

Framing Cinema

The Introduction of Cinema into the Contemporary Art Museum

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Introduction

Contemporary relevance

A visitor to any art museum, art gallery, or biennale today is likely to encounter more works of film and video exhibited in these contexts than ever before. In the last two decades, we have experienced an increased presence in these spaces of the products that were formerly confined to the movie theatre. The current 'explosion of the moving image in contemporary art'¹ can be witnessed around the world in spaces dedicated to the appreciation of visual arts, to the extent that 'cinematic modes of projection have quantitatively surpassed traditional media such as painting and sculpture.'²

In Barcelona and other major cities, the main art institutions have recently been programming exhibitions consisting of works of moving image. The Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) curated *Sigalit Landau. Phoenician Sand Dance* (November 2014 to February 2015); and *Bouchra Khalili. Garden Conversations* (April to June 2015); La Virreina Centre de la Imatge presented *Michael Snow. Seqüències* (July to November 2015); and *Sophie Calle. Modus Vivendi* (March to June 2015); and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (MNCARS) brought us *Hito Steyerl. Duty-Free Art* (November 2015 to March 2016); *James Coleman* (April to August 2012) and *:desbordamiento de VAL DEL OMAR* (October 2010 to May 2011), to name but a few.

Internationally, some of today's most prominent and notorious artists, such as Matthew Barney, Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon, and Pierre Huyghe, are no longer painters or sculptors but creators in the medium of the moving image. Only in the last 5 years, the Tate Modern awarded its prestigious Turner Prize to three artists working mainly with film and video:

¹ Balsom, Erika, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 10.

² Leighton, Tanya, "Introduction", *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, edited by Tanya Leighton, (London: Tate Publishing in association with Afterall, 2008), 7.

Duncan Campbell (2015), Laure Provost (2014), and Elisabeth Price (2013). Within the same trend, museums have also been including installations by filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, Atom Egoyan, Peter Greenaway, Isaac Julien, Abbas Kiarostami, and Chris Marker, and have been putting on collective exhibitions on the history of classical cinema, avant-garde cinema, and cinema production.³

Both formally and thematically, this trend encompasses an extremely diverse range of artistic practices: immersive large-scale video walls, intimate 16mm films, multiple channel projections, single screen projections, animation, live action films, digitally manipulated works, archival films, documentaries, fiction features and, more often than not, works that straddle the boundaries between two or more genres. The ways in which artists' films and videos are installed and exhibited in the museum are also very varied. Some are shown in dark rooms while others are projected on the gallery's white walls. Some works hide the projector while others expose it, thus turning the technical apparatus into a sculptural object.

In 1935, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) announced the formation of the Film Library, a department tasked with saving and exhibiting films that were in danger of being

³ Some well-known examples of exhibitions on cinema concepts and genres include: *Pathé: premier empire du cinema*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1994-1995); *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film since 1945*, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1996); *Passages de l'Image*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1999); *Notorious: Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, (Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1999); *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977*, (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2001); *Alfred Hitchcock et l'art: coïncidences fatales*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2001); *Jean Cocteau: sur le fil du siècle*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2003); *X-Screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, 2004); *Voyage(s) en Utopie: Jean-Luc Godard, 1946-2006*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris 2006); *Le mouvement des images*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2006); *Beyond cinema: The Art of Projection*, (Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2006); *Cinema Like Never Before*, (Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2006); *The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image*, (Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C., 2008); *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013); and *Dante Ferretti: Design and Construction for the Cinema*, (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2014).

forever lost to public view. After several name changes—which reflect the cultural shifts of exhibited cinema (Department of Film, Department of Film and Video)—the current Film and Media Department is responsible for the collection of 22,000 works of film and video, as well as managing the constantly increasing number of exhibitions in MoMA and abroad which include works in these media.

The Film Library at MoMA was certainly very advanced for its time. It would take another forty years before moving image practices would gain visibility in the museum space, as it was only in the 1990s when museums really started programming and collecting these works, and ‘discovering’ artists who were either hitherto unknown, or known only as filmmakers.⁴ In 1944, curator Iris Barry described the relationship of the Film Library to the rest of the MoMA as ‘rather remote’, and compared it to the ‘slightly ambiguous position of an adopted child who is never seen in the company of the family.’⁵ Extending the metaphor to describe the contemporary moment, we could say that today ‘film has become the golden child of the museum, showered with attention and praise.’⁶

Object of study

But how exactly did cinema find its way into the art museum and into the discourse of modernity in art history? How has it affected the museum’s conceptions of ‘cinema’? And how has it challenged spectatorship and audience interaction inside the museum? What follows is an attempt to confront these questions by exploring the challenges raised when cinema is re-contextualized from being programed in the ‘black box’ of a movie theatre to being exhibited in the ‘white cube’ of a museum.

⁴ The distinction between ‘filmmaker’ and ‘artist working in film/video’ indexes the realms in which the creator was mainly known, rather than a distinction between means of production and thinking. Because this paper traces the history of audio-visual creators in the context of contemporary art, they will henceforth be referred to as ‘artists’.

⁵ Iris Barry, quoted in Wasson, Haidee, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 121.

⁶ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 17.

This paper aims to provide an overview of how the moving image has entered contemporary art spaces, since the early film societies supported by art museums to our present day. I will focus on some of the countries and scenarios in which this phenomenon has been most documented. For obvious reasons, this dissertation is far from complete. It leaves out many of the boundary-breaking exhibitions that would serve as good cases for this analysis. The main purpose of the study is to call attention to certain debates taking place in our contemporary art museums today.

The paper is based on the idea that the exhibition context of a work challenges the perception and status of the work exhibited therein. Consequently, the analysis of the 'explosion of the moving image in contemporary art' will focus on the role played by museums. The most common approach to art history in general, and to cinema history in particular, examines the content or formal aspects of any given work of art or artistic movement. However, one of the problems with this approach is that it does little to help us understand the reasons why, at a certain time, a specific artistic practice comes to our attention as art. It takes a sociological approach, focused on the mediators of the objects of culture, to understand that symbolic capital is attributed to art objects through a system or, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, a 'field of cultural production', regulated by theorists and institutions.⁷ A sociological approach understands that the legibility of the artwork *as artwork* is contingent upon the critical discourse and institutional capital of its surroundings.

The study will mainly examine museums and art centres (and not other cultural agents such as galleries, critics, or academies) for several reasons. Firstly, museums were the first institutions to cater for the preservation of creations in the medium of cinema (the MoMA was a pioneer in this field). Secondly, throughout the twentieth century, museums have occupied a status of institutional authority, which has been an important factor in the migration of cinema from theatre spaces. Thirdly, museums are also the spotlight of most of the research conducted on exhibition practices, modes of display, and art spectatorship. Finally, in the

⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

words of Manuel Borja-Villel, the current director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 'el cine y las exposiciones se organizan en torno a un supuesto común: el montaje [...], que propicia el conocimiento fragmentario, la comunicación de las formas y la articulación de los elementos en un sistema dinámico de relaciones, generando narraciones en las que no necesariamente existen ni un comienzo ni un final y en las que se sustituye el principio de causalidad por el de continuidad.'⁸ The above reasons informed the decision to focus on the role of museums in order to examine the introduction of moving image into contemporary art circuits.

It should be noted that the progressive integration of the moving image into gallery and museum spaces is only a small chapter in the history of the transformations undergone by cinema in its relatively short life as an art form. The mutations of cinema as we once knew it have been primarily driven by technological developments, but also by the evolving ways of producing, exhibiting, seeing, financing, and studying cinema. Internet and the consumption of video on portable devices have also drastically transformed our conception of cinema. It is clear that cinema no longer means just one thing.

Terminology

An initial problem encountered was the slipperiness of the terminology employed in the field. In these first paragraphs, I have already used several different terms to refer to the same idea: 'moving image', 'cinema', 'artist films', 'video', 'projected image', etc. As museums and galleries take over the exhibition of the moving image, a proliferation of terms emerges to understand and conceptualize a visual practice that was already hard to pin down within its original context of the movie theatre. All these terms have different nuances, most of which reflect the technological conditions and the industrial and artistic contexts in which they were first used and studied.

⁸ Borja-Villel, Manuel, "El séptimo arte también se expone", *El País*, 10 February 2010. Accessed June 12, 2016, http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/02/04/babelia/1423055144_046403.html.

'Moving image' is a term chosen by many critics, but it can also include other fields such as light projections and Chinese shadows, which have a very different place in the history of art. 'Video art' works generally relate to the tradition of video linked to performance, installation, and sculptural art, which followed a different route into the museum from that of cinema. 'Video art' also refers to a number of artistic practices focusing on TV and broadcasting, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, which engaged with the monitor as a sculptural form in protest against television culture and the monopoly of the mass media. Despite these historical connotations, it is true that 'video art' is also commonly used to describe any artistic production that uses digital video, and not film, as a medium (most of contemporary production).

The choice of the word 'cinema' here can seem problematic at first as it relates to a long tradition of artistic production ranging from commercial Hollywood to contemporary artists' films creations. Since the 1990s we have been witnessing something of a paradigm shift, 'marked by a cultivation of cinematic tropes and conventions, such as *mise-en-scène*, montage, spectacle, narrative, illusionism, and projection.'⁹ Film critic Jean-Christophe Royoux refers to these developments as '*cinema d'exposition*'; film professor Catherine Fowler as 'gallery film'; curator Chrissie Iles as 'new cinematic aesthetic in video'; and film critic Erika Balsom as 'othered cinema'. The word 'cinema' is certainly polysemantic, but for the reasons mentioned above, and because one of the ideas argued in this paper is a new understanding of 'cinema', the term seems appropriate. However, the reader of this paper should bear in mind the elusiveness of the terminology in this field, especially in quotes from authors who choose to use different terms than the ones currently used.

Framing Cinema is divided into three sections. The first section examines the relationship between cinema and the ideals and missions championed by art museums in the twentieth century. The second section discusses the challenges and advantages for museums arising from technological developments affecting cinema practices and screenings. The third section analyses the new challenges for viewers of cinema in museums. Lastly, the closing section attempts to examine how the contemporary art museum might be one of the spaces where

⁹ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 17.

cinema can be reborn. I have included a few images when illustrations were needed to understand a specific museum installation referred to.

The title *Framing Cinema* has more than one meaning. Firstly, it refers to the museum tradition of framing and hanging works of art on walls. Secondly, it references that essential part of the medium of cinema and the moving image: the frame. Lastly, in a less literal sense, the title also refers to the power of art and cultural institutions to 'frame' art, i.e. to enclose it within a delimited, defining context.

Main bibliographical references

I have based this paper mostly on bibliography from countries with a long tradition in cinema, and a correspondingly strong institutional and theoretical backup. The main readings approach the matter from different angles, enabling me to examine the integration of moving image in the museum from the multitude of hybrid disciplines generated by the subject.

Dominique Païni, film critic, curator and former director of the Cinémathèque Française, comes from the Parisian tradition of cinephiles, whose quest to endow cinema with a higher cultural status led him to make valuable contributions to the language, the experience, and the programming of cinema. He put some of his ideas into practice by curating exhibitions on filmmakers, including the well-known *Collage(s) de France. Archéologie du cinéma d'après JLG* at the Centre Pompidou in 2006. His ideas on exhibiting cinema in a context closer to a museum space than to a movie theatre space are expressed in his essays and interviews. Haidee Wasson and Chrissie Iles both explore the history of film inside the main art institutions of the United States, mainly at the MoMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art respectively. Erika Balsom, who will be constantly referenced here, bridges the gap between the disciplines of Film Studies and Art History, concentrating on the European context since 1990. Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss, art critics and theorists with a strong aversion to the capitalist domination of contemporary cultural practices, have provided helpful reading on theory of the museum as an institution of power. Works by Peter Osborne and Boris Groys have been my main reference for studying the theory of spectatorship

experience. Exhibition catalogues, museum archives, and exhibition reviews have also been main references for this paper.

Lastly, in a paper on cinema, museums, technology, and spectatorship experience, it would be hard not to reference the ideas and discussions introduced by Walter Benjamin. The ubiquitously cited text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* has also been used for the writing of this study.

Chapter 1. Museology Theory and Cinema

This chapter will examine how different museology theories fuelled the way in which cinema was and is exhibited in the gallery space. The story of the recognition of cinema by museums is not presented here in a strictly chronological order; it spans various countries and decades while tapping into the major museology theories of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I have tried to exemplify each perception shift of museums towards cinema by referring to specific exhibitions, underpinned by the corresponding institutional decisions.

It is important to highlight the institutional hypotheses informing the decisions taken by art museums, as these are entirely different to those of movie theatres or art-house cinemas. They explain, in each case, the theoretical standpoints underlying each stage of the 'museification' of cinema. Rather than a complete history of this phenomenon, the following description aims to map out this diverse and constantly mutating movement. To borrow the metaphor used by Chrissie Illes, the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, trying to pin down the history of the theoretical decisions behind introducing film in the museum, 'is like trying to pin jelly to the wall. You just can't define it, because it's constantly changing and evolving.'¹⁰

Following Dominique Païni and Erika Balsom's respective analyses, I will describe this scattered story in five mutations: Cinema as a modern art; cinema as an amenity; cinema as a 'ruin'; cinema as cultural heritage; and cinema as a spectacle.

¹⁰ Chrissie Illes quoted in Young, Paul, "Black Box. White Cube", *Art and Auction*, (February, 2008) accessed on May 14, 2016, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/269620/black-box-white-cube>.

1.1. Making cinema into a modern art

During the 1910s and 1920s, the first artistic movements to appreciate the early cinema were the avant-garde Dadaism and Surrealism. In keeping with their critical attitude to all forms of art, these circles appreciated cinema *precisely* because it was not considered a high culture art like visual art, because it was the *enfant terrible* of the arts, and that was what made it the art of their time.¹¹ Their initial attraction to cinema as an art of lower cultural status exemplifies how the cultural reception of cinema has evolved over the last century and how, for better or for worse, its reception has become closer to that of the other so called *beaux-arts*. It is paradoxical that the early twentieth-century artists and critics who had once supported this art because of its opposition to the *beaux-arts* were partly responsible for its cultural 'escalation'. Museums hold another part of the responsibility.

From the foundation of the MoMA Film Library in 1935 by Iris Barry and Alfred H. Barr Jr., the decision to include 'motion pictures' in the museum collection aimed to give cinema the same status and treatment as the other arts, and to include the new medium in Art History, with all that this entailed. 'The Film Library will undertake a number of activities [with films], *in the same manner* in which other departments of the Museum now assemble, catalog, exhibit and circulate paintings, sculpture, models and photographs.'¹² Although cinema was evolving in a completely different direction to traditional arts, the *initial* foundational statement of the Film Library was to make no museological distinction between cinema and the other arts. The activities undertaken by the museum would be those that the film industry had failed to accomplish, 'despite its efforts'¹³: preservation, education, cataloguing and circulation. The move toward creating film archives within the context of the museum was also tangentially linked to an acknowledgement of the pioneers of cinema and their recent demise, such as

¹¹ Païni, Dominique, *Le temps exposé: le cinéma de la salle au musée* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2002), 18.

¹² MoMa, *MoMA press release archives 1930-1939. June 21, 1935, "Film Library to be established with Rockefeller Foundation Grant at MoMA"*, accessed on June 2, 2016, https://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press_archives/1930s/1935. Emphasis mine.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Georges Méliès (1861-1938); Auguste (1862-1954) and Louis (1864-1948) Lumière; and Oskar Messter (1866-1943).¹⁴

The founder of the MoMA Film Library, Iris Barry, was not the first person to consider film as an art form and to understand the importance of its preservation. Silent movies, having lost their commercial value, were rapidly being replaced by 'talkies' since 1930, and were often destroyed or bleached in order to re-use the celluloid. Cinema was only 40 years old and there were already 'old movies' which had to be 'discovered' and preserved before they were lost forever. 'The situation is as though no novels were available to the public except the current year's output or as though no painting could ever be seen except those painted during the previous twelve months.'¹⁵ This led to the formation of film clubs and film societies, mostly born from academic contexts, along with some film publications and film analyses. These initiatives all supported the preservation of old films, although none of them shared the Film Library's ambitious project of changing the perception of the cultural value of cinema by applying museology rituals and procedures, and of fostering a belief in film as a legitimate branch of Modern Art.

Despite its initial position, early film screenings at the MoMA made it clear to the Film Library team that the practices applied to other arts could not be directly applied to cinema. Preserving and exhibiting films raised some challenges, most of which remain today, over seventy years later. In the first place, there was no original object to value as a collectable item. MoMA had no similar artefacts in its collection, and if it wanted to differentiate its task as a museum from that of a library, it had to add the legal rights that applied to other artefacts of their collection. Secondly, watching films was dependant on a range of architectural and technological factors such as projectors, lenses, electricity, film gauges, distribution routes,

¹⁴ Christie, Ian, "A Disturbing Presence? Scenes from the History of Film in the Museum", *Film, Art, New Media. Museum without Walls*, edited by Angela Dalle Vacche, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 241-255.

¹⁵ MoMa, *MoMA press release archives 1930-1939. June 21, 1935, "Film Library to be established with Rockefeller Foundation Grant at MoMA"*, accessed on June 2, 2016, https://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press_archives/1930s/1935.

small and large screens, trained projectionists, all of which were costly and unreliable. Lastly, and most importantly, one of the main determinants to changing the status of cinema was shaping the practices of film viewing in the museum space. Viewers of the Film Library screenings were often unsure as to how to behave when watching cinema in a museum. According to MoMA, taking films seriously required a specific behaviour by the viewer, different from the behaviour of spectators in a movie theatre. In the first film sessions held by the Film Library, the museum staff would often have to stop the screening on account of the noisy, festive atmosphere reigning among the audience.¹⁶

MoMA understood that in order to frame cinema in the museum it had to 'carefully shape a new configuration of film viewing and a specialized audience: mindful and attentive rather than mindless and distracted'.¹⁷ Haidee Wasson describes this decision as one of MoMA's 'earliest and most significant impacts'.¹⁸ They had to find a way to exhibit the new medium in accordance with the museum's ideals of presenting high culture to the public. To this date, MoMA and other art museums are still endeavouring to establish a way of viewing film in a museum and to educate audience behaviour. This challenge will be addressed in detail in chapter 3.

The case of MoMA is important not only to understand the American context but also to understand the evolution of museum theory and museum critique during the second half of the twentieth century. Whether criticized or praised, MoMA played an active role in generating museum and curatorial theory in general, and on the place of cinema in the museum, in particular.

¹⁶ Wasson, *Museum Movies*, 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

1.2. Making cinema into a public amenity

Like Iris Barry at the MoMA Film Library, Henri Langlois was one of the first French and European cinephiles to defend cinema as a visual art, in 1936, and to take action in order to screen, preserve, and archive films that were being neglected or destroyed. Langlois' project to conserve, canonize, and curate film was not far from that of the Film Library in New York, but he lacked access to an institution that would accept that film had the same function as the other visual arts. This was not for want of trying. The failure of Langlois' lifelong dream, setting up a Musée du Cinéma, is just another example of how the introduction of film into the museum has been a long and difficult struggle.

The project of setting up the Musée du Cinéma started initially as a club for cinema lovers, who gathered at different locations, often in their own private apartments. In 1948, Henri Langlois re-located his collection of almost 50,000 films to a building near the Champs-Élysées, in a theatre at the Musée de l'Homme, which would be later known as the Cinémathèque Française. It gained more members, including many of the future *Nouvelle Vague* generation of filmmakers, and some institutional support, which fuelled the beginnings of what would later be described as 'cinophilia'.

From 1960, Langlois and his team frequently used the expression 'making a Louvre of the cinema', stating his intention to make cinema into a public amenity in a similar way to the visual arts.¹⁹ In 1970, Langlois was granted the 'former rooms of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, covering 1,500 square metres in area and 150 metres in length.'²⁰ Langlois' ambitious project succeeded, but only partially. Despite lack of funding and bad financial management, the museum opened two years later, with a non-chronological presentation of seventy years of cinema history. Internal problems and an unfortunate outbreak of fire in 1997 led to the abandonment of the project. Once again, the project was

¹⁹ Mannoni, Laurent and Richard Crangle, "Henri Langlois and the Musée du Cinéma", *Film History: An International Journal*. Vol. 18, No. 3, (2006), 274-287, 279, accessed on June 7, 2016, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/203913/pdf>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

beleaguered by the challenges inherent in exhibiting a medium chained to time and to technology.

The history of the Cinémathèque Française is well known and much praised; however, it is less known that it was only a testing ground for Langlois' real ambition. His idea of a Musée du Cinéma was an attempt to understand cinema as a public amenity: a way of taking the private or elitist cinephilia into the public sphere and subjecting it to scrutiny. "The Musée du Cinéma is essentially a museum of evocation and suggestion, where everything must work towards immersing the visitor in a series of atmospheres and conditions of the soul corresponding to the meaning which one wishes to give to each gallery."²¹

For Dominique Païni, director of the Cinémathèque Française from 1991 to 2000, and perpetuator of Langlois' museological ideas, the museum was to be different from the Cinémathèque in that it would educate and create cultural value for film:²² "[le musée] est, avant tout, une formation du regard et une faculté de bien choisir. Il ne doit pas devenir exclusivement une médiathèque de consultation, un inventaire de films, un catalogue."²³ Païni stresses that the difference between the project for the Musée du Cinéma and the Cinémathèque lies in its mission to educate the public: "Le passage de l'ère des cinémathèques à celle des musées du cinéma, c'est le passage de la phase primitive des accumulations et des inventaires à celle des confrontations et des évaluations."²⁴

In *Conserver, montrer: où l'on ne craint pas d'édifier un musée pour le cinéma*, Païni reflects on why the Cinémathèque Française never became a cinema museum in the way both he and Langlois had hoped. He attributes the 'retard de la réflexion muséographique des cinémathèques' to two factors: firstly, the anti-establishment attitude of cinephilia, 'la cinéphilie s'est caractérisée par sa défiance envers les lieux officiels de la transmission du savoir –l'université et le musée– et plus généralement envers une "culture cultivée"²⁵;

²¹ Henri Langlois, quoted in Mannoni, "Henri Langlois and the Musée du Cinéma", 7.

²² Païni, *Conserver, montrer*, 32.

²³ *Ibid.* 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 18.

secondly, to the difficulty of exhibiting time, a topic that will be further discussed in the last chapter of this paper.

Langlois was one of the first to attempt to link the concepts of cinema and public amenity by means of the museum. Many would follow his quest, including Paini who, although unable to build the imagined 'museum for the cinema', went on to curate major exhibitions in contemporary art museums, such as: *Alfred Hitchcock et l'art : coïncidences fatales*, (Centre Pompidou, 2001); *Jean Cocteau : sur le fil du siècle*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2003) and *Voyage(s) en Utopie : Jean-Luc Godard, 1946-2006*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2006).

1.3. Making cinema into a 'ruin'

Another entrance of cinema into the museum context coincided with the digitalization of our culture, or with what some critics call 'the age of digital reproduction'.²⁶ At the beginning of the digital age, museums are retroactively attributing cult value to cinema by introducing analogue films inside the museum context, and presenting a certain type of cinema as a medium linked to a spectral historicity that is the museum's task to preserve. One form of the 'museification' of cinema is to approach it as a dead object, treating it with the preciousness and rarity of the historical ruin. This approach seems to refer back to Theodor Adorno's likening of museums to cemeteries: 'museum and mausoleum are connected by more than a phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art'.²⁷

²⁶ In "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction", Douglas Davis argues that in our digital age there is no longer a clear conceptual distinction between original and reproduction copies in any medium. Boris Groys has also written on this topic, stating that the digital image is always a copy, but the event of its visualization—in the museum—becomes an original. See David, Douglas, "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction. (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995)", *Leonardo*, Vol. 28, No. 5, Third Annual New York Digital Salon (1995), 381-386, accessed on June 10, 2016, http://classes.dma.ucla.edu/Winter09/9-1/_pdf/3-Davis_Work_of_Art.pdf; and Groys, Boris, "From Image to Image File—and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization" in Groys, Boris, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008), 83-93. Accessed on June 10, 2016, http://www.tartumuliseb.net/Art_Power_Boris_Groys.pdf.

²⁷Adorno quoted in Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 17.

Cinematic practices, specifically those using obsolete technology, have triggered a museum conception of 'cinema in ruins', invested with all the curiosity and care lavished on an old media in an age of new media, and treated with a certain romanticised nostalgia.

This archaeological and auratic approach to cinema has influenced not only institutional determinations of exhibition, but also economic factors, notably the limited-edition model of distribution. Experimental cinema, and the film industry as a whole, has always been dependent on an economic model based on the fees coming from rentals or exhibition rights, limited to a certain space and time span. The model followed by the art market is that of the limited edition, where a small number of copies (from 3 to 10) are sold with the guarantee of never being re-printed.²⁸

Although not directly linked to museology theory, the limited-edition model, in which the museum participates when it acquires works of cinema for its collection, is influenced by this filmic necrophilia. Limited editions of films are used to perpetuate a 'ruin' approach to this medium, to treat it as something as scarce and unique as a ruin. What can be called artificial scarcity (going against the capacity for reproducibility inherent in the medium) manifests a determination to imbue the physical object of the film print with the attraction of rarity.

Erika Balsom interprets this as an attempt to endow cinema with an 'aura', in the sense used by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin predicted that cinema would be the agent for the liquidation of the so-called aura surrounding the work of art. Cinema was to be the agent that would displace the 'cult value' of an artwork, in favour of an 'exhibition value'. However, from a market perspective, when cinema enters the realm of the museum it becomes paradoxically endowed with a similar aura to the one it was meant to have dissolved. This reversal process of Benjamin's prediction will be discussed later on in the paper in the section about material specificity.

²⁸ Balsom, Erika, "Original Copies: How Film and Video Became Art Objects," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 53, No.1, (Fall 2013), 97-118.

1.4. Making cinema into cultural heritage

Dominique Païni has written that the 1990s signal the date after which cinema becomes the heritage of the century. Each film is also document, testimony, trace, memory.²⁹ After 1990, the spread of cinema throughout general culture reverses to give way to an interest in its specificity and its place in art history: 'After having been the curiosity of the century, the leisure of the century, the art of the century, the culture of the century, cinema becomes the patrimony of the century'.³⁰ As cinema 'gets lost' in the realms of commercial mass culture, a chorus of critics, filmmakers and scholars reclaim its history and attention, looking out for places to save a more artistic and experimental notion of cinema.³¹

In the 1990s, according to Païni, there was a change of attitude among filmmakers as they began to occupy the gallery space in a voluntary fashion.³² Païni suggests that ephemeral cinema was eager for the eternity that residence within the museum space might provide. Cinema was going through a period of uncertainty about its future at the same time as the museum was emerging as a public site of cinema spectatorship and claiming its duty to interrogate and write film history. He describes this shift as a mutation from industry to art.³³

The museum became the place to memorialize cinema, by projecting films, and by displaying their component elements: scripts, costumes, props, etc. This new understanding of cinema in the museum context took place in two primary ways: by presenting exhibitions with classical cinema as their main theme; and by introducing a new cinema 'purged' from its associations with the vulgarity of mass culture, a cinema specifically made for the museum. The former trend was seen in exhibitions such as *Pathé: premier empire du cinéma*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1994-1995); *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film since 1945*, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1996); *Notorious: Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, (Museum of Modern Art,

²⁹ Païni, *Conserver, montrer*, 26.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 38.

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Oxford, 1999); *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977*, (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2001); and *Jean Cocteau : sur le fil du siècle*, (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2003).



Installation view of *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945*, at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1996 © The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

As Balsom says, 'the many references to classical Hollywood cinema in these exhibitions function as a shared cultural memory, a site of collective experience. The return to classical Hollywood in art, in the form of big exhibitions or artist remakes of classical films, provides a way of excavating an experience of collectivity that is linked to our common cultural heritage.'³⁴

Technological developments, together with the growing understanding of cinema as a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved, generated enthusiasm among artists and curators for the new possibilities afforded by a museum-based cinema.³⁵

³⁴ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

1.5. Making cinema into a spectacle

In most of the above-mentioned cases, the museum has seen itself, and been seen, as the saviour of cinema in various ways. However, some critical voices such as Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss have raised suspicions about this redeeming role of the institution, and have objected to the tactical use of cinema in order to boost ticket sales and visitor numbers.

Some museums have ventured into the sensory possibilities of projecting large-scale images in their interior spaces and on their façades for the purpose of maintaining relevance and appealing to a wider public. More interested in pleasing audiences than in putting forward content and history, certain institutions have taken advantage of 'cinema's universal ability to communicate and its appeal to those who do not go to museums.'³⁶

Art critic Rosalind Krauss sees the traditional conception of the museum going in the direction of what she has called the 'late capitalist museum', described as 'an entity characterized by an interest in technology and spectacular intensity rather than history and aesthetic experience.'³⁷ In this new museum concerned with ticket sales, both technology and the moving image provide a spectacular way of delivering exhibitions with a wide appeal. 'The industrialized museum has a need for the technologized subject, the subject in search not of affect but intensities, the subject who experiences its fragmentation as euphoria, the subject whose field of experience is no longer history, but space itself.'³⁸ In Krauss' view, this new technologized museum will have more in common with Disneyland than with its previous incarnation: it will thus be dealing with mass markets, rather than art markets, and with simulacra experience rather than aesthetic immediacy.

³⁶ Penz, François, "Museums as Laboratories of Change: The Case of the Moving Image", *Film, Art, New Media. Museum without Walls*, edited by Angela Dalle Vacche, (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 278-300, 283.

³⁷ Krauss, Rosalind, quoted in Erika Balsom, "Brakhage's sour grapes", 17.

³⁸ Krauss, Rosalind, "The cultural logic of the late capitalist museum", *October*, Vol. 54, (1990), 3-17, 17. Accessed on June 7, 2016,

http://www.jstor.org/stable/778666?origin=JSTOR-pdf&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Following a similar line of thought to that of Krauss, Hal Foster is also critical of the institutional attention given to 'new media' for its accessibility, entertainment value, and sensory rush. In 1983, he described the increasing spectacularization of contemporary art as a case of 'technophilic extravaganzas'.³⁹

The exhibition titled *Pipilotti Rist. Partido amistoso - sentimientos electrónicos* held at Fundació Miró in 2010 was seen by some critics as an example of the use of projected image as a spectacle. The video installations of Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist are immersive and colourful, pleasing on the eyes and ears, and 'an excellent balm for today's world-weary culture travellers'.⁴⁰ In a review of an exhibition by Rist held in MoMA in November 2008, one critic wrote 'Rist's tantalizing installations speak the universal language of pleasure to an audience weaned on Ambien, electronic billboards and echoing, white-washed space.'⁴¹



Installation view of *Pipilotti Rist Partido amistoso – sentimientos electrónicos* at Fundació Miró, 2010. © Fundació Miró

³⁹ Hal Foster, quoted in: Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 55.

⁴⁰ Spears, Dorothy, "Pipilotti Rist at MoMA". *Art in America*, Vol. 97, No. 1, January 2009, quoted in Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 61.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

In a similar vein, curator and film critic Alexander Horwath stated that ‘this critical idea of exploding cinema or expanding cinema in the 1960s and 1970s has now turned into another connotation of the word “expansion”. Now it is about expanding with cinema. By that, I mean museums and the museum structure using moving imagery as part of their shopping mall.’⁴²

These voices raise the question of the extent to which galleries can claim to be ‘saving’ cinema, when their understanding of cinema is an asset to boost audiences. On the other hand, these exhibitions point to the contemporary transformation of the museum from a cemetery-like institution full of relics to a lively playground full of visceral intensity.

As we have seen in this chapter, the introduction of cinema into the museum is happening in an uneven and disjunctive manner, which allows for the cinema to appear at the same time as art, as an old medium in need of safekeeping, or as an epitome of mass culture. These are not the only museological approaches, but enough to understand that the museum is not a neutral institution and that each curatorial decision is fuelled by a particular ideology.

⁴² Alexander Horwath quoted in Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 46.

Chapter 2. The Question of Technology

An essential condition of cinema, both in the analogue medium of film and that of numeric video⁴³, is that it cannot be fully viewed until it is properly installed. The original work, on a filmstrip, on a magnetic tape, or on a numeric file, does not exist unless it is projected or screened. Installation depends on a range of technological elements: projectors, lenses, monitors, electrical currents, film gauges, distribution routes, small and big screens, etc. A difference certainly exists between the work on a filmstrip, which can be held and viewed against the light, and the work on a numeric file, which is intangible. However, in both cases, no moving image can be viewed without the use of technical equipment. The nature of cinema raises questions as to where the original work actually resides—on the filmstrip, in the projected image, in the whole installation—and how to circumnavigate the inexorable obsolescence of technology.

For these and other reasons, the history of cinema production and cinema exhibition is constrained by technological developments. In this chapter, I will be paying attention to some of the main technological implications that affect the migration of cinema into the museum, and which are present in the critical literature of this field.

2.1. The video revolution

The introduction to the market of 16mm film in 1923 implied a major change in film production and culture, and also signified, as noted by Wasson, ‘the possibility of cinema to be fully integrated with public institutions’⁴⁴, among which was MoMA. She continues by saying that, though ‘16mm’ may refer to the measurement of the filmstrip, ‘it was more accurately an

⁴³ The terms ‘film’ and ‘video’ are both used to refer to a certain aesthetic or genre, but also to different media, each with its own interests and issues.

⁴⁴ Wasson, 45.

expansive network of ideas and practices.’⁴⁵ 16mm technology drastically reduced the production cost of film registering compared to that of 35mm film, the previous standard of the industry. ‘The system relied on a reversal processing system that used the original stock to create a final positive print.’⁴⁶ In addition to the 16mm filmstrip, what really allowed cinema to move away from the movie theatre was the Kodascope projector that could screen these films: ‘the lighter weight and increased manageability of these projectors and films further ensured that exhibiting films could be orchestrated easily by one minimally trained projectionist.’⁴⁷ As Wasson points out, referring to the MoMA’s Film Library, ‘as a result [of 16mm], viewing conditions were becoming less beholden to the ephemeral distribution and exhibition patterns that undergirded the common sense of cinema [...] it further enabled the co-articulation of moving images with institutional models other than commercial ones.’⁴⁸

Despite the 16mm technological developments, projecting film in the museum was still a highly expensive activity. The technology was still bulky, unreliable, and dependent on specialist technicians to manoeuvre it. 16mm may have assisted cinema’s first steps into the museum, but the circumstances under which the moving image could be exhibited in art spaces only came about much later. The introduction of video projection technology in the early 1990s made the technique increasingly attractive for both artists and institutions.⁴⁹ ‘The widespread adoption of video projection (whether using analogue cathode ray tube projectors or digital liquid crystal diode projectors) [...] forever changed the possibilities of moving image art.’⁵⁰ As the technology for projecting video changed to make it easier, cheaper, and bigger, the institutions began to take interest.

This shift in the 1990s in the understanding of cinema as cultural heritage, as referred to previously, coincides with a major technological development that hugely facilitated the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁹ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

introduction of moving image art into the museum. Video, which hitherto had to be shown on one or more monitors, could now be exhibited using video projectors, a technique increasingly attractive to both filmmakers and artists.⁵¹ After the 1990s, the development of cheaper and more compact projectors enabled video to be shown in a larger, more immersive format, thus partaking of the illusionism of the cinema. The new development not only incentivized museum curators to approach cinema, but also attracted many filmmakers who were initially critical of the use of monitors in the museum space.

There is much debate on whether the arrival of video was a ‘revolution’ for cinema practices or not. While some argue that video did not substantially change the way in which filmmakers produced films, it definitely changed the way in which their cinema was exhibited, distributed, studied, and conserved. Within the museum context, the technology of the video projector meant that cinema was welcomed with wide-open arms.

2.2. Material specificity

Hal Foster has remarked that ‘there are usually two dynamics at these new technological moments. There are artists who want to push the futuristic freedoms of new media, and others who want to look at what this apparent leap forward opens up in the past, the obsolete.’⁵² These same opposing tendencies in artists described by Foster can be seen in museum practices in relation to cinema. Some museum curators foster the ability to translate old media from one format to another, to transcode all media to numerical files, whereas others, in a struggle against technological obsolescence, insist on maintaining the specific exhibition technology with which the film was originally intended. This latter inclination is supported by some purist film critics, but is very uncommon as it generates complex institutional and economic problems for the museum.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵² Foster, “Round table”, 73.

Because of all the difficult implications of adhering to material specificity—use of obsolete equipment, specialized technicians, very specific installation conditions—the museum has often tended to allow a promiscuity of different media which the purist movie theatres don't all appreciate. As Balsom notes, 'if curators were limited to celluloid exhibition, it is certain that fewer films would make their way into the museum or the gallery site'.⁵³

This medium promiscuity has sparked animated debates, especially when applied to works of one of the most robust movements in experimental filmmaking, i.e. structural filmmaking. Leading artists of this movement include Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, and Michael Snow, all of whose works have been incorporated into the museum space, mainly after the 1990s.⁵⁴ These filmmakers draw attention to the material attributes of cinema—surface of the filmstrip surface, single-frame articulation, sprocket holes, zoom, pan—and locate the film's specificity in the materiality of the apparatus, not in its ability to register reality. This self-reflexivity on the medium is not new for art history, as it follows the same principles as post-WWII minimalist art. As noted by Clement Greenberg—'perhaps the most influential theorist of medium specificity of the twentieth century'⁵⁵—artists associated with this movement, such as Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris, engaged 'in the process of distillation and self-criticism, to undergo a radical reduction so as to reach the medium's essential qualities.'⁵⁶ In a similar manner, for structural filmmakers, 'the medium specificity is grounded in film's ability to become about itself, achieving autonomy from that which would contaminate it.'⁵⁷ Whereas exhibiting in the 2000s a Sol LeWitt sculpture in the museum presents no major curatorial difficulties, when cinematic works by structural filmmakers, or other artists preoccupied with the materiality of film, enter the exhibition space, the specificity of their original medium is an extra challenge for the curator.

⁵³ Balsom, "Brakhage's sour grapes", 19.

⁵⁴ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 74.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

In the face of this medium promiscuity in the museum, rather than mourning the obliteration of the medium-specificity, Balsom argues in favour of a redefinition of the conception of the medium, in accordance with the ideas presented by Rosalind Krauss in her well-known lecture-turn-book "*A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*.

Krauss' view of the 'post-medium condition' begins as a critique of the essentialist unity of the modernist medium.⁵⁸ She 'outlines the state of the medium in contemporary art, tracing the fallout of the exhausted modernist paradigm of medium specificity.'⁵⁹ She continues by saying that a medium must be 'a supporting structure, generative of a set of conventions, some of which, in assuming the medium itself as their subject, will be wholly 'specific' to it, thus producing an experience of their own necessity.'⁶⁰ Balsom advocates for an understanding of medium specificity that 'does not rely on the old fiction of the purity of media,' but instead begins from the premise of contamination. 'It begins from the notion that, as André Bazin acknowledged over fifty years ago, film is and always has been an "impure art."⁶¹

Let us return to Benjamin's famous essay. He introduces two polarized variables under which the work of art is received and valued. At one pole, there is the 'cult value', which puts the accent on the existence of the work of art *for the person who created it*, such as the paintings on the cave wall for a man of the Stone Age. At the other pole, there is the 'exhibition value', which puts the accent on the artwork as perceived by the public eye. For Benjamin, writing in 1936 the emancipation of various artworks from their ritual purposes and the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art have put the emphasis on the 'exhibition

⁵⁸ 'Modernist' is not to be confused with '*art modern*', a term used in French and continental literature or with 'modern literature'. Although the period it encapsulates is much debated, in English-speaking culture, 'modernism' refers to the visual arts production of the early 1920s and 1930s but also to post-WWII abstract expressionism, pop art, and minimalism.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰ Krauss, Rosalind, "*A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

⁶¹ Balsom, 74.

value'.⁶² Again, cinema and photography were the agents that would supposedly revert these two variables: 'this much is certain: today photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.'⁶³

When the transfer of moving image works from film to digital video is seen as a *betrayal* by the museum, it is seen as an exploitation of the 'exhibition value' of the work of art in favour of the 'cult value'. The paradox of Walter Benjamin's thesis today is that film on celluloid, the very material that, according to Benjamin, once jeopardized 'cult value', is now perpetuating it.⁶⁴

The employment of 16mm film linked to a spectral historicity, and the selling of limited edition of films and videos as art objects as explained in the previous chapter, constitute what Balsom has called a 'new cultic attachment to cinema'⁶⁵, of our contemporary moment. In a digital age of individualized image consumption, 'cult value is retroactively attributed to the senescent cinema.'⁶⁶

⁶² Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art' Chapter V, accessed on June 10, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Balsom, "Brakhage's sour grapes", 19.

⁶⁵ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3. The New Audience Deal. The Problem with Space and Time

About the 2002 Documenta in Kassel, which ‘was crucial for the better acceptance of video works’⁶⁷ Chrissie Iles, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art at the time, wrote:

‘...no one knew Jonas Mekas was in Documenta because his work was only in the film program. But the art world was discovering people like Ulrike Ottinger because she had an eight-hour film in the gallery. The fact that people only saw ten minutes or half an hour of it was offset by the fact that many more thousands of people now know that she exists.’⁶⁸

About the following Documenta, held 5 years later in 2007, Alexander Horwath, curator of its film programme, wrote in his curatorial statement that all ninety-six films being exhibited would be shown in the movie theatre rather than in the gallery space: ‘this format and space [the movie theatre] are based on the physical and technical characteristics of the medium. They allow film to be perceived on *a specific level of intensity* to which it owes its historical success.’ He refers to “the normal case of cinema” [...] where ‘normal’ also means: film as an event, as a performance with a specific duration that cannot be influenced (or changed) by the viewer.’⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Schwarze, Dirk, “The exhibition as a fifth platform—An essay by Dirk Schwarze on the documenta 11”, (2014), accessed on June 6, 2016,

<http://www.documentaarchiv.de/documenta/documenta-11.html>.

⁶⁸ Lewinson, Ann, “The View from the Whitney”, *The Independent*, July 1, 2003, accessed on June 8, 2016, <http://independent-magazine.org/2003/07/view-whitney/>.

⁶⁹ Horwath, Alexander, “Second Lives - the Documenta 12 Film Programme”, (Kassel: documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, 2007), accessed July 8, 2016,

<http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=787&L=1> emphasis is mine.

The debate on the kind of reception experience cinema suggests in the movie theatre, versus the one it suggests in the gallery space, is a kind of watershed in the critical literature and curatorial practice in this field. The protocols for the viewer in a museum are strikingly different to the ones put forward by the movie theatre. Generally, in the museum, the work is presented in a loop, with no indication of when it begins and finishes, the viewer is mobile, there is no seating, and there may be visual or sound interferences by other works displayed close to it. In the movie theatre, the work is generally presented in a teleological manner, only allowing the immobile, seated spectator to watch it from start to end, in total darkness and in complete isolation from any possible distractions.

Part of the critical literature in this field tends to confront these two standards of presentation, arguing in favour of one standard in order to dismiss the other. The topic is often presented as the immersion experience of the movie theatre versus the distracted experience of the gallery; the constrained spectator versus the free viewer; or the passive spectator in the movie theatre versus the active viewer in the gallery. This generic separation serves to conceptualize the movie theatre experience as completely different to that of the gallery, as if no possible convergence existed between the two. It often also fails to see all the other presentation proposals, beyond the two standard ones, being introduced by museums. Additionally, it neglects the ideological determinations of the museum beyond the architectural space, as already mentioned above. In this last chapter, I will put forward some arguments of this debate by focusing on three of its key, intertwined elements: space and movement, time, and spectatorship experience.

3.1. Space and movement: 'black box' and 'white cube'

The white cube has not always been the chosen architectural model for the art museum. In the nineteenth century, the setting for displaying contemporaneous painting and sculpture was usually the interior of a bourgeois apartment made up of refurbished rooms. This model was gradually displaced by another: as modern art became more abstract and more autonomous, it called out for a space that mirrored its 'homeless' condition, a space that came to be known

as the 'white cube'. The architectural form of the white cube, popularized in the 1920s, is inextricably tied to the ideology of modernism and the desire for an artistic autonomy free of the contamination of mass culture.⁷⁰ It has been described as a 'survival compound'⁷¹ suggesting a clear border between what is inside, the autonomous work of art, and what is outside, the chaotic world. Douglas Crimp has written that 'the modern epistemology of art is a function of art's seclusion in the museum, where art was made to appear autonomous, alienated, something apart, referring only to its own internal history and dynamics.'⁷²

Although the 'white cube model' has also been slowly displaced by other architectural proposals,⁷³ it is still the model followed by most contemporary art museums built in the last 70 years and still open today.⁷⁴ The white cube model 'operates under the pretense that its

⁷⁰ Foster, Hal, "After the White Cube. Hal Foster asks what art Museums are for", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 37, No. 6, (19 March 2015), 25-26, accessed on June 6, 2016, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>.

⁷¹ O'Doherty, Brian, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁷² Crimp, Douglas, *On the Museum's Ruins*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 13.

⁷³ The 'white cube model' has also come under pressure, not only because of the demand to show cinema but also because of the current interest in presenting performance and dance in the museum. A notorious example is the initial proposal for the opening of the TATE Modern extension in June 2016, in which the new museum spaces were called 'grey boxes' and 'art bays'. The former is a cross between a black box and a white cube, and the latter a hybrid of a performance area and an event space.

⁷⁴ The expansion of the white cube model coincides with the expansion of modern contemporary art museums. This is linked to several factors including: the abandonment of huge spaces and warehouses in the 1960s, which were later turned into museums; the building of new museums to contain huge works being produced by artists such as Richard Serra; and the conception of the museum as an icon that can transform a city's profile. The clearest example of this latter factor is the Guggenheim Bilbao. For further reading on the history of the contemporary art museum expansion, see Foster, Hal, "After the White Cube. Hal Foster asks what art Museums are for", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 37 No. 6, (19 March 2015), 25-26, accessed on June 6, 2016, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>, and Rocco, Fiammetta, "Museums. Temples of Delight", *The Economist*, (December 21, 2013), accessed on June 6, 2016,

seeming invisibility allows the artwork best to speak; it seems blank, innocent, unspecific, insignificant. Ultimately, what makes a white cube a white cube is that, in our experience of it, ideology and form meet, and all without our noticing it.⁷⁵

As has already been pointed out, the architectural space of the white cube is far from a neutral container. It should be examined as a 'meta-medium',⁷⁶ even in terms of its architecture.

In accordance with its isolated and purist ideals, the white cube space presents the works of art in a static manner and suggests that the viewer ought to move around to view them. In the constructed ideal space of the white cube, the ideal viewer is also constructed—well behaved, solemn, disembodied, educated, *and able to focus on the singularity of the work of art with an uninterrupted gaze.*⁷⁷ Because there is usually no seating in the white cube, viewers are expected to be mobile and take control of their itinerary, contemplation time and attention to an object or image. This freedom to manage one's time and mobility in the museum contrasts with the way our concentration is often interrupted in 'real life'.

With the introduction of moving images into the museum, as these can dictate the time needed by the visitor in order to view them, both the visitor experience and the museum architecture are perceived differently. In order to maintain the visitors' freedom to manage their own time, the standard presentation of video in the gallery setting became the looped video projection, seen as the least disruptive and least time-demanding option for the museumgoer.

The black box is, of course, another constructed ideological model, a 'meta-medium' that needs to be examined. The cinema's black box intentionally negates both body mobility and environmental perception in order to transport the viewer *away from* the present time and

<http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21591707-museums-world-over-are-doing-amazingly-well-says-fiammetta-rocco-can-they-keep>.

⁷⁵ Filipovic, Elena, "The Global White Cube", *On Curating. Politics of Display*, Vol. 22, (April, 2014), accessed on June 10, 2016, <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-22-43/the-global-white-cube.html#n5>.

⁷⁶ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 39.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

local space, and *into* the narrative space of the cinematic world on screen. The black box experience as we know it today—darkened space, individual seating, single screen facing spectators, and optional popcorn—also has its own history, which was shaped mainly by the biggest industry of cinema: Hollywood.

In this model, the audience is immobile and does not have control over its contemplation time. The spectators are party to an implicit contract to give themselves over to the temporality of film, to confront whatever may come. Of course, one is always free to look away or to get up and leave; but ‘the power of the movie theatre is precisely this ability to harness the spectator's attention through a relinquishing of the ability to change the channel, fast-forward, or skip a page.’⁷⁸

In both models described, the architecture suggests isolation from the rest of the world. Thus, although the black box / white cube dichotomy has been infused by much critical literature, some voices also suggest that they might not be quite so far apart

Furthermore, the standard loop presentation also admits many exceptions. The museum, or even the audience, may adapt to the demands of the video. ‘I’ve never seen a public projection in a public space of exhibition where people were not lying on the ground, or making automatically a cinematic arrangement for themselves before the image, which then becomes just another kind of cinematic theatrical product.’⁷⁹ In fact, most of the video installations maintain part of the structure of the black box within the white cube, by darkening the rooms, providing seating, or establishing screening times.

⁷⁸ Balsom, Erika, “Screening Rooms: The Movie Theatre in/and the Gallery”, *Public: Art/Culture/Ideas*, Vol. 40 (2009), 24-39, 26, accessed on June 10, 2016,

<http://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/viewFile/31969/29230>.

⁷⁹ Baker, George, “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art”, *October*, Vol. 104 (Spring, 2003), 71-99, accessed on June 13, 2016,

<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228703322031712?journalCode=octo#.V17pQpN94b0>.



Installation view of *Hito Steyerl. Duty-Free Art* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2015-2016. © Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

Although each model generates different reactions in the spectator / viewer, the contemplative experience depends on more than just mobility and space. As Balsom puts it, the confrontation of passive spectator with active viewer ‘rests on a spurious mapping of passive / active binaries onto this architectural difference, as if to conflate physical stasis with regressive mystification and physical ambulation with criticality and intellectual engagement.’⁸⁰ The difference between the black box spectator and the white cube viewer is thus far greater than a simple question of stasis versus mobility; in fact, what is at stake is the relationship to time and attention.

⁸⁰ Balsom, Erika, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 51.

3.2. Time: the essence of the medium

While much has been written about how artists working with moving image deal with time, from the philosophical and aesthetic points of view, as well as those of film and art history, less has been written about the ostensibly more mundane concerns associated with the durational dynamics of the artwork's reception. How is time managed from the point of view of the curator and institution? While our traditional museum experience provides autonomy over the time of viewing—we come and go as we please, the painting or sculpture remaining the same—the video projection denies us this autonomy. As Boris Groys states, 'we are victims of its timing.'⁸¹

When cinema is exhibited in the museum, we lack the freedom to access the works of art at will. Entering the museum can feel a bit like situations encountered in real life, where we are constantly missing out on things. 'If during a museum visit we interrupt our contemplation of some video or film work in order to return to it a later point, we will inevitably be filled with that very same feeling [as in real life] of having missed something crucial.'⁸²

This issue not only affects cinema in the museum, but other time-based media such as performance, sound installations, and other staged art. Tate Modern in 2004 dedicated a whole exhibition to this topic. In the exhibition catalogue foreword, Tate director Vicent Todolí wrote that 'perhaps the most radical effect of the introduction of new technologies is the manner in which our perception of time is both altered and made apparent in material form.'⁸³ The exhibition, titled *Time Zones*, included ten works by artists who specifically proposed a reconsideration of the representation and role of time and duration in video and film within the exhibition context. The exhibition as a whole and the works included all questioned the museum viewing experience and the act of seeing itself. The work presented by Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij is a good example. To see the film, the visitor sits and waits for the projection to begin at the scheduled time, with all the excitement of the movie

⁸¹ Boris Groys quoted in Morgan, Jessica, "Time after Time", *Time Zones*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 14-27, 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Todolí, Vicent, "Director's Foreword", *Time Zones*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 9-10, 9.

theatre experience. At first, it appears that De Rijke and de Rooj have circumnavigated the museum visitor's discontinuous viewing experience but, when the film starts, they make the visitor watch a still single-shot video, with no narrative or action. The artists have the visitor watching 'real time in real time with the resulting impression that the image has been slowed. In fact, it is only we, the viewers, who have stopped or reduced movement.'⁸⁴

In a similar vein, the exhibition *Michael Snow. Seqüències* held at La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona in 2015 tried to circumnavigate discontinuous viewing behaviour. The retrospective exhibition on Canadian filmmaker and visual artist Michael Snow traced the different phases of his professional career by presenting his paintings, photos, sculptures, music pieces, and films all in the same space. Some twenty-three works were displayed in the exhibition, including one of Snow's best-known films, *Wavelengths* (1967).

Wavelengths was shown at the exhibition in a closed, darkened room with seating. A small poster outside indicated the starting times of the four daily screenings. The intention, as stated by curator Gloria Moure, was to respect Snow's determination to allow the viewer to enter and stay for the complete 45-minute duration of the film.⁸⁵ I attended the exhibition on two separate occasions, and entered the *Wavelengths* screening room at the appropriate starting time. I noted down the time spent in the room by each visitor. On both occasions, the average time spent was less than 3 seconds. Visitors did not usually avail of the cinema-style seating provided. While I was there, no one stayed for the full duration. One young man stayed for about 20 minutes; and I became suspicious of him. I knew before going to see it what the film was about, but I had forgotten, and it took me about 15 minutes to realise that the camera was zooming in. What is even more interesting is that this film was included in the exhibition space, not in the parallel film programme at Filmoteca de Catalunya, where six other films by Snow were being screened over as many days. When I asked the curator about this decision, she replied that because *Wavelengths* was an emblematic piece by Snow, she wanted to allow

⁸⁴ Morgan, Jessica, "Time after Time", *Time Zones* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 14-27, 23.

⁸⁵ Information provided by Gloria Moure, curator of *Michael Snow. Seqüències*, in an email correspondence, November 3, 2015.

the public more viewing opportunities than just one day at the Filmoteca.⁸⁶ In numbers, *Michael Snow. Seqüences* was open for 102 days and was attended by 27,322 visitors, an average of 268 visitors per day. The average attendance at the Filmoteca screenings was 48 spectators, with a maximum attendance of 101 people, and a minimum of 27 spectators.⁸⁷

This example, as well as the two above-mentioned Documenta experiences, shows how hard it still is for the museum curator to conceptualize its audiences' relation to time and attention when it comes to cinema in the exhibition space.

3.3. Spectatorship experience: the myth of activity

The development of museum architecture has evolved from space-centric, to collection-centric, and later to visitor-centric spaces. The study of the audience in the museum has been somewhat of a recent discovery for museums, which had more or less ignored this aspect of their institution until recently. In addition to this interest, the introduction of cinema in the museum opens up many perspectives regarding the place of viewers and the kind of reception they experience. The challenges posed by space, movement and time described above unfurl a whole new range of theoretical parameters on the reception of moving image, which spill into the disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, aesthetics, and even neuromarketing.

The main debate around spectatorship in this field focuses on the type of contemplative experience suggested when cinema is exhibited in the museum. In the critical literature concerning this subject, one frequently finds comparisons between the 'passive' movie theatre spectator and the 'active' museum viewer. The study of viewer activity is followed by the study of viewer engagement: 'attentive' in the movie theatre versus 'distracted' in the museum. The bottom question seems to be whether spectators who sit immobile for a specific time are more attentive to and more engaged with the artwork than mobile viewers who have more control over their time.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Information provided by Eva Carbó, coordinator of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, in an email correspondence, November 11, 2015.

The answer to this question is unclear, but a good point of departure is to try not to see one type of spectatorship as opposed to the other, and to understand that both are often mystified.

The exhibition in a museum is a fragmented narrative, explained visually and spatially. The visitor is the walker who articulates the narrative by moving from one object to another. Dominique Païni has compared the attitude of an exhibition viewer to that of the *flâneur*, in the Baudelairean sense of the word: 'libérée du fauteuil du spectacle cinématographique, c'est la flânerie du spectateur qui réalise, qui monte la fiction.'⁸⁸

Païni's metaphor of the *flâneur* in the museum does not only refer to physical meandering, but also touches on the window-shopping, consumerist attitude common to *flâneurs* and gallery-goers. Like many of Baudelaire's figures, the concept of the *flâneur* is marked by a profound ambivalence. It evokes both the free individual, 'mobile et esseulé'⁸⁹ and, at the same time, the viewer who is content with spending a few seconds or minutes watching the film, as in the case of Michael Snow's *Wavelengths*, or Ulrike Ottinger's films at Documenta in 2003.

Boris Groys takes another perspective on this notion of freedom. He argues that when viewers are liberated from the restrictions of sedentary spectatorship, they paradoxically become less free. For Groys, the greater the choice, the higher the anxiety over the choices to be made. Conversely, emptying the mind of the possibility of choice, i.e. being constrained to do just one thing, frees the mind from having to choose all the time. So for Groys, it is not the museum viewer who is liberated, but the movie theatre spectator. 'A film with a set duration affords the viewer a lot of liberty. You know you'll be there until the end, so you can relax and pay attention—and of course attention is a quicksilver state, constantly shifting between absorption and distraction.'⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Païni, *Le temps exposé*, 54.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Marks, Laura U., "Immersed in the Single Channel. Experimental Media from Theatre to Gallery", *Millennium Film Journal. Structures and Spaces. Cine-Installation*. Vol. 55, No. 19, (2012), accessed on June 6, 2016, <http://www.sfu.ca/~lmarks/writings/files/Immersed.pdf>.

Peter Osborne has another understanding of how attention is reached and valued, which re-examines the link between the 'absorption' model (intended in both the movie theatre and the museum) and the attentive viewer. In his essay, "Distracted Reception" written for the above-mentioned exhibition *Time Zones* in 2004, he offers a reconsideration of the politics of attention in the reception of cinema. He sees the modern world as an 'on-going crisis of attentiveness' because 'all attempts to produce attentiveness generate further demands to discipline, re-channel or otherwise deal with the distractions to which they themselves give rise.'⁹¹ Art and the institution play a distinctive role in this process: 'We go to the gallery to be distracted from the cares and worries of the world. Yet once there, the kind of attention demanded by the works (and the institutional context)—contemplative immersion—can produce a need for distractions.'⁹² According to this, whether cinema is exhibited in the movie theatre or the museum, it can only be received in distraction. 'Attentiveness is a norm produced by the fear of distraction, while distraction is a side-effect of attempts to produce attentiveness.'⁹³

The experience of viewing cinema in the museum is thus allied less with the disinterested wanderings of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* than with contemporary forms of screen-based communication and interaction on our screen-based devices. The study of attention in the museum space depends on wide range of institutions, consumption patterns, subjectivity conceptions, and our potential for distraction outside of the museum space

3.4. Shaping the audience

As I have tried to exemplify, the audience's activity within the museum does not only depend on the white cube architecture or the free management of time (although most of the debate centres on these two aspects). It depends on a wider range of things: the reputation of the

⁹¹ Osborne, Peter, "Distracted Reception: Time, Art and Technology", *Time Zones*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 66-84, 68.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

venue, the horizon of expectations created beforehand (mainly by critics and marketing departments at museums), and the nature of the work exhibited (a sense-immersive show by Pipilotti Rist does not require the same type of engagement as an exhibition of non-narrative films by Michael Snow). In addition, theory on the spectator's relation to cinema is still a much-debated field. 'In April 2009, as the Expanded Cinema Conference at Tate Modern was winding down, a weary panel of academics and filmmakers edged towards the conclusion that in the quest for understanding the subject's relationship to the moving image, the limits of speculation had been reached. None of the theories of spectatorship so far proposed based on structural/materialism, feminism, psychoanalysis, nor those that emphasized the social/relational dimension, the haptic, the historiographical, geographies of emotion, the 'pensive spectator', object relation, could prove beyond doubt that they were correct.'⁹⁴

While museums should certainly keep trying to know more and to understand their visitors, they should not aim for a standard spectatorship model, on the lines of the standard Hollywood model. If the museum wants to continue being the place where original works are seen in the best conditions, curatorial practices should constantly renegotiate the contemplation of the moving image within its context. As contemporary artist Hito Steyerl has noted recently, 'a museum doesn't organize a coherent crowd of people. People are dispersed in time and space—a silent crowd, immersed and atomized, struggling between passivity and overstimulation.'⁹⁵ Cinema in the museum requires more of the viewer, not only because of its different use of time rhythm and its non-narrative style, but because the museum visitor has still to get used to the new ways of contemplating cinema. More than a new audience ideal, museums need to present a new audience *deal*.

⁹⁴ Elwes, Catherine, *Installation and the Moving Image*, (New York: Columbia University Press: 2015), 258.

⁹⁵ Steyerl, Hito, "Is a Museum a Factory", E-flux journal, Vol.7, (June, 2009), accessed June 12, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museum-a-factory/>.

Chapter 4. Closing thoughts. A New Ontology for Cinema?

Throughout the preceding pages, I have attempted to provide an overview of how and why cinema has been integrated into the art museum. I have argued that this migration enables a rethinking of the history of cinema as well as new conceptualizations of what 'cinema' means today. The migration also provides an excellent starting point for reflecting on the art museum as an institution of ideological power, in which decisions in exhibition programming have a history and a specific inclination. This alternative conception of cinema sought not to compete with Hollywood, but to use the idea of the moving image in order to challenge the institutional foundations of modern art, as it remained structured by the static object.⁹⁶

In the introduction to this paper, I posed the question of how integration of cinema in the museum space affected the museum's conceptions of 'cinema'. Cinema has never been characterized in one single way. Over the past decades, curators, critics, and artists have conceived cinema variously as a modern art, such as painting or sculpture; as an educational public amenity to be shared and examined; as a 'ruin' under the spectre of technological obsolescence; as a cultural heritage to be saved from the tyranny of commercial culture; and as an eye-pleaser for mass audiences. These are only a few of the conceptions of cinema from the perspective of the museum. In the next 10 years, as technology and artistic production continue to evolve rapidly, it is likely that while some of the above-mentioned conceptions will still be held, many new ones will be introduced.

However, despite all these different conceptions, cinema is still generally thought of and studied in relation to the movie theatre as its 'proper' exhibition site, together with the whole complex of social, cultural, aesthetic and economic conventions attached to it. When cinema migrates to new exhibition locations, these conventions are altered. Not only is cinema now viewed in the museum, but also on airplanes, iPods, and laptops, and other such platforms

⁹⁶ Uroskie, Andrew V., *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 14.

designed for the individual viewer. If we are to come to terms with the expansions and mutations of cinema today, the institutional and site promiscuity of the medium needs to be taken into account.

I have tried to highlight the significance of the act of viewing, especially in those places specifically designed for it, such as movie theatres and museums. After pointing out the various challenges for the museum concerning audience shaping, one conclusion is that the act of viewing is always negotiated among various parties. On the one hand, both museum and movie theatre recommend a certain act of viewing, which is fuelled by its conception of the ideal standard visitor. On the other hand, artists may have the viewer in mind when conceptualizing their work, which may determine how the work ought to be viewed, as in the cases of Michael Snow or Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij. Ultimately, the act of viewing is a negotiation between the visitor and the museum display, as well as with all the other elements that may interfere with the viewing experience: phone calls, messages, other viewers passing by, sounds from the street, preoccupations, fears, etc. The conception of the viewer should probably be that of a person constantly negotiating with all the different elements that may catch or distract his or her attention.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, it was not possible to discuss other transformations in our cultural field that have affected the migration of cinema into the museum, such as the interdisciplinary character of art in the post-war period, and the continuous blurring of the lines between contemporary theatre, dance, installation, performance art, visual art, literature and cinema. The disintegration of the traditional boundaries between the different mediums has been a preoccupation of artists in the second half of the last century.⁹⁷

On a closing note, the match between cinema and the art museum may be a happier marriage that one would have thought. Not only do they have many elements in common, but they are also evolving in a parallel way. Therefore, despite all the curatorial challenges and critical

⁹⁷ On this topic, see Krauss, Rosalind *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

voices, the convergence between cinema and the museum can seem as evident as cinema and the movie theatre space.

The marriage is a flourishing one, to the extent that some authors believe that the museum provides a space for cinema to be reborn. For several decades now, the death of cinema has been presented as a fact: 'at first, television took away the family audience, then the video recorder killed off the neighbourhood cinemas, and now digitization has broken the photographic image. News of the cinema's death is thus no longer new, and some will say that it is greatly exaggerated.'⁹⁸ For those melancholic voices that mourn the death of cinema, the museum can be the place where cinema is reborn. Erika Balsom's prediction is less apocalyptic. She writes that the moving image in the museum might require a reconceptualization of the ontology for cinema. As has been mentioned in the preceding pages, the re-location of cinema outside the movie theatres is changing many of its modes of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception, all of which justifies a new conceptualization of 'cinema'. Although 'cinema's ontology has always been diverse and variable', she says that this moment is characterized by a 'new vitality and reinvention of the cinema [...] and palpable anxieties concerning the fates of the institution of cinema'.⁹⁹

Maybe the quest for a new ontology for cinema could start by re-visiting Marcel Duchamp's claim that we should no longer ask 'what is art?' but 'where is art?' If in 1976 André Bazin asked "*Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*" in his book of the same title,¹⁰⁰ today, as Francesco Casetti suggests, the question should also be "*Où est le cinéma?*"¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Elsaesser, Thomas, "Ingmar Bergman in the museum? Thresholds, limits, conditions of possibility", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, Vol. 1, (2009), accessed on June 12, 2016, <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/viewFile/2123/2611>.

⁹⁹ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ André Bazin is a French film critic best known for his book *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, (Paris: Cerf, 1976).

¹⁰¹ Casetti, Francesco, "The Filmic Experience: An Introduction," (2003), available online, accessed June 12, 2016, <https://francescocasetti.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/filmicexperience1.pdf>.

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