuality, the correlative concepts of activity and passivity become less coherent. If our ability to move between such radically distinct perspectives has given us the sense that we are not one thing but many – if it has rendered the borders between things somewhat fluid or indistinct – then the concept of agency itself becomes harder to grasp.

The perspective *Everything* provides is one which would have us refuse the anthropocentric hubris of technocratic control, and its correlative perspective of a 'view from above', without thereby resorting to the resignation borne of a belief that we must 'dominate or be dominated.' As such, it joins the broad, interdisciplinary effort currently underway seeking to precipitate

27 Watts, *Everything* audio narration.

new models of collaborative, 'sympoietic' agency across contemporary philosophy, science, and the arts.²⁸

Watts, like Margulis, abjured the anthropocentric conceit wherein the end of the world could be equated with the end of mankind. Thus a final interpretation suggests itself: that *Everything* is not intended as a representation of the present, but of the future – the world as it might exist a hundred million years hence, after the Sixth Mass Extinction had once again hit the 'reset' button, and thereby precipitated a new Eden devoid of humankind.²⁹ Against a cultural temporality of relentless acceleration, which today has reached a degree unimaginable only fifty years ago, *Everything* provides us with a solicitation to engage with radically non-anthropocentric forms of duration. And when considered from the five-billion-year perspective of the earth, our existence seems as precarious, and potentially fleeting, as the countless forms of life that expire, unheralded, each and every day.

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²⁸ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 135–214.

²⁹ Kolbert.

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About the Author

Andrew V. Uroskie is an Associate Professor at the Graduate Program in Modern Art History & Criticism at Stony Brook University in New York. He is the author of *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago UP, 2014 / Hyunsil, 2020), and his numerous essays on modern and contemporary art, film, and visual culture have been translated into five languages. His forthcoming book, *The Kinetic Imaginary*, was selected for the Arts Writers Foundation 2018 book prize.

12 Post-Cinematic Unframing

Lisa Åkervall

Abstract

What becomes of the frame in an era of post-cinema? This chapter explores that question and possible answers as suggested by two exemplary post-cinematic moving-image works, Camille Henrot's single-channel video installation *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) and Kevin B. Lee's video essay *Transformers: The Premake* (2014). The proliferation of frames in these works enacts an itinerary of the aesthetic strategy I call 'post-cinematic unframing' that particularly comes to the fore when framing is explicitly thematised – as it is, for example, when pop-up bubbles are superimposed on a scene to display characters' text messaging, or by superimposing, stacking, juxtaposing, and collaging images.

Keywords: Digital media, post-cinema, video essay, framing, installation art

What is the role of the frame in contemporary moving-image cultures? Camille Henrot's single-channel video installation *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) answers that question in the plural. It locates not so much the frame as *frames* at the centre of moving-image cultures marked by digitally facilitated transformations in industry, technology, and social practice. *Grosse Fatigue* won the Silver Lion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, where it was presented as part of the exhibition *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* (*The Encyclopedic Palace*). The thirteen-minute video, displayed in a darkened cinema-like room, confronted visitors with a multiplicity of windows stacked on-screen, one on top of the other. The frame-on-frame presentation mimicked Apple and Microsoft graphical user-friendly interfaces, which model interactivity in terms of attention and activity clustered around stacked mobile frames.¹ More specifically, by revealing an endless series of frames, the images of *Grosse Fatigue* recalled

1 See Tuck.

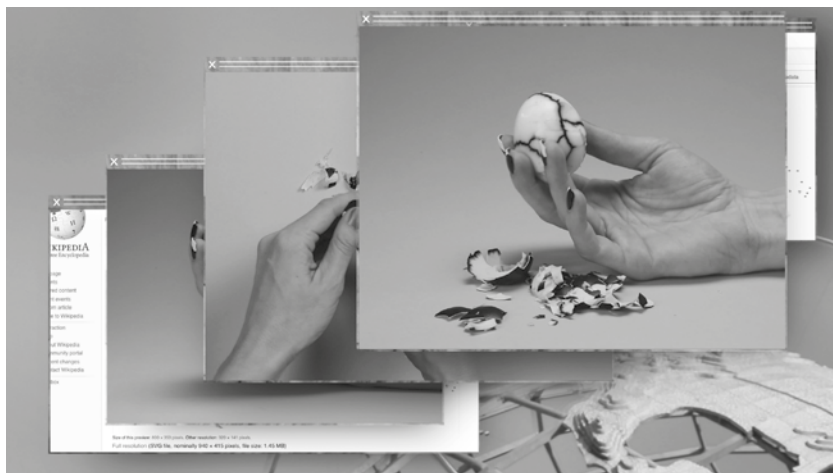


Figure 36 Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue* (2013), (HD video, duration 13:46 min), installation view. 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* (*The Encyclopedic Palace*), curated by Massimiliano Gioni, 1 June – 24 November 2013.

the pop-up browser windows that have circulated on the World Wide Web since the 1990s, with their characteristic 'x's in the upper left or right corner.

Grosse Fatigue and indeed a substantial number of what I will define below as 'post-cinematic works' do not simply multiply frames as if to enhance or amplify the pre-existing logic of the cinematic frame. These post-cinematic works include strictly digital works, to be sure, but also movies, television programmes, art installations, games, and even sound recordings employing framing, stacking, and layering strategies that have a parasitic reliance on cinematic protocols even as they explore the new technical and aesthetic tactics of contextualization emerging in contemporary media cultures. The proliferation of frames in these works enacts an itinerary of the aesthetic strategy I call 'post-cinematic unframing'. Particularly when framing is explicitly thematized – as it is, for example, when pop-up bubbles are superimposed on a scene to display characters' text messaging – it poses the question what becomes of the frame in an era of post-cinema. This chapter explores that question and possible answers as suggested by two exemplary post-cinematic moving-image works. In addition to *Grosse Fatigue*, I consider Kevin B. Lee's video essay *Transformers: The Premake* (2014), which recontextualizes the Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Michael Bay, 2014) by superimposing, stacking, juxtaposing, and collaging footage of the film's production and promotion in a live computer screen recording (hence the term 'desktop documentary'). Like in *Grosse Fatigue*, in *Transformers: The Premake* the stackable, multiframed

interface of contemporary screens becomes an occasion for at once exploiting and denaturalizing framing conventions inherited from cinema, in part by exploring their potential in new networks of relations made possible by contemporary technologies and cultural economies. To make sense of these moving-image works' experimentation with frames, I also reconsider seminal theories of the cinematic frame from André Bazin to Gilles Deleuze to further tease out the aesthetic significance of these works and the transformations of the frame in post-cinema.

Grosse Fatigue and *Transformers: The Premake* eschew the dominant paradigm of the cinematic frame, with its clear opposition of on- and off-screen space, replacing it with a paradigm of fractured framing. The fractured frames of post-cinema are characterized by perpetual susceptibility to rupture and division within the frame as well as a potential infinity of networked supplementations to the frame, independent of any particular spatial coordinates that might impose a real or fictional constraint on the re-articulation of this frame. While this technique can be distinguished from cinematic framing in important respects, it also maintains a crucial if somewhat peculiar dependency – speaking in the spirit of Michel Serres, we might even say parasitism – on cinema. Rather than simply abolishing or transcending the cinematic frame, these post-cinematic works experiment with its medial aftermath, exploring the affordances of post-cinematic unframing. This aesthetic strategy lays the groundwork for a formalistic and film-theoretical interrogation of the fictions of the frame and also opens up broader questions of its political and ideological implications.

Framing Post-Cinema

Before dealing specifically with the status of the frame in post-cinema, some clarifications of the term 'post-cinema' are in order.² Although the post-cinematic relates to questions of mediality, it is not reducible to digital technology. Post-cinema rather concerns a larger set of transformations in the protocols and practices of spectatorship, leisure, economics, governance, visual culture, and other domains. In a seminal account, film theorist Steven Shaviro argues that post-cinema refers to the gradual ceding of cultural dominance from cinematic and televisual forms to digital and networked forms of production that entail specific affective regimes characterized by

2 On uses of the term, see Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*; Denson and Leyda; 'Post-what?, Post-when?'; and Hagener, Hediger, and Strohmaier.

a new relation among moving-image cultures and their aesthetic reception. According to Shaviro,

we are now witnessing the emergence of a different media regime, and indeed a different mode of production, than those which dominated the twentieth century. Digital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience.³

As Shaviro suggests, and I have argued elsewhere, post-cinema refers less to an 'after' cinema, a historical phase determined by technological progress, than to a broader refashioning of the moving image and its embedding context of relations.⁴ To be sure, not all twenty-first century moving-image media are post-cinematic. Screenings in the cinema of *Halloween* (David Gordon Green, 2018) and *La-La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016), or a retrospective of films by Orson Welles at a museum, are not patently post-cinematic in any way. Nor does a day spent watching television programmes such as *The Price Is Right* (1972–), *Family Feud* (1976–), and *Oprah* (1986–), even if such programmes are delivered by cable, satellite, or *TiVo*, involve any necessary recourse to post-cinematic conventions, as none of these works rely in a pronounced way upon the parasitic deconstruction of cinematic conventions. In other words, as the paradigm of cinema persists and many cinematic works are still being produced alongside post-cinematic ones, even non-cinematic moving-image cultures thrive amidst new forms of digital distribution. The premise here is that when we look at moving images we see not only traces of a medium's qualities but also traces of a broader set of social and cultural relations that allow that particular work to exist in that way. The analytical conception implied by the term post-cinema, premised on certain formal and material links between a medium and the modes of production from which it emerged, as well as the consequent lack of a tidy distinction between form and content, predates the problem of post-cinema. Famously, in his essay 'The Mass Ornament' Siegfried Kracauer viewed the mechanical dance moves of the Tiller Girls on film as evidence of the imbrication of a medium, its mass audience, and a space of exhibition in a common mode of industrial production.⁵ Likewise, to argue for a post-cinematic framework for *Grosse Fatigue* and *Transformers: The*

3 Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, p. 2.

4 Åkervall, 'Networked Selves'.

5 Kracauer, pp. 75–88.

Premake is to posit a wider network of commercial, cultural, and aesthetic practices concretized in, but not identical with, the work, its materiality, and its exhibition. In post-cinema, as was the case with cinema for Kracauer (or Mary Ann Doane, Linda Williams, or Noam Elcott, for that matter), a certain set of technical affordances of the medium are on display but their operations bear the stamp of an aesthetics imbricated in contemporary science, industry, and politics.

If the first connotation of post-cinema (as part of a network of relations extending beyond the work) involves a largely synchronic field, the prefix 'post' points towards a second connotation involving a diachronic field with a special relationship to the history of cinema. In particular, the 'post' in post-cinema names how recent moving-image works enlist cinematic norms and practices while transforming their significance by placing them within systems of networked production and distribution. No longer relying on either the space of the movie theatre nor even the suburban family room, as television did, to forge a dyadic relation between screens and viewers (and a relatively stable audience), post-cinematic moving images slip and circulate across wider networks, as if the cinematic frame no longer holds its object. These changes mark both continuities with and differences from the moving-image cultures of the twentieth century. For example, if cinema's techniques of production can be traced back to industrialization and its preoccupation with time–motion studies and mass production, post-cinema's schema of production is instead rooted in the cybernetic regimes of information processing and human–machine communication, which rely on streams of data being constantly updated and reconfigured on a moment-by-moment basis.⁶ From the modular MTV logo of the 1980s to contemporary viral videos, post-cinematic moving-image cultures subject the moving image to informatic patterns of iterability, fragmentation, and circulation native to electronic and digital cultures.⁷

And yet, if post-cinematic works appear in so-called new media, they do so by repurposing and revitalizing so-called 'old media'. Post-cinematic works remain bound to visual norms and possibilities innovated within 'cinematic language', as well as cinematic institutions rooted in early-twentieth-century cultures of spectacle and attraction.⁸ If digital and networked media are the occasion for

6 For archaeologies of the cinema and its roots in modern industrial schemes of production, see Doane; and Elcott. On cybernetic schemes of production, and particularly their roots in real-time information processing, see Galison; and Edwards.

7 On the new aesthetic modes of MTV, see Rodowick, p. 71; and Rabinovitz (on the logo specifically, see pp. 99–100). On viral videos, see Åkervall, 'Die Wahrheit von Auto-Tune'.

8 On attractions and astonishment in early cinema, see Gunning.

post-cinema's articulation, they unlock and actualize potentialities inherited to some extent from cinema (and its contexts). It is this train of relations that the term post-cinema, with its recursive and iterative implications, captures.

Post-cinematic transformations necessarily entail aesthetic transformations in practices of framing. The primary role played by the frame in defining cinema's relationship to a site of industrial production (included or excluded from representation by the frame), to a mode of aesthetic experience (literally shaped by the contours of the frame), and to a subjective and political mindset or 'frame of mind', means that any reappropriation of a cinematic aesthetics cannot take place without reference to the problem of the frame.⁹ Such transformations involve deployment of the technical specificities of the digital frame, to be sure, but, as in cinematic framing, it is aesthetic strategies that direct the emerging techniques of framing.

Post-cinematic works such as *Grosse Fatigue* and *Transformers: The Pre-make* deploy the legacy of the cinematic frame within a network of relations that do not conform to the aesthetic, social, technological, or institutional norms maintained by cinema. This troubling of the cinematic frame, which also amounts to a reimagining, is not incidental in post-cinema. Insofar as it corresponds to an aesthetic regime defined by the reworking of cinematic aesthetics, it is an elementary aspect of a post-cinematic aesthetics and its affective productivity.

The Cinematic Frame

How exactly does the role of the frame in post-cinema differ from the role assumed by the frame in cinema? As seminal accounts in film theory have argued, the cinematic frame and its screen have a specific relation to the space both on- and off-screen, which allows for an expansion or supplementation of what's on-screen through constant processes of reframing. For example, André Bazin famously defined cinema in terms of a *cache*, a mobile mask that has virtually no limits, and which he opposed to the traditional fixed frame or *cadre* of painting:

The outer edges of the [cinematic] screen are not, as technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of

9 On the frame as a frame for excluding the industrial apparatus see Benjamin; on the relationship between framing and a frame of mind see Koch; on the relationship between framing and aesthetic experience see Peucker.

a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the [cinematic] screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal.¹⁰

For Bazin, cinema's mobile frame promised to disclose the world in a manner unique to it. Whatever is temporarily occluded can eventually make it into the centre of the frame again; every off-screen can eventually become on-screen. This is because the mobile frame of cinema stands in opposition to the immobile frames of painting and photography. Even when the profilmic space is a soundstage without a 'real' space for expansion into, or when the film is an animation without any reality beyond the screen proper, the off-screen space outside the frame persists as a structuring fiction.

The cinematic and cinephilic preoccupation with the possibilities of a framed space that continues beyond the cinematic screen animates a variety of other classical film theories that contrast with the case of post-cinematic screens. Following Bazin, Noël Burch treats off-screen space as relational and relative. His account of six different types of off-screen space sustains the notion of a continuous space beyond the frame as definitive of cinema. Specifically, he describes the first four types of off-screen space as those in prolongation of the four borders of the frame, the fifth one as the off-screen space 'behind the camera', and the sixth one as 'encompassing the space existing behind the set or some object in it.'¹¹ Important challenges to these classical conceptions of the cinematic frame also exist within film theory. Pascal Bonitzer famously discussed the notion of deframing (*décadrage*) and its decentring effects on the viewer as a process whereby the viewer comes to see an image differently through perspectives not pragmatically justified by the spatial coordinates or the demands of action: what could be called a cinematic version of anamorphosis. For Bonitzer, deframing is in fact more than a technical choice: a deframed image is for Bonitzer a mutilated image. It has profound effects on the spectator that he discusses as 'frustrating' or even 'sadistic'.¹² Inspired by Bonitzer's notion of deframing, Deleuze entirely moves away from the notion of the cinematic frame and off-screen space in a narrow sense. For him, cinema, as a medium not tied to the constraints of human subjective perspective, has a natural affinity to deframed images. In *The Movement-Image*, he takes up Bazin's and Bonitzer's

¹⁰ Bazin, p. 166.

¹¹ Burch, p. 17.

¹² See Bonitzer, pp. 200–201.

distinction between two types of framings (mask or frame) and takes them one step further. In his account, he differentiates not between two different kinds of frames, but two kinds of out-of-field [*le hors-champ*], which he relates to two different ways of framing and to two different functions of what he calls 'the outside', a relative and an absolute out-of-field referring to a relative and an absolute outside:¹³

In one case the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical Elsewhere outside homogeneous space and time.¹⁴

By introducing the idea of an absolute out-of-field Deleuze adds a dimension to the question of the frame and off-screen space that doesn't strictly relate to space or to a narrow definition of framing. His notion of an absolute out-of-field instead opens the cinematic image to dimensions beyond space and spatiality.

Framing and Unframing in Post-Cinema

That being said, and importantly for the historical trajectory being drawn here, even Bonitzer's deframing and Deleuze's absolute out-of-field still rely on the notion of the cinematic frame in a general sense, for a cinematic framing carries within it a logic of deframing, and a cinematic in-field implies the possibility of an out-of-field. Theirs are not rejections of the cinematic frame so much as a fleshing out of its internal logics, and their explorations of these possibilities tend also to reify the aesthetic and conceptual presuppositions of cinematic framing. The same could be said of practical interrogations of the frame in cinema itself. If cinematic works such as *Blow-up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) or even the animated Looney Tunes short film *Duck Amuck* (Chuck Jones, 1953) interrogate the cinematic frame, they also reconfirm its aforementioned hallmarks. Consider the case of the celebrated *Duck Amuck*, in which the interventions of the off-screen animator subject an on-screen Daffy Duck to an extraordinary series of trials as the continuity and logic of scenery, colouring, and scripting are

¹³ Deleuze, pp. 12–24.

¹⁴ Deleuze, p. 17.

disrupted or rewritten in real time by the seemingly malicious animator. The story of this particular animation, including the frequent addresses to the audience by protagonist Daffy Duck, break the fourth wall and call into question the coherency of the cinematic frame. However, this breaking of the frame somewhat ironically reinscribes the logic of the off-screen space in classical, live-action cinema, by suggesting that what appears on-screen is a series of staged conventions that exist in continuity with a 'real' off-screen space just outside the cinematic frame – which, in this case, is occupied by the animator, his drawing implements, and so on. The aforementioned relational and relative features of off-screen space, familiar from classical cinema, are here affirmed as an overarching logic by the imposition on an animation.

By contrast, post-cinematic works tend to introduce an entirely different logic of the frame undermining the fictions of the cinematic frame in the process. I call what happens to the frame in such works post-cinematic unframing, an undoing of the cinematic frame and its coordinates. Post-cinematic unframing is an aesthetic strategy that relies on a double departure from the role of the frame in cinema. On the one hand, it challenges the presumption of a continuous space beyond the frame. On the other hand, in an era of networked media, the content becomes iterative, subject to ongoing reiterations and additions that undermine the role of the frame in distinguishing content from context.

Firstly, cinema's premise of a space that continues beyond the frame and exists outside its viewability contrasts almost too perfectly with computer screens and their frames.¹⁵ Digital and post-cinematic screens, such as we might encounter in Microsoft Windows or an online video game such as *Fortnite*, adhere to no necessary fixed correspondence between on-screen and off-screen space, between what appears in the frame and beyond it. Instead, they present an arbitrary simulation of selective data, their concrete renderings having no privileged anchor in real space. Indeed, computer screens' user-friendly presentations are composed of tactical accommodations to their subjects' expectations of a more or less continuous space that extends beyond the frame, but these coordinates have no basis in the logic or material dictates of digital media.¹⁶ The frame is no longer a container for profilmic space; it no longer frames the image shown. Its relation is not simply that between on- and off-screen because it now infinitely multiplies the off-screen, which emanates from the on-screen. Its lack of correspondence

¹⁵ See Manovich; Friedberg.

¹⁶ For more on this conception of the interface see Kittler; and Galloway.

to any profilmic space is emphasized by the frequency of frames emanating from within frames in digital interfaces. It therefore makes no sense to speak of the off-screen space of the post-cinematic frame – not even in the sense of a production space with gaffers, mics, and lighting rigs, such as you might find in the production of a feature film or a television commercial. Nor is there typically a continuous integrity to on-screen space in most digital interfaces. Pop-up windows, icons rearranged or made visible according to clicks on a menu, sudden messages from remote websites: all underscore the lack, not only of a logically continuous and on-screen space of the post-cinematic frame, but also of a fiction of that space's off-screen continuity. The software of computers and the apps of smart phones selectively borrow conventions from the continuous expanse of the cinematic frame, even if they don't actually follow the logical dictates of that frame. This can be illustrated by user-friendly platforms such as Microsoft Windows and iOS that have introduced the fiction of a more or less continuous frame extending beyond the screen. While the use of animated and moving-image features, sound effects, the sounds and graphics that accompany booting up show the distinctly cinematic inheritance of these frames, this inheritance does not reproduce the cinematic frame (nor the televisual frame that generally exists within its sway), but rather bares hallmarks of adapting it in a post-cinematic manner.¹⁷ As every frame gives rise to many other frames, the frame loses its traditional function as a mask. Via the multiple frames emanating from it, the post-cinematic frame actualizes a split already present in the pixel technology. Each point on the screen is in fact a separate point, computed semi-autonomously and independently, unlike the scanning electronic beam of television or the continuous space of celluloid film and its classical projection by a more or less single apparatus.

Secondly, in the realm of post-cinema, content is iterative, mutating as it leaps from one context to another, replacing the frame with its demarcation of 'content' and 'context' with a network of remediations. Post-cinematic content is not merely put into a frame and delivered to a definite space (the movie theatre, the family room, the gallery). Rather, it is cut and pasted, hacked and forwarded, occasionally corrupted and degraded in its travels, and is perpetually open to radical transformations that cut across the divide between content and context (think of a viral video or a meme). Such an understanding of the post-cinematic frame points to moving-image production in networked cultures – to the films, TV shows, video installations, viral videos, and music videos produced and consumed in the last two decades

17 On digital forms of framing see Friedberg.

or so. Here again the frame loses its bearings, although in a manner even less related to spatial coordinates and more so to networks. At times, this dynamic extends to narrative logic itself, which increasingly spills beyond the frame, as well as audience practices of meaning-making. Consider the TV programmes that have sprung up since the 2000s in symbiotic relationships with digital, web-based, and DVD-based systems of textual production. ABC's *Lost* (2004–2010), for example, deployed a sprawling, somewhat non-linear body of storylines, timelines, and characters whose sheer complexity motivated the rapid emergence of online communities for analysing the weekly episodes and piecing together crowd-sourced explications of plot. More recent programmes such as *Westworld* (2016–) continue this trend by producing narratives so complex as to almost defy intelligibility without reference to podcasts and other web platforms that supplement interpretation of episodes. Digital media for the repetition of episodes, from DVDs to web streaming, allow for the multiple viewings that realize the possibilities of crowd-sourced analyses. Yet even as these programmes develop a new relationship with digital platforms, a common refrain in the discussion of so-called quality TV series has been the cinematic standards of their cinematography, performances, story-writing, and other filmic aspects, giving the impression that the new golden age of cinema is all at once televisual, digital, and cinematic. This reinscription of cinematic norms within new conventions is a hallmark of the post-cinematic features of these works, and the inadequacy of a nostalgic invocation of cinema to explain their specificity. Moreover, such a reworking and reframing of television – part technological, part generic, part social, part economic, part narrative, part aesthetic – involves a post-cinematic mutation of the relations produced by classical cinematic (framing) techniques.

Post-Cinematic Unframing in *Grosse Fatigue* and *Transformers: The Premake*

Returning to *Grosse Fatigue* we encounter a puzzling coincidence of framing and unframing. Whereas in photography and cinema frames typically introduce an authoritative or exclusive perspective on content, in post-cinema framing is iterative and multiple, meaning that acts of framing coincide with acts of unframing. In other words, the introduction of another frame often undoes the dominance of a first, second, or third frame already in place, producing a structural confusion between framing and unframing within post-cinematic works. For example, on the narrative level *Grosse Fatigue* tells

a schematic story of the creation of the universe and is composed of searches made by Henrot with Google and other engines, showing us snippets of her history of directed Internet browsing presented in a series of frames. The result of a collaboration the artist set up with the Smithsonian Institution, it samples different media, sources, and disciplines ranging from the history of technology to anthropology and ethnography, with different archival and disciplinary sources offering up competing 'frames of meaning', metaphorically speaking. The production of the film embeds these competing frames of meaning, insofar as a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship enabled Henrot to film the collections from a variety of institutions in Washington, D.C., including the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, National Air and Space Museum, and National Museum. Holding together this visual tour de force are poet Jacob Bromberg's rapid, poetic, hip-hop-like reflections on images that juxtapose scientific vernacular, profane, and religious outlooks on creation. In questioning the possibility of one system of knowledge, and in staging a series of competing frames for totality, the video perfectly fits into the exhibition *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* in which it appeared, which itself eschewed the Enlightenment mastery of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* for a post-Enlightenment panoply of frames, anchors, and outlooks on efforts at encyclopedic knowledge.

In *Grosse Fatigue* specifically, the outermost frame of the work (i.e. that which coincides with the edges of the surface for projection or display) contains within it what appear to be iterations of similarly staged content in a series of frames, the uppermost screen showing a boiled egg as its shell is peeled away, as well as one window seemingly featuring Wikipedia content. The repetition across the screens of *Grosse Fatigue* suggests the frame of the (digital) artwork is not merely a picture or representation but a platform for iteration, each frame entering into dynamic, even competitive relation with the others. As such, *Grosse Fatigue* engages the function of the frame in post-cinematic cultures in a twofold way. On the one hand, the artwork's reliance on a frame-based personal computing paradigm, oriented towards multitasking, ties frames to the modern attention economy with its multiple and simultaneous regimes of framed activity, each frame corresponding to a certain locus of activities. Leaving the sequentiality internal to the cinematic frame behind, we enter an age of framing simultaneity; instead of focusing on just one frame at a time, we focus on multiple frames at once. On the other hand, in investigating these changes and demonstrating how the fiction of the frame is broken in post-cinema, *Grosse Fatigue* performs a post-cinematic unframing of the image. The frame, as something that is multiple, or even plural, is coextensive with an unmooring of other frames

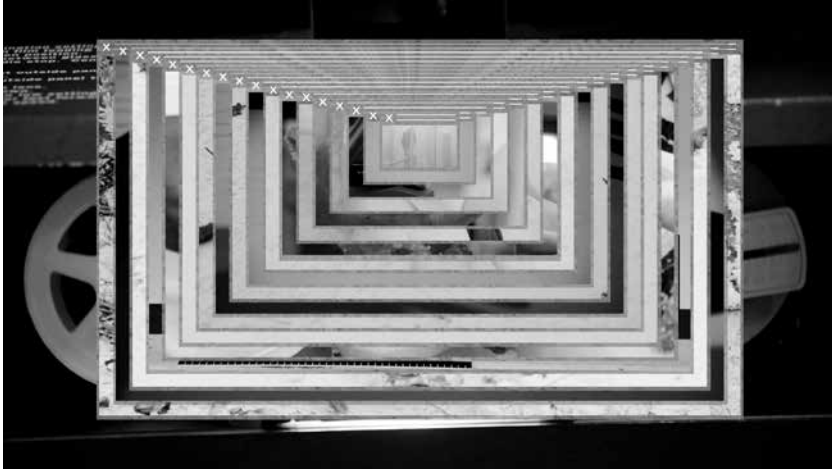


Figure 37 Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, (HD video, duration 13:46 min), installation view. 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace)*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, 1 June – 24 November 2013.

in a manner that undoes their traditional role so as to put forth not only the simultaneity of frames, but also the simultaneity of framing and unframing. This exploration of the frame both showcases the affordances of contemporary media-technical interfaces and interrogates the very definition of cinematic framing that has informed nearly a century of film theory.

These operations of unframing reflect a different paradigm of framing, but also, more crucially, a different relationship to the world. In terms of our relationship to the world, post-cinematic framing means that we no longer expect an image to be a world (as it is in painting) or even to contain a portion of the world (as it does in film and photography). Following Stanley Cavell, if a painting *is* a world, and photographs and films are *of* the world, post-cinematic images are endless openings *onto* endless worlds.¹⁸ No longer a window to the world, the frame is now an eternal rabbit hole of other frames (and other worlds), each offering up a new set of relations. In the age of post-cinema, the world can no longer be contained in an image, and the world of the image never comes to an end. It is this changed relationship to the world, which is also a changed relationship to knowledge, that *Grosse Fatigue* investigates.

In a certain way, *Grosse Fatigue* is part of a broader tendency in contemporary moving-image cultures. No longer tied to a representation of pro-filmic space, it features an action that is not just represented on a screen, but also

¹⁸ Cavell, p. 24.

takes place on a screen and reflects the function of the screen for the frame. While multiplied frames existed as a niche technique since the beginnings of cinema and slowly became popularized since the late 1990s and early 2000s – for instance in Mike Figgis's film *Time Code* (1999), which shows the embodiment of the projection of digital flows onto the moving image with its electronic running clock – today it has become part of cinema's vernacular. Increasingly, much of the narrative output of Hollywood and other moving-image cultures incorporates a range of frames and framing devices: for example, the depiction of texting in film and television series such as Netflix's *House of Cards* (2013–). In many films and TV shows, the information contained in a text message is displayed directly on the screen, either in its own frame, or superposed on the frame we are watching. While incorporating a range of frames and framing devices, many of these works relate to the frame in a rather gimmicky fashion, leaving the cinematic frame and its basic coordinates essentially intact.

On the whole, however, *Grosse Fatigue* is more in line with a number of experimental film and media works that have, in recent years, further investigated and interrogated the changing aesthetic possibilities of the frame and its capacity for unframing in particular. Here, through techniques of post-cinematic unframing, references to the frame are not merely a formal technique employed as a gimmick, but a critical aesthetic strategy. Another prominent example of such unframing is *Transformers: The Premake* by filmmaker, critic, and scholar Kevin B. Lee. *Transformers: The Premake* is a 'desktop documentary', a video essay that takes place entirely on the filmmaker's computer screen and which he uploaded to Vimeo in 2014. This format exploits the user-friendly interface of a desktop as the scene for telling a story through the piecing together of standard desktop operations (e.g. point, click, drag, opening windows, closing windows, multitasking). Here we encounter an exemplary post-cinematic work where the fictions of the cinematic frame and the post-cinematic practices of unframing are employed side by side. In the case of *Transformers: The Premake*, the result is to deconstruct and reconstruct the logic of the cinematic frame imposed by the movie *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, albeit before its release and with unauthorized material from YouTube and other sources.

This premake is similar to a fan remake such as might appear on YouTube; only, instead of being made after the release of the film, it is made beforehand with material already available online.¹⁹ Like Henrot, Lee explores the graphical user interface of the computer screen and the aesthetic possibilities

19 On fan remakes, see Jenkins.

of stacked windows and frames. In *Transformers: The Premake*, the screen is camera lens, frame, and canvas all at once. In a way, the screen becomes a battleground for networked cultures disclosed through stackable windows and frames, in which Lee brings together production footage from the Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, fan and amateur videos shot on smartphones (including Lee's own), as well as commercial footage shot for television. We follow Lee's mouse clicks in real time as he navigates networks of information, opens dozens of video clips and Google Maps segments, and performs numerous Google searches – only to stack the opened windows on top of each other a moment later.

In making the desktop a site for exploring images from video via the cinematic to the post-cinematic and the televisual, from the professional to the amateur, Lee not only investigates the technologies of post-cinematic unframing; he also explores a network of relations linking the global production of a single large-scale Hollywood blockbuster to a network of fans, consumers, governments, and other agents connected to the film who somehow witness its production. He pieces together these bits of media, composing a symphony of what Hito Steyerl has termed 'poor images'. In this sense, Lee grapples with post-cinematic unframing's political implications as his playful aesthetics shifts into a more serious critique of the global relations of moving-image production under contemporary capitalism. The shuffling from one frame to the next, the stacking and unstacking of pop-up browser windows, becomes an occasion for investigating the formal, material, economic, and political features of the moving-image cultures in which *Transformers*, its fans, its users, and contributing industries are embedded. Notably, Lee not only shows us these videos and clips from different sources, but also the ways he searched for them online, encouraging an articulation of links between the local space of the user's or viewer's (the distinction is blurred) screen and the global networks it accesses. Furthermore, Lee uses Google Maps to connect the different locations where the *Transformers* film was produced, thereby reflecting on its global frame and networked power relations. In a manner reminiscent of the genre of peephole films from early and silent cinema that explored viewing positions and modes of disclosure peculiar to the cinematic gaze (*The Peeping Tom* (1897); *A Country Stud Horse* (1920)), Lee stages the modes of aesthetic disclosure embedded in the stackable windows of the graphical user interface of today's personal computers.²⁰

20 On *A Country Stud Horse*, see Williams, p. 78.

In *Transformers: The Premake* the aesthetic strategy of post-cinematic unframing takes on an explicitly political meaning, and thus helps us to think about the political and economic implications of such unframing. Similar to *Grosse Fatigue*, the desktop in *Transformers: The Premake* frames and at the same time unframes these images and videos. But, more explicitly than in Henrot's piece, *Transformers: The Premake* acts as a node in global relays for the proliferation of mobile screens, fractal interfaces, and their relation to globalized capitalism in a media-critical tradition. For example, by showing us how crowd-sourced material becomes promotional material, Lee asks questions about the labour and media economies of this kind of image production. The frame plays an important role in this investigation of the blurred boundaries between work and leisure, consumer and worker as it selects and connects the different images and source materials, thus pointing to the connections between the formal elements and their political implications. When many frames co-exist on-screen and are juxtaposed in a dialectical manner, we might be tempted to see them as a post-cinematic version both of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's dialectical montage or the techniques of juxtaposition in Harun Farocki's media-critical essay films.²¹ Taking up this technique on a computer screen, Lee makes networked power relations visible as he investigates, for instance, *Transformers: Age of Extinction's* international co-production deal with a Chinese broadcaster.

Digital Frames and Frames of Mind

This analysis of *Grosse Fatigue* and *Transformers: The Premake* shows that post-cinematic unframing is not merely a formal technique reducible to digital technologies but rather an aesthetic strategy that reflects a changed relationship to the world and a different frame of mind. This change can be traced to a variety of agents – digital and non-digital, narrative and non-narrative, human and non-human – in the socioeconomic and political context of the past ten or twenty years. Gertrud Koch has shown in the context of cinema that every act of framing always implies a political position and acts of political framing. But what frame of mind does post-cinematic unframing imply? As technologies of framing in post-cinema cease to correspond (as they did in cinema) to an inside and an outside,

21 For a (somewhat critical) account of Eisenstein's montage and its strategic juxtaposition of unlike images, see Nesbet. On Farocki's media-critical perspective, see Elsaesser.

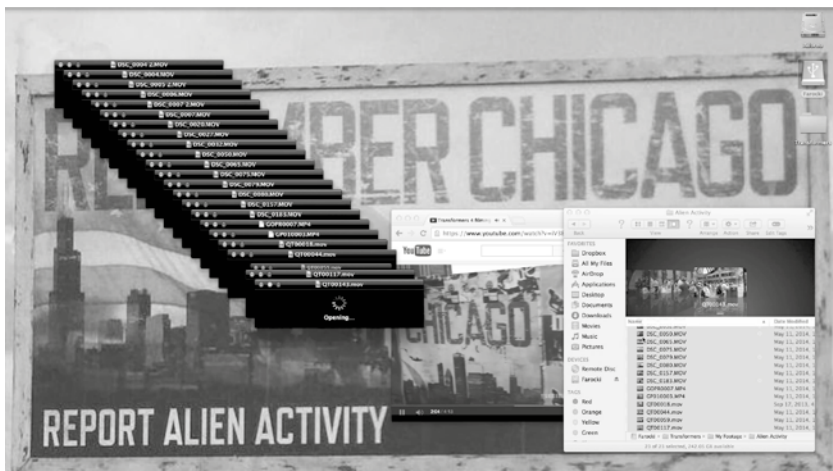


Figure 38 Kevin B. Lee, *Transformers: The Premake* (a desktop documentary) (2014), <<https://vimeo.com/94101046>>, screenshot.



Figure 39 Kevin B. Lee: *Transformers: The Premake* (a desktop documentary) (2014), <<https://vimeo.com/94101046>>, screenshot.

an on-screen and an off-screen, an included and an excluded, the political meaning of acts of framing changes. More specifically, the blurring of the inside and outside of the frame, the on-screen and the off-screen, and the breakdown of these distinctions enacted by post-cinematic unframing, correspond to a growing indistinction in political fields in the era of globally networked neoliberal economies. In this sense, post-cinematic unframing reflects the seeming disappearance of the outside, which theorists such as Mark Fisher and Fredric Jameson have identified with

contemporary forms of late capitalism. Jameson suggests that what this means for the bourgeois subject of contemporary capitalism is that '[it] is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'.²² For Fisher this breakdown in the imagination corresponds to a capitalist realism that dissolves classical political oppositions. Since the 1990s theorists have associated this breakdown with the effects of global networks. Mark Poster and Manuel Castells, on the one hand, herald the rise of post-Cold War, globally networked cultures that would dissolve the nation-state; while theorists such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, on the other, warn of a new era when all features of social life would be organized according to the dictates of digital capitalism, dissolving traditional antagonisms to the market.²³ In these accounts, a seeming synergy emerges with the end of the Cold War, the rise of a globally triumphant capitalism, and the proliferation of global digital networks that subvert traditional oppositions.

Grosse Fatigue's and especially *Transformers: The Premake's* aesthetic strategies of post-cinematic unframing offer an uncanny corollary to that waning of imaginative possibilities that presuppose the absence of an outside. And indeed the title *Grosse Fatigue* itself seems to already suggest a state of exhaustion that could be linked to this waning of imaginative possibilities. In place of a discrete inside and outside, the aesthetics of post-cinematic unframing confronts the viewer with a hypertopia – a field of open-ended possibilities defined by an infinite field of links and frames, devoid of clear oppositions between inside and outside, centre and margin.²⁴ While the techniques of post-cinematic unframing are afforded by digital technology, post-cinematic works show that this unframing is in no manner reducible to digital technologies. In the breakdown of inside and outside as well as on-screen and off-screen, post-cinematic unframing provides an aesthetic strategy of affirming and imposing differences on the seemingly undifferentiated spiralling networks of digital cultures. Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* and Lee's *Transformers: The Premake* play with the proliferation of frames as a way to identify new networks of meaning. In the face of information abundance, these artworks use the breakdown of the frame to tease out questions about our relationship to the world. The breakdown of the coherency of the frame as a neutral fact becomes, through the aesthetic

22 Jameson, p. 76. See also Fisher.

23 See also Shaviri, *No Speed Limit*.

24 Although my usage is somewhat distinct from his, my use of the term 'hypertopia' borrows from (and is inspired by) Francesco Casetti's invocation of that term in *The Lumière Galaxy*.

strategy of post-cinematic unframing, revealed as part of a wider unravelling of geographical, technological, economic, and political enclosures in an era of global networks. The illusion of the frame as neutral fact fades away and is replaced by the reality of unframing as a condition of contemporary economic as well as cultural production.

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About the Author

Lisa Åkervall is Senior Lecturer in Culture, Aesthetics and Media with a specialism in Aesthetic Theory at the University of Gothenburg. Her research focuses on cinematic affect, digital media, postcinematic aesthetics, digital sound studies, and the cultural techniques of neoliberalism. She is author of *Kinematographische Affekte: Die Transformation der Kinoerfahrung*, Fink Verlag 2018, and co-editor of *Waking Life: Kino zwischen Technik und Leben*, b_books Berlin 2016. Her publications appear in journals including *Screen*, *NECSUS*, *Navigationen*, and *Rhizomes*. She is currently writing a monograph on the relationship among aesthetics, subjectivity, and neoliberal politics in postcinema.

13 Absolute Immanence

D. N. Rodowick

Abstract

The defining question of modern art was how to release the image from representation. The problem for contemporary art is how to find new approaches, materials, techniques, and technologies for remapping this question in ways responsive to our current history and media environment. What has the image become under new conditions of technological production and reproduction, amplified flows of communication through social and mass media, and the global expansion of neoliberalism, both politically and economically? In this chapter, Rodowick appeals to Theodor Adorno's late writings on aesthetics to evaluate contemporary art's critical responses to its current technological and social condition in works by Philippe Parreno, Sturtevant, Pierre Huyghe, Michel Majerus, Cory Arcangel, and other international artists.

Keywords: Contemporary art, art and capitalism, art and politics, Adorno, aesthetic theory, utopia

On behalf of what cannot be exchanged, art must through its form bring the exchangeable to critical self-consciousness (T. W. Adorno).¹

The defining question of modern art was how to release the image from representation. The problem for contemporary art is how to find new approaches, materials, techniques, and technologies for remapping this question in ways responsive to our current history and media environment. What has the image become under new conditions of technological production and reproduction, amplified flows of communication through social and mass media, and the global expansion of neoliberalism, both politically

¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 83.

and economically? Then again, perhaps we have lost faith entirely in the concept of 'representation', or the image's capacity to stand for, to stand in for, or to give voice or meaning to one thing by another thing?

From Walter Benjamin came modernity's lesson that technological reproducibility promotes the disappearance of the original in a cloud of copies. In turn, Jean Baudrillard voiced postmodernism's assertion that because the very distinction between originals and copies has disappeared, there is now only simulation without any referent. In my view, Baudrillard's concept of simulation was entirely discredited, rather than proven, by the historical facts of the two Gulf Wars, September 11, and every act of terror and mediated violence that followed. Perhaps, then, after modernism and postmodernism, what we need from the image in contemporary art are new forms and strategies for addressing the Real. The Real is most present where violence is done to bodies – that is, where biopolitical power is exercised simultaneously on global and capillary levels – but art is almost powerless to respond to that. And there is also the widespread violence done to our capacities for perception and sensation, and for the making and sharing of sense, not necessarily as communication, but rather through a certain persistence and depth of questioning of the forms and materials through which images are transmitted to us. It might also be said that we are losing time in this image-world. How can time be regained? Only by renewing and amplifying the powers of the virtual, which is, or should be, one of the functions of art.

We may no longer believe in representation, but we do believe in mediation. Writing on Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze remarks that an artist never begins by confronting a blank surface. Rather, this apparently empty space is already clogged with clichés that fog our visual field and determine our modalities of seeing.² The question, then, is how to give form and expression to a critical Image out of the vast flux of reproduced images and images of reproduction that one encounters in daily life. This is a question of style and the organization of forms, and above all, a question of construction. But it is also a matter of presenting the technologies of sighting in which we are all envisioned and produced as images, and in turn, to invent new techniques for the critical interrogation of images.

My writing here is inspired by an exhibition called *Images* that took place at the Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany in spring 2016. Curated by Susanne Pfeffer, *Images* is an astute survey of contemporary art's critical

2 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation*, pp. 86–89.

responses to its current technological and social condition.³ The most precise emblem of this condition may be Elaine Sturtevant's *Plato's Dual Action: Same/Idea/Transposed* (2004, HDCAM Metal Tape, two camera video 4/3, displayed on two screens, colour, sound, 30'), whose *dispositif* of two facing television monitors suggests a mediated cave from which there is no exit – one image only refers to another, and not to some external reality or transcendental sense. Mark Leckey's *Made in 'Eaven* (2004, 16mm loop, 2') produces a similar perceptual abyss. The film begins with a quick track-in towards a highly reflective surface. As the framing rotates and tracks back, one recognizes immediately a replica of Jeff Koons's 1986 sculpture, *Rabbit*, itself a distorting mirror for anything that approaches it and everything that surrounds it (in this version, Leckey's own London studio).⁴ In this work, the apparent perception of optical depth is continually reabsorbed by the surface of an image; there is no escape from a vertiginous conversion of presence into absence within the image. In this respect, the medium of contemporary art is less the forms and materials of individual works than the technologies and conditions of our mediated, indeed *media*-ated, environment – a world saturated with signs, industrially designed, technologically produced and disseminated, and regulated by copyright as brands and intellectual property – whose primary sense is exchange. (Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *Annlee* in her various incarnations is the emblem of this condition.) In this world, the sense of the image – displayed on billboards and jumbotrons; printed on packaging, t-shirts, and stickers; displayed on screens of all sizes and scales – is withdrawn or displaced. The primary function of language is no longer referential and intersubjective, but rather, to assign and extract exchange value. This is where we encounter the Real as a perceptual violence. Will we awake one day to protest along with the children in Philippe Parreno's video *TV Channel* (1998–2013), 'No more reality', or perhaps, as in some frames of the image, so difficult to completely decipher, 'More reality'?⁵

3 This chapter is a revised and expanded version of 'Some Assembly Required', which was my contribution to the *Images* catalogue to be published in 2019 by Walther König Books. I would like to thank both the Fridericianum Museum and Walther König for permission to reuse and expand this material. I am also grateful to Susanne Pfeffer, Anna Sailer, and Eva Möller for their help and support. For more information, including visual documentation of *Images*, see Pfeffer.

4 The full version of Leckey's film can be seen on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rH5Ew_fOTk>.

5 *TV Channel* is an installation with LED panels screen and sound system displaying a re-edited collection of six works: *Anna* (1993, video HI-8, colour, sound, 4'); *Fleurs* (1987, video 8, transferred to U-matic, color, no sound, 52'); *Alien Seasons* (2002, 16mm film transferred to Digital Betacam, colour, sound, indeterminate length); *The Writer* (2007, Mini DV, colour, sound, 3'58"); *Anywhere*

How can some depth of intersubjective sense be restored to this world? And how can all that is far-too-actual in our current media environment, so densely populated with clichés, be challenged by counterforces of the virtual? Perhaps not by a faith in representation, but rather by an appeal to thoughts provoked by the inherent reticence of art and its withdrawal of sense. Or as Annlee demands of you, the viewer, in Pierre Huyghe's *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000, animated film, colour, sound, 4'9"), 'I am haunted by your imagination, and that's what I want from you'. What attentive and concerned viewers may want from contemporary art, then, in all its complex varieties and manifestations, in its misfires and mistakes as well as its provocations and successes, is to raise again the force of the Real in the Image and to remap for us new terms for intuiting now not only what is or was, but what could be. The Real, as I use the term here, refers to nothing actual, but rather the persistence of the virtual in our common existence as what might restore to us the force and the reality of non-determined futures and unforeseen possibilities.

One might think of this situation as T. W. Adorno's nightmare scenario – a world so universally permeated with the logic of commodity fetishism that all functions and relations of exchange, social or aesthetic, are overwhelmed by exchange-value, which thus becomes their only referent and sense. At the same time, the old Critical philosopher spent the last decade of his writing defending the independence or autonomy of art and aesthetic experience with respect to these totalizing forces of reification. For Adorno, the autonomy of art is ineluctably linked to its capacity for criticism, whose powers derive precisely from its reticence and its withdrawal of sense, but in ways that counter and reimagine forms of value and exchange. What if this idea of autonomy was the secret residing deep within every authentic work of art, a secret calling out to every viewer and every thinker capable of receiving and responding to it? Adorno calls this the utopian dimension of art. In my view, it is the force of the virtual trying to teach us the lesson of time as absolute immanence, if we are indeed capable of receiving this lesson.

It is important to understand why the criterion of autonomy is so deeply embedded in Adorno's demand for critical art. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant defines aesthetic autonomy as the form of the artwork's purposeful purposelessness, or a purpose without directed ends or aims [*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*].⁶ Under this directive, aesthetic experience is

Out of the World (2000, 3D animation, Digital Betacam, colour, sound, 4'); and *No More Reality, la manifestation* (1991, Betacam, colour, sound, 4'). An excerpt of *No More Reality* is viewable on YouTube, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuApQjAksNw>>.

6 See Kant, 'Analytic of the Beautiful', especially § 10.

lifted out of any consideration of need, desire, or instrumental use; in other words, the work of art establishes a mode of existence as absolute freedom distinct from the demands of commonplace life. It is also the case that aesthetic experience so defined is singular and isolated and thus abstracted from collective and social life – its mode of exchange is solitude.

The dilemma of modernity no less than postmodernity, however, is that the penetration of the commodity form into nearly all terms of existence and exchange has universally endowed aesthetic experience with a singular purposiveness: to be bought and sold, to seduce and entertain, to reduce experience to habit, and to impose these conditions uniformly throughout the social whole. Modern art responded to this situation through abstraction, absolute construction, and complexity of technique – these were some of art's ways of resisting exchange value by changing the terms of representation. However, Adorno believes that contemporary art faces a dilemma unknown in Kant's era. The demand for autonomy is made ever more difficult by two factors. First, art has become increasingly dependent on technologies whose history of production and consumption is concomitant with that of the history of capital in both its industrial and informatic or computational incarnations. This is especially true of the new media arts of film, photography, video, and electronic music, whether analogue or digital, and all of their technologies for production and reproduction. And for similar reasons, sensory experience is almost unavoidably absorbed into the social, although in the alienated form of reification and commodity fetishism. This is the second factor. The solitary subject of Kant's analytic of the beautiful has now become a homogenous and alienated collective, and all experience has been transformed as the externality of things.

The contemporary formal and ethical demand of autonomy is to restore the critical capacities of both the artwork and the viewer by changing the terms of their autonomy and renewing their capacities for registering and undergoing transformation and change. To begin, the grip of technology on technique must be loosened to achieve new styles of expression, construction, and assembly. One might think here of Wade Guyton's break with conventional concepts of 'painting' through the creative use of digital image editing and inkjet printing on canvas, or Seth Price's pixelated transfers of frame grabs from hostage videos to unconventional surfaces such as acrylic, commercial signage ink on PVC, or archival polyester film.⁷ Here, perhaps,

7 *Images* displayed four of Price's *Hostage Video Still with Time Stamps*, all from 2005. The *Images* exhibition booklet describes these works as 'appropriations of a gruesome motif. They show images of beheadings committed by Jihadists. Seth Price has chosen a motif passed on

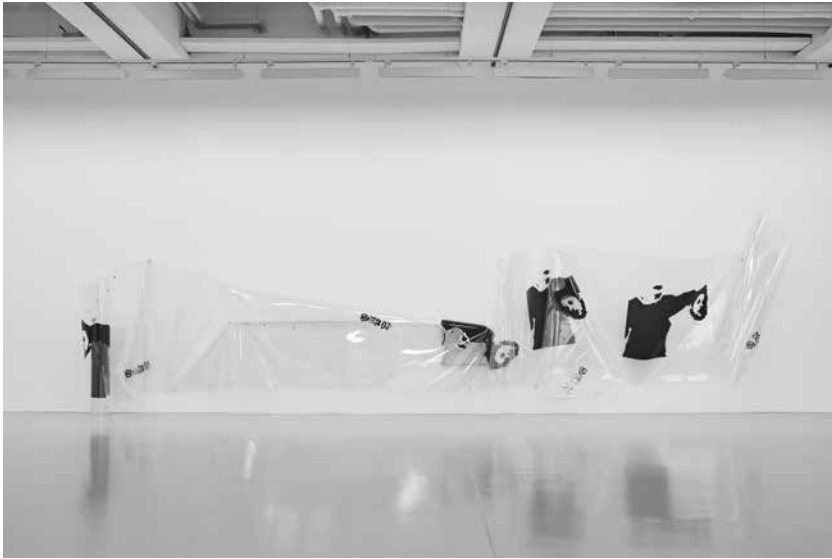


Figure 40 Installation view, Seth Price, *Hostage Video Stills With Time Stamps* (2005). © Photo: Fabian Frinzel.

new sensory domains are imagined by passing through just those domains of experience where life seems most alienated.

The logic of Adorno's demand for aesthetic autonomy, especially in his *Aesthetic Theory*, is difficult, yet it might also signal new directions for understanding the virtual as the anticipatory time of contemporary art. Adorno suggests that art does not become autonomous by separating itself from alienated forms or existing independently from them, but rather by passing directly through them. 'Artworks extend the realm of human domination to the extreme', Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*,

not literally, though, but rather by the strength of the establishment of a sphere existing for itself, which just through its posited immanence divides itself from real domination and thus negates the heteronomy of domination [...] The necessity of art cannot be propounded *more scientifico* but rather only insofar as a work, by the power of its internal unity, gives

through art and media reporting that is indelibly inscribed in our collective visual memory. He extracts these images from digital circulation, freezes the action sequences in still images, crops and processes them, prints them as serigraphs in signage ink on transparent foil (used, for example, by libraries for archiving purposes), and distorts them to the point that the motifs are only barely recognizable. The integrity of these images, which expose the most brutal violation of human integrity conceivable, is violated itself' (Pfeffer, p. 15).

evidence of being thus-and-only-thus, as if it absolutely must exist and cannot possibly be thought away. This being-in-itself to which artworks are devoted is not the imitation of something real but rather the anticipation of a being-in-itself that does not yet exist, of an unknown that – by way of the subject – is self-determining. Artworks say that something exists in itself, without predicating anything about it.⁸

In other words, art for Adorno is absolute immanence.

What Adorno calls genuine art is future oriented, though without supplying positive advice or direction concerning how movement into the future might be achieved. In his 1961 essay on *musique informelle*, Adorno characterizes this anticipation of a still unknown critical autonomy as perpetuating something like the ever-present possibility of a break in time and history as what cannot be foreseen or fully imagined in the present moment. Autonomous art therefore expresses the real and concrete possibility that characterizes every artistic utopia: 'to make things of which we do not know what they are'.⁹ Are Guyton's images paintings or prints? Are Seth Price's *Hostage Video Stills with Time Stamps* prints or sculptures? Similar arguments appear in *Aesthetic Theory*, where Adorno argues that art probes after truth in the evanescent and the fragile. 'In each genuine work of art something appears that does not yet exist', Adorno asserts. 'The appearance of the nonexistent as if it existed motivates the question as to the truth of art. By its form alone art promises what is not; it registers objectively, however refractedly, the claim that because the nonexistent appears it must indeed be possible'.¹⁰ This appearance of the nonexistent as if it existed is the immanence of the virtual in every actual image, sign, or event, if only it were possible to make it present.

The stakes here are very close to what I have recently called the naming crisis in contemporary art in its inventive quest for new orders of time, memory, and history, and new forms and terms of criticism.¹¹ In similar terms, Adorno characterizes *musique informelle* as experimental, unpredictable, contingent, and incomplete. These are open works whose sense is reticent and enigmatic, yet still connected, if only obliquely, to the social real. Adorno sometimes refers to such work as 'hieroglyphs for which the code has been lost'.¹² The sense of these forms is paradoxical. Think of them

8 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 77.

9 Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', p. 322.

10 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 82.

11 See Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, especially Chapter One.

12 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 124.

as audiovisual constructions whose forms are often mimetic and which demand interpretation while acknowledging the futility of pinning images to any stable or final signification. Indeed, technologically mediated forms are automatically mimetic – they convey directly the ciphered truth of alienation through the intensity of their reification and its technological manifestation. These mimetic forces can be broken apart, reassembled, and reconfigured, however.

The hieroglyph can be thought of as a special kind of writing that combines distinct elements that are at once depictive, phonetic, and determinative. Nevertheless, it must be said that for critical art, a number of obstacles, both spatial and temporal, bar the way to transforming normative forms of the image. The standardized image is a sign and a sensory construction, but without the expressive conditions that demand active free interpretation; rather, the image is entirely characterized by demonic forces of repetition. Here repetition is first conceived in the form of commodity circulation in which every image is structured by exchange value, and concomitantly, modalities of seeing are produced as acts of consumption. This is partially what Adorno is trying to counter in writing of the autonomy, or lack of it, in aesthetic construction. When art reproduces the logic of commodities it has no terms of existence other than those of commodities, nor does it admit to other forms of exchange. Rather than thinking of autonomy in terms of self-identity or as a complete and total Form, autonomy here becomes an ethical and existential criterion for expressing art's resistance to and independence from the commodity form and its terms of exchange value. The achievement of autonomous expression thus requires new forms of reciprocity and interactivity that are both individual and collective, and which appeal to the virtual more than the actual.

Various works in *Images* target the forms and materials of commercial mass media, with which we are all too familiar, as well as their means of transmission – logos, brands, video games, neon lights, video and film projections or TV monitors, animated characters. In addressing how collective acts of consumption make vision disappear into exchange, these works respond to Adorno's demand that critical art appeal to a social collectivity by speaking through 'the How of apperception. Their We', Adorno writes, 'is simply the sensorium according to its historical condition pursued to the point that breaks the relation to representational objectivity that was modified by virtue of the development of its language of form'.¹³ The reproductive visual arts appeal to a plural beholder by saying, 'Behold! [*Seht einmal!*]'.

13 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 168.

This look is outward directed, both to the world itself and to that domain of historically structured experience that is the image-world. But the collective appeal to the 'How of apperception' is equally important. To the extent that apperception requires a critical and self-reflective consciousness, this collective We must also be engaged in on-going acts of willed interpretation, of making meaning from signs, and as importantly, in understanding how the powers and limits of current technologies for seeing and modalities of vision might indeed constrain the possibilities for making new sense through images. Achieving autonomy in aesthetic construction is also an achievement of independence in critical reading. The collective can only attain the possibility of a willed critical reading by releasing art from the dominance of the commodity and its forms of infernal repetition.

The demand for autonomy and critical interpretation in art is also dissipated by another force of repetition – the image is taken as a copy or a re-presentation of the world marked by qualities of immediacy and presence. For an image to achieve the autonomy characteristic of an artwork in Adorno's sense, it must be entirely present as construction. Otherwise said, the artwork must interrupt the forms of perceptual experience sustained by demonic repetition by introducing difference and discontinuity into aesthetic form and reception – images must become writing, or that special form of writing that Adorno calls hieroglyphs. The given immediacy of the world in perception is one quality hindering the transformation of the image into aesthetic writing in Adorno's sense. Another is the overwhelming presence of represented objects in their immediacy. In effect, these two qualities, immediacy and presence, account for the naturalization of images as emblems of capital. In Adorno's view, the significance given to the immediate presence of objects in an image mitigates against the formation of aesthetically autonomous techniques – the signs are too present to be ordered in discontinuity and to inflect perception with difference. It is also the case that such images are self-interpreting – they permit no other message than one that states that reification is universal and that the world is how it is. Adorno calls this the automatic self-reproduction of the status quo in its established forms as an expression of domination. Nevertheless, owing to their absorption of social relations, perhaps such images can be dismantled, reassembled, and revalued in passing dialectically through the social and the subjective to give new sense to images and the powers of the virtual that may reside within them.

The most obvious hieroglyphic emblem in *Images* is Pierre Huyghe's *RSI, un bout de réel* (2006) – a neon sculpture of Lacan's (in)famous Borromean knot as a model of the imbrication of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the



Figure 41 Installation view: foreground, Cory Arcangel, *Data Diaries* (2003); background: Michel Majerus, *DECODER* (1997). © Photo: Nicolas Wefers.

Real. But, more imaginatively, I want to refer to the juxtaposition of work by Cory Arcangel and Michel Majerus. In the installed version of *Images*, Majerus's *DECODER* (1997, dispersion paint on wall, 317.5 × 714.5 cm, dimensions variable) serves as a divider, but perhaps also as link, between the two artists' works. Seen together, *DECODER* and Arcangel's *Data Diaries* (2003, 31 single-channel-videos, colour, 11'58" each) suggest two variations of aesthetic hieroglyphs, whose meaning is as open as it is ultimately undecipherable. Is *DECODER* a sculpture or a 'sign'? What does it depict or what function does it serve? If it is a named machine for symbolic interpretation, it is as silent as the monolith from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). If read as a word in French, *décodeur*, it is an admonishment to the visitor to engage in an ultimately incomplete act of sense-making.

Where *DECODER* gestures towards a word, the line of seven identical video monitors in Arcangel's *Data Diaries* suggest a phrase, perhaps a rebus. To call these thirty-one videos looping on seven screens 'diaries' suggests an agent's historical account of its activities and labours. But what is presented here is a record of inhuman labour – a computer's data cycles outputted as video, though as a consequence of Arcangel's own work at the computer. The rigorously patterned images unfold on the screens with the deep mathematic rationality of algorithms and the beauty of animated grids, as if Mondrian's paintings could dance to a techno beat. Could one imagine each monitor

as the phonetic 'depictive' in a glyph or as individual words in a sentence? There is 'writing' here, but not of a kind that humans can understand, and there is a deep logic to these animated symbols, but no act of translation will bring them into a human world, overcoming their abstraction and thingness. Rather than enhancing communication between humans, here machines withdraw it into their own world of symbolic computation, or into their own logic and memory structures.

Walk past *DECODER* and you see Majerus's *it does not really matter what things look like if one cannot see them that well anyway* (1999, laminated chipboard, writing foils, two-part, 52 x 52 x 251 cm each), whose horizontal layout formally echoes Arcangel's line of monitors. A message, certainly, but what is its meaning, and if discovered, can one act on it? The response, if there is one, floats in the title of a nearby work, *yet sometimes what is read successfully, stops us with its meaning, no. II* (1998, lacquer and digital print on aluminium, 278.5 x 485 x 15.5 cm). Here is another glyph whose sense reaches out to us yet stops short before us, perhaps crushing viewers beneath the force of its outsized and foreshortened athletic sneaker laid over the bold colours of an illegible design. Its companion work, *Untitled* (1996–2002, silkscreen and/or acrylic on cotton, acrylic and pencil on cotton, acrylic on synthetic, 60 x 60 cm each), consists of a grid of 20 equally sized works whose spatial deployment echoes Arcangel's seven screens. Each component image is itself a logo or glyph, sometimes referencing mass culture, as in the sketch of Woody from *Toy Story*, the close-up of Super Mario, or a pixelated 'trash' icon. Again, forms, lines, and colours are drawn from the repertoire of commercial graphic design, as is the technique of silk-screening, and each image individually would not be out of place in a college dorm room. However, when taken together these infinitely recombinable elements coalesce into an acute rebus whose sense, which seems so familiar yet uncanny, can never be restored.

Arcangel's hacking of video games and computer algorithms, or Majerus's remapping and repurposing of commercial materials and graphic designs, suggest that new terms of imagination and criticism may become possible *because* of the image's ineluctable relation with capital and technology. Having completely absorbed within its forms the logic of capital, the cliché can only present this logic as ciphered images. Call this a disguised sociology. The problem then becomes one of how to understand these ciphers dialectically. What forms of negation might give the image pause, as it were, by interrupting repetition with difference in order to liberate new modalities of social seeing and to imagine new forms of collective life? How can the language of form be released from its relation to representational objectivity?



Figure 42 Installation view of works by Michel Majerus. From left to right: *Untitled* (1996–2002); *it does not really matter...* (1999); *yet sometimes what is read successfully, stops us with its meaning, no. II* (1998). © Photo: Nicolas Wefers.

From what must the critical Image free itself? To be sure, one factor is the reproductive logic of capital and consumerism, and another is an uncritical dependence on technology, which has itself evolved according to the demands of capital and mass production. Equally important, however, is the need for images to distance themselves from the presence and immediacy of empirical reality to become expressive in ways that remap relations between the objective and subjective, between the world and perception, or between perception and imagination. Indeed, perception must become apperception, or a form of seeing engaged by a critical self-consciousness freed from its anchor in immediate perceptual experience and the ineluctable temporal flow of projected images. In becoming newly legible as writing, the image now calls for reading. This is where Adorno's deeply held critique of representation yields a new sense of what images could be. Adorno conceived of Images as fundamentally non-representational; meaning, that they are neither limited to the visual register nor fixed in space and time. Or, as Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, 'Artworks are images as *apparition*, as appearance, and not as copy [*Abbild*]'.¹⁴ It is significant that Adorno imports this term from French or English. In either case, 'apparition' indicates a becoming, emission, or appearing, perhaps the coming to sight

14 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 83; emphasis in the original.

of something previously unseen or unknown, that emerges from its own terms of immanence.

To think of the Image as a fluctuating and momentary appearing recalls Adorno's insistence on the anticipatory powers of critical art as something 'that flashes up, vanishes, yet cannot be read for its meaning'.¹⁵ What does not yet exist can appear suddenly and unpredictably in art – this is one of art's most significant powers of the virtual. Art, however, cannot hold this fragile light in a stable image or give it self-identical form. Yet the non-existing can be mediated through and between disconnected and reassembled fragments of the existent. These fragments are particular kinds of images – documents or world-pictures, if you will – where the social is already embedded through reification. Wanted then is a new form of construction, perhaps hieroglyphic, that takes up these fragments and recombines them into critical Images that are analytical, but which also offer to experience new temporalities as expressions of change, the new, the unforeseen, the not-yet – in other words, the Image aims at sensitizing subjects to the uneven rhythms of history and the possibilities of an open relationship to the future. Adorno likens the Image as apparition to Walter Benjamin's dialectical images, themselves constructed from eccentric forms of citation and literary montage, whose fluctuating existence persists in the register of Henri Bergson's *la durée*. Flashing up suddenly and momentarily, these ephemeral dialectical images are only accessible to an unconscious and involuntary apperception; they elude intentional observation. Yet in giving them duration – as Deleuze would say, drawing percepts from perception – art perhaps makes them critically legible. For these reasons, Adorno argues that, while 'representing' nothing,

art is nevertheless the truth of society insofar as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world is expressed. In art, denunciation and anticipation are syncopated. If *apparition* illuminates and touches, the image is the paradoxical effort to transfix this most evanescent instant. Pertinent here is Benjamin's formulation of dialectic at a standstill, which he developed in the context of his conception of a dialectical image. If, as images, artworks are the persistence of the transient, they are concentrated in appearance as something momentary. To experience art means to become conscious of its immanent process as an instant at a standstill.¹⁶

¹⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 84; emphasis in the original.

I have characterized the critical Image in terms of its autonomy, its reticence, its openness, and its lack of finality. Critical self-consciousness will find new terms of existence only by being released from the hold of representation as repetition. And the power of releasing viewers from the hold of representation is to offer them the same realm of freedom that autonomous art claims for itself. There is interchange between work and viewer, but not exchange, leading to the phrase that opens this essay: 'On behalf of what cannot be exchanged, art must through its form bring the exchangeable to critical self-consciousness'.¹⁷ The work of art must extend to the viewer, and the viewer return to the work of art, the time of absolute immanence. Or, again, as Annlee says in Pierre Huyghe's *Two Minutes Out of Time*, 'I am haunted by your imagination, and that's what I want from you'.

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17 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 83.

About the Author

D. N. Rodowick is Glen A. Lloyd Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago where he teaches in the departments of Cinema and Media Studies and Visual Arts. He is the author of numerous essays as well as eight books, including most recently, *What Philosophy Wants from Images* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). Before coming to the University of Chicago, he was William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies and Director of the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University. Rodowick is also a curator and an award-winning experimental filmmaker and video artist.

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