SPACES

THE KEY DEBATES

Mutations and Appropriations in **European Film Studies**

Edited by Ian Christie

9

Amsterdam University Press

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The Key Debates

Mutations and Appropriations
in European Film Studies

Series Editors
Anna Backman Rogers, Nicholas Baer, Ian Christie, Dominique Chateau, José Moure, Sarah Leperchey, Annie van den Oever.

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Spaces

Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media

Edited by
Ian Christie

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Editorial

The *Key Debates* series was launched in 2010, with the ambition to revisit "the central issues that continue to animate thinking about film and audiovisual media," which we have now done over eight previous volumes. All of these have followed a pattern of re-examining foundational texts and issues, as well as investigating new lines of transmission and interpretation in what has always been a hybrid field of study, appropriating and modifying much of what it uses.

Nothing demonstrated this mission better than our last collection, *Post-Cinema*, published at the beginning of what became a worldwide response to the COVID pandemic, involving drastic restrictions on social gathering which dramatically affected relationships with both public and private screens. In the editorial of that volume we foresaw that the shutdown of communal cultural activity was likely to create new attitudes to film and cinema in the contemporary media environment – which it undoubtedly has done, reinforcing the centrality of "streaming" in everyday experience. Cinema attendance has still not returned to the levels it had stabilized at before lockdown closures, and despite notable exceptions, may never reach the same level again. Sales of "physical media," such as DVDs and Blu-rays, also seem to have been permanently affected.

Yet these impacts may be counterbalanced by what appears to be a new appetite for "immersive" experiences, which is discussed in this ninth volume. Several contributions to *Post-Cinema* anticipated that trend, notably Francesco Casetti and Andrea Pinotti in their survey of "post-cinema ecology," along with a number of chapters on the increasing interaction between gallery artists and the moving image. Post-cinema turned out to be not a break with the past, as several contributors observed, but a new set of relations between cinema's varied pasts and emerging futures.

This is the context in which our ninth volume emerges, a collection marked equally by both "real world" and media experiences of the last three years, in which our contributors address one of the oldest issues in thinking about screen media: the duality or paradox of being "in two (or more) places at once." Once again, we bring together scholars and practitioners belonging to different traditions, schools of thought, and language communities. With the support of our institutions in three countries (Netherlands, France, and Britain), and of our valued publisher Amsterdam University Press, we provide a platform to air differences, while also insisting that transnational

and transmedial film and media studies must be accorded a key position in contemporary intellectual and cultural life.

The occasion is, however, marked by a deep sense of loss among the series editors. During the preparation of this volume, one of our valued advisers, Roger Odin, passed away after a long illness. Roger played a vital part in helping launch the *Key Debates* series, making crucial introductions and contributing to three volumes. His chapter here, written after the experience of COVID lockdown, is both poignantly personal and typically original, reflecting his longstanding interest in amateur film – a fitting legacy for a tireless theorist of media old and new.

London / Groningen / Amsterdam / Paris / Gothenburg / San Francisco
Ian Christie, Annie van den Oever, Dominique Chateau, José Moure, Anna Backman Rogers, Sarah Leperchey, Nicholas Baer

Acknowledgments

Spaces is the ninth collection to appear in the *Key Debates* series. Like its predecessors, (*Ostrannenie* 2010; *Subjectivity* 2011; *Audiences* 2012; *Technē/Technology* 2014; *Feminisms* 2015; *Screens* 2016; *Stories* 2018; *Post-Cinema* 2020), it addresses a key topic that has reverberated through the history of film and screen media studies, with what we hope are some fresh and unexpected perspectives. I am, as ever, grateful to Amsterdam University Press, and to its Senior Commissioning Editor for Film, Media and Communication Studies, Maryse Elliott, for supporting this latest volume in our series, especially after considerable delays in its completion. Thanks are also due to Chantal Nicolaes and the production staff at AUP.

Much of this delay was directly or indirectly due to the pandemic, which disrupted many channels of communication and plans, even if it appeared to offer increased opportunity for reflection and writing. I am grateful to contributors, some of whom overcame personal difficulties, and all who were patient during the extended process of bringing the book together. Sadly, one of our key contributors, Roger Odin, did not live to see his fine essay appear. But his encouragement for this volume, as for earlier ones, was invaluable, and my fellow editors join me in dedicating it to his memory.

Members of the expanded editorial board of the *Key Debates* series have been particularly helpful, notably Sarah Leperchey, who is also a contributor, Anna Backman Rogers, and Nicholas Baer. José Moure and Dominique Chateau have been consistently supportive, while Annie van den Oever, as founder of the series, has been as encouraging and resourceful as ever. The continuing support of the Research Institute ACTE at Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Paris 1 and of the University of Groningen is gratefully acknowledged.

Ian Christie
London, Summer 2023

1. Introduction – Phenomenologies of Screen Space

Ian Christie

> No man can conceive anything, but he must conceive it in some place.
> – Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

> The anxiety of our age has to do fundamentally with space.
> – Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1967)

> If once it was "time" that framed the privileged angle of vision, today, so it is often said, that role has been taken over by space.
> – Doreen Massey, *For Space* (2005)

Andrei Tarkovsky (1987) famously defined cinema as above all an art of time, enabling its spectators to experience time in novel ways – and its makers to "sculpt" it. Twenty years earlier, André Bazin had defined cinema as a photographic medium as "objectivity in time" or "change mummified" (1967, 15). But is it not equally, or even more fundamentally an art of *space*? Even before we have registered any sense of time, in front of a screen we are unavoidably "in another place." In classic cinemagoing, we have traveled to a special place where this vision of a different world is presented in its optimal form, framed by a dark surround, with distractions minimized. The history of cinemagoing is rich with phrases such as "being transported/immersed" and entering "other worlds." As early as 1911, the playwright Jules Romains wrote about the cinema audience entering a "group dream" in which, "while their bodies slumber […] they pursue burglars across the rooftops, cheering the passing of a king from the east, or march onto a wide plain with bayonets or bugles" (1988, 53).

Today, multiplatform media call into question the classical model of cinematic space, with its abstracted ideal spectator before a fixed screen.

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The portable image/mobile screen forms part of a redefined space, in which viewer and viewed are no longer fixed, but constantly changing place and in flux. The cinema – place of a "special memory," as Raymond Bellour (2012) termed it – may once have been a stable place within this flux, like the gallery or concert hall, but now and in the foreseeable future, it is very much the exception rather than the rule. We are, it seems, adrift in multifocal and constantly evolving spaces. And here, we are inevitably more conscious of two superimposed or embedded spaces: that of the viewing experience and of the experience viewed; of representation and of reception. We are habitually "in two places (or more) at once." And during the worldwide closure of cinemas in 2021-2022 – which was also the period when this collection took shape – domestic viewing became a new norm, with streaming overtaking other forms of domestic viewing.[1]

Why then, we may wonder, have the spatial aspects of the cinematic or filmic experience been largely ignored by theorists of the medium? Perhaps because they seem so obvious, even banal. What can we say about the fact that any filmic image shows somewhere other than the darkened room and the framed screen – apart from cataloguing the typical spaces of, say, the Western, the *film noir*, or the "heritage film," which takes us into considerations of genre, authorship, ideology, and away from space *per s*e.

Perhaps this is exactly the problem. As the philosopher Edward Casey suggests, near the end of his large historical study *The Fate of Place*:

> The shape of place, its very face, has changed dramatically from the time of Archytas and Aristotle. So much so that we may have difficulty recognizing place *as place* as it comes out of the concealment in which it has been kept for over two millennia. It certainly no longer appears as a mere container. (1997, 339)

Casey points to Martin Heidegger's rejection of the "container model" early in the latter's major text *Being and Time* (1927), transforming it into "more of an event than an entity." He also cites Jacques Derrida's "denial that place as such [...] is ever simply *presented*: for him too, place is an event, a matter of *taking place*." (339). Casey goes on to celebrate in this "Postface" to his history the "ever-proliferating guises" in which place has appeared in recent philosophy: as imaginary *topoi* in Bachelard; as *heterotopoi* in Foucault; as

1 For an analysis of film viewing by location, see the British Film Institute report *Opening Our Eyes* (2011, 16). The 6 percent of viewings in cinemas estimated in 2011 would almost certainly be a smaller proportion today.

traces in Derrida, also in Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, and Stegner. He notes that it "surfaces in the cultural efflorescence of 'cultural geography.' Never having vanished into Space (or Time) altogether, place is abounding" (339).

Casey's concern is to extricate specific senses of "place" from what he believes has been a dominant abstract sense of space running through Western philosophy – typified by the opening of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1965), with its dove "cleaving the air in her free flight [that] would be still easier in pure space." For the influential English cultural geographer Doreen Massey, whose work has been an important influence on Patrick Keiller, a contributor to this collection (and for its editor), it is certainly important to disentangle space from time. But it is also important not to succumb to the lure of place – "usually evoked as 'local place'" – as a "politically conservative haven" (2005, 5-6). Her manifesto work, *For Space*, recognized the difficulty of keeping space in view, as "the product of interrelations" and the "dimension of the social," and may appear antithetical to that of Casey (9). Yet Massey wants to insist on "place as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories," and places as posing "in particular form the question of our living together," (151) which are issues raised by a number of contributors here.

The present collection is indeed informed by what has often been termed "the spatial turn" in critical theory and in cultural geography, while recognizing that this can mean very different things to those shaped by different philosophical traditions. Most of its contributors are probably familiar with Michel Foucault's "heterotopia" (1976) and many will have at least a passing acquaintance with Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991). But fewer may be familiar with the architectural theorist Christian Norburg-Schultz's *Existence, Space and Architecture* (1971) or the anthropologist Edward T. Hall's *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), despite the use that has been made of these by writers on film design and screen space.[2]

Two long-running historic debates in film theory are not directly addressed in this collection: the early contention between "theatrical" and filmic space; and the discussions of "narrative space" launched by Stephen Heath in the 1980s, and involving narratologists such as Gerard Genette, D.

2 For instance, Charles Tashiro's *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History of Film* (1998) draws on Norburg-Schultz for its theorization of design; and Hall's idea of "territoriality" was an influence on J.B. Jackson's conception of "American space," discussed in my chapter on NOMADLAND, but is also invoked here by Yosr Ben Romdhane in her discussion of stereoscopic cinema (chapter 11).

Herman, and others. Nor is Mikhail Bakhtin's *chronotope* explored here, as a potential way of specifying how time and space are typically combined in different genres of narrative fiction, such as adventure, epic, or romance. In discussions of this, the emphasis has often been primarily on the different temporal modes employed, rather than the spaces typical of these genres, which might well be fruitful. The main aim, however, has not been to summarize or develop new theoretical paradigms, but to offer a range of "case study" approaches to the neglected issue of screen space, and to span a wide range of historical media, from pre-cinema panoramas and stereoscopes, through different phases of twentieth-century cinema, to the emergence of videographic and digital media, and finally the XR immersive experience of the present.

About the Book

The collection is divided into three parts – Spaces of Spectatorship, Spaces on Screen, and Spatial Speculations.

PART I begins with the most popular form of immersive spectacle of the nineteenth century, the Panorama, as Luke McKernan evocatively describes the experience of visiting Europe's last surviving example of this form, the Mesdag Panorama at The Hague in the Netherlands, comparing this with one of several films that have played with positing an "off-screen" space within their diegesis. Mark Cosgrove writes from the experience of a career in film exhibition, programming a variety of specialist or "art house" venues in Britain, and arguing that spaces of exhibition do significantly impact the experience of the works shown.[3] He also reaches beyond conventional exhibition to discuss the growing importance of site-specific presentations that combine live performance with the projected image. Last in this section is an unusual and highly personal exploration by Roger Odin of the "mental space" created through domestic filming under COVID-19 lockdown conditions in France in 2021.

PART II – Spaces on Screen – offers four contrasting case studies in the creation of fictive spaces. Mark Broughton examines the English country-house estate that was both subject of and filming location for Joseph Losey's 1971 film The Go-Between. Noting that this was at the time an unprecedented case of combining landscaped exteriors with the

3 For a historical sketch of the interaction between cinema architecture and social experience, see my article on Russian cinema buildings (Christie 2001, 32-34.) See also Tsivian 1994, 15-120.

actual house they surround – where previous "heritage" films had relied on studio-built settings interspersed with landscape imagery – Broughton probes both the history of English landscape "improvement," beginning in the eighteenth century, and the roots of the "picturesque" aesthetic that inspired it. Losey, he argues, as an American-born "foreigner" to English society, and aided by Harold Pinter's radical script, is able to reveal

> the violence [...] and cultivation that seem beyond the estate's gardens, but in fact underpin the whole estate. The "Old Garden" [...] where Ted and Marian have sex, acts as a picturesque enclave near the house's terrace garden: a reminder that the violence and differences concealed by picturesqueness are at the heart of the estate.

In sharp contrast, the modern interiors seen in Chantal Akerman's films, often infused and imprinted by the filmmaker's autobiography, display a modernist sensitivity to the filmic representation of "found" domestic space. Sarah Leperchey traces eloquently how framing, movement, and duration are deployed by Akerman across an extensive body of work. And since Akerman played a part in the emergence of a second phase of "expanded cinema" in the 1990s "her installations invite us to use the conceptual framework of the 'spatial turn,' and thus to rethink the relationships that are established between filmic space and the space within which moving images are seen by their viewers."

Not only do Akerman's films have more in common with the architectural premises of Anglo-American "structural film" than might be obvious, as Leperchey demonstrates, but by virtue of their focus on mundane settings, they also anticipated a widespread preoccupation with "everyday" space that emerged contemporaneously in the work of Henri Lefebvre, Georges Perec, and Michel de Certeau.

Back in Britain, Patrick Keiller's "Robinson trilogy" – London, Robinson in Space, and Robinson in Ruins – directly address the fabric of England in terms of historical and economic geography, albeit informed by what might be termed a post-modern sensibility. As the filmmaker, himself a former architect, explains, these are all linked by the conceit of being fictional accounts of research by a would-be scholar called Robinson into a series of "problems" – of London as a historical complex, of England's industrial decline, and of the multi-layered fabric of England's landscape.

Keiller's perspective was deeply informed by his association with the cultural geographer Doreen Massey, and he quotes suggestively from her

book *For Space*: "Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, 9). Like Akerman, his films would also lend themselves to gallery-based display, in this case a 2012 exhibition at Tate Britain, *The Robinson Institute*, in which objects and paratexts "spatialized" what had previously existed as an audiovisual continuum (a form that is revisited in the "Afterword").

In the final chapter in this section, I consider Chloe Zhao's NOMADLAND, not only in terms of its fictionalized reportage on the phenomenon of America's "new nomads," but also from two other perspectives. One is the deep impulse to escape from an oppressive "civilization" that has run through North American culture from the era of the Pioneers and New England Transcendentalists up to Mark Twain's Huck Finn and the twentieth century's Beats and Hippies: a search for some Edenic wilderness that has given America's empty spaces and its highways their distinctive cultural and historical significance, as theorized by Leo Marx, J.B. Jackson, and others.[4] The other perspective, more recent and relating to other chapters, is recognizing the significance of NOMADLAND appearing near the end of the COVID pandemic's enforced isolation, which may well have affected responses to its protagonist's choice to reject the doubtful consolations of domesticity after her bereavement, seeking instead a Winnicottian "potential space" of fulfillment.

PART III – Spatial Speculations – begins with a dialogue exploring differences between evocations of space in prose and screen fiction. This was prompted by two earlier publications by Isobel Armstrong and myself. Armstrong, a distinguished literary critic, had noted a striking difference between the topographical information conveyed by different classic nineteenth-century novels, and was interested in pursuing this into the following century. For my part, I had compared a number of filmic representations of "home" and welcomed a chance to pursue this classic debate, not in terms of adaptation, but of how we interpret different spatial cues, particularly in the case of two major John Ford Westerns, MY DARLING CLEMENTINE (1946) and THE SEARCHERS (1956).

In the next chapter, Catherine Elwes recounts how, even before becoming a pioneer English video artist and curator, she had faced the challenge of

4 It may be worth signposting here an earlier article in which I attempted to "read filmic space historically," relating the representation of places of filming to their historicity, taking as my text Milcho Manchevski's BEFORE THE RAIN (1994), filmed in Macedonia and London. This reading was strongly influenced by both Lefebvre's *Production of Space* and W.J.T. Mitchell's then-recent anthology *Landscape and Power* (1994). See Christie 2000, 165-174.

"finding a place to practice as a woman artist." Her later work as a curator and historian of moving image art leads her to draw a polemical distinction between male artists' persistent preoccupation with exceeding the terrestrial boundary, and a succession of works by women which have punctured this grandiosity. While granting that images of the earth viewed from space have allowed us to invest our planet "with ecological and aesthetic meanings that go beyond the modern concept of space as territory, owned, fought over, and wantonly exploited for profit," she is concerned to restore a grounded sense of embodied values in a range of works discussed, whether or not they invoke extra-terrestrial subjects.

The coming of digital cinema in the early 2000s made possible a return of stereoscopic illusion, after the aborted experiments with this in the 1950s. Combined with CGI, as Yosr Ben Romdhane explains, this has given cinema unprecedented scope to create novel spatial experiences, and in particular to enhance the haptic sensation, which the discoverer of stereoscopy, Charles Wheatcroft, first identified as one of its distinctive qualities. Ben Romdhane makes a persuasive case for a range of 3D films which may not enjoy critical acclaim, yet offer remarkable opportunities for spatial exploration. In a somewhat similar vein, as Teresa Castro observes, the combination of drone footage and video sharing platforms now in existence for varied reasons has made possible a new sense of the global with an often eerie aesthetic appeal of its own, as in the views of deserted cities that proliferated during COVID lockdowns. But as Castro warns, in an essay written at the height of such lockdowns, there is a danger of such aestheticization dulling what should be political and ethical responses to the imagery shown by drones and satellites. Despite the feelings of mastery and detachment that such perspectives can give, she argues, like Elwes, that we need to keep our feet on the earth, and resist distraction from urgent environmental challenges.

Thanks in large part to the rapid development of digital media, we are living in an era of what has been termed "hypermediation," discussed in the "Afterword." The richness of past eras' representation can now be experienced as never before, enhanced – or as some would argue vulgarized – by new technologies. Today's "immersive" media displays are promising extraordinary experience, which overflow conventional framing, using XR technologies. We may wonder if these constitute a "new space" of virtuality, evoked in such neologisms as "cyberspace" and "the metaverse," or if they are the remediation of an old concept? They certainly recall the goal that André Bazin (1967) identified in a history of nineteenth-century audiovisual media – the creation of a perfect simulacrum – but they are also an experience

readily available to millions of video gamers, although one largely ignored by film and media theorists.

Cinema of the last thirty years has not hesitated to explore the potential spaces, and especially the paradoxes, of XR simulation, in films such as Kathryn Bigelow's Strange Days (1995), David Cronenberg's eXistenZ (1999), Steven Spielberg's Minority Report (2002) and Ready Player One (2018), and Rian Johnson's Looper (2012). Yet as immersive "edutainment" becomes an everyday reality in today's economy, the conceptualization of its experience seems to be trapped in a contested conceptual limbo – a "harmless metaphor" (Conrad 2023) or "knowing kitsch" (Jones 2013) for those, who cling staunchly to the traditional structures of theater and museum; or an exciting new world of potential, harnessing digital sound and image reproduction to create a novel space of participation (Dean 2023)?

How we position ourselves in this critical arena may well prove more a matter of generational identity and experience than of analytic or aesthetic principle.[5] What is clear, at least, is that we can no longer maintain "fixed, undialectical or immobile" (Hebdige 1990, vii), let alone "container" concepts of space, if we genuinely want to understand the complexity of the real and virtual spaces we inhabit and experience. This collection aspires to offer some pointers toward a conceptualization fit for current and future purposes.

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5 See the study "How Different Generations in the UK Respond to Digital Advertising" (Koutsou-Wehling 2023), in which Gen Z and Gen Y have a similar level of interest in the metaverse (26 percent), while Generation X and Baby Boomers have least (fourteen and eight percent respectively).

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About the Author

Ian Christie is a film historian and curator, currently Professor of Film and Media History at Birkbeck, University of London. He is a fellow of the British Academy and has been a visiting professor and fellow at universities in Oxford, Cambridge, Stockholm, Canberra, Paris, and Olomouc, and at Gresham College in London 2017-2021. He has written and edited books on Powell and Pressburger, Russian cinema, Martin Scorsese, and Terry Gilliam; and contributed to many exhibitions, including *Modernism: Designing a New World* (V&A London, 2006) and *Revolution: Russian Art 1917-1932* (Royal Academy, 2017). In the *Key Debates* series, he previously edited *Audiences* (2012) and co-edited *Stories* (2018). His most recent books are *Robert Paul and the Origins of British Cinema* (2020) and *The Eisenstein Universe* (2021), and he has co-directed a film about Eisenstein in Mexico, A Trip to Tetlapayac (2023).

PART I

Spaces of Spectatorship

2. Panoramic Space and the Mesdag Show[1]

Luke McKernan

Abstract
The Panorama Mesdag in The Hague, the Netherlands, opened in 1881 and is the oldest surviving panorama still to be found in its original, dedicated location. It is the creation of Dutch maritime artist Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915). The vast 360-degree panorama depicts The Hague's seaside resort of Scheveningen in meticulous detail. However, the work is more than a simple touristic pleasure, but rather a profoundly accomplished comment on the construction of reality. Panoramas are part of a continuum of larger-than-life visual displays that are antecedents of, or analogues to, the cinematic experience. In particular, there are illuminating parallels to be drawn between the Panorama Mesdag and the 1998 feature film The Truman Show, both of which explore the limits of illusion, albeit in different eras of representation.

Keywords: panorama, screen, cinematic, immersive

The build-up to a show is always a part of the show. The title, the publicity photos, the names in lights, the walk down a corridor or up flights of stairs, the taking of one's seat, the buzz of anticipation, the drawing back of the curtains. At the Panorama Mesdag in The Hague, some of this is in evidence, but with an extra twist.

The exterior of the building gives you the name; the guidebook entices you with the information that this is the oldest surviving panorama still

1 This chapter was originally published as a blog post, "The Mesdag Show," on October 23, 2022, at https://lukemckernan.com/2022/10/23/the-mesdag-show. It appears here with minor changes, including end notes and references.

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to be found in its original, dedicated location.[2] Since 1881, people have been going to the very show that you will now experience. You proceed through a long corridor with a timeline and examples of the works of Dutch artist Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915), an accomplished and in his time acclaimed producer of marine paintings, who was the chief creator of the panorama you are about to see. Not the only creator, you are told, for among his several collaborators was his wife Sina (Sientje) Mesdag-van Houten (1834-1909), herself a painter of some accomplishment.[3] Examples of her works are also on display.

Your appetite suitably whetted with facts, names, and images, you approach the entrance to the panorama. Here lies the twist. You are being set up. As you proceed down a dark corridor, the darkness enlarges the pupils of your unwitting eyes. You climb a spiral staircase, separating the senses from the familiar world you are leaving behind while building up expectations. You do not know where you are, but you know where you are going. You step out onto a circular viewing platform and what is there before your widened eyes is utterly overwhelming. You have stepped into infinity. The space is so much larger than you are expecting, the brightness such a shock to the senses. A 360-degree image surrounds you, to which there seems to be no top or bottom. You have become God-like, the viewer of all things, totally immersed in the artwork that envelops you.

What lies before you, in every direction, is The Hague's seaside resort of Scheveningen, reproduced in meticulous detail. You are positioned as though on the Seinpost, the highest sand dune in Scheveningen, and indeed what appears just below you is real sand that leads down to the foot of the circular painting. To the south, there is The Hague with its prominent church towers; west, and in front of you, the lighthouse, the long beachfront busy with shipping; north, the Von Wied pavilion, hotels, and the municipal bathhouse; east, some open country and the new steam tram line. There are boats, people, buildings, the sea rolling in, and above an endless, clouded sky.

You start spotting the details (there are binoculars available). You detect landmarks, but what you really want to see are people, and the stories that they promise. There are fishermen attending to their nets before heading out for another catch. Along the sands there is a procession of cavalry undertaking exercises on the beach. There are sea bathers emerging from

2 The Panorama Mesdag website (in Dutch and English) includes an explorable representation of the panorama. See https://panorama-mesdag.nl.

3 Four painters worked on the panorama with Hendrik Mesdag: Bernard Blommers, George Breitner, Théophile de Bock, and Sina Mesdag. See Veldink and Prins 2021.

Fig. 2.1: The Mesdag Panorama today (photo Luke McKernan).

protective bathing coaches. The fashionable promenade along the shore. In the town, household sewage is being collected by horse and cart. There is a ghostly figure on the side of one of the houses – an unfinished piece of the painting or an actual ghost? There is a painter at her easel, a parasol above her, a servant (presumably) looking inquisitively over her shoulder – surely the painter is meant to be Sina?

The eye is continually drawn across the canvas, to pick out such features and have them play with the imagination. But there is more going on. Mesdag was unhappy with the encroaching industrial age and his painting reflects this. At the edges of the view one sees steamships out at sea, while traditional sailing craft are drawn up on the foreshore. The steam tram speeds along in the distance, leaving a trail of white smoke. More smoke pours out of industrial chimneys. Where once there was nothing but rolling dunes, now hotels and entertainments are being built for the growing number of tourists. What appears at first to be a celebration of stillness is actually a record of change. To judge from the sails and waves by the shoreline, and the smoke trails of the chimneys and tram, there are opposing weather systems on display. One could say that such smoke trails are simply created by objects in motion, but the smoke coming out of the chimneys trails in the same direction. The inner world is blowing one way, the threatening outside world is blowing the other. There is profound disharmony in this supposedly idyllic view.

Hendrik Mesdag came from a business family that had artistic links – Lawrence (Lourens) Alma-Tadema was his cousin.[4] He was able to indulge

4 Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) was born in Dronyrp, the Netherlands, and studied at the Royal Academy of Antwerp before settling permanently in London in 1870. He was highly regarded as a painter of elaborately detailed scenes from classical antiquity, which would later influence filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille. A friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, he was knighted and awarded the Order of Merit.

a passion for painting thanks to his wife's fortune, gradually building up a reputation through his seascapes and moving with ease among the cultural elite of the Netherlands. He remained a businessman, however. When approached by a group of Belgian investors to create a marine panorama, he welcomed the opportunity, when others of his profession might have sneered at being involved in such populist fare (Sillevis 2015).

Panoramas, or wide-angle views of a scene presented as public entertainments, emerged in 1792, when the Irish-born artist Robert Barker applied the term to his innovative large-scale paintings of Edinburgh. He had worked out how to maintain a sense of perspective when presenting a large-scale image over a curved surface. He opened a cylindrical panorama building in London's Leicester Square in 1793. Visitors would stand on a central platform and view the semi-circular world before them (Ellis n.d.).

The huge success of Barker's Panorama led to many imitators and variants. There were semi-circular and 360-degree panoramas, known as Cycloramas and Cosmoramas. Later came moving panoramas, and the Dioramas, where the panoramic painting was static, often with lighting effects, while the audience was moved round on a turntable.[5] They could be accompanied by lecturers, or music and lighting effects. By the time Mesdag was invited to produce his panorama in 1880, the public thirst for such entertainments was on the wane, and although the Scheveningen display gained much praise (no less a visitor than Vincent van Gogh said of it, "the only shortcoming of the painting is that is has no shortcomings"), the company that ran it went bankrupt in 1886 (Sillevis 2015).

Thereafter Mesdag took over the business (the panorama remains to this day in the hands of the Mesdag family), partly because he must have felt there was still a business opportunity there, but maybe more because he knew that this was his masterpiece. One hundred fourteen point five meters in circumference and fourteen point four meters high, covering a total surface of 1,660 square meters, the Mesdag panorama is as huge in its imagination as it was in execution. Technically adroit, touristically satisfying, it is also a profoundly accomplished comment on the construction of reality.

Panoramas (and their variants) are recognized as antecedents of, or analogues to, the cinematic experience. There is a large screen that must dwarf the viewer; the immersive nature whereby the viewer becomes wholly absorbed in the world placed before them; the seeking out of stories at a macro (the overall narrative) and micro (the stories to be found within) level;

5 On the history of panoramas and their variations, see Hyde 1988; Comment 1999; Huhtamo 2013.

the shock and delight of seeing reality recreated. One sees that cinema, and the immersive visual entertainments that have come after it (television, IMAX, virtual reality), are part of a human compulsion to accept a visual recreation of reality and to live (for a time) within it. Such spectacles become our dreamworlds and help us orient ourselves within the true world to which we must return. Here is the place, which comes to life because we are there to witness it (Griffiths 2008, 37-78; Uricchio 2011).

Viewing the Mesdag panorama from every point of its central platform, from shoreline activity to the limitless skies, a particular film came to my mind – The Truman Show. In Peter Weir's ingenious 1998 film, Truman (played by Jim Carrey) is the unwitting star of a TV "reality show." The show is set on Seahaven island, constructed within a gigantic studio, with fake buildings, roads, communications, landscape, and people (all played by actors), which only Truman thinks is reality. Born and raised in Seahaven, he yearns to travel (Fiji is his dream destination), but loved ones ask him why he would ever want to leave, and a manufactured boating accident in which his "father" appeared to drown, has intentionally left Truman with a deep fear of the sea.

When his "father" reappears, years later, Truman starts to piece together what is happening around him. He overcomes his fear of water to sail away single-handedly from the island. Having weathered artificial storms sent by the desperate producers, Truman proceeds serenely over a calm sea to the cloudy horizon – with which his yacht collides, piercing the fabric of the world that has contained him. Walking along the edge of this world, he finds a set of stairs and a door. He makes his escape to who knows what, cheered on by an unseen viewing public.

Mesdag created a similar all-encompassing world that all but invites us to sail away from the center, where we will eventually run into the limits of illusion. Our dreamworlds satisfy only insofar as they appear to be infinite; once we discover their falsity, we must break through. Mesdag painted an idealized image of a treasured, unchanging location in which its Dutch visitors might wish to reside forever, but surrounded it with the agents of change. The dreamworld, by straining to keep out reality, must inevitably destroy itself.

The Panorama Mesdag too has its piercing moment. When you exit via the same stairwell, in a corridor leading toward the outside world there are two portholes through which you can see the previously-hidden bottom edge of the panorama, with floorboards and a walkway beneath. Reality intrudes.

The Panorama Mesdag remains an astonishing experience. Reproductions of the work, even in its panoramic entirety, cannot give any real sense of

the shock of stepping up out of the dark and finding oneself confronted by an infinite view. It is so unreally real. You could stay there forever, because why would you ever want to leave? But, logically and inescapably, you must.

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About the Author

Luke McKernan is an independent researcher specializing in media history, formerly at the British Universities Film and Video Council and Head of News at the British Library. His publications include *Picturegoers: A Critical Anthology of Eyewitness Experiences* (2022), *Breaking the News: 500 Years of News in Britain* (2022, edited with Jackie Harrison), *Charles Urban: Pioneering the Non-fiction Film in Britain and America, 1897-1925* (2013), and *Yesterday's News: The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (2002). He publishes regularly through his website https://lukemckernan.com.

3. Places of Exhibition

Mark Cosgrove

Abstract

Mark Cosgrove's professional life in independent cinemas – first at Plymouth Arts Centre then Cornerhouse in Manchester and now Watershed in Bristol – has brought him close to audiences' responses to films, and also to their experiences before, during, and after the cinema screening of a film. He believes there is no one way to receive a film: each individual brings their own life journey to a screening. However, the collective experience of the venue – the place of cinema – creates a unique context where a film and the various lived experiences of the audience can connect in powerful and meaningful ways. That resonance between film, venue, and audience evolved further for him when taking Carl Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc, 1928) on tour with a newly commissioned score. Each place – venue or festival context – brought fresh meanings to the extraordinary images filmed nearly 90 years earlier.

Keywords: programming, venue, audience, screening, live silent, immersion

I have spent most of my professional and personal life in and around the cinema. And increasingly I have been giving thought to the specificity of films in the cinema: the nature of the cinematic experience and the unique – I would suggest – relationship that can develop between place, object, and audience. This has primarily evolved through practical professional experience; the experience of programming a cinema, being there with audiences before and after films, putting on events with films for audiences, both in my own cinema and also at site-specific events, or touring with a film to different exhibition venues. All my examples are drawn from this experience, and hopefully offer insight into the significance of the experience of seeing a film in a specific place: the cinema. Over the past decade, I have sought

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to understand, and begin to articulate, this significance within a broader cultural and theoretical context – the place of cinema.

This has followed a number of routes. The first route has been organizational: trying to understand what exactly is the value and impact of Watershed.[1] It is prompted partly by business considerations, but also the existential questions, "what are we?" and "who are we for?"; and also the strategic, "why should we get public funding?" In 2010, we invited the International Futures Forum to work with us on trying to conceptualize what the answers might be. This led to the publication of *Producing the Future: Understanding Watershed's Role in Ecosystems of Cultural Innovation* (Leicester and Sharpe 2010).

The second route has been experiential: having organized screenings and events, then seen their impact – some of which are discussed below – I am convinced that something of a different order happens when we screen a film at Watershed, rather than when that same film is screened at the local multiplex. George Steiner's gnomic phrase "the meaning of meaning" has stayed with me since I read it many years ago (1991). Recently, it has come more sharply into focus when I experience the varied meanings contained in films as they resonate for different audience members. Our experience of screening Steve McQueen's 12 Years a Slave (2013) illustrates this most vividly.

Thirdly, and more recently, reading Tim Cresswell's book *Place* has made me realize that place has more significance than simply being a casual somewhere, rather it is "a concept that expressed an attitude to the world that emphasized subjectivity and experience" (2015, 18). Watershed was established in 1982 in empty warehouses on Bristol's then-derelict Harbourside. Forty years later it is a key feature of the regenerated Bristol waterfront. The building is a cultural, creative, and social space, with its cinemas and café/bar the key drivers of public engagement. Over those forty years, we have often been asked "can we have a Watershed in North London/Barcelona/Kyoto?" We thought about this, but soon realized that it was the specificity of place – of Watershed on Harbourside in Bristol – that created the uniqueness of the experience. To somehow reproduce that for other places would not have created the experience those requests sought.

1 Watershed opened in 1982 as the United Kingdom's first dedicated media center, in an area of Bristol that was then mainly derelict. Based in former warehouses on the harborside, it hosts three cinemas, a café/bar, event spaces, and the Pervasive Media Studio. As well as programming a wide range of international films, it hosts a number of festivals, including Brief Encounters and Cinema Rediscovered, and serves as a regional hub for many film exhibition initiatives.

These, combined with a research project, *Beyond the Multiplex*, and drawing on my professional experience in cinema, combine to make me believe in an essential cultural and social value to the screening of a film in an independent cinema.[2] One that can create a meaningful relationship between film and spectator, beyond the financial transaction of mainstream cinema.

First Encounters

My childhood years were spent going to the George Cinema in Barrhead on the outskirts of Glasgow in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A place which only lives on in my memory. Interestingly, I cannot remember any films I went to see there and in fact the only things I do remember are dropping the sweets off the balcony (mint imperials got the best response from any head that was hit), the darkness of the space, and a large luminescent grandfather clock which stood off to the left of the screen keeping real time with the on-screen fictional time. I do however vividly remember films I saw on television. The classic Hollywood of Jimmy Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, and John Wayne, who were my holy trinity and whose films were regularly screened in weekend matinees on one of the then only three UK television channels. It was also television which broadened my film horizons at that time. Long before I was aware of film directors, foreign language films, and the trappings of cinephilia, I was watching Fellini, Bergman, Antonioni, and many other European films. Some no doubt seen in the wrong aspect ratio, which only enhanced their otherworldliness.

A defining moment in memory was watching Kaneto Shindo's Onibaba (1964) on television as a young teenager, around 1976. I was still unaware of distinctions between Hollywood, mainstream, popular art, or world cinema, and was simply watching something that had arrived in our living room. I remember watching it with my father, with the lights switched off and both of us being entranced by the intensely atmospheric haunting reed marsh world. The sound in particular was mesmerizing. We lived on a newly built council estate on the edge of the countryside. Our front window looked out on a group of mature trees that created an equally atmospheric effect when the branches swayed in the wind. Shindo's film seemed to merge with the shadows inside and outside the living room. My older brother came home

2 *Beyond the Multiplex: Audiences for Specialised Films in English Regions* was a research project led by the University of Glasgow, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and reporting in 2021. See https://www.beyondthemultiplex.org/.

toward the end of the film, opened the living room door and switched on the light. The atmosphere of the film evaporated, and my dad and I shouted at him to switch it off and close the door. The intensity of our response left him no choice, and we were returned to the immersive atmospheric darkness of the living room and the entrancing Onibaba.

This memory has become more potent for me as time has passed. Potent because the film and the context of its viewing had such a visceral effect on my younger self, and in describing it now I realize that my dad and I had instinctively created a cinematic experience in the living room, with focus solely on the film, however small the screen. The darkness of the room sharpened that focus. Also, of course, we could not pause the film, and once it had finished there was no way to "catch up." It was not on demand, it was not on the shelf waiting to be watched whenever. It was only on at that time in those conditions.

Spool forward to 2021. COVID forced the closure of cinemas along with much of society. I am the cinema curator at Watershed, and we were just coming out of the third wave, and slowly reopening, with the prospect of getting back to "normal" still uncertain in face of the possibility of new variants. There was much existential soul searching about the future of cinema. But I had just bought a digital projector, which connected to Wi-Fi and, via mirroring, to my laptop or mobile, as well as by cable to a Blu-ray player. I had painted a screen on my wall. The sound from the projector was excellent, and it was a revelation. Watching films in my living room had once again become meaningful, with an impact far beyond watching them on my large-screen television.

Thus, watching films in this domestic setting could become an event, ritualistic in atmosphere and scale. There is only space for two to view comfortably, but that experience of watching the film seems more meaningful than if we watched the same film on the flat-screen television. Watching Monte Hellman's Two Lane Blacktop (1971) as research for our Cinema Rediscovered festival, I felt my concentration as a viewer was more intense than if I was watching it on a television screen, with the scale of Hellman's cinematography more impactful. This is not to dismiss television. Having watched Jimmy McGovern's prison drama Time[3] and the police procedural Line of Duty[4] projected on my wall, neither has the same engaging impact

3 Television drama series set in prison, written by Jimmy McGovern. Two three-part series, 2021 (dir. Lewis Arnold) and 2023 (dir. Andrea Harkin) for BBC Studios.

4 Long-running BBC television drama series (2012-2021), centering on a police anti-corruption unit, created by Jed Mercurio.

as Hellman's road movie. Their visual composition and episodic structure make these ideal for television, the format they were intended for.

This recent experience of "home cinema" has also reminded me of Godard's distinction between cinema and television: "when you go to the cinema you look up, when you watch television you look down." Like my younger self watching Onibaba, I have recreated the conditions of the cinema in the living room. They are both available to me. Godard was being provocative, offering "looking up" and "looking down" as a value judgment. But it is precisely that physicality of engagement with film in the conditions of a cinema auditorium which creates a different relationship with the viewer. The external world is minimized and the real world of the cinema amplified.

When I started professionally as the programmer of a 72-seat cinema at Plymouth Arts Centre in 1987, cinema was still very much the economic and cultural driver for film's impact and success or otherwise. Cinemagoing may have slumped from the peak of the late 1940s, with competition from television and various leisure activities, but theatrical exhibition was still very much predicated on exclusivity of content. Very few had access to projection in their houses, and it would be months after theatrical release before a film would find its way onto television. Domestic VHS viewing and recording was a new factor; however, the old business model kept cinema exhibition at the top of the film watching pyramid. If you wanted to watch a film – especially a new one – you had to go to the cinema. Now, of course, that has all changed. There is a proliferation of ways in which to watch films. If you think of a film and search for it online, you can almost often watch it immediately whether legally or illegally. The cinema business model of exclusivity was always being challenged by digital: it has now been upended by COVID. Those who work in film exhibition are watching to see where cinema goes next, but it is undoubtedly only a part of the spectrum of opportunities to watch film.[5] Certainly, Bond films may have remained cinema events until recently, but even these will be subject to market demands and opportunities. Industry rumors during the pandemic suggested that the last Bond film, No Time to Die (2021), might have been available to any streaming platform that could afford it.[6]

5 See the conclusion of a study, commissioned by the British Film Institute, on attitudes to film in the UK, *Opening Our Eyes* (2011, 16), which showed that only 6 percent of a total of 5 billion "viewing occasions" took place in cinemas.

6 The release of No Time to Die, which was completed in 2020, was delayed until 2021 due to pandemic cinema closures.

My own interest is not this area of cinema – the logics of the market will determine the future of mass cinema going – but rather it is in the experience of watching and connecting with films in the cinema, and what that can mean for the film as well as the viewer. This interest has evolved during thirty years of selecting films to be screened in the cinema, working in partnership with various individuals and groups to present films to audiences, and sitting with audiences in the cinema. Some occasions have produced memorable illustrations of the enclosed world that the cinema creates, where reality can be surrendered to the illusion on screen.

One memorable incident resulted from the habits of a Plymouth projectionist, who used to visit a local pub while running films on the twin 35mm projectors. Timed to perfection, he would be back in time for the changeover cue, so the film's illusion was invariably maintained.[7] However, one night his timing was out, and rushing back to the projection room he managed to knock the running projector's image off-screen onto the right-hand wall, before carrying on with the changeover. The film being shown was David Lynch's Wild at Heart (1990) and at the end, a member of the audience was heard marveling, "that David Lynch is really something – how did he manage to do that with the image?" This remains for me an entertaining example of how an audience can surrender to a film and the context of its screening. The cinema at that moment had become an extension of the Lynchian universe.

This potential to construct meaning – whether intended or not – is something that the cinema space uniquely provides through its insular and focused moment of engagement. Meaning is of course all around, but making it "meaningful" and connecting meaningfully with audiences is, for me at least, the essence of the cinema experience and the endlessly interesting challenge.

Scoping Cultural Value

Watershed did some work with the International Futures Forum (IFF) several years ago to research what our essential value might be. As an organization we were in a period of growth and (pre-COVID) confidence, where we were looking ahead optimistically at what our future could be, which included

7 In traditional analogue film projection, the end of each reel was signalled by a "cue" in the top corner of the final frames, alerting the projectionist to prepare for a "changeover" to another projector.

thinking about our regional, national, and international role. We were also taking on board positive responses from visiting filmmakers and speakers, who described the "buzz" in the venue, and thinking was there potential in opening similar Watersheds across the country. Could we be like "boutique" chains Everyman or Curzon and open similar sites across the country even internationally?[8] While this was a flattering proposition, it was equally never going to happen. The essence of Watershed's value is the building – a converted Victorian warehouse, with all its architectural peculiarities – in its location – Bristol's increasingly popular and busy Harbourside – as part of a unique city ecology. The principle could be transferable, but not the defining essentials. Those boutique cinema chains are in fact smaller examples of commercial mainstream multiplexes relying on centralized services. As cinema business models, they are replicable. However, cultural models – if they are to meaningfully connect with their audience – are specific to their location.

The IFF research brought an ecological approach to try to understand and articulate what Watershed adds to the range of cultural, creative, and commercial constituencies in our city. This approach broadened the scope of thinking about Watershed as more than simply a cinema or a café/bar (the two things by which it is most commonly defined).

> With this analysis in mind, we can now see Watershed in a new light. It is a creative ecosystem, operating in many different and overlapping economies. And it is an innovator. It is pushing the creative boundary not only in the invention of new work, but in the subsequent consolidation of that work in new patterns of shared meanings, new cultural genres. (Leicester and Sharpe 2010, 32)

IFF's thinking also placed Watershed in a more dynamic relationship between making meaning and making money.

> As a system, Watershed can operate to maximise its returns in either money economics or meaning economics. If it concentrates only on meaning it may produce exceptionally valuable work but go broke [...] If it concentrates only on money it may become highly profitable but will no longer offer the participants the opportunity to enrich their understanding of the meaning of their own lives and what it is to be human. (34)

8 Curzon and Everyman are two established London arthouse cinema companies which have developed new regional cinemas in recent years.

Cinema exhibition is most popularly defined by the commercial mainstream, which today means blockbusters and franchises. There, success is defined by box-office: Stephen Spielberg's West Side Story (2021) was bordering on failure having only taken $10 million in its opening weekend in America. The most recent Bond, No Time to Die (2021), has saved cinema by taking over £50 million in the UK. Making money through screening films in the cinema is important, but that reflection from IFF helped refocus our thinking on the value of cinema in making meaningful connections for and with audiences.

An example of this which also illustrates the different place Watershed occupies in the wider film exhibition landscape is when we screened Steve McQueen's 12 Years a Slave in January 2013. This was booked like any normal new film and would also be screening first-run at most other cinemas – commercial and independent – in the city. I could have screened it like any "normal film." Let audiences know it is on, let it play – hopefully make some money – and move onto the next one. However, screening a film called 12 Years a Slave in a city that has a profoundly unresolved relationship with its involvement in the slave trade takes on a different significance.[9]

I worked with colleagues from the Black curating collective Come the Revolution to put on a series of formal and informal discussion opportunities. The informal were for me some of the most interesting. One idea was that someone would sit in our café/bar with a sign saying "just seen 12 Years a Slave? want to talk about it?," intended primarily for a Black audience, given the impact the film might have. In one formal event, a member of the collective introduced the film saying "I haven't seen the film. I am watching it with you and let's have a conversation in the cinema after." That conversation with Roger, sitting on his own in front of a largely white audience, was an intense experience, where the film's own intensity opened up conversations about Bristol's involvement in the slave trade, racism and, surprisingly, bullying. This was raised by an elderly White woman who reflected on the theme of power and its abuse, based on her experience at school.

It was, however, the experience of a young Black woman that brought home the importance of the place and space we had created for 12 Years a Slave. She had already been to see the film at a local multiplex, which involved the everyday naturalized experience of watching a film at a multiplex: buy ticket, watch film, leave cinema. Imagine, however, that young Black girl

9 In 2020, demonstrators in Bristol pulled down a public statue of Edward Colston, an eighteenth- to nineteenth-century merchant and slave-trader and threw it into the harbor. For the subsequent story of this protest, in the wake of "Black Lives Matter" protests in the United States. See https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/the-colston-statue/.

arriving in the cinema to witness Solomon Northop's tortuous experience of slavery, told with all of Steve McQueen's creative power, then walking through the multiplex corridor, past the concessions stands, and out into the car park. She simply wanted to talk to someone about what she had just experienced. The multiplex is not designed to cater for that discussion, for those emotions that the film had opened up. The meaning of 12 Years a Slave for the multiplex is as with every other film shown – to make money. She welcomed the opportunity to discuss the impact of the film at one of our events. We created the context for that conversation to happen, and in that moment 12 years a Slave became powerfully and intensely meaningful.

Over the years, I have regularly experienced this intense absorption by an audience, before moving from the real world of the cinema to the external real world. Often, especially when we have a visiting filmmaker, I will stand at the back of the auditorium for the last twenty minutes to gauge the mood before I go onstage with the director to open a conversation with that mood. This example was not with a visiting filmmaker but simply a desire to see how audiences responded. I had seen Michael Haneke's Amour (2012) in the cavernous Lumière auditorium at the Cannes Film Festival and was moved, as was the whole audience, by its depiction of an end of life. I knew it would "play well," as the saying goes. I was however interested in the audience response and would regularly stand at the back of the auditorium to sense the response (vociferous clapping and cheering rarely happens outside Cannes). Each time there was a collective silence and no movement from anyone wanting to leave the auditoria. Rather people wanted to sit with the film, with the mood that Amour had created in that space. The house lights going up to half even felt like an intrusion. The acclimatization into the real world was slow and somewhat reluctant. The immersion into the world of Anne and George had been absolute.

We later screened Amour as part of a short series "Caring about Dying" in partnership with the 4th Public Health Palliative Care International conference. Other films in the series were Fred Schepisi's Last Orders (2001) and Richard Glatzer's and Wash Westmoreland's Still Alice (2014). Each screening was introduced by a health professional working in palliative care. The context provided was to open up personal conversations about the audience's own experiences. This theme was developed a couple of years later in 2018 when we put on a series exploring "Grief, Death and Love," which included the documentary A Love That Never Dies (2018) directed by Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds. Their documentary comes from a very personal experience of grief and explores its impact through encounters with people in similar circumstances. Jane and Jimmy hosted a

question-and-answer session. When this had finished, I noticed a group – two adults and a child – who were in tears at the back of the auditorium. I pointed Jane in their direction. Afterwards she explained that they had recently lost their daughter/sister in a tragic accident and had been recommended to come to the event as one of a number of ways to deal with what they were going through. The cinema and the screening of that film had moved beyond what we think of as the space of cinema to become a space of refuge, of therapy, of immediate connection with complex reality of lives lived.

Professor Bridgette Wessel, who led the *Beyond the Multiplex* research, talks about audiences' journeys with film. That project highlighted, through interviews with audience members across the country, the richness of these ongoing personal journeys with film:

> Personal film journeys are part of people's life courses – and life courses are part of personal lives. In terms of personal film journeys, this is seen through the ways a person progresses through life, gaining new experiences, new friends and family members, new jobs, homes, interests and so on. These changes feature in their film choice, types of audience experiences, and the types of audiences they choose to participate in. Understanding this means recognizing that the types of film and types of audience experiences people want changes in relation to their life stage from childhood to old age. (Wessel 2021)

Beyond the Multiplex reveals audiences as groups of dynamic individuals at different stages in their lives and therefore in different relationships with film.

The rebalancing of money to meaning by International Futures Forum; *Beyond the Multiplex*'s thinking about the audience as a group of individual personal journeys; and George Steiner's injunction to make meaning meaningful, have all reframed the way we should think about presenting films to audiences and the importance of cinema as the place where that cultural and social value is created. The examples of both 12 Years a Slave and A Love That Never Dies illustrate the meaningful ways in which the context of cinema can connect with individuals at different moments in their life experience.

"Being There" – The Specificity of Place

My last example brings together the specificity of place with renewed multiple meanings for a film across different exhibition contexts. The film

Fig. 3.1: Premiere of The Passion of Joan of Arc with a new score by Adrian Utley and Will Gregory in Bristol 2011.

is Carl Theodor Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc, made "silent" shortly before the arrival of synchronized sound in Europe in 1928. Many will have first encountered the film through Jean-Luc Godard including a sequence in his own Vivre sa vie (1962), in which Dreyer's intense scrutiny of his actor Falconetti's face is mirrored by his heroine Nana's emotional absorption in watching the film. Since then, and especially since the 1980s screenings of Abel Gance's Napoleon (1927) with orchestral accompaniment, the practice of "live silents" with accompaniment has become widespread.[10]

In 2010, I was involved in commissioning two leading musicians based in the South West, Adrian Utley (of the band Portishead) and Will Gregory (of Goldfrapp) to score a silent film. When they saw Dreyer's film, without accompaniment, I could see the impact it had on them, and also how their musical minds began to think about the creative challenge of scoring it. Their score, which featured six electric guitars, two harps, electronic keyboards, a choir and brass section, premiered in Bristol in May 2010 as part of the refurbishment of the then Colston Hall.[11] The intensity of Dreyer's film, with its intense performances, was complemented by the dynamic power of

10 Napoleon, as reconstructed by Kevin Brownlow, premiered at the London Film Festival in 1980 with an orchestral score commissioned from Carl Davis, while a rival score by Carmine Coppola accompanied the film in the United States. The restored film has since been shown worldwide with a variety of accompaniments.

11 What had been known as the Colston Hall, Bristol's leading concert venue, named after the above-mentioned slave-trader, was renamed Bristol Beacon in 2020.

the new score and resulted in a moving live performance. But the question that inevitably follows "how will it be received?" must be "will it find wider resonance?"

Since then the piece has toured nationally and internationally, with its unorthodox mix of musicians and instruments forming part of the experimental Ether Festival at London's Southbank Centre; and to the Brighton International Festival, where the parallels between Joan's tale of courage, faith, and conscience, resonated with the experience of the festival's guest director in 2011, Aung San Suu Kyi.[12] The first performance in Poland formed part of the Easter Holy Week celebrations in Krakow, where "the passion" takes on a more intense symbolic significance, with Joan's status as a Catholic saint adding extra significance.

Each performance, in a variety of different locations, has given the film and its new score fresh meaning. And for me, the experience of following this production has amplified Cresswell's claim about "spaces which people have made meaningful": wherever Dreyer's film is brought alive by Utley and Gregory's novel accompaniment becomes a meaningful "place," the site of a new encounter which gives the film new meaning. Like classic music, which can take on unexpected significance in unusual contexts of performance, so a classic film such as Dreyer's can create new meanings, which transform the varied spaces of presentation into significant places of encounter and reflection.

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12 The Brighton Festival's invitation to Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011 predated her acceptance of the role of State Counsellor in Myanmar in 2016, which led to wide condemnation of her failure to address her country's economic and ethnic problems, especially the plight of the Rohingya Muslims.

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About the Author

Mark Cosgrove has worked in independent film exhibition for over 30 years. He is Cinema Curator at Watershed in Bristol, one of the UK's leading independent arthouse cinemas, which was awarded the Europa Cinemas Entrepreneur of the Year in 2010. He has curated and toured a wide range of film seasons, including "New European Cinema & Independent Hollywood," and retrospectives of such directors as Claire Denis, Ulrich Seidl, and Fukasaku Kinji. He recently founded Cinema Rediscovered, a festival of restorations and archive film. He regularly works with musicians on creating and presenting live scores to silent-era film and site-specific screenings. He is a visiting fellow at the University of West of England (UWE).

4. Lockdown as a Mental Space of Communication[1]

Roger Odin

Abstract
The author chronicles the experience of being confined to his farm in the Haute Loire during France's period of COVID lockdown in early 2020. During this time, he continued his usual practice of filming on video, documenting daily life in and around the farm. He began to notice that what he filmed was different from his usual subjects, concentrating on unusual subjects around the farm, and taking close-ups of his wife's hands, even of his own face while shaving, despite usually avoiding selfies. Analyzing this material, when assembling it for a film about the experience of the pandemic, MÉFIEZ-VOUS DE LA CRYPTE (BEWARE OF THE CRYPT), he identifies a number of psychic processes at work, including a blockage of symbolization, the risk of a "crypt," and a number of symptomatic parapraxes, constituting a kind of "dream work." He concludes that the experience served as a valuable reminder of the mental space of unconscious communication.

Keywords: lockdown, symbolization, amateur film, mental space, communication

How do I know how far I'm not currently "under the influence"?
– Daniel Bougnoux (1997)

1 The French government's Decree no. 2020-293 of March 23, 2020 enforced drastic restrictions on movement and association in face of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic; restrictions which were widely known in English as "lockdown," which has been used here in place of ***confinement***. (This translation benefitted from extensive consultation with Roger Odin before his death).

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
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In March 2020, we went down to our farm in the Haute Loire for three days, intending to see Mario Luraschi's latest equestrian show with our daughter Florence, who breeds horses in the Pilat Park. Of course the show was canceled and we found ourselves trapped by France's lockdown decision ("stay at home").

"Like almost everyone else, I never expected to live through such a situation." This was what Etienne Klein (director of research at the Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission) wrote in April (2020), and it expressed exactly what I thought. As Klein went on to explain, usually we are confined in time ("Time is like an embrace in which we can only be passive: we physically inhabit the present moment and cannot leave it, except perhaps through memory or imagination"), but now, "we are *also* confined in space, which is usually the place of our freedom." He added ironically, referring to a "certain Albert Einstein," that in fact "even when we are immobile in space; that is to say, confined to a fixed place, we are all moving, all the time, at the speed of light in space-time," before concluding: "I admit, however, that I cannot guarantee those who are currently trapped between a few walls which are too close will all experience a feeling of mad exhilaration on hearing this information" (Klein 2020).

Still, being confined to our farm, surrounded by nature, was certainly not the worst option.

In fact, I thought I had passed through lockdown without any problem, rather like a vacation, and nothing very different from what we experience there every summer … yet when I started to watch the videos I shot during this period with my mobile phone, I discovered with some astonishment, and even concern, that things were not so simple.

Two Communication Spaces

Of course, like everyone else in the period of lockdown, when I left the farm to go to the next village, I had to fill out an exit permit request and follow the safety instructions. These were legal constraints; I was in the communication space of the law. In this space, communication was in the discursive mode and more precisely in the injunctive mode. We are in the conative function: the objective is to govern my behavior (no one is supposed to ignore the law). I can oppose it, twist it, cheat …, but one thing is certain, this discourse imposes itself on me from the outside: it is there and I am aware of it.

On the other hand, when I was on our farm, it was very different: the legal constraints were not felt; I could go where I wanted when I wanted (I never saw a policeman); and I wasn't risking much in terms of my health (there's no one around) …, suddenly, I could let myself believe that nothing abnormal was happening, release my defenses and refuse to think about lockdown; but it is then that the unconscious constraints become very strong. Hence my axis of relevance for this analysis; construct the space of confinement as the space of unconscious communication.

It is not easy to approach this space that can only be apprehended from the effects it produces, since it is operating masked, hidden, without my knowledge. However, it seems to me that the videos I shot during this period offer a doorway to try to approach what happened.

The Secret

Filming is part of what psychoanalysts call symbolizing apparatus (*dispositif*). To symbolize is to become aware of unconscious elements and to try to bring them back to consciousness through a work of "awareness," in particular by creating personal representations of the experiences encountered. A symbolized situation is transmitted by words, stories, shared images, gestures, rituals. My videos are completely in line with this perspective, but it must be understood that symbolization is a process that happens in stages and the videos that I shot during lockdown only began the movement. As René Roussillon notes,

> The raw material of the psyche is enigmatic, it is not immediately graspable as such, it implies a mediation.[…] It cannot be fully grasped from the outset in the time of its recording; there is the time when it happens, the time of experience, and the time when it is grasped, the time when it is re-presented. We often symbolize after the fact, in a recovery, a re-entry, a re-presentation, and within a situation that lends itself to it. (2000)

This is particularly true when it comes to symbolizing a highly traumatic situation, which is precisely the case with lockdown. When I shot them, my videos belonged to the work of representation: they certainly show confinement, but in an unknowing mode. It is only when I went back to them to make a short film – Méfiez-vous de la crypte (Beware of the Crypt) – for a contribution to the Pandemix conference (December 8-9,

2020)[2] that these videos would be structured into a communication to an audience making the symbolization complete: communication to a third party is essential to complete the symbolization process.[3]

During lockdown, there was therefore a conscious-unconscious split, and reference to lockdown was made in the unconscious space. However, one of the consequences of the conscious-unconscious split, as Serge Tisseron (1997) has explained, is to create a Secret situation, but a very different Secret from the normal secret (when we "make secrets" to hide something from others), since it is a secret that its bearer first hides from himself. Tisseron suggests writing Secret with a capital letter to clearly differentiate this type of secret from relational secrecy. The Secret that I hide from myself is that I am filming the lockdown.

Tisseron notes that the psychic Secret has a specificity: "it is that it always 'oozes.'" And he adds,

> This is quite understandable since it divides its carrier in two, between a part of him which wants to forget the traumatic experience and another which wishes to remember in order to symbolize all the components. [...] A psychic Secret therefore "secretes" offbeat facial expressions and intonations, strange emotional manifestations, enigmatic attitudes. (1997).

My videos were, indeed, very different from what I usually shoot ... This is the oozing of the Secret. It is this effect of estrangement (to use a formulation of the Russian formalists) which alerted me, it is this which marked the existence and the power of the unconscious determinations at work and which proved that the lockdown governed my behavior without my knowledge throughout this period.

Figures of Estrangement

When I'm on the farm, in the summer, I make family films[4] and sometimes documentaries on the local area, but during lockdown, I filmed

2 Conference Pandemix.mob, organized by the research group Mobility and Creation at IRCAV, Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris 3, December 8-9, 2020, *pandemix-mob.huma-num.fr*.

3 The film Méfiez-vous de la crypte (20') can be seen on YouTube: https://youtu.be/ZpsUJoeAnrs.

4 Translator's note: "film de famille," literally "family films" is the normal French term for what are known in English as "home movies" or "amateur films." Odin, who has written extensively on this genre, was perhaps its leading Francophone specialist.

Fig. 4.1: "Filming to exist," walking around the farm during the 2020 lockdown.

all the time, I filmed to exist: as is evidenced by an incredible series of videos taken walking around the farm, which often show nothing but my feet on the path, my shadow (you can clearly see that I'm filming with my mobile phone) and the trees which move to the rhythm of my steps in chaotic and hesitant tracking shots. In short, these videos show movement, and movement outdoors. Definitely my way of resisting lockdown.

But there is more: while I am normally not very interested in nature, despite being the son of a naturalist, I start reading with passion about Gerald Durrell's adventures on the island of Corfu in *The Corfu Trilogy*, a book bought at the Annecy flea market two years ago, which I had never opened … I stage this reading in a video which shows me settling myself outside, in an armchair, taking care that the flowering forsythia is in frame and opening the book at the page where Durrell talks about his dog Roger (ah yes Roger …). Durrell recounts his frantic quest for bugs of all kinds, which he observes and collects; he brings home hundreds of them under the benevolent gaze of his mother (but that annoys his brother Lawrence quite a bit …). Suddenly, I am seized by a kind of frenzy to film everything that moves … I film the vital momentum of nature: the frenetic copulation of toads, which gives birth a few days later to thousands of tadpoles; the amorous parade of blue dragonflies like tightrope walkers dancing on a tightrope; the lizard family which has grown, become almost tame … I film the arrival of spring (there are beautiful passages on the arrival of spring in Durrell): the explosion of white hawthorns and cherry trees, the bees that come to drink in the pond, the bumblebees gathering pollen from

Fig. 4.2**:** Filming the "vital momentum of nature."

the flowers … It's uninhibited filming, which is not afraid to mobilize the power of clichés to fight against the pressure of lockdown and the deadly discourse of television; clichés, it must be said, that I would never have filmed in other circumstances and which, even if they are psychologically effective, nevertheless remain the sign of a lockdown mentality …

I also note that I am filming a lot in series. As I always see the same things, what strikes me is what they become over the days, the changes of light in the neighboring forest, the leaves that appear on the sycamore maple that is in front of the farm, the arrival of M. Massardier's cows in the meadow next door, then the cistern which will supply them with water, then the quad bike that Dominique will use to check the condition of the fence … I also film thematic series; for example, during our walks around the farm, I film huge stumps that look like sculptures. To film in series is to set an axis, a framework that will ensure its coherence, and therefore limit its field of investigation; there again is a form of mental lockdown in this way of doing things.

Sometimes the theme of these series refers to the confinement of lockdown. Thus, a shower of pollen produced a veritable installation of natural land art; "each puddle is then like a butterfly's wing placed under glass," as Francis Ponge (1960) wrote nicely about this phenomenon, and it is true that the spectacle of all these puddles decorated with silver is quite fascinating, but the puddles themselves have a shape that evokes lockdown, a closed, often circular structure. Even worse! I filmed a series that I called "Circularity," which mixes shots of the circular section of tree trunks (we saw countless examples during our walks in the forest) with other objects

Fig. 4.3: The "Circularity" series mixes shots of a variety of circular objects, including circular puddles, cross sections of tree trunks, and circular shaped engraved symbols.

that are themselves circular (cart wheel, satellite dish, abandoned tires, etc.) and I ended the series with the symbol of the Templars engraved on a corner stone of our farm (a footed cross in a circle; in the thirteenth century, there was a commandery of Templars in the Dunière valley). I had fun making it sound like a horror movie … without ever thinking that this series directly symbolized lockdown …

Every evening, I would film the news on television; the idea was to constitute an archive, but when I look at these images, I realize that I was not filming so much to document the pandemic (in fact these sequences are very poor on the informational level: they are merely incoherent snippets), but only to document my experience of lockdown: I filmed the space in which we watched television, a cramped room full of books and records, cluttered with various things (pottery, jugs, a Swiss soldier's bag, a samovar, an electric piano …), and below the small latticed window, a washing stone, and on the side the opening of a large bread oven; a communal oven where bread was baked for the whole hamlet. In several shots, I panned from the screen to Andrée; I even put the phone on its stand to film the two of us eating a meal on trays in front of the television, or joining in the salute to the caregivers.[5]

I film Andrée making the bed, cooking, vacuuming, (shots with implied sexism …). I had the feeling that I was making a family film; but in fact, it was about something quite different. I note that I almost never filmed Andrée's face; I filmed closely, even with very tight framing, hands peeling, stirring, beating, cutting, as well as saucepans and casseroles simmering on the heat. In fact, what I filmed was the restriction of space, a limited, bounded space; what I filmed was lockdown.

Something I never normally do, I filmed myself shaving, putting away wood, mowing; I who hate selfies even take a series of them: they show my beard getting longer and thicker, transforming me into an old sage, an

5 In France, as in other countries, there was a regular show of appreciation for caregivers during the lockdowns of 2020.

Fig. 4.4: Filming snippets of television news to document the experience of lockdown.

old monkey, as the lockdown progresses … But the main thing is not what these images represent; there was no desire to give an image of myself to others; it was the fact of taking them: taking a photo or a film of me as an attempt to free myself from the grip of lockdown; it was an act of mastery, of self-control. These images were made for me, for identity purposes. According to Etienne Klein,

> Lockdown undermines our customary identity. "*Everyone is at home, but hardly anyone knows anymore where they live*." Our existential center of gravity has suddenly changed. Usually, our life is divided into different zones – professional, family, friendship, social – which each of us prioritizes as we are able or as we want. But in a period of lockdown, this weighting is reconfigured, for better or for worse. We find ourselves forcibly married, in a way, to ourselves, forced to invent a new way of feeling we exist, of being in the world. (2020)

I film from behind, in stolen images, the few walkers who pass on the path behind the farm; I record the sound, during a brief discussion with our young neighbors, but the image shows anything, the grass, a low wall, the tops of the trees; a video shot during the visit of the farmer who works the fields around the farm (he is used to seeing me filming) shows that the strongly felt obligation to keep a distance makes the exchange difficult, even if the dog comes to lick Andrée's feet, serving as a "go-between" connecting the

Fig. 4.5: Filming up close; a reminder of the restriction of space as well as an act of mastery, of self-control.

two spaces, everyone stays in their space, and then suddenly, the communication becomes stiff, forced. In short, I film, without wanting to, the loss of relationships with others.

Finally, many of my videos show images that are poorly framed, moved, shaken, spun …, enough to shame the amateur filmmaker that I claim to be … testifying to a strong loss of control.

In fact, my videos speak about my experience of lockdown with a mode of production of meaning close to that found in "dream work," indirectly, on the level of interpretation – "The dream is an interpretation from the unconscious, to be understood in the subjective genitive: it is the unconscious that interprets, and its interpretation is the dream" (Guérin 2013, 13-20). My videos are a kind of waking dream. This mode of production of meaning, which consists in transforming representations into other representations by displacement, can be called metonymic.

From the Blockage of Symbolization to the Risk of the Crypt

In order to operate, symbolization needs the social bond to function; we understand that lockdown can make this difficult. But there is more. The extracts that I filmed every day from television had a very low informative value, but clearly showed the role played by television in blocking symbolization.

The fact that television continuously broadcasts negative images creates a cognitive and emotional overload that mobilizes most of our attention and diminishes our ability to react. By constantly appealing to fear, which, if the communication does not offer a solution to the problem (which was the case here), produces anxiety and aggravated trauma; television engenders an inability to imagine any control over the situation, leading to a form of

passivity and a weakening of all motivation. This is what Jean-Marc Monteil has called "learned helplessness" (2020).[6]

I also note that the discourse of politicians and experts functions in permanent contradiction. In saying this I am not thinking of the prevailing contradiction between the government and the opposition, which is a normal and rather healthy democratic phenomenon, but of the manifest contradictions between experts who intervene in the debates and members of the government: ministers contradict each other, even contradict the president, but also change their position overnight, always with the same apparent assurance … on the effects of the virus, on the wearing of masks, on lockdown measures … Everything leads us to unlearn how to understand: a powerful process of symbolization blocking.

Tisseron (1992) distinguishes two causes that can lead to this blockage. The first, intrapsychic, is the reactivation of conflicts between desires and the corresponding internalized prohibitions (this is Freud's position). The second, relational, is confrontation between the desire to know and understand and the various forms of opposition to this desire. This is exactly what is happening here. The result is the creation of a *psychic inclusion*:

> When a complete introjection is not possible, the individual reacts by enclosing within a part of his personality all the emotions, thoughts and representations that were mobilized in him during the trying situation he experienced. (Abraham and Torok [1968] 1987)

Tisseron specifies that a subject can identify more or less permanently with one or other of the characters locked up in this inclusion, and in particular with himself as he perceived himself at the time of the trauma. The resulting manifestations may appear to those who experience them strange, quirky; so they do not recognize themselves. This often takes the form of repetitive acts.

I can't help but think of this analysis while watching a series of videos and photos (more than four hundred!) that I devoted to a bathtub that is in the middle of a meadow a few steps from our farm. A cast iron bathtub, enameled in white on the inside … What could have pushed me to film this bathtub every day – a truly quirky and repetitive act? Of course, I have a ready answer. The idea was to make a small experimental film showing the changes in nature, the state of the sky, meadows and forest, and also animal and human activities (silage, hunting, installation of beehives),

6 Monteil is an honorary professor and chair of behavioral and applied sciences at the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (CNAM).

Fig. 4.6: The "*baignire*"; the bathtub without "o," without *eau* (water).

with the bathtub as a fixed and permanent point. Something like "the four seasons of the bathtub."

But once lockdown was over, it struck me that it was only a pretext and that I would never have been interested in this bathtub, which has stood in the meadow for over fifty years (the farmer told me the circumstances of its installation by his father, which practically coincided with our arrival at the farm), if it did not have the peculiarity of not having water. The pipe was cut, perhaps because its source has dried up (as a result of global warming?). The fact that this bathtub is without water fascinates me: I called it the "*baignire*."[7] But one thing is certain: I have never seen a cow drink there. Even after rain, when it has filled a little with water, the farmer does not allow his cows to drink there, for fear that they will poison themselves, as the water quickly becomes polluted. After a while, it takes on a beautiful blood-red hue … Thus, even with water, this bathtub remains a useless object, an object that does not fulfill its function. The explanation then dawned on me: no question, if I filmed this bathtub so much, it was because this bathtub was me, me during lockdown, me defunctionalized, incapable of writing. When the lockdown was announced, I told myself that since I had nothing else to do, I was going to have time to progress the two books that have been running around in my head for too long. But I soon had to face the facts: it was impossible to work; my head was elsewhere, I could not concentrate. The emptiness of the bathtub refers to my mental emptiness. I really failed to understand.

At the same time, the use of the formulation "the bathtub without "o" (*une baignoire sans "o"*) can be read as a sign that I still rejected lockdown: if there is a figure of lockdown (which could have been part of the Circularity series), it is the O! This ambivalence shows the tension that is at work in the

7 Translator's note: this pun needs some explanation. Bathtub in French is *baignoire* not *baignire*; and normally the function of a bathtub is to contain water. Water is *eau,* pronounced "o"; so a *baignoire* without water – without *eau* – without "o" can be called a *baignire*.

space of unconscious communication and that in this inner conflict that drives me, all hope is not lost …

The risk of the crypt came later. The crypt is a severe form of inclusion, an inclusion that is difficult to get rid of. The notion of crypt was proposed in 1968 by Nicolas Abraham and Marie Torok, in *L'écorce et le noyau* (The Shell and the Kernel). Abraham and Torok explained that certain traumatic experiences block the subject's integration of his experiences: they are incorporated and active, but they act on the subject without his knowledge, from a psychic vacuum comparable to a separate chamber or a crypt.

I started to worry when it was pointed out to me that in the commentary of the little film that I devoted to lockdown several months after it ended, I spoke of David Bougnoux instead of Daniel (Daniel is a colleague whom I have known for more than 40 years …): in David, there is emptiness[8]… Note that this slip occurs in a sequence devoted precisely to the "bathtub," a sequence filmed at night which explores the interior of the bathtub with a flashlight (as if the bathtub were a crypt) … Thus, while I thought that all of this was far behind me, the lockdown and its corollary, the fear of emptiness, continued to produce its effects and to work my unconscious … If it hadn't been for the Pandemix colloquium to push me to symbolize, the crypt might have been installed …

One thing is certain, lockdown has shaped my mental space and it is likely that I am not the only one to have suffered its effects: we are afraid, we do not understand, we cannot react or symbolize; the process of infantilization is at work, which allows the "manufacture of consent" (Lippman 1922), and which is not without political consequences. Too bad for democracy, we are ready to rely on *Big Mother* (Schneider 2002; Clit 2001). Daniel Bougnoux notes that the prohibition of understanding can prove to be the most solid cement of the social bond, and that we first bond on this symbolic impossibility, that is to say, on the sharing of the crypt (he gives the example of sects), and he adds: "The history of the totalitarianisms that have ravaged this century, shows in any case, at the basis of their project of total influence, a piloting of the group's relationship by the crypt."

I felt the wind from the crypt on me … and it sent shivers down my spine.

Toward a Typology of the Spaces of Mental Communication

In this chapter, I have tried to report on the space of lockdown as I experienced it from March 17 to May 11, 2020. To do this, I was led to construct a

8 Translator's note: David – Da*vid*; "*vide*" = emptiness.

type of space different from those I usually construct; an interior space, a mental space: the space of unconscious communication.

In a way, to speak of spaces of mental communication in the semio-pragmatic perspective does not make sense, since spaces of communication as I conceive them are only constructions of the theoretician, heuristic tools which aim at allowing us to see better, unless we already consider that the spaces of communication, as constructions of the theoretician, are always mental spaces, that is to say, spaces which exist only in the mind of the analyst who constructs them. But it is obviously not in this sense that I am using the notion of mental space here. The metaphor that I propose in *Les espaces de communication* (Odin 2011) to help people understand the status that I give to these spaces is that of an optical instrument, a telescope, or rather a microscope. In fact, just as we felt the need to build different types of microscopes according to the uses we wanted to make of them (optical, electronic, scanning, reflection microscope, etc.), we can build different types of spaces of communication, depending on the type of questions asked. However, since the publication of *Spaces of Communication*, I became aware that the analysis of certain communication situations required them to be assigned to *a place*, a place in the world, or a place in the heads of the actors in communication: it is these that I suggest calling "mental spaces."

In *Spaces of Communication*, I evoked this question in a brief sentence, noting that these "systems of constraints" that are communication spaces "can readily be transported and internalized": hence "when I ask my friend Pierre, whom I have just bumped into on a street corner, for news of his family, I am caught up in the constraints both of the family as an institution and of politeness. And as for romantic relationships …" (Odin 2022, 53). It is now clear to me that we cannot analyze communication without addressing this question, because to adapt a formula from René Lourau (1978, 48) that I like to quote, we can say that our self allows itself to be described as a "bric-a-brac" of mental communication spaces.

With lockdown, I was reminded of the existence of the space of unconscious communication. But the status of mental spaces is also extremely diverse.

Watching a film on my mobile phone, the presence of the mental space of cinema (seeing a film in the theater in the dark continuously in the company of an audience) risks spoiling my pleasure and jeopardizing communication. I will speak of "interiorized communication spaces" to designate those spaces that we have frequented in reality and have then incorporated. With the cinema, the internalized space is an apparatus (*dispositif*), but it can also be a text (in the case of adaptation or translation), or a form: with parody or

imitation, we take pleasure in seeing the internalized form. If the interiorized spaces presuppose a prior real space, it also happens that a mental space returns to the real. In *La vie esthétique*, Laurent Jenny emphasized that "no one escapes the modeling of existence by schemes derived from art" (2013, 14-15). Literature, poetry, music, painting function as mental spaces "which affect our vision, our perception and our intelligibility of the world."

> As so often, my eye is drawn to the picturesque display of one of these New York grocery stores, open day and night and run by Pakistanis who offer a heterogeneous panorama of goods ranging from ballpoint pens to bouquets of flowers [...]. Mechanically I take out my mobile phone [...] and always wanting to see more, here I am seized by the mania of digital zoom magnification and concentrate on transparency effects between ice cubes and pineapple pieces. The results, immediately viewed, fill me with astonishment. The subject, which has become totally unrecognizable, has given way to an indisputable cubist composition, from this wonderful period of the years 1908-1912 when Braque and Picasso competed on the verge of abstraction." (2013, 89-91)

Other spaces can be described as "inculcated": the space of politeness, that of discipline are inculcated spaces; they result from education (more or less explicitly). Pierre Bourdieu has clearly shown how school is one of the privileged places of this inculcation: thus, there one learns the division of knowledge into spaces of communication (literature, science, the various disciplines), a division which will then function as a unquestioned doxa (Bourdieu 2000). Amateur film clubs instill in their members a certain conception of communication through cinema, a conception that they will then implement when making their own films: the essential thing is that the film be "well made" (stable camerawork, fluid editing, a title and "the end"), the subject itself counts for little.

Still other spaces can be described as "dreamed": this was the case with cinema before its creation (I will be careful not to enter into the controversy over who created it). But we undoubtedly find traces of this dream in various texts and also in the manifestations of what is called pre-cinema (from shadow theater to praxinoscope), long before it took shape. Here we are in the logic of invention.

We could also say that communicating is always (or should always be) constructing a mental space: the space of the one to whom we are speaking. Insofar as we never have direct access to this, we must try to imagine it and adapt to it if we want the communication to succeed (we can speak of a targeted space).

I could multiply examples of mental spaces … and I am hopeful of one day being able to produce a kind of typology of these spaces.[9]

Translated by Ian Christie

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9 For an first attempt, see Odin 2016, 331-343.

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About the Author

Roger Odin (1939-2023) was Emeritus Professor and Head of the Institute of Film and Audiovisual Research (IRCAV) at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris 3 from 1983 to 2004. A communication theorist and specialist in amateur film, he wrote, edited, and co-edited many books, including *Cinéma et production de sens* (1990); *La film de famille* (1995); *L'âge d'or du cinéma documentaire: Europe années cinquante* (1997); "Le cinéma en amateur" (1999); *De la fiction* (2000); *Les espaces de communication* (2011, which appeared in English translation in 2022); *Téléphone mobile et création* (2014); *Ville et cinéma* (2014). He contributed to the earlier *Key Debates* volumes *Audiences* (2012), *Screens* (2016), and *Stories* (2018).

PART II

Spaces on Screen

5. The Go-Between's Picturesque

Figure (and Disfigurement) in the Landscape

Mark Broughton

Abstract
The prominence of the country estate as a setting in British cinema suggests that it would be fruitful to consider the aesthetic history of the landscape garden on screen, yet this is still an under-researched area. This chapter is concerned with location and setting in The Go-Between, tracing the genesis of its screen landscapes, from L.P. Hartley's novel and contemporaneous debates about stately homes, through Joseph Losey's development of a new approach to filming the country estate, to the production of the film itself and the use of Melton Constable Hall, Norfolk as a location. It explores how the film can be situated in relation to modes of practice in landscape culture and approaches to landscape historiography, and argues that The Go-Between both echoed emergent forms of landscape history and paved the way for other country-estate films and television programs.

Keywords: landscape, garden, country-estate, location, heritage

The prominence of the country estate as a setting in British cinema suggests that it would be fruitful to consider the aesthetic history of the landscape garden on screen. Yet, while a number of publications on landscapes in cinema have emerged, landscape gardens have received little attention, perhaps because of the refusal of "heritage" criticism to address the roles played by country-estate imagery and locations' historical associations in films' narratives.[1] This essay situates Joseph Losey's The Go-Between

1 Heritage critics have often argued that shots of country houses and gardens interrupt and distract from narrative, but this actually applies to very few – if any – films. For an archetypal

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
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(UK, 1971) at a turning point in the history of the country estate on screen and demonstrates how Losey and his collaborators deployed a location rhetorically to comment on the history of landed power. The film represented a new kind of country-estate cinema, having been shot entirely on location in Norfolk, at sites unusually close to one another.[2] No previous country-estate film was grounded to such an extent in local geography. Most of the interiors and exteriors of the fictional country estate Brandham Hall were shot at Melton Constable Hall. Apart from those set/shot in Norwich, the other sequences were shot within a ten-mile radius of Melton Constable Hall (Joseph Losey Special Collection 1971).[3] The Go-Between's detailed exploration of a wide variety of landscapes around one main estate location was unprecedented, and this exploration was purposeful, enabling the film to articulate different ways of understanding the estate's socio-cultural structure.

More than any country-estate film before it, The Go-Between established a congruence between its narrative and a location. The film's landscape fiction is best understood as an adaptation both of the 1953 source novel by L.P. Hartley and of Melton Constable Hall itself. Adaptation theory has moved away from the notion of a single "original" source and toward a consideration of ways in which, for example, a film or television program may draw on multiple texts (Cardwell 2002, 25-28). It is thus worth considering the deployment of locations as a key part of the adaptation process, and locations as sources in their own right, particularly when a film engages with their aesthetics and historical associations.

This essay traces the genesis of The Go-Between's screen landscapes, from Hartley's novel and contemporaneous debates about stately homes, through Losey's development of a new approach to filming the country estate, to the production of the film itself. It then analyzes a key sequence in which the protagonist Leo (Dominic Guard) makes a fateful journey from the country house, Brandham Hall, to Black Farm, where he meets the farmer Ted Burgess (Alan Bates), a sequence in which the estate's spatial

heritage approach, see Higson 2006, 91-109. For a persuasive attack on this kind of approach, see Hall 2001, 191-199. The few essays that discuss gardens in British film include Helphand 2008, 204-223, and Broughton 2010, 241-251.

2 The only exceptions were some inserts of the deadly nightshade, filmed at Elstree Studios, rather than at Melton Constable Hall, because re-takes of the plant were needed after the shoot had ended (Hartop 2011, 55).

3 As stated in a program for the Royal Norfolk Première of The Go-Between; this program is item JWL/1/18/7 in the BFI's Joseph Losey Special Collection. Hereafter, codes with the prefix JWL/1 indicate that sources are from this collection.

and ideological span is mapped. I conclude with a consideration of how The Go-Between both echoed emerging forms of landscape historiography and paved the way for other country-estate films and television programs. I am therefore concerned not only with the origins and aesthetics of the on-screen estate, but also with how the novel and the film can each be situated in terms of modes of practice in landscape culture and approaches to landscape historiography.

There has been little discussion of The Go-Between's landscape gardens or its position in the history of country-estate cinema.[4] Indeed, the film's representation of rural landscape has been dismissed as antithetical to its politics. For instance, an anonymous reviewer in *Sight and Sound* argued that "despite the picture-postcard imagery, the film-maker's real preoccupations – snobbery, sex, betrayal and violence – are always apparent" (Macnab 2000, 61). D.I. Grossvogel was more severe, contending that "the picture's visual beauty distracts [...] from its sociological intent" (1974, 56). In contrast, I argue that the film's landscape shots are integral to its social commentary.

The Go-Between's tale of a boy who is mentally harmed by his experience of secretly carrying notes between Marian (Julie Christie) at the hall and her lower-class lover Burgess is inextricable from the landscape in which this experience "takes place," since the social structure that defines the relationship as illicit is shaped by landownership and embedded in the owned land. Back and forth, Leo goes between the rarefied aesthetics of the country house and the functional rural world of Black Farm. But the film does more than simply contrast the "second nature" of agriculture with the "third nature" of landscape gardens; his journey reveals their interrelationship through the picturesque space that links them.[5]

Likewise, the fractured remembrance of the older Leo (Michael Redgrave), which is reflected in the disjointed intercutting of 1900 scenes with his return to the area around Brandham in the 1950s, is inseparable from the setting. This remembrance appears to spring from the sight of the landscape through a car window in the film's first shot, which precedes the first line of the older Leo's voiceover: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." This line derives from the first sentence of the source

4 Charles Shiro Tashiro's article (1993, 17-34) on the film's production design considers the way in which Losey utilizes windows and doors to symbolize thresholds between binary oppositions, but does not comment in any detail on the gardens.

5 On the origin of the terms "second nature" (functional landscapes shaped by human intervention) and "third nature" (gardens), see Hunt 2003, 3-4.

novel, with which Hartley (1997, 5) not only pointed toward memory's spatial organization (that is, the past as a country), but also denied the continuity of national history, by suggesting that the England of the past is a foreign land. Indeed, the novel goes on to relate how the older Leo's exploration of his mind's hinterlands reveals a chasm between the optimism of the Victorian era and disillusionment of mid-twentieth-century England (Brooks-Davies 1997, xi-xxix). At the same time, the process of regaining lost memories is reflected in the experience of viewing the country estate: it is only at the end of the novel that "the south-west prospect of the Hall, long hidden from my memory, sprang into view" (Hartley 1997, 261). Is the "view" ocular or mental? The older Leo has returned to Brandham, but it is not clear whether this sentence describes a literal sight of the forgotten prospect or an unearthed recollection: if the former, his memory has been refreshed by visiting the estate; if the latter, he has regained access to part of the estate through the release of a suppressed memory. Either way, it is evident that his explorations of his memory and of the geography of the estate are inextricable.

Hartley's Geographical Psyche: The Country Estate in Print, 1927-1953

How can we contextualize Hartley's conflation of the psyche, the country estate, and national history? His novel resembles Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), which also contrasts the past and present of a country estate from the point of view of a middle-class outsider who recalls his visits to the house and, at the same time, reflects on social changes in England. Both novels end with a narrator struggling to come to terms with a downfall caused by his emotional investment in the house and its family, and with parts of the house under occupation (by the army in *Brideshead Revisited* and a girl's school in *The Go-Between*). The influence of Marcel Proust is evident in Waugh's and Hartley's treatment of remembrance as a spatial experience, but their explorations of country-estate aesthetics and history were, more specifically, part of a growing trend in England, which included Christopher Hussey's book *The Picturesque: Studies in Point of View* (1927), and Nikolaus Pevsner's 1940s articles on the picturesque (1944a, 1944b).

As Peter Mandler has shown, while Hussey's aesthetic theory argued in favor of the aristocracy's continued residence in country estates, Pevsner's claim was that he "could separate the houses from the vanished way of life they had once embodied" (1997, 332). The emerging professional historiography of the country house and its gardens was initially characterized by these

disparate political perspectives. The aesthetics of the country estate thus became a contested ideological ground, both in architectural historiography and in national politics; during 1949 and 1950, a Labor Government committee considered the preservation of country houses, and discussed whether continued residence was desirable from the point of view of architectural maintenance (Mandler 1997, 341-342).

Hartley's reflection on the country estate and the conduct of its past inhabitants can, therefore, be seen as part of a tendency that became prominent in the 1940s, the era in which the preservation and democratization of the stately home began to be seen as a concern of the post-war Welfare State. But his view of the estate also derived from personal experience. At least some elements of his novel were drawn from a visit he made as a teenager to Bradenham Hall, in Norfolk. How much of the book is autobiographical is open to conjecture (Wright 1996, 30-33; Lees-Milne 2007, 320), but Hartley rooted the story in a recognizable geography, and mobilized a toponymy of Norfolk to imbue the novel with local color. The name Trimingham came from a Norfolk village, while the Beeston Castle to which Mrs. Maudsley proposes a visit on Leo's birthday, is most likely a reference to a village called Beeston, just north of Bradenham Hall (Brooks-Davies 1997, 274, 291).

The name of the novel's house, "Brandham Hall," bears a close orthographical resemblance to "Bradenham Hall." However, it also fulfils a proleptic role, anticipating the "branding" of various characters by the events that unfold, including Leo's knee injury and his psychological trauma. This combination of an actual place name with symbolism is characteristic of the book's hybridization of landscape writing. On the one hand, the novel contains large amounts of description of the estate's grounds and farmland. For instance, Leo's first walk alone, which ends in his accident, sliding down the haystack at Ted's farm, is charted with detailed, positivist rural observation. Leo as narrator remarks on the distinctive features of the area, such as the corn stooks, whose shape is different from that of the stooks in Wiltshire, where he grew up. He also describes the physical sensations of walking through the landscape, such as the way he feels the sharp edges of the corn stubble against his ankles (Hartley 1997, 71).

On the other hand, Leo has a tendency to look superstitiously beyond appearances and contingency to try to find meaning and determinism. This "magical thinking" leads him to see the Zodiac not only as a system that shapes and determines character, emotion, and events, but as a schema that specifically corresponds to the world of Brandham Hall, so that Marian, for example, *is* the Virgin/Virgo in his eyes. His desire to find ordered meaning in events also affects his descriptions of the landscape, so that he often

transforms metonyms into metaphors: at one point, he has a "fancy" that Ted is a sheaf of corn "the reaper had forgotten and that it would come back for him" (Hartley 1997, 93). Ted's contiguity to the harvested corn provides a metonym (in which the "reaper" is a harvesting machine), which Leo translates into a metaphor that foreshadows Ted's suicide (in which the "reaper" is death); contingency and contiguity become "fate" in his eyes.

The younger Leo's inclination to find design and intention in events at Brandham can be seen as a desperate attempt to make sense of a world in which he often feels bewildered and powerless as a double outsider: a member of the middle class and a child. With his destruction of the deadly nightshade, Leo makes what he sees as a symbolic and magical intervention in the landscape, an attempt to remove illicit desire. That the older Leo as narrator reports every such "fancy" his younger self had, suggests that this inclination persists even as he tries to rationalize events that happened half a century ago. Consequently, the older Leo never manages fully to distinguish between his psychic landscape and the actual landscape of Brandham; his tendency toward metaphor and prolepsis to evoke fate is pathological, as it prevents the older Leo (and Hartley) from fully analyzing the true determinant of tragedy at Brandham: the power of landownership and its attendant hierarchies of class, culture, and propriety.

The novel's emotive account of his attempt to come to terms with the history of the country estate nevertheless resonated with readers at a time when art historians and the Welfare State were also attempting to come to terms with that history and its legacy in the form of surviving houses and gardens. Like Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Hartley's novel became a bestseller and almost immediately attracted the interest of the film industry, which had also begun to revisit the country estate as a setting (Brooks-Davies 1997, xii).

Losey and the Country Estate on Screen after 1945

Country-estate films began to emerge in British cinema in the 1940s, notably with The Wicked Lady (1945), Jassy (1947), and Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949). All of these were set in the past and foregrounded lavish period set and costume design, but their tales of outsiders struggling for power over, or independence within country estates echoed contemporary concerns about the relationship between aristocrats and the lower classes, and about the potential role of country estates in post-war England: were they monuments to greed, violent oppression and snobbery, or works of art worth preservation

and democratization? Many of the country-estate films have tried to have it both ways – by presenting period aesthetics to audiences through plots about avarice and murder.

As was conventional at the time, the 1940s country-estate films were shot mainly in studios and included only a few exterior sequences shot on location. These films thus only engaged to a limited extent with actual country estates; they were more concerned with the country estate's place in the social imaginary than with specific locations. Plans were made to adapt *The Go-Between* for cinema soon after the novel's publication, when Alexander Korda bought the rights (Caute 1994, 254). Had these plans borne fruit, it is likely that the film would have consisted of a combination of studio sets and some exterior location shots. With such an approach, it would have been difficult to achieve anything that resembled the grounding of Hartley's novel in local rural observation or its juxtaposition of Leo's objective description of the estate with his magical thinking. Anthony Asquith, who most likely became involved in the film after 1956, when Robert Velaise acquired the rights, had planned to use Wilbury Park, near Salisbury in Wiltshire as a location for Brandham Hall (Joseph Losey Special Collection 1969b). This suggests that situating the events within the distinctive geography and architecture of Norfolk was not a high priority for Asquith. Nor is there evidence to suggest that he intended to map Brandham precisely onto Wilbury Park, by using the location's interiors as well as its grounds and facade.

While location shooting became much more widespread in Britain in the late 1950s and 1960s in the wake of the Free Cinema movement and "kitchen sink" films, country-estate films continued to rely on studio-location combinations. The Grass Is Greener (1960) and The Innocents (1961) both joined exterior location shooting with interior sets constructed at Shepperton Studios. The exception is Joseph Losey's first country-estate film, The Gypsy and the Gentleman (1958). Bringing the fresh perspective of a left-wing, émigré director to the country house, Losey shot not only exteriors, but also some of the interiors at Shardloes, retaining where possible the location's dialogue between Robert Adam's interior decoration and Humphrey Repton's landscape gardens. Where the interiors were studio sets, production designer Richard Macdonald drew heavily on Adam's style to ensure architectural unity. The film is now largely ignored, but despite weaknesses in plot and performances, it is noteworthy for the rhetoric of place Losey constructed through innovative location work. The Gypsy and the Gentleman was the first country-estate film to be grounded in the kind of attention to architectural detail popularized by Nikolaus Pevsner.

By shooting interiors and exteriors at one site and basing set designs on the *oeuvre* of the location's original architect, Losey and Macdonald replaced the eclectic pastiches that characterized studio set design in the 1940s Gainsborough melodramas with a new emphasis on the materiality and integrity of historical architecture *in situ*. This historical materialist approach culminates in a particularly striking shot linking the gardens with the house's interior. This shot is focalized by the gypsy Belle (Melina Mercouri), who gazes out of the house's windows and surveys the landscape garden she covets. At first, only the landscape is visible, but then the camera pulls back to show that we have been looking through a window with Belle. She is holding a riding crop, with which she strikes the windowpane (and hence the landscape) as if to discipline it, before moving away. David Caute argues that Losey made Belle "an undeviating bitch" (1994, 128). At this moment, though, we are drawn into empathizing with her desire to own the estate by the way the shot begins with an aesthetically pleasing view and then reveals that we have been sharing her gaze. The shot implies (and exploits) the attraction of the English garden, an aesthetic system that displays but often mystifies the power of landownership. Seen in isolation, this moment suggests that despite (or because of) her immorality, she is the only character who appreciates the estate as an aesthetic entity. We subsequently learn that she has struck the window in anger because she has spotted what she sees as a blot on the landscape: horses belonging to gypsies, who have camped on "her" land. She appreciates the landscape's aesthetics, but the film thus connects aesthetic appreciation with her proprietorial gaze and disciplinary urge, and thereby implicates the audience's attraction to the landscape in such ideological tendencies.

Scripting The Go-Between: Time out of Place

Joseph Losey had wanted to make The Go-Between as his second country-estate film as early as 1963, but legal problems delayed production by seven years (Caute 1994, 254). In the intervening period, Losey developed his working partnership with Harold Pinter on The Servant (1963) and Accident (1967), both of which deconstructed British hierarchies of wealth, class, and culture. With Accident, Pinter, Losey, and editor Reginald Beck began to experiment with flashbacks, intercut scenes, and the separation of dialogue and image. These temporal experiments were extended in The Go-Between, also edited by Beck, and Pinter's 1972 script for an unrealized film of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Newland and Losey 2008, 33-51).

In adapting Hartley's novel, Pinter omitted all but the first line of the prologue and interspersed parts of the epilogue throughout the plot, so that amid 1900 sequences there are flash-forwards to the 1950s.[6] We can tell one era from the other not by sequencing, in this case, but by how the same area looks different in each era: cars replace horses, clothes are different, and the weather is bad in the 1950s, whereas 1900 is sunlit until Leo's fateful birthday. By intercutting the two eras and using production design and the pathetic fallacy rather than chronological order to orientate the viewer, the filmmakers achieved a form suitable for what was just a theme in Hartley's novel: the spatialization of memory.

As he revised his script, Pinter removed Hartley's description of the social position of the Maudsleys and their financial relationship with Trimingham (Edward Fox) as tenants: the film is not interested in how the Maudsleys have come to live in the house or whether the house is Trimingham's ancestral seat. Pinter also removed all but two references to the name of the Hall. "Brandham Hall" is never spoken in the dialogue and only appears in the letterhead above the note from Marian to Ted, which Leo reads and cries over, and on the envelope of the letter from his mother telling Leo that he cannot come home earlier, when he is desperate to escape the world of the house. Marian's affair with Ted and his mother's coldness are thus both implicated in the "branding" that Leo is subjected to. However, by limiting references to the house's fictional name to these two shots, and removing exposition about ownership and tenantry from the dialogue, Pinter left Melton Constable Hall relatively unadorned. The on-screen landscape, then, is more than the setting for events remembered by Leo; it is a location, whose own aesthetics, materiality, and place in history we are encouraged to dwell on. As well as the double articulation of time through Leo's experiences in 1900 and the 1950s, the film draws on the historical associations of the location, so that the imbrication of the story's two different eras reflects and adds more temporal layers to the location's traces of different epochs.

Adaptation by Landscape

From the moment he began to devote himself to preparatory work on The Go-Between in early 1969, Losey was resolved to film entirely on

6 The film's conception of time is a complex issue, which has been dissected at length. See, in particular Jones 1973, 154-160; Palmer and Riley 1978, 219-227, and 1993, 90-116; Gardner 2004, 134-179.

location (Joseph Losey Special Collection 1969a). The decision to place so much visual emphasis on a small area in Norfolk, however, was taken as pre-production progressed. Losey and production designer Carmen Dillon initially considered at least twenty estates as possible locations, some of them outside Norfolk, including Asquith's intended chosen site, Wilbury Park (Joseph Losey Special Collection n.d.). They solicited advice from the Norfolk's major landowners and, by the autumn, Losey had decided to shoot in north-east Norfolk (Joseph Losey Special Collection 1969c).

One of the reasons for choosing this region was to document the area described in Hartley's novel. Indeed, Losey considered filming at Bradenham Hall, the house Hartley had stayed at, but decided against using it: he recalls that "the house and gardens had obviously been re-done and it was not the place my imagination searched" (Losey 1977, 5). Instead, they selected Melton Constable Hall, about fifteen miles north of Bradenham. The house was dilapidated: the interior had to be redecorated. Outside, Dillon made plaster reproductions of the garden's statues, which were falling apart, and the crew sprayed the ailing lawns with green paint (de Rham 1991, 266; Hartop 2011, 29). Because the house was not occupied and was in a state of neglect, Dillon and Losey could add the decor they felt was appropriate. They chose to preserve the estate's geography on screen as far as possible, though, rather than by editing shots of several gardens together to give the impression of a whole.[7]

There were two exceptions: editing was used to link the estate's furthest woods with Ted's Black Farm, shot nearby at an old dairy farm on Hanworth Hall's grounds, where a corn field was also specially planted so that a period sail cutter could be filmed harvesting it (Anonymous 1971; Hartop 2011, 27-28, 39). The scene in which Mrs. Maudsley (Margaret Leighton) interrogates Leo was shot at Blickling Hall's flower garden, nine miles east of Melton Constable Hall, because the latter's flower garden was no longer extant (Caute 1994, 256).[8] Apart from these additions, Melton Constable Hall's integrity as a location was preserved. Indeed, one of the attractions for shooting there was that its interiors were suitable, so that Dillon and Losey would not have to compromise by combining exteriors and interiors from different locations. Above all, they could film through the house's

7 By the 1970s, creative geography was, in country-estate films, something directors either avoided whenever possible or drew attention to. Two later films, The Ruling Class (Peter Medak, 1972) and Barry Lyndon (Stanley Kubrick, 1975) used combinations of locations reflexively, making a virtue of atomism. See Broughton 2010, 241-251.

8 The BFI's Joseph Losey Special Collection contains Losey's copy of Blickling Hall's tourist guide: Lees-Milne 1970, JWL/1/18/6.

Fig. 5.1: Shooting at Melton Constable Hall meant its integrity as a location could be preserved. Leo and Marcus looking out at a croquet game in The Go-Between.

windows and thus link the garden outside with the decor inside, as well as the characters' behavior indoors and outdoors. For instance, when Leo and Marcus (Richard Gibson) stand at a window, through which we see figures formally arranged in a croquet game, the camera pans left, lingering on the formally arranged silverware. Etiquette and refined deportment make the adults in this world become like the objects they own. Such shots occur throughout the film.[9] Furthermore, by linking indoors and outdoors, the window shots establish the interiors as the center of the estate, which is shown to stretch across a series of different landscapes toward Ted's farm. For Losey, who claimed his preoccupation with location filming was informed by the documentary tradition, Melton Constable Hall was almost a found object, in a found county:[10] "Norfolk helped me a lot because Norfolk hasn't changed. The house was there, there was very little to adapt" (quoted in Ciment 1985, 154). Losey's words point to The Go-Between's geographical discourse, but the film itself shows that Norfolk *has* changed.

9 Much has been written about the ubiquitous windows in The Go-Between: their role in the film's treatment of subjectivity and voyeurism, as well as their metaphoric values as "thresholds" and/or "barriers"; see Elsaesser 1972, 18; Palmer and Riley 1978, 220-221; Tashiro 1993, 19, 33.

10 See Caute 1994, 256, 323; Losey 1977, 7. The village scenes were shot at locations (Thornage and Heydon) only a few miles from Melton Constable (Hartop 2011, 7, 45). Heydon was also something of a "found" location: the village was privately owned, preserved as if part of an estate. For Marian's dower house, seen in many of the 1950s sequences, as well as in the 1900 sequence during which Leo goes to church and is given his first message to carry by Trimingham, Losey used the village's actual Dower House.

History in the landscape: The Picturesque

Landscapes in cinema are usually *audio*visual and The Go-Between's sound designer Peter Hanford was concerned to utilize a range of techniques to document the difference in the Norfolk countryside between 1900 and the present: in particular the ambient silence of an era before car-ownership was widespread. He offset silences with occasional sounds of animals and train engines. He was also aware that the town of Melton Constable's *raison d'être* had been the railway in 1900 and that the local railway was not in use by the late 1950s, so made train whistles and engines evident in the 1900 sequences, adding historical context to the older Leo's journey to Marian's house by car from Norwich in the 1950s (Joseph Losey Special Collection 1970). The sound design thus contributes to Losey's historical-materialist impulse. However, that impulse is balanced by an emphasis on narrative symbolism in the landscape, conveying how Leo feels. Thus, the black car he travels in is also a metaphorical hearse, suggesting he is mourning what he lost when he became "all dried up inside," as Marian puts it. Drawing on Hartley's mixture of positivism and superstitious metaphor, the film sustains a dual rhetoric, weighing emotive symbolism against materialism.

This dual rhetoric extends to Losey's portrayal of the fate of the country house in the post-war era. At the very end of the film, when Leo's car drives away from the hall, the road curves around the house's terrace garden. The road, not visible in the 1900 scenes, is clearly a public road, separated from the estate by a fence. If the road demarcates the estate's border, a large part of the landscape has been sold off since 1900. The loss is both historically plausible and figural.[11] The grounds look far less overbearing now they have been diminished. The view of the estate from the car window contrasts diametrically with the high-angle 1900 shots of the landscape which imply both Leo's awe and the threat the estate/family pose to him. As he drives away, the final message apparently undelivered, Leo's 1950s car window now frames and contains the estate: only at the very last moment does the older Leo appear to achieve a different perspective on and, therefore, a different power relation with the estate.

The aforementioned contrasts between the 1900 and the 1950s Norfolk reinforce the film's double articulation of time. However, evidence of a changing landscape is also to be found within single 1900 sequences. The

11 As Mandler (1997, 356-368) points out, most of the houses that were not sold off or demolished in the 1950s were maintained only by auctioning off significant parts of the estate's art collections and land.

estate, as found by Dillon and Losey, combined landscape designs from different periods. Next to the house was a mid-nineteenth-century terrace garden (Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 615). Surrounding this, there was a park, whose layout was largely as Capability Brown had landscaped it between 1764 and 1769 (Stroud 1975, 112; Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 612). Typical of Brown's work, the park contained clumps of trees and, in contrast with the formal terrace garden, was picturesque in its contrived naturalness.[12] It also included a deer park, dating back to the enclosure of the estate in 1290, but reshaped by Brown (Turner 1999, 184). Beyond the park were neglected areas, woodier and more picturesque, which Beck edited together with the area around the farm at Hanworth.

Parts of the estate appear several times in the film, but there is one central landscape sequence, during which Leo discovers Black Farm and injures his knee. The sequence charts Leo's journey from the house to the farm, so all of the above areas of the estate are shown. The sequence begins with Leo's returning to his room to incant a spell and ends with his being helped by Ted into the farmhouse. It consists of a montage, which is disjunctive in part, as the temporal and spatial relationships between five consecutive shots are unclear: Leo's incantation; his (silent) reading of the thermometer; Marian lying in the grass; Leo walking (shot in a high-angle zoom-out); and the deer park. We have no indication whether the shots of Marian and the deer park are from Leo's optical point of view or not.[13] However, connections between the shots are implied; it seems as if the reading of the thermometer continues the incantation, which conjures up Marian. We could infer that Leo makes the traditional equation of female body with landscape and imagines his exploration of the grounds as an exploration of Marian's body.[14] On the other hand, Marian's relaxed pose suggests confident possession of the grounds, cuing a zoom-out that makes Leo become miniscule. The historical process of enclosure, alluded to in the next shot, of the deer park, is re-enacted by the zoom-out, as Leo is effectively enclosed by the "improved" landscape. Leo's desire for control through casting a spell – his magical thinking – is at odds with the long history of power relations embedded in the landscape.

12 Brown's work was often criticized by theorists of the picturesque, but on the extent to which Brown's work was picturesque, see Hunt 2003, 38-40.

13 In general, the sequence plays with point of view, sometimes following Leo, sometimes anticipating him, sometimes perhaps focalized by him. On the film's ambiguous articulation of point of view, see Tashiro 1993, 19-20.

14 As Karen Lang points out, there is a long history, evidenced in male writing associated with the emergence of the British picturesque garden, of the passive woman seen as corresponding to the landscape (Lang 2000, 107).

These five shots and the sequence as a whole are lent cohesiveness by Michel Legrand's ominous non-diegetic music, which begins before the spell and ends as Leo arrives at Black Farm, implying a causal relationship between the spell and what follows, including the knee injury and Leo's encounter with Ted, which will lead to the message-carrying and, ultimately, to Mrs. Maudsley's discovery of the illicit relationship and Ted's suicide. The emotive bridge supplied by the music thus suggests the older Leo's belief that the spell led to the injury. Later in the film, when the aged Marian mentions her grandson's conviction that he is "under some sort of spell or curse," the older Leo averts his eyes, his nod, in agreement to her "that's just plain silly," clearly forced; the older Leo still believes in his curse and its supposed consequences. We have to read the older Leo's feelings from such gestures and the mood conveyed by the score, because unlike the novel, the film is not explicitly narrated by him. We hear a couple of maxims spoken by him, but they are more commentary than narration. The images from 1900 seem to emerge from his memory or subconscious: in conversation with Michael Ciment (1985, 304), Losey describes the film's double articulation of time as "subliminal." Later in the interview, Ciment (311) resurrects the term to characterize some of the film's shots, including those featuring deer. The term is appropriate for this sequence's dual logic of staccato editing and implied causality, which suggests at once fragments of memory and a sublimated attribution of coherent meaning to the remembered events.

However, the landscape sequence that links the incantation with the injury also separates the two, distancing them. The staccato editing and Leo's nonchalant walking pace stress this ironic distance. If the sublimated implication is that Leo's spell is responsible for the injury, the interpolation of the landscape scenes suggests, on another level, that the landscape is in fact the precondition of Leo's injury. The shot that implies a relation between Marian's body and the landscape significantly precedes the shot in which Leo's body is effectively enclosed by a zoom-out, implicating Marian (and her position in the estate) in this symbolic enclosure of Leo and, by association, the historical enclosure of the countryside. The hidden axe and the haystack are the results of a cultivation which is both determined by, and maintains, enclosure. Leo treats the farm as a playground, and is consequently punished when the tools of cultivation are unveiled. An alternative causal chain therefore subtly links the sequence, from Marian in the landscape, to the process of enclosure, to Black Farm, to Leo's injury, and finally to Ted's arrival on the scene. Losey thus deconstructs the picturesque's historical function of naturalizing landownership: to make landscapes look like "natural" spaces, rather than controlled property. The landscape conceals its design

and its violence, along with the power relations that create them: the very conditions that lead Leo to become harmed physically and emotionally, so that in Leo's eyes, it is his curses which cause harm, including his own injuries and, ultimately, Ted's suicide. However, it is Leo's misguided linkage of curse and knee injury, across the intervening landscape, which makes available the alternative: a materialist representation of landscape power relations.

The landscape that we see Leo wander through, from the house toward Black Farm, is increasingly picturesque. The historical picturesque, with its "natural" excess, roughness, and concealments, often acted as a screen, hiding boundary lines of estates and thereby obfuscating the differences between labor and leisure, between poverty and property, while the natural appearance of the landscape gardens hid their status as private culture, thus naturalizing ownership. The most picturesque part of Brandham separates the park from the farm and blurs the distinction between the farm's functional landscapes and the emphatically aestheticized design of the park. Closer to the house, away from prying eyes, the openly artificial formal terrace garden more overtly signifies control of the land and provides an appropriately refined setting for upper-class deportment.

By following a trajectory across the estate, from the house's interior, through windows, across the terrace garden and the Brownian park, through wooded areas, Losey could trace an aesthetic and ideological chain across the landscape. Toward and through the picturesque, he reveals the violence (animal blood, Leo's injured knee, Ted's suicide) and cultivation that seem beyond the estate's gardens, but in fact underpin the whole estate. The "Old Garden," played by Melton Constable Hall's pre-Brownian Kitchen Garden, where Ted and Marian have sex, acts as a picturesque enclave near the house's terrace garden: a reminder that the violence and differences concealed by picturesqueness are at the heart of the estate, as well as at its periphery.

In the film's ironic symbolism, Leo, the figure in the landscape, emerges as a new, human incarnation of the *genius loci* of the picturesque tradition: he performs within and takes on elements of the landscape, but in turn alters the landscape.[15] That is, he is wounded in the landscape, but in the

15 Alexander Pope urged Lord Burlington to "Consult the genius of the place," that is, its intrinsic character, when designing "improvements." Different versions of this idea appeared throughout the eighteenth century, in, for example, Capability Brown's evaluation of the estate's "capabilities" and Uvedale Price's avowed belief that buildings should be designed to match their surroundings. Nikolaus Pevsner (1997, 178, 181) had modernized the idea of the spirit of

process unwittingly exposes its apparatus of cultivation. In this way, The Go-Between presents its historical landscape as a socio-economic construction which is ultimately instrumental in the downfall of its *genius loci*. Leo is reconstituted in a disfigured form in the 1950s, as an old man Marian describes as being "all dried up inside": Leo's knee wound anticipates this later disfigurement, the hidden axe serving as a symbol for the dangers concealed beneath the country estate's aesthetics.

The spell/axe sequence implicates Marian in the trauma Leo suffers. However, the film also positions her as a victim in the socio-economic structure of the estate. In a later scene, we see a deer herd race through the park, followed by a reverse shot of Marian and Leo, watching through a window. An exchange follows:

> Leo: Why don't you marry Ted?
> Marian: I can't. I can't – can't you see why?
> Leo: Why are you marrying Hugh?
> Marian: Because I must. I must. I've got to.

Marian's "can't you see why?" can be seen as a reference to the deer park they are gazing at. Marian cannot marry Ted, because she would lose her privileged place in the landscape. Like the deer, whose freedom is illusory, Marian is enclosed as part of the demesne's aesthetics, a marriageable asset prepared for Trimingham's consumption. She must choose between this closed existence and one beyond the estate's comfortable confines, in a space she might well imagine as like the one in the painting hanging behind them: an unyielding sublime landscape utterly unlike the view from the window.

Revisionist Landscape Historiography and Socio-Economic Critique

The Go-Between utilizes the narrative arc of its figure in a landscape to expatiate on the power relations of the country estate. If Hartley's geographical psyche reflected to some extent the place of the country estate in both architectural history and the post-war social imaginary, Losey's film foreshadowed and complemented the revisionist landscape historiography which emerged in the 1970s, the first major Marxist contributions to the

the place in his 1940s and 1950s work on the picturesque, arguing that this and other principles of English landscape-garden design were apparent in British modern town planning.

field: John Berger and Mike Dibb's television series WAYS OF SEEING (1972) and the tie-in book version (Berger [1972] 2008);[16] John Barrell's two books on landscape between 1730 and 1840 (1972, 1980); and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1985). These texts all discussed representations of figure and landscape from a socio-economic perspective.

Meanwhile, the film's focus on one country-estate location set a precedent, which was followed by Granada Television's BRIDESHEAD REVISITED (1981) and Peter Greenaway's THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT (1982), although they could also exploit tourist knowledge of locations, whereas THE GO-BETWEEN democratized landscapes that no member of the public had seen in such great detail.[17] Heritage criticism has tended to see shots of country estates in British film and television as ideological extensions of the tourist industry, but THE GO-BETWEEN, BRIDESHEAD REVISITED, THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT, and later films/programs not only explore locations extensively, but offer critical commentaries on those locations' histories, through narratives about characters who are harmed by their visits to estates.

Conclusion

Leo, the figure in THE GO-BETWEEN's landscape, moves through the estate as no other character in the film does and, indeed, as no character had walked through a location in any country-house film before THE GO-BETWEEN. It has been argued that causality plays only a minor role in the film (Palmer and Riley [1955] 1993, 93). However, Leo's movements unveil the socio-economic links across the setting/location. Through Leo, the film comments on the ideological causalities at work in a country estate in 1900. The estate's span, both spatial and ideological, is documented via his meandering. At the same time, Leo's perception is wounded; as an old man he still imagines that a mystical causality underpins the events on the estate and therefore fails to realize the full truth, until perhaps the last moment, when his car takes him away from the hall. The film opposes his mysticism with naturalistic

16 John Berger and the series' director, Mike Dibb, deconstruct and historicize Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, a painting which, thirty years later, was still at the heart of debates about the Marxist analysis of the power relations between landed figures and eighteenth-century country estates. See WAYS OF SEEING (Mike Dibb, BBC, 1972); Berger (1972) 2008, 106-108; Rosenthal and Myrone 2002, 62-63; Barrell 2002, 21.

17 Unlike Castle Howard (the main location for BRIDESHEAD) and Groombridge Place (the main location for DRAUGHTSMAN), Melton Constable Hall has never been open to the public.

rural observation and historical-materialist social commentary, utilizing innovative location work to achieve a new cinematic perspective on the country estate.

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6. Akerman and Domestic Space

Sarah Leperchey

Abstract
Initially influenced by structural aesthetics, Akerman continued to build her films around spatial issues – distance, light, emptiness and fullness, inside and outside. In doing so, she systematically re-examined the means of filmic representation (frame, movement, editing, and duration) to understand how to show space in cinema. The ambivalence toward domestic space seen in Jeanne Dielman would point in two directions: toward everyday life and to the opacity of the maternal world. In Saute ma ville it is associated with the asphyxiating daily routine of household chores, while in Je tu il elle the filmmaker systematically exhausted its possibilities. The film No Home Movie was produced from material recorded on a daily basis in her mother's apartment. Her installations Maniac Shadows and Je tu il elle, l'installation allowed visitors to interact with screens that enhanced a sense of displacement as well as encounter and liminality.

Keywords: domestic, frame, window, structural, autobiography

Chantal Akerman's work is characterized by great heterogeneity. Her films of the very early 1970s – La chambre (1972), Hotel Monterey (1973) – were heavily influenced by the American avant-garde and were part of the experimental cinema movement (Margulies 1996, 3; Schmid 2010, 4-6). That said, Akerman soon turned to fiction, directing Je tu il elle (1974) and Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975). As Marion Schmid (2010, 33) notes, Jeanne Dielman is situated at the crossroads of structural aesthetics and European auteur cinema. With this film, Akerman invented a very singular form of modern cinema, which clearly deviates from the experiments carried out in the 1960s by filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, Ingmar Bergman, Alain Resnais, or Michelangelo Antonioni. Subsequently,

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she would direct genre films (such as the musical Golden Eighties, 1986), literary adaptations (La captive, 2000; La folie Almayer, 2011), and also films of more uncertain nature, in which the narrative is "retarded" (Toute une nuit, 1982) or "programmed" by an initial device (L'homme à la valise, 1984). Alongside this fictional vein, we find a documentary vein, also marked by structural aesthetics (D'Est, 1993; De l'autre coté, 2002). Moreover, some films from the last period are very close to being filmed diaries (Là-bas, 2006; No Home Movie, 2015). In fact, her entire work is underpinned by an autobiographical dimension that can be found in the experimental films (News from Home, 1976) as well as in her fiction films (Les rendez-vous d'Anna, 1978). In this respect, we can quote Catherine David:

> What could be called the dramatic formalism of Chantal Akerman resides in strong enunciation strategies that dialectically articulate impression and gaze, subjectivity and otherness, actuality and history. Contrary to the formal procedures (repetition, accumulation of information without a causal relationship, search for neutrality of point of view) of structural or minimal cinema, to which her work has long been compared, and which claimed to evacuate the subject, the cinema of Chantal Akerman is directly [...] or indirectly [...] always autobiographical. The essential figures of her filmic writing (repetition, ellipse, interruption) are articulated in a poetics which is also a formal politics of the movements of the unconscious (repression, obsessive repetition) with a very personal interpretation of history. (1995, 62)

Let us recall that Akerman's autobiographical narrative also gave rise to texts, as well as to video installations intended for the museum space (Akerman 2004, 2013). While some of these installations have unpublished images as their starting point (To Walk Next to One's Shoelaces in an Empty Fridge, 2004; Maniac Shadows, 2012), others have been conceived as a reassembly and a "spatialization" of earlier films (From the Other Side, 2002; Je tu il elle, l'installation, 2007). As Vivian Sky Rehberg notes,

> When Akerman reworks a film for an installation, she invites the spectator to participate in a collective act of historical or autobiographical re-reading and re-interpretation of her own production. Displaced from imposed chronologies, and released from the linear temporal progression of 24 frames per second, as well as from the conventions of storytelling in narrative and documentary cinema, Akerman's installations appear as fragments in a constantly moving history in the making, one that

> engages the history of art and the history of cinema, as well as her own life story. (2012, 52)

In fact, Akerman's trajectory, because of its singularity, offers a fruitful entry point for understanding a cinema which was built on the foundations of 1960s modernity. In terms of space, Akerman's work is particularly interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, having been formed by contact with the American avant-garde, the filmmaker never stopped questioning in her films the fundamental data of the filmic image – the frame and the representation of space, movement, and duration. On the other hand, Akerman directly participated in the emergence of expanded cinema in the 1990s: her installations invite us to use the conceptual framework of the "spatial turn," and thus to rethink the relationships that are established between filmic space and the space within which moving images are seen by their viewers.

Situated on the margins of the last fifty years' production, Akerman's films accompany it at a distance. Taking a step back, they offer an active reflection on the means available to cinema to deepen our perception of space. This should surely mean both our visual perception and what is involved in "inhabiting it"; what attaches us to a given place. To clarify this point, I want to consider more specifically the question of domestic space. Indeed, the bedrooms and kitchens that occupy Akerman's films offer a good starting point for analyzing a body of work that is characterized by both its autobiographical dimension and its minimalism. Using closed interior spaces, the filmmaker gives shape to the fundamental questions that underlie all her work: psychic disorders, the relationship to "home," the temptation to withdraw and openness to the world. The domestic setting offers a structure to which different forms of emotional and artistic experience can be anchored: through this, Akerman questions reflexively the relationships between filmic practice and the daily practices of domestic space. I will develop this reflection by approaching domestic space from three different angles: considering it first as a place occupied by one's body, then as a framework from which one looks out, and finally as an environment where we live with moving images.

Actions

For Akerman, domestic space is above all a feminine world, which corresponds to a social reality, since we know that it is women who most often

stay at home to take care of children, and that they take on the burden of maintaining the home more than men. More specifically, however, in Akerman's films, domestic space refers to the maternal world. We know that the character of Jeanne Dielman, played by Delphine Seyrig, was inspired by the director's mother. Akerman said of the film, "I started with a few very specific images from my childhood: I saw my mother at the sink, my mother carrying packages" (quoted in Dufournet 1976, 564).[1] The decor of Jeanne Dielman is the well-kept apartment of a good mother, in which one finds order, comfort, and good meals served at regular times. But the film also conveys a lingering feeling of unease and this place, although quite ordinary, seems stricken with strangeness. The maternal world of Jeanne Dielman is not reassuring, it offers no peace of mind. We can recall here Laura Rascaroli's observation about No Home Movie, that the omnipresence of frames within the film frame "emphasizes the entrapping power of the architecture, the invisible barriers between family members, and the ultimate inaccessibility of the house intended as belonging, safety and wholeness" (2010, 166).

To analyze the "disquieting quality" of Jeanne Dielman, Ivone Margulies (1996, 90-92) invokes the Freudian theory of the uncanny. This very convincing reference tends to confirm that the anguish conveyed by the film has its origin in the maternal world – a world populated by things familiar and habitual, but which are also intimate and secret (Freud 1919). Chantal Akerman often said that her mother, a survivor of the Holocaust, never spoke to her – couldn't speak to her – about her experiences in the camps. In relation to this family history, Jeanne Dielman adopts a displacement that hides its autobiographical dimension: Jeanne is hiding something, but what she hides is very different – it is the fact that she occasionally prostitutes herself in the afternoons while her son is at school. Jeanne puts the money from her clients in the soup tureen that sits on the dining room table. This perfectly familiar object therefore contains a secret: it condenses the double meaning of *heimlich*, a double meaning which constitutes the starting point of the Freudian analysis of the feeling of uncanny.[2] The same ambivalence affects the entire decor. As Laura Mulvey writes, "as Jeanne's life pivots on the essential separation of these roles [mother and prostitute], the horizontal topography of the flat assumes a metaphorical dimension

1 Dufournet quoting an interview for *Télérama* by Claude-Marie Trémois; my translation.

2 Freud begins his essay by noting that *Heimlich* ordinarily means "homely" but can also refer to what is hidden and concealed. Hence *Heimlich* means literally "unhomelike" or "uncanny" in the standard translations of Freud.

Fig. 6.1: Jeanne Dielman shows the well-kept apartment of a good mother, displaying order, comfort, and good meals served regularly. But the film also conveys a lingering feeling of unease and this place, although quite ordinary, seems stricken with strangeness.

in its division between surface and secret" (2016, 27). The frontality of the shots – long takes during which Jeanne carries out her domestic chores, one after the other – paradoxically contributes to giving the feeling that we have stumbled upon something opaque. The fact that certain actions (washing dishes, peeling potatoes) are accomplished in their entirety, within the duration of a single shot, could mean that everything is there, offered to our gaze. But the succession of spatiotemporal "blocks" (where the cut marks the passage from one room to another, and the beginning of a new activity) leads to a false continuity: in fact, the temporality of the film is punctuated by constant ellipses, which open disconcerting gaps in Jeanne's very orderly days.

From the ambivalence that characterizes the apartment of Jeanne Dielman, two paths emerge for thinking about the use of domestic space in Akerman's films. The first way, linked to the familiar dimension of the maternal world, leads us to everyday life. The apartment is a space in which Jeanne lives day after day: she occupies it, and she takes care of it. The fact that Jeanne occupies herself by taking care of her apartment makes the domestic space an ideal starting point for raising a universal problem. What do we do with ourselves? What do we do with our time? As Akerman explained, "there are close connections between Hotel Monterey and Jeanne Dielman: they are two films that show how we fill our time, so as not to leave room for the anguish of death" (2004, 46).

The second path, linked to the opacity of the maternal world, is based on the enclosed nature of domestic space. For Jeanne, her apartment is a shelter

that allows her to hide from the outside world. Imprisoned by an extremely rigid routine, she struggles to keep control of her universe and maintain her psychic balance. Of course, the interior of the apartment functions as an extension of the character's interiority: her constant, obsessive struggle to maintain order and erase all trace of organic life refers, quite transparently, to the process of repression. Domestic space, both refuge and prison, is the site of a test, where one confronts very directly the fact that one is trapped in a body, trapped in one's own head.

To show how Akerman's work explores these two paths, I want to turn briefly to two fictions that are much more directly autobiographical than Jeanne Dielman: Saute ma ville (1968) and Je tu il elle. In these two films, the filmmaker stages herself. Akerman's engagement with the camera feels like it's not only to make a work: filming offers a framework that allows invention, the experience of different practices of space.[3] My hypothesis is that these films clearly bring out the performative dimension of Akerman's work. This dimension is also present, in a less obvious way, in Jeanne Dielman, about which Ivone Margulies rightly notes

> Up until the murder scene, everything that happens is literally done as well as enacted. Indeed, the distinction between a literal gesture and a performance is canceled by the nature of the actions shown: as Jeanne peels potatoes and washes the dishes, the potatoes get peeled and the dishes get washed. (1996, 88)

Saute ma ville was Akerman's first film, made almost as an autodidact when she was only eighteen years old. She plays the role of the daughter: like her mother (or the character of Jeanne Dielman), Chantal confines herself to the kitchen to perform a series of household chores – but contrary to what her mother would do, she sabotages these horribly. She empties the cupboards to throw everything on the floor, she fills a bucket with soapy water, pours it on the floor and floods the tiles, then tries in vain to push a mop through this mess with the help of a scraper; she polishes the shoes on her feet then frantically applies black shoe polish and so on.

3 We find the idea of "practices of space" in Michel de Certeau, which is based on the linguistic model to bring the action of walking closer to the act of walking, by proposing that walking constitutes a process of appropriation which is close to verbal enunciation. In this perspective, the appropriation of space by walkers introduces play into the "geometric" space designed by architects and urban planners. See de Certeau 1990, 148-152. Henri Lefebvre also uses the term "spatial practice" to designate the production and reproduction of places specific to each social formation, born of the competence and a certain "performance" by the members of such and such a society. See Lefebvre 1974, 42.

Fig. 6.2: In her first film, SAUTE MA VILLE (1968), Akerman sabotaged a series of household chores.

At the same time, the young woman seals the door and the window with tape, gets rid of her cat by throwing it onto the balcony. At the end of the film, she lights a piece of paper, turns on the gas, and lies down on the stove, with a bouquet in her hand. She waits. Nothing happens for twenty seconds. Then comes the explosion: a sudden cut to black, accompanied by the sound of the blast.

In SAUTE MA VILLE, as in JEANNE DIELMAN, domestic space is associated with a particularly asphyxiating daily routine – that of household chores. Akerman wants to express the horror that this "feminine" destiny inspires in her, and to show the difficulty of escaping it. As Corinne Maury writes, the cleaning undertaken by the filmmaker "does not aim to 're-establish order,' but rather to intensify in an extreme chaotic way the daily gestures, in order to reveal their harassing and suffocating properties" (2018, 25). (Interestingly, this transgression involves repetition: it seems that Chantal is doomed to repeat her mother's actions – she can only do them badly. In reality, of course, by the very fact that she is making a film, Akerman breaks away from the maternal model. However, the feeling persists that SAUTE MA VILLE represents a solution which works on two levels. How to live? What to film? Everyday life, which in itself is a subject of anxiety, also offers material – a repertoire of actions that can be performed in front of the camera, in a given place and time.

The first part of JE TU IL ELLE is based on a similar principle, but this time Chantal reduces her daily activities to a strict minimum: alone in a room that she has emptied of all furniture except for the mattress, she writes and rewrites a letter, then just waits, naked, as the days pass. To feed herself, she digs with a spoon into a bag of sugar. A few minimal actions punctuate the wait. For example, she spreads the pages of the letter on the ground before her, in several rows, and pins some of them on the ground. She goes to the

bathroom and then lies down on the mattress. She looks out of the patio door. Meanwhile, we hear her story, in voiceover:

> It snowed. And I thought life was stuck anyway. That nothing would happen anymore, and that I had to wait until it stopped snowing and the snow melted.

In this first part of Je tu il elle, we have the feeling that the character exhausts all the possibilities of space, just as the filmmaker exhausts all the possibilities of the place she is filming. For the character, her seclusion begins with a litany which marks the attempt to arrange the room, before the decision to create a vacuum:

> I painted the furniture blue the first day. I painted them green the second day. On the third day I put them in the hallway and on the fourth I lay on the mattress.

This litany runs through the first three shots of the film: in each of them, the same furniture is arranged differently, as if the young woman had tried in vain to find a configuration that suits her. And until the end of the sequence, Chantal keeps changing the place of the mattress. As a counterpoint, the montage alternates between different views of the room. The French window, the corner and the wall to the right of the French window, the back wall, the opening of the bathroom to the left of the French window: these are the subjects of twenty-two shots. The camera, almost always fixed in an axis perpendicular to the walls, advances or retreats slightly, moves a little to the right or left to film different portions of the room. Changes in framing echo subtle changes in space, caused by the actions of the character.

As we can see, the very close relationship that develops between the practice of space and the practice of film is directly linked to the principle of seclusion: the character and the filmmaker set themselves in a given place, in which they are inscribed in a duration. This applies to Je tu il elle as much as to Saute ma ville. We can add that, in both films, confinement corresponds to a paradoxical form of liberation. The more she hides herself, the more the young girl in Saute ma ville avoids external observation, which allows her to unleash her destructive impulses. In Je tu il elle, confinement creates the possibility of an almost total letting go. In both films, domestic space offers a closed place that allows the characters to exteriorize their psychic disorders – through manic excess

or depressive withdrawal. Corinne Maury writes about SAUTE MA VILLE as follows:

> The Akermanian body is guided by a nervous power which fills the functional space, stifles it, twists it [...] It is therefore the body which here acts on space, expends itself in it and against it: this act of spatial mistreatment leads [...] to looking at the practical and technical space of the kitchen as a psychic place where the maelstrom of emotions and inner troubles are experienced. (2018, 27)

In JE TU IL ELLE, the fourth shot, during which we see Akerman's character pushing her furniture into the hallway, shows us something quite similar. The struggle that begins between the body of the young woman and the space that surrounds her sends us back to a very identifiable affect – the fact of suffocating, of feeling the prisoner of a place, but also a prisoner of one's own body, feeling enclosed in one's head. It should also be noted that the action accomplished by Akerman allows her to "perform" anxiety in a gesture that is also a gesture of staging – because the movement of the furniture gradually modifies the composition of the shot. In the same way, household chores in SAUTE MA VILLE have a performative dimension, insofar as they mobilize domestic space in three different ways: as a place of daily practices, as an extension of psychic interiority, and as a closed space that provides a basis for artistic experimentation. To confirm this, we can describe the gestures performed by the apprentice housewife with verbs: fill and empty, tidy and disturb, clean and make dirty (that is to say, leave traces). These terms, which are often used metaphorically to designate the fight against overwhelming feelings, can characterize both domestic chores and operations related to the creative process.

By anchoring herself in domestic space and daily life, Akerman finds a way to articulate the minor and the minimal (Marguiles 2016, 4). Starting within a restricted perimeter, from a repertoire of repetitive actions she manages to transpose minimalist structural aesthetics in a narrative register. With JEANNE DIELMAN, SAUTE MA VILLE, and JE TU IL ELLE, the body and its affects are placed at the heart of work on the fundamental data of the cinematographic image. To explore this point, let us consider how the look is staged. This question arises at two levels. On the one hand, the films are closely associated with a practice that could be defined as an exercise of the look, which is exercised over time within a given place. On the other hand, the films constantly connect with and create tension between the

spatial and the filmic framework, questioning how cinema extends and sharpens our perception of space.

Frames

In an interview with Dominique Païni (2001), Chantal Akerman explained:

> To frame, I need to have rooms, windows, corridors … otherwise, I don't feel comfortable framing. I feel much more comfortable inside, with structures, than outside, when there are none, and your structure is up to you to create with your framing.

Domestic space thus constitutes for Akerman an architectural framework that provides a basis for the work of filmic framing. Steven Jacobs (2012, 74) notes that Jeanne Dielman can be compared to films such as Wavelength (Michael Snow, 1967), Room (Peter Gidal, 1967), or Corridor (Standish Lawder, 1970), which bring into play the gap between the dimensions of the screen and the dimensions of a given architectural structure. Tension is explored through the establishment of a frame with rigid perspectives which usually persists throughout the entire film. In Jeanne Dielman the medium shots are filmed in wide angle with a fairly low camera, which often places the vanishing point in the center of the frame. The room is only filmed in three axes, with angles of 90 or 180 degree. The living room is filmed in four axes creating perpendicular lines. The kitchen and the entrance are filmed in two axes with a 90-degree angle, and so on. The montage, which organizes the succession of these frontal views, seems determined by a systematic "framing" of the space of the apartment.

In Jeanne Dielman domestic space also offers a spatiotemporal structure, because it is a place that is inhabited on a daily basis, and which is therefore subject to repetitive actions and cyclical variations. So, on the first evening Jeanne and her son Sylvain (Jan Decorte) open up the sofa in the living room, which turns into a bed for Sylvain. The next morning, Jeanne closes the sofa bed, and the room regains its daytime appearance. At night, the sofa becomes a bed again: the living room takes on the appearance of a bedroom. The sofa bed is then folded up by Jeanne the following morning.

This double function of domestic space, which constitutes both an architectural and a spatiotemporal structure, is very apparent in Là-bas (Down There, 2006) and No Home Movie. In the first of these two documentaries, Akerman is in Tel Aviv. Most of the film is shot from inside an apartment

rented by the filmmaker. The camera, placed in the living room, is always oriented in the same direction, toward the wall facing the street. The filmmaker hardly appears in shot, but she is present on the soundtrack through discreet but very clear sounds: footsteps, the clinking of dishes, a trickle of running water, the keys on a computer keyboard. We hear the phone ringing, and Akerman's voice answering – in French, English, or Hebrew. The filmmaker also delivers her thoughts in voiceover. For example, she thinks that if she had grown up in Israel, her mother would have let her play in the street:

> In Brussels, she didn't want me to, she was afraid. Here, she would have let me, and I would not have spent hours watching the other children playing ball or hopscotch through the window.

In LÀ-BAS, most of the shots shot from inside the apartment show us what is visible from the window: the buildings opposite, the street below. From this point of view, the domestic space inhabited by the filmmaker is little seen; it is reduced to a small portion of the living room, which appears in the few shots where the camera is placed far back in the room. However, the architectural structure offered by the wall facing the street is overused, insofar as the filmic frame is almost always made according to the frames of the window and an adjoining French window that opens onto the balcony. Moreover, the apartment, as an observation post, is directly connected to the repetitive structure of everyday life: the filmmaker is particularly interested in two elderly couples who appear regularly on their balcony. Twice, the lady in the building on the left smokes a cigarette while seated and drinking her coffee. Then she empties the ashtray and goes inside (the first time, she comes out to retrieve her cup, which she forgot outside). The man in the building on the right is seen several times moving the plants on his terrace, drinking a Nescafé with his wife, or looking at the street, leaning on the railing of his balcony. These actions are repeated in slightly different shots, more or less tightly framed, each time with a different light, depending on the time and the weather.

The routine of the gentleman in the building on the right, like that of the lady in the building on the left, naturally sends us back to Akerman's daily life – a routine which is also recreated by the soundtrack. One has the impression that the succession of shots reconstitutes or represents one of the filmmaker's daily activities: looking out the window. As we have seen, Akerman explicitly indicates in the film that she picked up this habit as a child. The spectator is therefore invited to assimilate what is being shown

by the exercise of a look. By her own admission, the filmmaker leaves the apartment very little, and we imagine that her eyes fall, day after day, on the two buildings she sees from her window. From this lived constraint, Akerman invents an aesthetic system based on repetition. The view offered by the living room, across some forty shots, gives rise to a variation on the motif. We have the feeling that the work, in its artistic dimension, represents a creative outcome based on a practice which, at the start, was more connected with recreating past experience: always observing the same end of the street and identifying repeated events, noticing differences, recording changes in atmosphere. This daily activity feeds a filmic work, which prolongs it and leads to the invention of a form.

The exercise of the look which is at the origin of Là-bas leads the filmmaker to rely on variations of light in composing her film, a principle which she had already followed in Nuit et jour (1991) and D'Est.[4] According to Cyril Beghin, in Akerman's later work "light becomes a dramaturgical element purely by the effect of its difference, or relationship to itself, and rarely by its straightforward symbolic link to the thing it illuminates or obscures" (2019, 143).

This reflection also applies to No Home Movie, and proves invaluable for analyzing the editing of the film, especially the many shots filmed in the apartment of Natalia, the filmmaker's mother. There is indeed a gradual darkening of the frame, as Natalia's strength declines and she approaches death. Akerman relies on the rudimentary nature of her small camera, the way it accentuates contrast and reacts abruptly to changes in lighting, to create dark areas in the image. In most shots, the light comes from the windows, which the filmmaker does not hesitate to frame frontally, creating very strong backlit effects. Comparing the first and second parts of the film, we notice that these dark areas are getting larger, that the rooms are plunged into darkness, while the outside becomes more and more visible. Akerman adjusts her camera according to the light coming from the windows, rather than the light level inside the apartment. This results in a gradual darkening of what lies in the center of the frame, most evident if we compare the beginning and the end of the film.

In both No Home Movie and Là-bas, the filmmaker develops a subtle yet rigorous aesthetic system from the very limited space that she occupies on a daily basis. The filming that produced shots for No Home Movie was not undertaken for artistic purposes: distressed by the imminent death of

4 The documentary D'Est was edited by Claire Atherton, who also edited the majority of Akerman's subsequent films, including Là-bas and No Home Movie.

Natalia, Akerman filmed to have images of her mother (Margulies 2016, 64). Having acknowledged this, we can also think that this filming provided a diversion (in her 2013 book *Ma mere rit*, Akerman admits that she dreaded staying with her mother, that she suffocated in her apartment). Certain images in No Home Movie recur several times, each time framed differently: for example, the abandoned deck chair in the garden below the kitchen, or the window and the foot of the bed that can be seen from the door of Natalia's bedroom. Akerman is confronted with a series of very limited spatial configurations, which she knows by heart, but by playing with the infinite possibilities offered by filmic framing, she manages to exercise her own look, to question what there is to see, and to continue to wonder what it is to really see.

The modern buildings of Là-bas and Natalia's bourgeois apartment in No Home Movie have no particular aesthetic qualities, and their ordinary appearance is accentuated by the rather "poor" image that Akerman obtains with her small digital camera. At first glance, the banality of the places, the craftsmanship of the images give the impression of a certain flatness. However Akerman manages to confuse us, to make us realize that there is something opaque there, to designate what the look cannot manage to exhaust. This effect is largely based on the duration of the shots. Cyril Beghin argues

> What is at stake for Akerman is the viewer's engagement with the film's shots, the alternate pleasure and boredom that they provide, the perceptual implication that they modulate. What they make evident is something foundational. In the course of their excessive duration, the long takes fascinate and repel, invite and reject. (2016, 48)

Domestic spaces are usually not really seen, precisely because they are too familiar. By focusing her look on them, leading us to observe them over time, Akerman invites us to question what we perceive of the places around us. Faced with shots that last several minutes, we experience a "more or less numb absorption" (Beghin 2015, 87), which brings us up against the limits of our attention, as well as the limits of the filmic image. In Là-bas and No Home Movie, the multiplicity of shots produced within a limited setting makes us particularly sensitive to the ambivalent power of the filmic framing, which shows as much as it hides: in cinema, the visible is always doubled by an invisible that remains off-screen. The viewer is thus confronted with a persistent opacity, maintained by the apparent flatness of the two films. From ordinary places, which we recognize immediately

but never really look at, Akerman's filmic image introduces a gap: it allows us to realize how difficult it is for us to perceive fully the space we inhabit.

In Jeanne Dielman, Là-bas, and No Home Movie, the closure of the filmic frame and of the domestic space constantly allude to each other, referring one to the other. In this respect, windows play an essential role. In Jeanne Dielman, their presence remains discreet. Only those of the kitchen are framed frontally: they are very often present in the image, but they are masked by curtains, and the camera does not approach them. On the other hand, in Là-bas and No Home Movie windows are omnipresent and provide access to a view. Several shots in No Home Movie use the same pattern: the filmmaker moves around the apartment, camera in hand, initiating a journey that ends in front of a window. In both films, windows create the opposition of inside and outside, making it possible to "construct" the domestic interior in relation to the outside world. Of course, the window effectively doubles filmic framing: it cuts out a portion of space and lets it be seen. In return, the interior of the apartment becomes an observation post, offering a certain distance and allowing us, perhaps, to see better. Analyzing Là-bas, Giuliana Bruno notes that the shutters drawn in front of the windows offer Akerman "the shelter she needs to look out," adding

> This screen-shade is tailored to hold in its very fabric, its particular version of empathy: a position of distant proximity. We go out with Akerman into the world only to look inward; we remain inside to look out. (2014, 131)

Steven Jacobs writes that in Akerman interiors are presented "as a viewing device or optical instrument" (2012, 77). Starting from this idea, we can argue that in Là-bas and No Home Movie the use of windows refers us to the device of the *camera obscura*. The light that enters through the openings in the walls, the views permitted by the architectural framework allow us to apprehend the outside world while giving it the character of a look. The outside comes to us in its opacity, in its very lack of evidentiality; its image is formed, elaborated within the domestic space, like an enigma that remains to be deciphered. The filmmaker, standing back, thus enjoys the privilege of the painter, whom Maurice Merleau-Ponty told us was the only one "to have the right to look at all things without any duty of appreciation."[5]

5 Merleau-Ponty opposed the painter to the philosopher or the writer, of whom "we ask advise or an opinion," who "we want to take a position," who "cannot decline the responsibilities of someone who speaks" ([1964] 1997, 14).

Fig. 6.3: In later films, such as No Home Movie (2015), the light entering through windows and the views they offer, allow us to apprehend the outside world while giving it the character of a look.

If the motif of the world glimpsed from a window is already present in Akerman's first films, its meaning tends to be inflected in her later work, when screens gradually invade the public as well as the domestic sphere, whereas the moving image is the subject of constant exchanges within ordinary life. It is obvious that No Home Movie is part of this evolution. The film was produced from material recorded on a daily basis, which corresponds to a practice that has become commonplace, now that you can film your loved ones with a simple mobile phone. In addition, Akerman shows us Skype conversations, which allows her to question quite explicitly the place that screens occupy in domestic space, and the access they give us to the outside world. That question is particularly raised by her installations, which draw our attention to the fact that images exist in a physical space – a space that we share with them when we visit an exhibition. In this context, the filmmaker offers us a unique experience, which invites us to reconsider the way we relate to the screens that populate the spaces we inhabit.

Screens

Giuliana Bruno has written about Akerman's installations:

> Her style of long-durational filming punctuated with minimal or casual action transferred well from the film theater to the art gallery. It resonates with the performative, subjective, roaming style of imaging that has come to inhabit our digital screens today. Her itinerant way of filming was especially suited to the peripatetic mode of reception experienced in the art gallery, where visitors interact with screens that can enhance displacement as well as forms of encounter and liminality. (2016, 164)

Starting from this reflection, I want to analyze in more detail two works in which domestic spaces predominate: Je tu il elle, l'installation and Maniac Shadows. Bruno insists particularly on the movement that drives the work of Akerman, a nomadic artist who does not feel at home anywhere.[6] In fact, the images of Maniac Shadows were shot between Paris, New York, and Brussels. Projected in the form of a triptych, they show us different places inhabited by the filmmaker.[7] Although there are several shots filmed outdoors, by the sea and in the street in Harlem, we mainly see interiors, bedrooms, and views taken from a window. Most of the time, the frame is mobile. Often the camera zooms in, reframes with little jerks, zooms out again: the image, at first blurry and confused, becomes clearer, emerges, becomes clear, before dissolving again. These are indeed, as Bruno says, performative and subjective images. What we are shown visibly corresponds to Akerman's own look, seeking her frame and trying to capture what she sees. The movement of approaching and trying to capture is given back to us at the level of the image itself, with its oscillation.

If this very specific mobility is absent from Je tu il elle, l'installation, whose shots were filmed in the early 1970s, we find there the association of domestic space and wandering. The film Je tu il elle consisted of three parts: in the first, as we have seen, the character played by the filmmaker shuts herself up in a room and waits. The second part, on the other hand, shows us a journey: Chantal is picked up hitchhiking by a truck driver (Niels Arestrup), whom she accompanies for some time on the road. She then joins a friend (Claire Wauthion), who welcomes her reluctantly, feeds her, then ends up making love with her. This last part therefore brings us back to a domestic space, which is moreover a very ordinary domestic space, a comfortable apartment which contrasts with the empty room at the beginning of the film. Despite everything, Chantal is in transit, since she leaves in the early morning.

The installation designed by Akerman and Claire Atherton juxtaposes the three parts of the film, which are projected side by side and form a triptych.[8] On the left, we find seclusion and waiting, in the center, the trip with the trucker, and on the right, the romantic reunion with the nurturing friend.

6 In Là-bas, Akerman says in voice-over "I don't feel like belonging."

7 The installation, in addition to a triptych of moving images, also consists of a collection of ninety-six small-format photographs (hung side by side on a wall), and the projection of a video in which Akerman reads extracts from *Ma mère rit* (this is the recording of a public reading).

8 During an event organized by the Marian Goodman gallery in Paris in January 2022, Claire Atherton explained that the editing of each part of the film had been modified, but that most of the initial images were included in the installation.

The principle of a linear succession is therefore replaced by a principle of simultaneity and fragmentation.

To understand what the triptychs of Maniac Shadows and Je tu il elle, l'installation bring into play, we can call on the reflections of Anne Friedberg. Friedberg contrasts two conceptions of the window, one associated with a perspective view, the other relating to the surface of a screen. To simplify, we could say that there is, on the one hand, a metaphorical use of the window which designates the pictorial representation of the Renaissance and, on the other hand, the "windows" of our computers. Friedberg considered that computer operating systems

> made this "new" multiple "window," multiple screen-format a daily lens, a vernacular system of visuality. This remade visual vernacular requires new description for its fractured, multiple, simultaneous, time-shiftable sense of space and time. (2006, 3)

In effect, Akerman directly addressed this issue in No Home Movie, where she filmed the screen of her computer.

During a first conversation by Skype, we see on the screen the "window" open for the video-conference, which covers a second "window" (a search engine) as well as the desktop (with the icons of different folders). The result is surprisingly confusing. The spectator immediately recognizes a familiar configuration, but is disconcerted by the sudden change in the regime of vision introduced by this sequence. Computer interfaces are rarely shown in the cinema and usually they appear in very readable shots. This is not the case here: on the one hand, because the surface of the screen is fragmented (different "windows" are juxtaposed on it); and on the other, because Natalia's images are of very low quality, chopped, and pixilated. During a second Skype conversation, Akerman reinforces the confusion by capturing in the same frame a portion of the screen, the edge of the computer, and a few objects placed on the table (a pack of cigarettes, sunglasses, a telephone, etc.). Within each shot, the filmmaker approaches and moves away; at one point she pans up to bring the two living room windows into view, behind the table on which the computer sits. The sequence therefore brings together a regime of vision based on perspective, and a very contemporary regime of vision, linked to digital interfaces. The architectural windows of the living room are opposed to the "windows" of the computer screen. In addition, by a progressive tightening of the framework Akerman tries to come closer to the image of Natalia. This gesture has, of course, a symbolic meaning: the filmmaker seeks to bridge the distance, geographical and emotional,

which separates her from her mother; she seeks to unravel the enigma of an interiority that escapes her. However, this sequence also allows for an artistic reflection. Zooming in on her screen, Akerman seems to want to enter the depth of the image, but of course she bumps into a flat surface, and the image dissolves as the frame tightens – we see only pixels, blur, traces of color. We are thus witnessing a tension: the perspectival view attached to the "window" of the film frame comes into conflict with the pure surface on which the "windows" of the computer operating systems are juxtaposed.

This tension is also present in Maniac Shadows, where shots of (architectural) windows are shown in an exploded structure. Taken separately, each part of the triptych gives access to a space traversed, explored in depth, structured by the opposition between inside and outside. However, taken together, the three simultaneous projections form a fragmented surface. From one channel to another, shots appear and disappear like so many "windows" that we open and close – which brings us back to the regime of vision attached to digital interfaces.

To this complex equation is added the fact that the "architectural" windows filmed by Akerman are often masked by curtains or glazed with opaque panes. Glass or curtains, in this case, form a surface on which shadows or reflections are inscribed. For example, in one shot of the triptych, a silhouette appears transparently behind a curtain: the body leans out of a window then straightens up, backlit. Here, the fabric of the curtain forms a screen, in the double sense of the term – it hides, at the same time as it shows and reveals.[9] Two long takes in Maniac Shadows bring into play this ambivalent function of the window-screen. In the first, the camera oscillates on the surface of a window, in extreme close-up. We seem to be scrutinizing a reflection, but zooming out reveals that what we saw was a piece of sky filmed through the glass. In the second, we caught a glimpse of a hand behind opaque glass. Here again, what follows undeceives us. A tracking shot widens the frame, and we understand that the camera was filming the window of a bathroom which appears in several shots of the triptych. The glass, obscured by white paint, lets the light filter through, but prevents us from seeing outside. The image we thought we saw was actually a reflection – the reflection of the filmmaker's hand, holding the camera.

These window-screens allow Akerman to maintain a relationship of "distant proximity" with the outside world. Giuliana Bruno points out, in her analysis of Là-bas, that the film "articulates an elaborate geography of thresholds." She believes that the blinds drawn in front of the living room

9 On the double function of the screen, see Avezzù 2016, 29-41.

windows, "which filter the light and our vision," form a screen which is "deliberately positioned between the world and us" (2014, 131). Following this hypothesis, we can consider that the window, for Akerman, in its double function of frame and screen, leads us to apprehend the filmic image as a threshold, which gives access while also marking a limit. This idea allows us to think more clearly about what is at play in the installations, where the visitor moves from one work to another, approaching and moving away from the various screens situated in the gallery space.

To deepen this point, we can cite a text by Miriam De Rosa devoted to the spatial turn and expanded cinema. The author starts by observing that

> the contemporary experience of moving images does not simply raise issues revolving around the increasingly algorithmic creation, distribution, recycling, remix and reordering of cinema, but it poses the question of dwelling that is, of how "post-cinema" (or new forms of cinema) is woven into the network texture of everyday life and practices, of how it inhabits our space and allows us inhabiting through the image. (2020, 222)

As we have seen, the images of Maniac Shadows were recorded amid the movement of daily life, in the passage from one place to another. The question of inhabiting is therefore explicitly addressed here – it provides the theme of the work. But this question is also mobilized by the very structure of the installation. For De Rosa, expanded cinema "allows for a new sense of inhabitation of space, on the basis of a temporarily contamination and integration between image and space" (2020, 226). In fact, Akerman's work is based on establishing a gap, a gap between, on the one hand, the restitution of a familiar experience – namely our relationship to screens in domestic space – and, on the other hand, a singular aesthetic experience, which stands the test of distance. In Maniac Shadows, the use of the window motif highlights the question of the threshold. The places that come into view are not immediately accessible. They are caught in the embedding of frames and covers, in the shimmering of surfaces, in the alternating movement of the triple screen. And this triple screen itself constitutes a threshold, which brings us back to our presence within the gallery space. In this, the installation thwarts the apparent immediacy of the profuse and banal images that populate the sphere of everyday life: it allows us to re-examine our relationship to the visible, in a reconfigured space, hybridized and multiplied by the presence of digital screens.

The passage from the original Je tu il elle to Je tu il elle, l'installation covers very similar issues. In the first part of the film, the French window

successively assumes three different functions. It is first a frame that opens onto a view: in one of the shots, we see the young woman looking outside, and we hear the shouts of children playing. The French window is next a surface-screen: it is dark, Chantal has turned on the ceiling light, and she is looking at her reflection in the glass. Finally, the French window creates a threshold that the character crosses. Chantal is hungry; she got dressed and she decided to leave. She exits through the French window and, in the following shot, she is hitchhiking at the edge of a freeway ramp. In the initial structure of the film, passing through the French window constitutes a culmination: it leads us to the second part, on the road with the truck driver. In the installation, this narrative progression is broken by the simultaneous presentation of the three parts of the film. The possibility of seclusion is abolished by the juxtaposed images of travel; the possibility of leaving, of being uprooted is abolished by the images, left and right, of seclusion and the night spent at the lover's house. Seen from this angle, the configuration of the triptych abolishes the possibility of distance in the visual regime born of the generalization of digital interfaces. But the installation also leads us to experience another form of distance. In the gallery space, we feel a certain form of detachment. The narrative progression of the earlier fiction is blurred by the fragmentation imposed by the triptych and, in any case, the simultaneity of the three projections edge to edge prevents us from grasping everything, forces us to let go, to let our gaze wander. We are thus led to question what is inducing the new visual regime that has interfered at the heart of our daily lives. As Alison Butler has noted, expanded cinema "may be seen as contributing to the dislocated condition of viewers," but "it can also be used in subtle and precise ways to address the complex situation of the contemporary subject in the mediatized time and space" (2010, 323).

Influenced early in her career by structural aesthetics, Akerman continued to build her films around spatial issues – distance, light, emptiness and fullness, inside and outside. In doing so, she systematically re-examined the means of filmic representation (frame, movement, editing, and duration) to understand how to show space in cinema.

By taking an interest in ordinary places, Akerman was completely in tune with her time, as shown by the many works in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, which have been devoted to the varieties of space in everyday life.[10] If Akerman invested more specifically in domestic space, it is perhaps because she was a woman. In certain aspects, her first films can

10 For instance, both *La production de l'espace* by Henri Lefebvre and *Espèces d'espaces* by Georges Perec appeared in 1974, the same year as Akerman's Je tu il elle.

be linked to the feminist cinema of the 1970s. Thus Laura Mulvey considers Jeanne Dielman alongside feature films directed by Yvonne Rainer and Valie Export in the 1970s. For her, these films share a common concern: "the interiority of women's lives, that is, how to find a voice for the inside of the mind as well as for its silences" (Mulvey 2016, 26-27). From this point of view, Akerman's work on domestic space is far removed from what Godard, for example, imagined when he made Une femme est une femme (1961) (Baschiera 2020). It seems to me, however, that the singularity of Akerman's treatment of interiors is above all due to her autobiographical approach. Closely linking her artistic practice to her own daily spatial practices, she produced performative images that put the question of dwelling at the center of her work.

Akerman's research joins that of artists such as Pedro Costa, Tariq Teguia, Avi Mograbi, Wang Bing, and Béla Tarr, who have questioned the "modes of existence that link a body (and therefore a subject) to space" (Maury 2018, 17). For these filmmakers, place is at the forefront of the narrative, raising political, historical, and anthropological questions. These issues are also present in Akerman, as shown by Sud (1999), De l'autre coté (2002), and the installation Marcher à côté de ses lacets dans un frigidaire vide (2004). What is specific to her is what she invents within domestic space, and her very particular way of observing the world from her window.

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7. Sequence and Simultaneity

Critiquing English Spaces with a Cine Camera

Patrick Keiller

Abstract
The chapter relates the evolution of its author's mode of filmmaking, in which sequences of actuality footage of urban and rural landscapes are accompanied by spoken narration written after the footage has been edited. The resulting films – initially short fictions, then feature-length critiques of England's economy and culture – were accompanied by a growing awareness of the medium's limitations in representing spatial subjects. Attempts to counter film's essential linearity were encouraged by two texts – one a well-known passage from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; the other a quotation from a 1967 essay by John Berger that became a founding text for contemporary geographers – and by experience realizing installations in which moving images were displayed simultaneously on multiple screens.

Keywords: architecture, journey, landscape, capitalism, manufacturing

When I began making moving images, I didn't have much of an idea what, if anything, I would do with the footage. As a former or at least temporarily lapsed architect, I was attracted not so much by the medium's capacity to *represent* space, as by the possibility it offered to capture particular kinds of spatial experience, and it seemed to me that this was achieved primarily through cinematography. I wasn't very interested in narrative, although most of the films I had in mind were narrative films: some were *films noirs*, and most monochrome or, if not, Technicolor. I was in the habit of identifying buildings and similar spatial structures with architectural and other qualities that were conventionally overlooked, a genre of quasi-Surrealist "found architecture" that seemed to involve – when I came to know of it – the

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conceptual transformation that for Louis Aragon ([1926] 1994, 113-115) was confirmed by the Surrealists' *frisson*. I collected a canon of texts describing the phenomenon that I have quoted repeatedly ever since (Keiller 2013), among which are passages in Walter Benjamin's essay "Surrealism" (1929), in which he writes that "it is a cardinal error to believe that, of 'Surrealist experiences,' we know only the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs" and that "the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a *profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration" (1979, 225-239). In life, such moments of altered awareness are typically very fleeting, but it seemed to me that in photographs and, even more so, in films, something similar could be captured.

Photography of architecture and landscape typically involves large camera formats and high-resolution, often high-contrast images, as if in pursuit of illusory three-dimensionality. I was used to 35mm color transparencies, smaller, but without the generational loss involved in making a print. In comparison, the 16mm cine frame was quantitatively challenged.[1] My subjects also rarely moved – the first footage I dared exhibit was of a few seconds of a building's demolition. The first completed film, on the other hand, comprised two ten-minute walks with a hand-held camera, for which I wrote and recorded fictional narration.[2] There were similar phantom walks in subsequent films, but in each the camera was increasingly, and eventually almost always, static, each set-up a space within which movement might occur. Edits were more frequent, and narration – initially part sound effect, part attempt at *genre* – became more important for continuity. As the cinematography was largely spontaneous, the result of mostly unplanned encounters with a variety of landscapes and other structures, I reasoned that the script should be written only after the pictures had been photographed and fine cut.[3] This method had the advantage that only a little footage was discarded in editing, but it was difficult to compose coherent text for such a relatively rapid succession of unconnected images and locations. I was encouraged by a passage in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*:

> *For if you will turn your eyes inwards upon your mind* [...] *and observe attentively, you will perceive, brother, that whilst you and I are talking*

1 The emulsion area of a 16mm cine frame is about 77 square millimeters, compared to the 319 square millimeters of a 35mm Academy ratio cine frame and the 864 square millimeters of the 35mm still cameras I had been used to.

2 Stonebridge Park (1981, 16mm b&w, 21 minutes).

3 This is more or less how cinema newsreels were produced.

> *together, and thinking and smoaking our pipes: or whilst we receive successively ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist* [...] Now, whether we observe it or no, continued my father, in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or other, which follow each other in train just like—A train of artillery? said my uncle Toby.—A train of a fiddle-stick!—quoth my father,—which follow and succeed one another in our minds at certain distances, just like the images in the inside of a lanthorn turned round by the heat of a candle.[4] (1767, 3.18)

In an essay about Sterne and Ignatius Sancho, Sukhdev Sandhu (1998) has written: "Linearity, Sterne believed, amounted to little more than selfishness. In contrast, he felt that we must look around us, be prepared to halt, be diverted by what is going on in the corners, the crevices, the byways of life. These side routes are full of value, pleasure, goodness." As Sterne wrote: "In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too" (1767,1.22). This, and the succession of ideas, seemed to legitimize the sporadic character of the narration I was trying to write.[5]

London, the first of several longer films, was released in 1994, and reached a wider audience than any of its predecessors.[6] In November that year I presented it at a screening for the London Group of Historical Geographers (Daniels 1995, 220-222), and in the following January at *Parisian Fields*, a conference at the University of Kent arranged by Michael Sheringham to coincide with the publication of Jacques Reda's *The Ruins of Paris* (1996) in English translation.[7] A few months later, I was to begin the cinematography for a sequel to London that was completed as Robinson in Space.[8] Like most of their shorter predecessors, these two films relied on journeys to structure their unscripted production, but differ in that they have non-fiction subjects, were photographed in 35mm color, and are narrated by their unseen protagonist's unseen companion, rather than by the unseen protagonist himself. They were much more expensive, undertaken as commissions from producing institutions, and as a result involved a good deal of preparation.

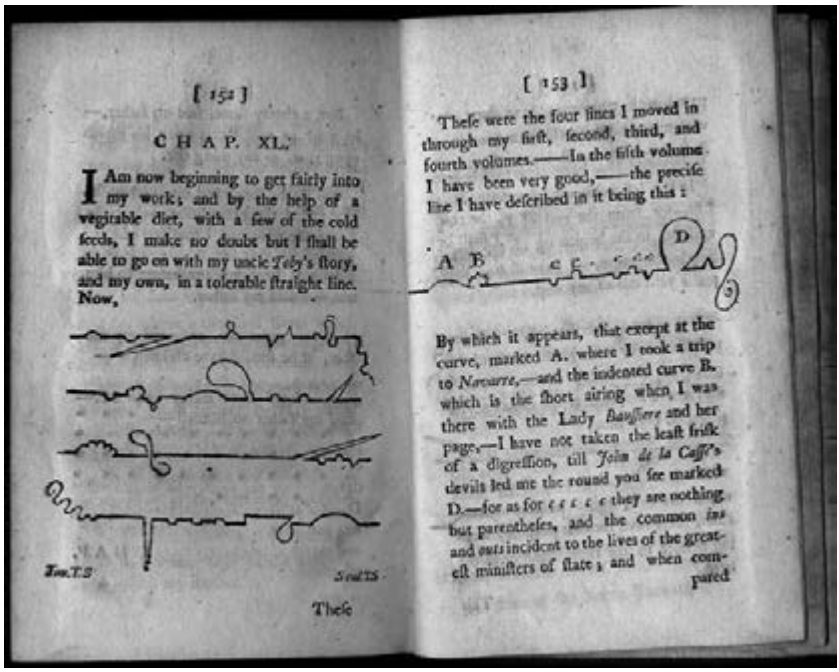
4 Sterne's lanthorn is borrowed from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690, 2.14.9). See also Alexander 1929, 271. Editor's note: italics in original.

5 The film was eventually completed as The End (1986, 16mm b&w, 18 minutes).

6 London (1994, 35mm color, 85 minutes), Koninck for the British Film Institute.

7 See also Sheringham 1996. The book *Robinson in Space* (Keiller 1999) was the outcome of a conversation begun at this conference.

8 Robinson in Space (1997, 35mm color, 82 minutes), Koninck for the BBC in association with the British Film Institute.


[152]

CHAP. XL.

I Am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegitable diet, with a few of the cold seeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line. Now,

Vol. I. 5 Vol. IX.

These

[153]

These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes.——In the fifth volume I have been very good,——the precise line I have described in it being this:

A B c f D

By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to *Navarre*,—and the indented curve B. which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady *Baussiere* and her page,—I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till *John de la Caze*'s devils led me the round you see marked D.—for as for *c c c c* they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared

Fig. 7.1: Pages from the original publication of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767).

London, Robinson in Space, and the later Robinson in Ruins,[9] are all fictional accounts of research by a would-be scholar called Robinson into a series of "problems" – in London, the "problem" of London; in Robinson in Space, the "problem" of England; while in Robinson in Ruins, the problem is perhaps that of "dwelling." Robinson in Space was to involve a search for sites of surviving UK manufacturing industry and visits to many ports, in an effort to discover how the country managed to sustain its material economy. I must have mentioned some of this to Michael, and he suggested I might have a look at Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989). Between trains in London on the way home, I went into a branch of Waterstones and started reading the first chapter, in which Soja quotes two paragraphs from John Berger's essay "No More Portraits":

> We hear a lot about the crisis of the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the mode of narration. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And

9 Robinson in Ruins (2010, 35mm color to 2K, 101 minutes), for the Royal College of Art and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

> this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the story-line laterally. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as the centre of a star of lines. Such awareness is the result of our constantly having to take into account the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities.
>
> There are many reasons why this should be so: the range of modern means of communication: the scale of modern power: the degree of personal political responsibility that must be accepted for events all over the world: the fact that the world has become indivisible: the unevenness of economic development within that world: the scale of the exploitation. All these play a part. Prophesy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space, not time, that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today it is only necessary to know men as they are throughout the whole world in all their inequality. Any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of this dimension is incomplete and acquires the over-simplified character of a fable. (1989, 22)[10]

Soja's emphasis, and that of other geographers, was on the assertion "it is space, not time, that hides consequences from us," though I was just as enthusiastic about Berger's observation of "a change in the mode of narration." I didn't read the rest of Soja's book until long after I'd made the film, and never knew exactly why Michael had recommended it: perhaps for the insights that "to speak of the 'post-industrial' city is thus, at best, a half-truth and at worst a baffling misinterpretation of contemporary urban and regional dynamics, for industrialization remains the primary propulsive force in development everywhere in the contemporary world"; and that theoreticians "have tended to overemphasize consumption issues and neglect the urbanization effects of industrial production" (Soja 1989, 187-188).

The BBC's commission to develop ROBINSON IN SPACE had been confirmed only after I'd mentioned that it would be modeled to some extent on Daniel Defoe's *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1726). Defoe's *Tour*, first published in three volumes over three years, is a series of "letters"

10 Berger's essay was published first in *New Society* in 1967, most recently in Overton 2016, and, as "The Changing View of Man in the Portrait" in anthologies; *The Moment of Cubism* (1969), *The Look of Things* (1972), and *Selected Essays* (2001). Punctuation, spelling et cetera are here as in *The Look of Things*.

each of which describes a more or less serpentine journey through part of the island. Volume I covers East Anglia and England south of London as far as Land's End; Volume II, a journey from Land's End to London, London itself, and the rest of the island south of the rivers Dee and Trent; Volume III, everywhere to the north. The tours were perhaps not undertaken as they were described and were at least partly informed by Defoe's travels in earlier years. Robinson in Space also drew on earlier travels, some undertaken for other films. I had identified places that the film might visit, often from newspaper reports, and had accumulated a large archive of press cuttings filed in chronological order. In the proposal for the film, I arranged selected sites as a series of two-week trips with the camera, between which would be two-week breaks for viewing the previous fortnight's footage, preliminary editing, and preparation for the next trip. Before each one, I would go through the chronologically filed cuttings, select those relating to the places we were to visit, and put them in a new file in topographical order, so that the film was driven by a kind of data management. There were to be seven trips: the first from Reading,[11] to which Robinson, sacked by the (fictitious) University of Barking after publishing his work on London, had exiled himself. From Reading, the two travelers would follow the Thames downstream, supposedly on foot, as far as Sheerness. A second outing from Reading, during which they buy a car, described an arc across southern England to Felixstowe, via Zeebrugge and Calais to Dover, west along the south coast and eventually to Portbury Dock, near Bristol. These and a further five journeys made up an erratic but more or less continuous progress as far as Northumberland.[12] The proposal included a schematic drawn on a piece of acetate overlaid on a map. I'd hoped it might resemble Sterne's narrative lines in *Tristram Shandy*, but it didn't look much like any of them.

The film's "problem" of England wasn't explicitly stated but, as I wrote after finishing it, "there are images of Eton, Oxford and Cambridge, a Rover car plant, the inward investment sites of Toyota and Samsung, a lot of ports, supermarkets, a shopping mall, and other subjects which evoke the by now familiar critique of 'gentlemanly capitalism,' which sees the UK's economic weakness as a result of the City of London's long term (English) neglect of the (United Kingdom's) industrial economy, particularly its manufacturing base" (Keiller 2013, 36).

11 Arthur Rimbaud's last-known address in England was in Reading.

12 Bristol to West Bromwich; West Bromwich to Warrington; Warrington to Immingham; Immingham to Menwith Hill, near Harrogate; and Preston to Newcastle upon Tyne.

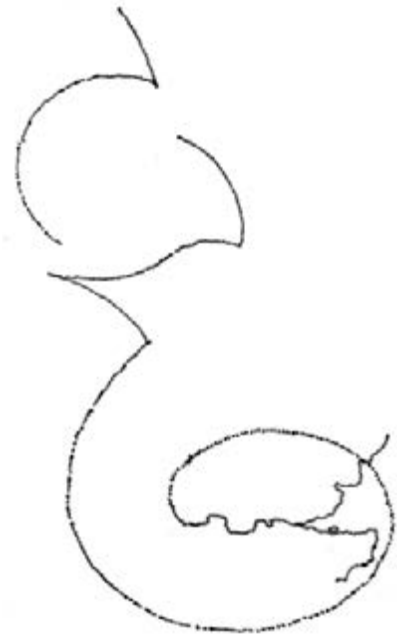


Fig. 7.2: Keiller's schematic of journeys in homage to the plot lines in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (see Fig. 7.1).

This "now familiar critique," already questioned,[13] was merely the starting point for the exploration. By the end of the film, its perception of "a particularly *English* kind of capitalism" had changed: it appeared that the UK's social and physical ills were not so much the results of gradual "decline" as of the imposition of an economic model, unpleasant to live with but relatively successful in its own terms (a persistent idea of decline, meanwhile, serving to moderate expectations). Also, as Soja observed, the loss of manufacturing had been overstated: a more accurate picture was of a "combination of deindustrialization and reindustrialization" (1989, 188). Though manufacturing's share of employment had become smaller, this was at least partly the result of mechanization, automation, and the reclassifying of some now outsourced tasks as services. Manufacturing had also changed and was less visible: the UK's manufacturing's strengths were in capital goods and intermediate products – neither seen in shops and both often produced in out-of-the-way places – while many branded products, such as those of the UK's car industry, most of it foreign-owned, were indistinguishable from others of the same makes built abroad (Keiller 2013, 35-49). It turned out later that the mid-1990s had been a relatively

13 See, for instance, Rubinstein 1993, quoted in the film, and Wood 1991.

successful period for the UK's international trade, exports slightly exceeding imports in the years 1995-1997 (House of Commons 2020, 8-9).

At some point after I had finished Robinson in Space, I began to think – or hope – that, by citing Berger's critique of narrative I might claim some validity for the film's peripatetic method. Although its images rarely depart from the order in which they were photographed, I began to see the film as a succession of discontinuous spaces, each one potentially the crossing point of intersecting narratives – a "star of lines" – a thought encouraged by the film's expansion, later, as a book, in which images and text are accompanied by annotation (Keiller 1999, 205).

I began the cinematography for Robinson in Ruins in January 2008. I had recently made two multi-screen installations, assembling moving images simultaneously in space, rather than in time, successively, as films. Each attempted to create a coherent virtual space by displaying footage on screens arranged in a configuration based on that of its various camera viewpoints, so as to mimic (in one) a complex interior and (in the other) the UK's urban geography in circa 1900.[14] While making the film, I hoped that it might lead to another installation or a book, perhaps both. It was made as part of a research project,[15] a collaboration with Doreen Massey, Patrick Wright, and Matthew Flintham, the project's doctoral student. The aim was to explore a tension between, on one hand, the extent of critical and cultural attention devoted to experience of mobility and displacement, and, on the other, a tendency to hold on to ideas of dwelling from a more settled, agricultural past. In early discussions, questions about "belonging" gave way to others, more urgent, about enclosure and the absence of rights to land. Doreen discussed this in "Landscape/Space/Politics: An Essay," one of her contributions to the project.[16]

The film is a record of a largely unplanned wandering through part of southern England: as before, the picture was photographed and edited before anything was written, but this time there was no map. I began very tentatively, with an image of a house in Oxford, encased in a temporary structure of scaffolding and plywood.

14 The largest of these was a 30-screen "replica" of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in Mumbai, the headquarters and end station of India's Central Railway, one of the largest neo-Gothic railway stations in the world. See Keiller 2007, 38-39, 42-43, and patrickkeiller.org/londres-bombay/. See also https://patrickkeiller.org/the-city-of-the-future-2/.

15 See http://www.landscape.ac.uk/research/largergrants/thefutureoflandscape.aspx; see also Keiller et al. 2012.

16 See Massey 2008; also an extra on the BFI's DVD of the film and, abridged, in Tyszczuk et al. 2012, 90-95.

Fig. 7.3: Robinson in Ruins: a house in Oxford.

Fig. 7.4: Robinson in Ruins: The Pelican Inn in Newbury, Berkshire, as it survives today.

A few weeks later, after a couple of preliminary excursions, I set out for Newbury where, in 1795, Berkshire magistrates had inaugurated the model of outdoor poor relief known as the "Speenhamland system": they had met at the Pelican Inn in Speenhamland, now part of central Newbury.

In the same year, the 1662 Settlement Act was amended by "An Act to prevent the Removal of Poor Persons until they shall actually become chargeable." The Act enabled the rural poor to move to factory towns; Speenhamland made it easier to remain on the land. For Karl Polanyi ([1944] 2001), in *The Great Transformation*, much referred to in the wake of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the "double movement" of the Act and Speenhamland in

Fig. 7.5: Diagrammatic record of Keiller's travels while researching and filming Robinson in Ruins.

1795 was a crucial moment in the imposition of markets, and in a history that led ultimately to twentieth-century catastrophe.

By November, I had made an approximately elliptical anti-clockwise progress through mostly rural landscapes, arriving – soon after the culmination of the crisis – in the vicinity of a place called Enslow, where the former main road from London to Worcester crosses the river Cherwell, about eight miles north of Oxford.[17]

In *For Space*, Doreen Massey had written: "Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, 9). Enslow is not much more than a bridge, a few houses, a roadside pub – "The Rock of Gibralter" – now closed, and some businesses in a former railway yard. For such a small

17 "The Road From London to Aberistwith," plates 1-3 in John Ogilby's *Britannia* (1675).

place, it seemed to offer an unusual number of stories,[18] though when I suggested this to Doreen, she thought it was perhaps not so unusual.[19] Some of these stories are related in the film, in narration accompanying footage supposedly photographed by "a man called Robinson" who, released from prison in January 2008, had "made his way to the nearest city, and looked for somewhere to haunt."[20] Toward the end of the film the images are of spaces close together, some of them intervisible, so that with the aid of continuous ambient sound, a sense of surrounding landscape was possible.

In 2011, after the film's release, I was invited to devise an exhibition at Tate Britain, in which its images and narrative would be accompanied by works from the Tate's collection, and other items. In discussions with Tate curators

18 In 1596, after several poor harvests, "Enslow Hill" was the site of an attempted rising against enclosing landlords. Its leading figure was Bartholomew Steer, a 28-year-old carpenter who lodged at Hampton Gay, a hamlet, since largely deserted, about a mile to the south on the left bank of the river. Its enclosing landlord, Vincent Barry, was among the rebels' targets. They planned to steal arms, make their way to London to join with the city's apprentices, who had rioted during the previous year. Steer called for the rising to assemble at 9 o'clock in the evening of Sunday, November 21 (O.S.), but only three men joined him, and after two hours they all went home. Barry had been told of the plan by one of Steer's neighbors. After arrest, imprisonment, interrogation under torture, and a trial for treason, two survivors of those judged to have been participants were hanged, drawn, and quartered on the hill. (For a more detailed account, see Walter 2006, 73-123). Until recently, the name "Enslow Hill" appeared only in accounts of the rising, all based on records of suspects' interrogation in state papers. Enslow was then little more than a bridge and a mill; immediately after the bridge, the road diagonally ascends a kind of bluff or promontory extending from higher ground northwest of the river. This is presumed to be Enslow Hill, though it is now known as "Gibraltar Point," a name that perhaps dates from the building of the Oxford Canal. The canal and the Reading-to-Birmingham railway line follow the Cherwell valley, passing through Enslow east of the river, where there was once a station. The hill was perhaps, as Steer believed, a site of action in an earlier rising in 1549, and is thought to have been the pre-conquest *Spelleburge* – "Speech Hill" – an Anglo-Saxon meeting place. During the twentieth century, much of it was removed by quarrying; Vodafone's satellite earth station is now located in the disused quarry. At Hampton Gay, there had been a train crash in 1874, one of the worst ever on a British railway, and several fires at a paper mill; the manor house, built by Vincent Barry's father, was gutted by fire in 1887, and remains a ruin. I had seen it from the train, but had never visited, or known of the rising, until making the film. On the opposite bank of the river is a similarly small village – Shipton-on-Cherwell – where an enormous limestone quarry, still active, supplied a now-demolished cement works until the 1980s. When owned by Richard Branson, Shipton Manor had been a recording studio. Between 1997 and 2007, Virgin CrossCountry trains passed by.

19 A thought recently confirmed by Patrick Wright (2020).

20 The film, on the other hand, was supposed to have been completed by a team of "researchers," who had been given the footage and a notebook after they were discovered in a derelict caravan near the manor house at Hampton Gay. Its narration was informed by the notebook, in which Robinson had written that, from the roof of a car park overlooking Oxford, he had surveyed "the location of a *Great Malady*, that I shall dispel, in the manner of Turner, by making *picturesque views*, on journeys to sites of scientific and historic interest."

Fig. 7.6: *The Robinson Institute* exhibition, Tate Britain, 2012.

and Jamie Fobert, the exhibition's architect, its design was developed as a succession of seven "clusters," each based on part of the film, to be arranged in the gallery as a circuit modeled on that of the film's progress through the landscape.[21] Each "cluster" was conceived as a crossing point of intersecting narratives, a "star" of lines. As in the earlier multi-screen installations, moving images were displayed simultaneously, rather than sequentially, as they are in the film, and in a layout based on the topography of their subjects. The exhibition opened in March 2012 as *The Robinson Institute* and continued until October.[22] It was accompanied by a book, in which many of the exhibits, and some other works, were reproduced (Keiller 2012).

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21 See https://jamiefobertarchitects.com/work/patrick-keiller/.

22 See https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/patrick-keiller-robinson-institute.

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About the Author

Patrick Keiller studied architecture at University College London and fine art at the Royal College of Art, where he began making films. Since the early 1990s, he has completed a series of feature-length films in which images of urban and rural landscape are the basis for critiques of England's economy and culture: London (1994) and Robinson in Space (1997) were subsequently adapted or expanded as books (2020, 1999), and Robinson in Ruins (2010) was the basis for *The Robinson Institute*, an exhibition at Tate Britain in 2012, accompanied by a book *The Possibility of Life's Survival on the Planet*. A book of essays *The View from the Train* was published in 2013. Website: patrickkeiller.org.

8. Unhoused

On the American Spaces of Nomadland

Ian Christie

Abstract
Nomadland won numerous awards internationally during 2021, probably due to its theme of learning to live as a van-dwelling "nomad" on America's highways chiming with the widespread isolation experienced during the COVID pandemic. But it also relates to longstanding American traditions of seeking wilderness solace, reflected in such classic texts as *Walden* and *Huckleberry Finn*, in traditional Westerns, as well as in the 1960s Hippie rejection of modern consumerism. Yet, the film's female protagonist's escape from the yoke of domesticity, after her bereavement and the collapse of the remote company town where she lived, may also point to a search for her "true self" as theorized by the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott.

Keywords: landscape, home, houseless, road, nomad, space

When Nomadland (2020) won an unprecedented number of awards during 2021, there was good reason to suspect this may have owed much to the timing of its appearance.[1] For many (including me), it was the first film seen in a cinema after many months of being confined to home-viewing due to COVID. Many more would have seen it online, as cinema attendance began a slow recovery, making the film an exceptional case of a multiple Academy Award winner that was more widely seen domestically than in theaters. And after so many people were either confined to their homes by COVID travel restrictions, or forced to take solitary recreation, it was – is

1 Nomadland won three Oscars and three BAFTA awards, along with many other awards internationally.

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– perhaps an ideal film to distil a distinctively modern sense of social and spatial isolation. As the AFI "Movie of the Year" Award citation indicated:

> Nomadland looks to the horizon of an unseen America. Chloé Zhao's richly rendered portrait of one woman's life journey is a meditation on transience – exploring the natural need to be a neighbor alongside the freedom of isolation offered by the sweeping majesty of nature. (AFI 2021)

Does this imply that under other circumstances, it would have attracted less admiration, or at least fewer awards? Judging by a number of the comments on IMDb that record frustration and disappointment, this is probably the case: Where's the plot? Why should we be interested in these modern nomads in their often well-appointed RVs, whether they have taken to the road by necessity or choice?[2]

So, a film that eerily matched the temper of its appearance, despite having been conceived and made well before the COVID pandemic took hold, which factor will no doubt continue to complicate its reputation. But my concern here is with the film's unusually concentrated focus on space – on the spaces of American living, and of the American landscape, both seen from an unfamiliar angle; and on what I take to be a crucial, even primordial distinction between the space we call "home" and everything that lies beyond it.

First, some explanation of "unhoused" as a term to use in considering Nomadland. This obsolete word has been revived in contemporary discussions of poverty and what is more commonly called "homelessness" (Slayton 2021).[3] And even before its increasingly polemical use by housing activists, a repeated motto of the new nomads featured in Nomadland is "houseless, not homeless," asserting that these can no longer be considered equivalent, let alone identical. Because nomads choose to live in a van does not mean they consider themselves "homeless," merely that their home is now mobile. But I want to ask how does this claim relate to the idea of home as a place of security, of origination? A posthumous collection of essays by the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott was titled *Home Is Where We Start From* (1986), taking as its epigraph the lines from T.S. Eliot's poem "East Coker" (1940).

2 RV, an abbreviation for Recreational Vehicle, has become standard American usage for a van large enough to sleep and live in.

3 "Houseless" is used in Shakespeare's (2023) *King Lear,* act 3, scene 4, line 34: "your houseless heads and unfed sides"; and later by the English Romantic poets, John Clare and William Wordsworth. Dickens evoked "Houselessness" in his essay "Night Walks with the Uncommercial Traveller" (1860); and William Raban's 2011 film inspired by this is titled The Houseless Shadow.

> Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment. (Elliot 1969, 182)

For Winnicott, as a psychoanalyst specializing in work with children, "home is the place where the richest experiences can be reached" (1986, 139). But of course home is also a complex and no doubt variable concept for Winnicott, not at all to be equated with a dwelling. And if we reach further back in psychoanalysis to Sigmund Freud, we find an important paper built around the concept of *unheimlich,* which is Freud's exploration of a feeling that's usually translated in English as "uncanny." In his 1919 paper, Freud wrote,

> The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home"; and we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar.[4] (1990, 2)

From his philological research, Freud concluded that

> the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. The word *unheimlich* is only used customarily, we are told, as the contrary of the first signification, and not of the second. (4)

He concludes that "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*," adding "let us retain this discovery, which we do not yet properly understand" (4). For Anglophones, these terms are inescapably linked to an apparently literal meaning – "home-like" and "un-homelike," which they may no longer

4 The translation of Freud's paper by Alix Stratchey remains the "standard" one. Freud included a comparative survey of terminology in several languages, followed by a long philological preamble. The most relevant part is perhaps: "ENGLISH: (from dictionaries by Lucas, Bellow, Flügel, Muret-Sanders). Uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal, uncanny, ghastly; (of a house) haunted; (of a man) a repulsive fellow. FRENCH: (Sachs-Villatte). Inquiétant, sinistre, lugubre, mal à son aise" (Freud 1990, 341).

have for German speakers. But, following Freud's 1919 paper, let us "retain this observation, which we many not yet fully understand."

The new nomads are insisting on a distinction between home as a conventional dwelling-place, and the possibility of a home that is effectively mobile and perhaps more akin to an era when living in the open air was more common, certainly for those working the land or the cattle range. In this respect, we inevitably recall the lyrics of the traditional American song, "Home on the Range," which has remained popular long past the era of cattle-herding. What all the versions of this "cowboy song" celebrate is a life lived in the open air, "where the deer and the antelope play," originally herding cattle and sleeping by a campfire under the stars.[5]

On the Road

There is of course a long tradition of taking to the road in American literature, which has been recognized as having two ideological armatures. One was conveniently summarized in Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), which explored the lasting importance of westward migration and settlement, long after the era of the pioneers and "manifest destiny" as a political project. The other was expressed in Leo Marx's classic study *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), subtitled *Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, which examined the persisting tension between technological innovation and a "pastoral ideal" that had been fostered by some of America's earliest thinkers, such as Emerson and Thoreau. Not surprisingly, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) figures in most accounts of these founding themes. Smith (1984, 25) noted how reaction against Twain's earthy vernacular humor, especially among New England guardians of a "genteel tradition," spelled the defeat of that lofty attitude, faced with the book's wide acceptance. For Marx, the garden is represented by the raft that carried Huck and his black friend Jim downriver, while the steamship is the machine that smashes it – as well as the dream of escape for Huck and Jim. As the raft drifts south, further into slave-owning territory, it is increasingly clear that this existence is unsustainable. Huck's only option is to "light out for the territory" (Twain 1994, 435), meaning the land set aside for Native American settlement, and

5 "Home on the Range" lyrics: "How often at night when the heavens are bright / With the light from the glittering stars […]."

so escape the relentless mechanization of modern America, together with its veneer of gentility.

Huck's bid for freedom not only signaled a new direction in American culture, but also an existential choice that would echo through succeeding generations up to the recent era that NOMADLAND portrays. Fundamentally different from the large westward migrations of the Frontier era, the Gold Rush, or the Depression, there is a persistent individualistic urge to reject the consumerism that has come to define modern American society. The prime cultural expression of this would be Jack Kerouac's semi-fictional *On the Road* (1957), chronicling the 1950s travels of members of the Beat generation, followed by Ken Kesey's equally drug-fuelled bus-ride with his Merry Pranksters in 1964, with a variety of literary and filmic offshoots.[6]

In cinema, after decades of Westerns and picaresque road journeys, America's drug culture would produce Dennis Hopper's EASY RIDER (1969), immediately recognized as a zeitgeist defining statement. Flush from a large drugs haul, Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda embark on a motorcycle journey eastward from Los Angeles to visit Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Along the way, they befriend Jack Nicolson's character, a sometime lawyer, who muses on the racist attitudes they have encountered at an earlier stop: "You know, this used to be a helluva good country." Soon after, confirming his worst fears, he will be killed by a gang of local roughnecks who attack the campers under cover of darkness, as the film's protagonists continue their journey through a backwoods America marked by violent hostility toward what they are seen as representing. No such violence occurs in NOMADLAND, despite its sharing with EASY RIDER a vision of America's vast interior wilderness, and an elegiac attitude toward American society fifty years later. The new film's protagonist, Fern, is a single woman, who has taken to the road after her husband's death, joining the large number of "nomads" that have abandoned conventional homes to live permanently, or at least indefinitely, in their vans.[7]

The violence that underlies this social revolution is economic rather than driven by intolerance. This "wandering tribe," as the author of the book on which the film is based, Jessica Bruder, describes them, "are driving away from the impossible choices that face what used to be the middle class,"

6 These include Kesey's own novels, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), neither are about the actual bus-ride, which was chronicled by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968).

7 According to reports in 2011, the number of permanently mobile Americans was three million. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01777fp.

especially after the financial crash of 2007 (2021, xii). Faced with the cost of maintaining a conventional lifestyle, these van-dwellers have opted to become mobile, taking advantage of a ready market in vehicles that may be intended for camping trips, but can also be, quite literally, "mobile homes." They are also taking advantage of the large economic and technological shifts that have added new kinds of temporary employment to traditional seasonal occupations, such as the Californian harvesting that sustained the westward migration of Midwestern "Okies" in the 1930s, as chronicled by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Chief among these is the online marketing behemoth Amazon, with its offer of short-term work to members of an itinerant "CamperForce." Short periods of intensive work in its warehouses will enable many nomads to enjoy, or at least survive, not having more traditional employment; and will leave them free to embrace the new rituals of the nomadic life, such as the annual Rubber Tramp Rendezvous at a remote site in Arizona named Quartzsite.

This large gathering of modern nomads serves as a social, even tribal gathering, offering a wide range of supports for those attending. Some of these are practical, as we discover from its portrayal in the film, and others might be termed supportive. A key figure in the nomad movement has been the avuncular figure of Bob Wells, who has created a what amounts to a movement, and appears as himself in NOMADLAND. A report summarizing Wells's life story includes in a photograph caption a reference to one of the historic inspirations for solitary life in the wilderness: "by his own telling, he was the living embodiment of Thoreau's 'quiet desperation'" (Trujillo 2021). This evokes a celebrated statement near the beginning of Thoreau's account of his two-year experiment, *Walden; Or Life in the Woods*, that "The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation" (1854, 10). We are inevitably reminded that escaping this has been a distinctively American avocation.

If Thoreau is an unavoidable reference point in discussing the new nomads, so too is a less familiar, but distinctively American perspective on cultural geography associated with John Brinckerhoff Jackson, widely known as "Brinck."[8] Jackson was active after World War II as an essayist, publisher, and teacher, and he popularized the idea of "American space," stressing its everyday or vernacular qualities, rather than those due to planning. He also coined the term "odology" for a sub-field in cultural landscape studies dealing with streets and roads, taken from the Greek *hodos*, meaning road or journey (Wilson 2020). As a keen motorcyclist, who had travelled and observed widely in Europe as well as America in the first

8 J.B. Jackson (1909-1996).

half of the twentieth century, he argued trenchantly for the significance of the American highway and its associated landscape, however tawdry this might seem to the high-minded. In his journal *Landscape*, he defended the American passion for road travel (Jackson 1957). A contributor to an anthology devoted to Jackson's legacy summarized his enthusiastic advocacy:

> Along with dramatically expanding the range of personal mobility, the automobile enabled its operator to engage landscapes and social relationships in exhilarating new terms. No longer a static observer [...] the modern motorist was an active participant in the construction of his or her own individual experience [...] Sweeping along a curve of the modern highway [...] they become "the shifting focus of a moving abstract world." (Wilson 2020, 69)

These ideas were first expressed by Jackson in a pioneering 1957 article "The Abstract World of the Hot-Rodder," where he wrote of this "new landscape of movement" as having a "mystical quality," and it is perhaps to his disciples in this new branch of landscape studies that we should turn for keys to what NOMADLAND seeks to convey as an "odological" epic.

What Bruder and other journalists have chronicled is essentially a response to economic disaster after the financial crash of 2007, structurally similar to the response of "Okies" and Midwesterners to the Dustbowl and Great Depression of the 1930s. Yet crucially different in that the new migrants are apparently most often individuals, or couples, taking advantage of modern resources to remain mobile, without seeking any new place to settle and work. And although Zhao's film draws heavily on the book, to the extent of featuring several of its case histories and protagonists, it also crucially introduces a new fictional character, who embodies the rejection of suburban domesticity, and ultimately of an idea of "home" itself.

Fern is cast as a novice "nomad," who must learn the basics of modern van-living, which she does largely from two experienced RV-ers, Linda May and Charlene Swankie, who appear as versions of themselves in the film. Fern's life has been upended by the death of her husband, and also by an event that is reported in Bruder's book: the collapse and abandonment of a small isolated company town in Nevada. Empire had been created by United States Gypsum, a company that produced the drywall building material known as plasterboard in the UK, and by its trade name Sheetrock in the United States. Faced with falling demand, the company decided in 2010 to close the mine and factory, and withdraw its extensive support for the town that housed its remaining employees. From being "a throwback to

Fig. 8.1: Fern (Frances McDormand) as a novice "nomad" learning how to be houseless in Nomadland.

the much romanticized heyday of American manufacturing" (Bruder 2021, 39), with a population of 750 in the 1960s and a strong community ethos, Empire became a deserted non-place.[9]

Nomadland is bracketed by two highly evocative visions of this ghost-town. The first image we see is from inside a lock-up in Empire, with Fern opening its door to reveal a desolate snow-covered landscape. We don't yet know that this will be the prelude to her becoming a "nomad," but in terms of the history of American filmic landscapes, it could be the opposite of an image such as the opening of John Ford's The Searchers (1956) where we look out on a sun-baked desert, from which another nomad, John Wayne's Ethan Edwards will appear. That film is memorably framed by Edwards's arrival, before a massacre sets him off on his bitter mission to recover an abducted youngster, and his departure at the end, unreconciled to any final homecoming. At the end of Nomadland, Fern will return to Empire and visit the empty shell of the house she formerly shared with her husband. Through the film, we've become accustomed to McDormand's impassive demeanor, suggesting fortitude, self-sufficiency. We've shared evenings and mornings in the close proximity that her van's interior dictates; but we know little about her past life in Empire, except that her husband worked for the company, and that she worked as a teacher. So we're left with little to fill this desolate space of what was once a home. The trajectory of Fern's encounters

9 Empire is not a "non-place" in the sense explored by French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), referring to non-places of supermodernity. Rather it is an "erased" place, like the abandoned sites of mining and prospecting across America. The final mark of its erasure was the discontinuation of its postal zip-code in 2011, rendering it an administrative "non-place."

has been toward a need to accept transience, impermanence – perhaps in the terms that Wells uses: "There's no final farewell – I'll see you down the road." However, in returning to what was once her home, Fern appears to be ready to accept the end of her past life; and her departure from Empire carries an unmistakable echo of Edwards's in THE SEARCHERS, albeit without the romanticism of the Western's drifting loner.[10]

THE SEARCHERS drew much of its power from a wide-ranging journey through the North American wilderness, seen as if from horseback; and NOMADLAND displays an equally impressive range of Midwest and Great Plains landscapes, mainly in Nevada, South Dakota, and Arizona, as seen "odologically" from the contemporary highway and from the numerous campsites, which offer nomads like Linda May and Fern an opportunity for casual work as "hosts." These desolate sites of transience are perhaps closer to Augé's (1995) "non-places" than Empire or the various industrial plants, both old and new, seen during the film.[11]

Resisting Home-Life

Between the bracketing episodes in Empire, Fern experiences two forms of "home life": one when she is forced to visit her sister, living in a neat Californian suburb, to get financial help for repairing her van; and the other when she joins a fellow-nomad, Dave, on a visit to his son's family. At her sister's, Fern experiences what she has been in flight from for much of her life – what took her to Empire, and kept here there after Bo's death. It's the epitome of middle-class suburban life, with a group gathered around a barbecue, and Fern finds it intolerable. Her sister clearly resents that she left home and moved "to the middle of nowhere" with Bo; accuses her of finding the nomads "more interesting" than suburbanites. When her sister presses her to stay, she expresses a visceral unease – "I can't live in this room; I can't sleep in this bed." Her sister can only rationalize this by casting her as "part of an American tradition," like the pioneers.

Fern is alienated from what has come to signify "home" in modern America, and indeed from the idea of the conventional family, as

10 Arguably the two archetypal figures of mainstream American cinema are the drifter and the settler … the one permanently homeless, apparently by choice; the other in search of a home, however precarious.

11 Augé writes suggestively of the "excess of space" which the supermodern world brings us via screen media and its "false familiarity" which serves as a "decoy" (1995, 31-32).

becomes clear when she joins Dave at his son's family home. Dave is clearly attracted to her as a potential partner, and the scene is set for a new romantic relationship in an attractive non-suburban setting. But Fern instinctively rejects this, leaving the house early without any farewells, and is next seen walking along a rugged coastline in stormy weather (actually California's Point Arena). Nature at its rawest seems to be mobilized here to resist any collapse into the temptation of domesticity – or perhaps this marks a deployment of the "pathetic fallacy" as Fern is conflicted by her decision to part from Dave. In any event, she will remain alone in her community of nomads, and shortly after she takes part in a ritual celebrating the life of Swankie, who has died, before hearing how Bob losing his son to suicide led him to the idea of "serving" the nomad community.[12]

It's after this philosophical exchange that she decides to return to Empire, and deal with the unresolved legacy of Bo's death, by giving away what she's kept in storage, and returning to the nomadic road. The emotional trajectory of the film has been to bring Fern to this point, where she can let go, and move on. But we can also note that Zhao's film mutes the political thrust of Bruder's book, which focused on the impact of America's 2008 recession, condemning millions to poverty and precarity. The conditions that have created the real nomads who populate the film are not explored, and while the work that they undertake – cleaning, servicing, working amid the mechanization of Amazon warehouses – is hardly romanticized, but nor is it shown as exploitative or corrupting. In the book, Linda May explains to Bruder the realization she has reached:

> Right now I am working in a big warehouse, for a major online supplier. The stuff is crap all made somewhere else in the world where they don't have child labor laws, where the workers labor fourteen-to sixteen-hour days without meals or bathroom breaks. There is one million square feet in this warehouse packed with stuff that won't last a month. It is all going to a landfill. [...] Our economy is built on the backs of slaves we keep in other countries, like China, India, Mexico, any third-world country with a cheap labor force where we don't have to see them but where we can enjoy the fruits of their labor. This American Corp. is probably the biggest slave owner in the world. (2021, 240)

12 The "real" Swankie had not died, but the death of her fictional character serves to motivate an episode in the film, a ritual celebrating her life as a nomad, as if to support the fatalistic philosophy already outlined by Bob Wells.

Linda is struggling to reconcile her disgust with the economy she's involved in with her aspiration to build an eco-friendly "Earthship" dwelling on the proceeds. Others, like Bob Wells, are aiming to create something like a neo-communal movement of exchange and mutual support.

In muting the political thrust of Bruder's book, and building her film around Fern's fictive trajectory, Zhao has created a form of "new pastoral," in which nomadic van-life brings freedom from economic anxiety through a rugged and indeed fatalistic self-sufficiency. It may recall Leo Marx's yoking together of Thoreau's cabin and Huck Finn's raft, representing historical forms of escape from social restrictions, embracing "all of the extravagant possibilities of sufficiency, spontaneity and joy that had been projected on the American landscape" (1964, 330). Watching the film, we experience a succession of intensely picturesque landscapes, often seen at dawn and at dusk. And the interior of Fern's "Vanguard" RV rhymes plausibly with the imagined interiors of Pioneer or Okie wagons, enhanced with the benefits of modern mobile technology.

Yet Fern's trajectory is also a search for new "emotional space," after the end of her conjugal life in Empire, and involves rejecting the two versions of modern American domesticity that she is offered – a return to the birth-family and embarking on a new relationship. And perhaps we can return to Freud's observations on the psychic implications of *heimlich/unheimlich*, enhanced by Winnicott's reflections on space. Home may be where we start from as infants, meaning the place where the primary mother-baby relationship is formed. But Winnicott was critical of the classic Freudian dichotomy between an "inner" and "outer" world, arguing instead for a third of "potential" space, which "depends for its existence on living experiences" (1974, 127).

Fern's exchange with her sister clearly articulates this:

> Dolly: Why don't you move in with us?
> Fern: I can't live here. I can't live in this room. I can't sleep in this bed. Thank you, but I can't
> Dolly: I know, we're not as interesting as the people you meet out there.
> Fern: That's not what I'm talkin' about.
> Dolly: No, that's what it is. It's always what's out there that's more interesting. You left home as soon as you could, you married Bo after just knowing him a few months, and then you moved to the middle of nowhere with him. And then even after Bo passed away, you still stayed in Empire. I just didn't get it. I mean, you could have left …
> Fern: Yeah. See, that's why I can't come here.

Here, as elsewhere, NOMADLAND maps a metaphorical sense of space onto the physical spaces it portrays. Fern knows that she has definitively rejected the home of suburban domesticity offered by her sister. And by the end of the film, she has also moved beyond the previously unresolved grief after her bereavement, leaving behind the shell of her former home in Empire, now literally a "ghost town." The space that lies before her on the highway is effectively what Winnicott would call "potential" – "the feeling of being free to choose and being able to create anew" (quoted in Davis and Wallbridge 1981, 120).[13] Beyond the slogan of "houseless, not homeless," we might perceive the emergence of a new concept of non-dependent living space. We might also recall that prototypical American wanderer Huck Finn, after he has escaped living with the formality and feuding of an adoptive family ashore, to resume the journey down-river with his friend Jim:

> We said there warn't no home like a raft after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft. (Twain 1994, chap. 18)

As Leo Marx observed, that raft "embraces all of the extravagant possibilities of sufficiency, spontaneity, and joy that had been projected upon the American landscape since the age of discovery" (1964, 330). Fern's driving away from Empire on a Nevada highway at the end of NOMADLAND hardly aspires to the same register. But neither is it depressive or pessimistic. Indeed, if we are prepared to follow Winnicott's later thought, we might claim that Fern has finally escaped "False-Self organization," and is now in search of her creative "True Self"– a concept which he found hard to define or relate to Freudian orthodoxy, yet one he thought might be "what life itself is about" (Phillips 2017, 135).[14] NOMADLAND can certainly be located in a deeply American tradition of road and trail movies. But perhaps because Zhao comes from outside that tradition, discovering a new social and topographic or "odological" reality in the wake of America's most recent economic cataclysm, she has been able to show the RV nomads as a tribe in search of personal authenticity amid the scarred landscape of America's industrial

13 This Winnicott quotation cited here by Davis and Wallbridge is from an unpublished paper titled "Freedom."

14 Adam Phillips (2017) discusses one of Winnicott's last papers, "The Location of Cultural Experience" (1967) as an attempt to address the large question of "what life itself is about," which he admits lies outside traditional psychoanalytic theory. Nonetheless, he defines Winnicott's "True Self" as "what for each person 'gives the feeling of real'" (127).

past and consumerist present. And in search of a new understanding of "home," no longer tied to the economy of housing.

Beyond Nomadland

Returning to the initial reception of the film, on the cusp of emerging from COVID restrictions, might this point toward a much wider – yet often ignored – aspect of cinema's social and psychological efficacy? Annette Kuhn edited a collection that offered a Winnicottian perspective on cultural experience in 2013, at a time when film consumption was in transition, with domestic streaming still far from the level it has since reached. She then observed that

> New modes of delivery of film make possible a range of different spatial and bodily relationships with the "cinematic apparatus" [...] To the extent that these relationships are potentially more tactile, more immediate, the relationship between films and viewers might in some circumstances become more like that between toys and their users [...] We can see that the toy/playing aspect can still potentially involve the kinds of outer world/inner world dynamics at work in transitional phenomena. (2013, 14-15)[15]

My own experience of Nomadland started with seeing it in a cinema, in an early return to public viewing after COVID restrictions lifted in Britain; then continued with a second home viewing, followed by a local film society viewing, which led to a lively discussion.[16] Although I can no longer disaggregate these experiences, I strongly suspect that Fern's "journey" toward embracing a new independent life had particularly strong personal resonance, in a prevailing social and psychological climate of reassessing priorities and values. Much of Kuhn's work has been on the classic era of cinema viewing in the 1930s, but she suggests that this may yet be reconfigured for today's multiplatform world. Nomadland would seem to represent a prime instance of film continuing to help its viewers

15 Referring to Winnicott's best-known concept; his discussion of toys as "transitional objects" that help us negotiate separation, elaborated in the papers collected as *Playing and Reality* (Winnicott 1974).

16 I was invited by Highgate Film Society, at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution, to lead a discussion after the film in February 2023.

negotiate inner world dynamics through the representation of trauma being worked through fictionally at a time of social crisis.

More broadly, there is also empirical evidence that film viewing continues to constitute what could be considered a Winnicottian "third space" for exploring trauma and uncertainty, as revealed in a large-scale study of attitudes, *Opening Our Eyes* (UK Film Council 2011). Here a substantial cross-section of the UK population confirmed that specific films had often changed their attitudes to a wide range of subjects and indeed contributed to their sense of identity. Beyond the unusual conjuncture in which NOMADLAND appeared, there is undoubtedly scope for continued exploration of how film provides an emotional space for viewers to explore their inner worlds and vicissitudes.[17]

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17 During its first two decades of existence, from 2001-2019, the European Psychoanalytic Film Festival in London provided a forum for filmmakers, theorists, and critics, and psychoanalytic practitioners to explore these issues, often yielding remarkable insights. For an overview, see Institute of Psychoanalysis 2023. See also the festival director Andrea Sabbadini's books (2003, 2014).

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PART III

Spatial Speculations

9. Conjuring Spaces on Page and Screen – A Dialogue

Isobel Armstrong and Ian Christie

Abstract
This dialogue about spaces in literature and on the screen turns on comparing the difference between spaces mediated by language and by image, and on the scopic possibilities of each medium. The interlocutors range across the John Ford films My Darling Clementine and The Searchers and up to Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, encountering along the way a number of writers and theorists from Proust and Lou Andreas Salomé to Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Lefebvre.

Keywords: space, novel, Dionysian, haptic, Woolf, Proust, Ford

Ian Christie: As a literary scholar, you've written about how nineteenth-century literature powerfully evokes a sense of place. I'm thinking of your essay "Theories of Space and the Nineteenth-Century Novel," where you ask "how does the novelist, through the signifying power of language alone, enable a reader to *experience* or feel that she experiences, the lived, immediate nature of three-dimensional space?" (Armstrong 2013). You make two important preliminary points. One is the large claim that "if we subtract the element of space from the nineteenth-century novel, it would be hard to say what is left." The other is your empirical account of asking cohorts of students about their spatial mapping of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) compared with George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860). Everyone, apparently, grasps the layout of Mansfield Park with what is perhaps surprising accuracy, in view of the sparse topographical information offered by Austen. But in the case of Eliot's novel, you report that "students' attempts to render the impressionistic poetic space of the novel" result in "wildly different" representations. I wonder if you think there might be an equivalent range

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
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in cinema? All films portray "places," albeit in very different ways. But do some create a fictive topography more precisely than others?

Isobel Armstrong: It's such an obvious thing to say, but cinema comes to us, can conjure space, without the mediation of language, signification, unlike fiction. Nor is it an *image, a duplication*, representation, exactly: it doesn't have the element of doubleness Rancière (2009) associates with the image, flickering between likeness and unlikeness. It is a form of space itself, simulated space within space. So for me it comes under the rubric of those optical devices going back to the nineteenth century and further that play with the eye – diorama, stereoscope, anorthoscope, zoetrope, dissolving view. (I know Deleuze liked to think there was an epistemological break between these and cinema, but I'm not so sure.) And the interest of this is that the eye reciprocally plays with these devices. The viewer can choose to look in a certain way, choose to focus on things on the screen – a detail, a bit of a face, a bit of lace, a horizon, a distance. This gives her a certain power. Lou Andreas-Salomé worried about cinema – for her a new art form – for this reason. She thought the viewer could have delusional power, the stronger the moving image the more intense. The viewer is under the direction of the cinema space, but nevertheless brings it into being with a certain freedom.

IC: Andreas-Salomé was, as you say, reacting to a new art form. But do you think film built upon literary apprehensions of space or did it forge a new spatiality?

IA: In her Freud journal, written over 1913 and 1914, Andreas-Salomé thought of film as the only art form which "permits the rapid sequence of pictures which approximates our own imaginative faculty; it might be said to imitate its erratic ways" (1964, 101). For her this was certainly a visual feat that novels and theater could not achieve. In a way she was proved right: modernist novelists such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce clearly reimagine space through the techniques of cinema. But I am unhappy about making a decisive break between the realist and modernist novel, and between the nineteenth century and new film media. Dickens's understanding of the visual transformations, the rapid supersession of images, created through train travel, in *Dombey and Son* (1848), or George Eliot's evocation of vistas of white forms and the sprawling erotic life of frescos on walls and ceilings in Rome during the honeymoon tour of her heroine in *Middlemarch* (1872) are cinematic. The nineteenth century was a supremely optical century. In many ways – this is a bit of a truism – the nineteenth century anticipated film.

IC: But you mention Andreas-Salomé's skepticism about cinema?

IA: Though she loved the "extraordinarily abundant variety of forms, pictures, and impressions" (1964, 101) and believed that both working classes and intellectuals could be liberated from their respective "treadmills" by film, she evidently believed that cinema's unmediated spaces and images could release fantasies from the "erratic" unconscious. In her surrealist verse drama of 1922, *The Devil and His Grandmother*, she locates a violent scene of rape of a child by the devil screened as a film sequence (Andreas-Salomé 2017). Cinema's capacity to isolate body parts in close-up was a new visual experience of violence. "The phantom structures [...] growing on the filmscreen, larger than life . [...] Here you see a finger joint, – blown / To errant place; here nipples" (2.790-796).

IC: This leads us to cinema spaces and places and the way they are constructed. I have some potential film comparisons in mind. For instance, John Ford's My Darling Clementine (1946) and its imagined Tombstone, compared with his The Searchers (1956), where there's an intense focus on the opening desert homestead, followed by the epic "homeless" search that John Wayne's Ethan Edwards makes in search of the abducted girl.[1]

IA: I started rather far away from your initial talking point, which was to ask whether, despite the Kantian imperative of *a priori* space under which we all live, there are different ways of experiencing and creating space and place in the moving image. (Incidentally, you speak more about place than space, whereas I tend to speak of the latter.) Your query emerged from my report of the uncanny experience of seeing a whole class describe the space of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in virtually the same way, whereas the same class described the lyrical space of a scene from George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* in widely different ways, even to the affect of the description. You wondered if the spaces and places of Ford's two films, My Darling Clementine and The Searchers, differed as widely, whether cinema is capable of making one "live" space differently, in different contexts.

Though the abstraction of geometry was Kant's preferred way of expressing the *a priori* of space – that is, we don't *deduce* space after experiencing it, we are *in it* – he was certain that it organizes our bodies in a visceral way.

1 For an earlier comparison of these two films, see Christie 2017, 11. Also p. 127.

Looking at these two movies I feel that cinema likewise exerts a tremendous physical pull on the self. But they are as different as *Mansfield Park* and *The Mill on the Floss* in the way they create spatial possibilities.

In Clementine you are hyper aware of the organizing power of space as soon as things begin. Not just because of the fluent acts of herding cattle in the distance which you see first, but because when speaking of Tombstone all the characters look back behind and beyond themselves, never forward. And the space you and they see is not the town, it is the admonitory physiographical presence of the mesa, which stands a gigantic geological memorial of rock formation where the unseen town is supposed to be in the distance. No one says that the town is named after the mesa, but the mesa looks like a tombstone. To what exactly this rocky tombstone is dedicated, what memorial it is, is hard to know. And of course the black and white film endorses the sense of gloom. This is destabilizing from the start, although it's tempting to see the handling of filmic space as organized according to the conventions of the Western. Naturally, the familiar elements recur: the saloon bar, the long flat street, the covered walk, the room whose interior space is lit up by open door or window, and the corral.

But the way these are handled isn't conventional at all. People are always violating or breaking out of, or breaking into, these spaces – jumping over the division/barrier of the bar whose long flat surface parallels the long straight street outside, for instance, or crowding into the wrong rooms. In a movie about trying to evict people from a town, space is singularly unable to contain anyone. And the O.K. Corral can't contain the violence either – "corral" is exactly the wrong word (I suppose there's a sexual aspect to the breaking of barriers too). Everyone is trying to break out of the tomb of Tombstone in some way. Space neither can be organized or organize the actants, but this very fact makes one aware of its coercive power. I puzzled about the presence of *Hamlet* and the intimations of death.[2] I found this quite an admonitory movie: there's a gravitas that dominates; perhaps until the ultimate tomb we have the power to be or not to be in space. And this is a political as well as a personal act.

2 IC: An itinerant actor, played by English-born Alan Mowbray, due to perform in a melodrama at the town theater, is kidnapped by the Clanton gang, and forced to recite act 3, scene 1 of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" standing on a saloon table. When his tormentors tire of this, Doc Holliday asks him to continue, and helps him finish the soliloquy: "But that the dread of something after death … / The undiscovered country / From whose bourn no traveler returns, / Puzzles the will / And makes us rather bear those ills we have / Than fly to others that we know not of?" (Shakespeare 2023, 3.1.86-90).

Fig. 9.1: Henry Fonda as Wyatt Earp, precariously balanced in front of Tombstone's Mansion House hotel in My Darling Clementine.

The Mansion House hotel on the town's main street also keeps recurring as the setting for scenes like Clementine's arrival, and as a background in wider shots, but always in ways that truncate its dimensions and the letters of its name. It's as if the foundations and proportions of this building are never stable, and the action takes place on this basis.

IC: Picking up your point about the Mansion House's "instability," one of the film's most memorable images is of Henry Fonda precariously balancing on his chair in front of the hotel. Just as the *Hamlet* sequence foreshadows Holliday's death in this "undiscovered country," perhaps too pointedly, here Fonda's Wyatt Earp is emblematically poised in a state of precarity – a strange moment of suspension for a Western, even one as reflective as this.

IA: The Searchers is a far more individualistic film in comparison with the communality of Clementine. What Wayne's character really wants to do is achieve the whole damn rescue on his own, which he more or less does. And here space is deeply affected by color – the color produces the perpetual new drama of the mesa spaces, particularly the drama of sky with land and human figures in profile, small figures and large rockscapes – it's a drama of traversing space, perpetually crossing one spatial barrier after another, endlessly. When Wayne says "That'll be the day," he means hubristically

that there never will be a decisive moment when he is contained, when he reaches a moment of pause or finitude, closure. And the spaces grow up around him as if to endorse this – there is always another barrier to cross, a river, a gorge, a mountain. Which is why it's such an anti-climax when the girl is found. The rhythm of the movie is daemonic in this way. That's to say, it seems to be possessed by a compulsion to conquer successive spaces to infinity, spaces that never reach closure. Against this rhythm, it repeatedly punctuates the open spaces of postponement with the enclosure of the isolated homestead, though interestingly once you are inside this "domestic"/social space the interior space tends to recess – there always seems to be more unseen space inside the interior than the ostensible size of these homesteads warrants. And more people too. It's overcrowded where the outside seems underpopulated. The hidden presence of Indians is a shock. The lone silhouette is, in a sense, ideological space, an assumption of the individual's ownership of space and autonomy within it that is actually unfounded. I'm not sure that CLEMENTINE has this kind of critique. But as in the earlier film, the ownership of space is at stake.

These two films are profoundly different in their spatial structures. I almost want to say (reaching rather truistically for Nietzsche) that the first is Apollonian and the second Dionysian in its structuring of space. CLEMENTINE emphasizes the rule-bound, organizing constraints of space. SEARCHERS is about individualistic space, the sublime, sometimes rhapsodic power over it. But to end: I do think that film might constitutively encourage the creation of a Dionysian kind of space. It moves in this direction.

As I was thinking about your questions, I came across Marcel Proust's contemplation of space in volume four of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1927). He speaks first of dream space but then turns to what happens when you drive a motor car – it's in line with his fascination with trains, travel in moving carriages, and indeed with the optical devices of the previous century that set space in motion, as well as with photography. (He loves the magic lantern, stereographs.) For Proust the motor car revolutionizes space because it seems to set the outside world moving as images in motion and can be at times almost anarchic. Space is stripped of mystery yet profoundly defamiliarized. Time is superseded by space. And although the outside world moves sometimes dizzyingly, the driver is in ultimate control, the camera man, as it were. Consider these passages:

> We set off again, escorted for the moment by the little houses that came running to meet us with their flowers. The face of the countryside seemed to us entirely changed, for in the topographical image that we form in

> our minds of separate places the notion of space is far from being the important factor [...]
> and having passed through Incarville, whose houses still danced before my eyes, as we were going down the by-road that leads to Parville (*Paterni villa*), catching sight of the sea from a natural terrace over which we were passing, I asked the name of the place, and before the chauffeur had time to reply recognized Beaumont [...] suddenly linked with places from which I supposed it to be so distinct [...]
>
> the "general post" of the perspective which sets a castle dancing about with a hill, a church and the sea, while one draws nearer to it however much it tries to huddle beneath its age-old foliage; those ever-narrowing circles described by the motor car round a spellbound town which darts off in every direction to escape, and which finally it swoops straight down upon in the depths of the valley where it lies prone on the ground; so that this site, this unique point, which on the one hand the motor-car seems to have stripped of the mystery of express trains, on the other hand, it gives us the impression of discovering, of pinpointing for ourselves as with a compass, and helps us to feel with a more lovingly exploring hand, with a more delicate precision, the true geometry, the beautiful proportions of the earth. (Proust 1993, 548-550)

So I wonder if cinema is in the business of exploring the beautiful proportions of the earth.

IC: Thinking further about Proust's accounts of driving, I wonder if you know Jacques Henri Lartigue's early photographs of racing cars, which are contemporary with Proust, and which show space "deformed" by the speed of motoring, or rather by trying to photograph this?[3]

IA: I didn't know these photographs until you mentioned them. But they are wonderful. It does seem as if film and photography constantly interact with one another. In fact, the "beautiful proportions of the earth" are transformed. Both the car and the space around it seem to be recreated by the slip stream, the force of currents of air, created by speed.

IC: The Lartigue photographs, which we could think of as stills from a film, and the passages from Proust highlight a major problem for cinema, or at

3 See his photograph *Automobile Delage, Grand Prix de l'Automobile-Club de France, Le Tréport, 26 juin 1912* (Lartique 1912).

least an important difference from the novel. There's no frequentative tense, or ability to interject the kind of reflective summary that Proust makes here: "I asked the name of the place, and before the chauffeur had time to reply recognized Beaumont [...] suddenly linked with places from which I supposed it to be so distinct."

IA: Yes. This is crucial. As I understand it you are saying a film cannot comment on itself. All it has are its images, its spaces. I suppose one could say that the images themselves constitute a deictic way of showing us what to think or feel. But this is not a satisfactory way of thinking about cinema. Cinema does not belong to the archaic conventions of the Victorian peep show. You are never looking *at* a film, you are *in* it. And I think in two ways – here I am going to draw on two theorists, Henri Lefebvre and Gilles Deleuze – and I risk extreme simplification by doing so, but it seems appropriate. Lefebvre (1974) in his classic work insists that you cannot think space without the body. The body is *in* space in a way that organizes all the self's representations of space. I think we are *in* a film in the same way, via the body. Lefebvre makes a distinction between two ways of thinking space that effectively are in a dialectic relation to one another, "represented" and "representational" space. Represented space comes from the body's location in a specific location, its orientation, its recognition of its lived empirical and social circumstances. Representational space is the space of memory, dreams, symbols – these are, he says, "the loci of passion" – "they are essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (Lefebvre 1991, 42). I wonder if film enables us to experience these two kinds of space in ways that comment on each other, thus enabling that reflexive, frequentative dimension that prose can achieve by explicit intervention. I think we need only go back to Clementine to see this. The opening sequences of the film are clearly telling us about the occupation and habitat of the characters, their rural lives, and even their values, as cattle ranchers: and to understand this one has to be *with* their bodies and spaces. But as well as this, the images of the "tombstone" mesa are mythic, admonitory, the space of imagination. The two spaces simultaneously mediate each other, comment on one another.

I think that Lefebvre was exploring via space (and rather more accessibly) what Deleuze is exploring in his work on cinema. For Deleuze a movie always lives in the present – it has as it were, no future or past tense. And that's how we live it too. But paradoxically the present is in a state of passing even when it is present – "it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time that it is present." The past "coexists with the present it was" (Deleuze 1989, 79). It is this paradoxical disjunction and simultaneity of two elements of

time that for him bring together what he calls the "actual" and the "virtual" image, or to put it more simply than he would like, what comes together is the felt immediacy of an image and a way of "realizing" it, reflecting on it, imagining it, granted by the present that is past or passing.

In both Lefebvre's and Deleuze's case the double nature of the cinematic image, its immediacy and the gap that enables reflexive thought, imagination, serve the purpose of the commentary, even critique, that prose enables by its sequential nature and its temporal syntactic progression. Virginia Woolf perfectly understood this when she made Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) understand that in the act of crossing a threshold her movement became "already" the past.

IC: If we grant this, did cinema introduce new kinds of spatial awareness/apprehension (you hint at this with the idea of cinema creating Dionysian space). The simplest example would be the pan across a landscape, not linked to a character's viewpoint, as if to show us, the spectators, the "scene of operations"? Another example would be the "haptic" sense of space, as if we could touch what is visually before us, much discussed in relation to 3D cinema.[4] From more recent modernist literature, there are obvious examples in some nouveaux romans by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Georges Perec, both writers who were influenced by cinema and in turn have influenced it.

IA: I haven't been able to go back to nouvelle vague writing but the *boeuf en daube* in the novel I've just mentioned, *To the Lighthouse*, is exactly a haptic image that might come from the immediacy of cinema and, indeed, from the close-up that was surely one of cinema's great innovations. I think the close-up's enlargement, its way of giving new dimensions to objects or part of objects, is what alarmed Lou Andreas-Salomé, and made her demonstrate the shocking distortions and objectivization of the body in the for me terrifying images of her drama.

The new kinds of spatial awareness that cinema has granted us, for me at least, come from the way that cinema grants the seeing of any object or scene from endlessly different perspectives and angles – above, below, from beneath, from above, from the side, from the inside, from the outside, close, distant, obliquely, frontally, from behind. This is something prose cannot do. It is the special gift of cinema. Film gives us endless surprises. And a process of unexpected exchange between genres always seems to be going on. Just recently, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (2023) wonderfully conjures

4 See Yosr Ben Romdhane's discussion of the haptic quality of digital 3D space in Chapter 11.

the flat, distorted spaces of the comic book, the almost deformed contortions of comic book bodies. But in doing so it creates a new form of cinematic space, a kind of mock Dionysian space, where we can zoom in, zoom out, flip, fly, expand, contract the body, be on a rooftop one moment, explode, be crushed, another. And all in colors that evoke anything from Matisse to Rothko.

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10. *Fly Me to the Moon* … Extra-Terrestrial Projections in Artists' Film and Video[1]

Catherine Elwes

Abstract

The moon has long fascinated moving image artists as both a point of reference for the earth's position in the cosmos and a vehicle for extra-terrestrial flights of the imagination. This chapter examines video works inspired by the moon landings in the 1960s by David Lamelas and by Mike Leggett and Ian Breakwell in the 1970s. Next it takes a phenomenological turn reviewing Rachel Rose's preoccupation with astronauts and their experiences of floating in deep space. The role of the moon in women's drive to establish an autonomous cultural space in early feminist art of the 1970s is explored through works by Joan Jonas and Catherine Elwes. The early installation works of Joan Jonas and Brian Eno are seen to harness the celestial emissions of the cathode ray tube to cast a cool, spectral glow on their surroundings. The chapter ends with a meditation on the commonalities between the magnetic attractions of the moon and analogue TV sets in the mid-twentieth century. All the works discussed look back to the earth on which we were born, the lone habitable planet in our solar system whose future we hold in our hands.

Keywords: moon, space, astronaut, earth, menstruation, video, TV

> The hunting ground of the motion picture camera is in principle unlimited; it is the external world expanding in all directions.
> – Siegfried Kracauer (1997, 41)

1 From the song "Fly Me to the Moon" (1954) by Bart Howard: "Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars / Let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars […]." In my view, the most beautiful interpretation of the song is by Ella Fitzgerald on her 1964 *Ella in Japan* album.

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
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I have never understood the urge to flee this planet and wreak havoc in other celestial bodies while littering the skies with the detritus of space exploration. Nor have I found any charm in the idea of potholing or descending into the bowels of the earth to eavesdrop on its planetary rumblings and ventilations. I have never quite grasped the poetry of Andy Goldsworthy's practice of puncturing the carapace of our world in order to tune into the "potent energies" at the core of its being; and I have difficulty visualizing his concept that "the black is the energy made visible" (quoted in Sinden 1988, 29). Mine has been a strictly horizontal approach to space, concentrating on what can be seen and understood in the immediate environment, in the phenomenal and natural world that can be captured in the lens of a hand-operated video camera, on the move. My interest in place, space, and landscape has been aesthetic and academic, material and locational, and I have been less sympathetic to the conquest of uncharted territories in the furthest reaches of the planet. However, the urge to break the final frontiers above and below ground has proved irresistible for moving image artists of all genders and persuasions. Beyond the thrill of exploring the unknown, these space cadets' astral projections can be indicators of deeper drives and dreams, and as such their work merits closer examination.

Since the invention of film, practitioners afflicted with wanderlust have exploited all manner of conveyances in their determination to defy gravity and exceed the natural reach of the human body and its mechanical third eye. To that end, cameras have been mounted on horses (Abel Gance's Napoléon, 1927); cars (Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera, 1929); and trains (early "Phantom Rides"), enabling them to move at then unimagined land speeds. Boats under sail, and later, steam and diesel-powered vessels helped film artists eat up the nautical miles across water. Movie makers also carried their imaging devices underground (Henri Chomette's Jeux de reflects et de la vitesse, 1925), and later down the lifts of mineshafts plunging into the depths of the earth (Lindsay Anderson's Meet the Pioneers, 1946; Steve McQueen's Caribs' Leap/Western Deep, 2002). Their most spectacular expeditions involved vertical ascents, first in hot air balloons, then in planes. In recent years drones have enabled artists to emulate the flight of birds (George Barber's The Freestone Drone, 2013). In the space age, rockets and satellites have beamed images of outer space to the earthbound and artists have purloined these God's-eye views to create imaginary journeys of their own.

Deep space has long been an arena of creative play. In Powers of Ten (1977) Charles and Ray Eames devised the ultimate armchair intergalactic voyage. They animated a series of staggered aerial shots taken from high

altitude planes and NASA satellites thereby creating a vertiginous journey from earth out into the inky, velvet cosmos and back down to earth before delving into the microscopic, subcutaneous world inside the body of a sleeping man.[2] For their video Black Rain (2009), Semiconductor[3] also turned to NASA to provide satellite data, which they digitally processed, constructing optical and acoustic renditions of cosmic and solar activity that is otherwise beyond the range of human perception. Both the Eameses and Semiconductor star-gazed while remaining firmly rooted in their own planet. In these extra- and intra-terrestrial excursions, real and imagined, the return to earth and known reality is as much a journey of discovery as is its outward bound flight. Descriptions of regaining the mother ship of the earth, the native turf from which heroic figures heroically set out, are central to stories of polar exploration and myths such as that of Odysseus, whose "homecoming" followed a ten-year round trip following the Trojan wars.

Homeward-bound astronauts, transformed by their travels, have offered new visions of our planet. According to Donna Haraway, the "Earthrise" image of home taken by William Anders as Apollo 8 orbited the moon in 1968 reframed our blue planet as "a homeostatic, self-forming system" (2017). The historic photographic portrait of our earth, devoid of national borders, gave a fillip to the environmental movement. However, my focus here will be neither on the ecology of the "one-earth" planet as seen from space nor on the ethics of littering the skies with the detritus of space exploration. My interest lies with the iconic presence of the moon in the works of David Lamelas in the 1960s and the duo Mike Leggett and Ian Breakwell in the 1970s. I shall also revisit a more recent video installation featuring space travel by Rachel Rose, another moonstruck artist who traveled by proxy to our rocky, dust-choked satellite through the reminiscences of the astronaut David Wolf. The spatial parameters will include the 239,000 miles that separate us from our lunar neighbor and the cultural space "he" occupies in the imagination of those night sky-gazing artists who make the journey through the magic of filmic illusion. I will end with a brief discussion of an analogue video by Joan Jonas exploring her own brand of lunacy and an early work of mine on the subject of menstruation from the same era. My objective in citing these last two works is to speculate on the role of the moon in women's drive to establish an autonomous cultural space in the early days of feminist art. While the compulsion to follow the Star Trek

2 For an account of the techniques used by the Eameses, see Hughes 2012.

3 Semiconductor are Ruth Jarman and Joe Gerhardt. For a selection of their films see https://semiconductorfilms.com/ (accessed August 30, 2023).

mantra and boldly go where no filmmaker has so far pushed the human imagination my sense is that these moon-lit works turn not so much on distance as on proximity; they do not seek to unravel the mysteries of celestial bodies, but use the moon as a means of reframing the relationship of their own bodies to the horizontal, to the earth on which we were born, the planet whose future we hold in our hands.

Preamble: Cinematic Space

Before I discuss any specific work, I would like to consider the spatial characteristics of the moving image, attributes that align with filmic journeys made across vast distances to the moon and beyond. The abiding achievement of film is the creation of space along an axis of time; real time, decelerated time and compressed time, a shorthand used in Powers of Ten to simulate the time it takes to get to the back of beyond and return. Beyond their unfolding of space over time in the sequencing of images, film and video (both analogue and digital) have an inherent spatiality. The space outside the frame is just as important as what passes through it, prompting André Bazin to describe film as "centrifugal," because the filmic illusion "seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe" (1968, 164). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the filmic medium initiates a play of interconnected spaces, physically real and simulated, inside the frame and exceeding it, manifesting in the present while reanimating the past with a trajectory that projects into future screenings, audiences, and viewing conditions. While conventional cinema spaces with their immense screens and surround sound work hard to "take perception elsewhere" (Smithson 1996, 138), viewers remain aware, through their proprioceptive systems, of where they are in space, in relation to the ground, to others in the auditorium, and to the volumetrics of the enveloping architecture that houses the filmic event. The parallels between star gazing – feet on the ground, head in the clouds – and the spectatorship of films may seem a little obvious, but in the context of the works by Rose, Lamelas, and Breakwell and Leggett, the observation is apposite. Each activity demands the establishment of the ideal viewing position for the beholder: a clear night, an uninterrupted view, and a telescope for the astronomer; an optimal arrangement of seats relative to the screen for the cinemagoer. In the case of installed works with no fixed seating, spectators automatically maneuver to find the best place to consume the illusion of perspectival recession beyond the "magic casement" framing the images on screen(s). Movie goers and visitors to

galleries are thus endowed with a perceptual doubleness, or what Richard Wollheim called in relation to painting, a "two-foldedness," whereby they can become lost in the deep space of filmic realism, while never losing their sense of how that space is conjured out of artifice.[4] Spectators retain an awareness of the distance between the camera operator and screen subject notwithstanding the telephoto and airborne devices of today. As I have indicated, at the movies, muscle memory helps us maintain awareness of where our bodies are located and how we are living and breathing in the here and now. Simulated on-screen space and phenomenological reality remain distinct while constituting dual aspects of the cinematic experience, characteristics that remain in tension. Spectators oscillate between the suspension of disbelief and the skepticism to which the inbuilt flaws in the illusion give rise, their loss of credulity aided by the distanciation effect of the material presence of the viewing space as a phenomenological reality.

In addition, spectators of the moving image engage in a series of minutely calculated spatial measurements: between diverse objects that manifest on screen, between themselves and the projection surface or display unit, and between their own experience and what is being suggested to them in the parallel universe of the cinematic illusion – the story of the work. Those artists who choose celestial bodies, notably the moon, as their objects of filmic contemplation add a further set of calculations that involve not only the space between the satellite and the moonstruck human but the social value of making the trip to earth's inhospitable, extra-terrestrial escort.

David Lamelas, A Study of Relationships between Inner and Outer Space (1969)

As Lamelas's black-and-white documentary film demonstrates, the myth and mystery of the moon have long since given way to more prosaic reckonings here on earth. Made just before the momentous Apollo 11 moon landings in 1969,[5] the film begins in the Camden Arts Centre and moves out into the city of London where daily life flows through the busy streets. Lamelas literalizes Bazin's "centrifugal" spiraling outward with the initial shift in focus from the gallery space to the alleys and thoroughfares of the capital. He then

4 For the application of Wollheim's theories to the moving image, see Weinbren 2003, 37.

5 For their trip to the moon, the Americans unaccountably named their spacecraft after Apollo, the Greek Sun God, rather than after the many incarnations of the Moon Goddess – Selene, Luna, or Artemis.

launches the spectatorial imagination from its earthly moorings, up through the stratosphere toward our revered satellite as he intercepts a number of passing citizens and asks them to comment on the impending moon landings, an event that, as Duncan White has observed, "promised to alter the cosmic perspective of a generation" (2013, 166). The interviews prove the contrary. A girl is asked whether she would like to go to the moon and she replies, "No, I think it would be lonely." She also comments that the vast sums of money invested in sending men to the moon might have been better spent solving the problems we face here on earth. This is a sentiment echoed by many African Americans including Gil Scott-Heron whose poem "Whitey on the Moon" (1970) countered the American triumphalism of the moon landings by decrying the impoverished conditions of working class citizens: "I can't pay no doctor bills [...] [got] no hot water, no lights, but Whitey's on the moon" (1970).

In America, the space race was being played out against a background of a burgeoning counterculture – the moon landing coincided with the Woodstock and Harlem music festivals. American society was also being rocked by social unrest, principally instigated by the civil rights movement and anti-war protestors who demanded, "What are we fightin' for" in Vietnam?[6] Back on the streets of London, where the culture of the "swinging sixties" was most in evidence in the Carnaby Street revolutions in fashion, one man admits that he is left cold by the prospect of reaching the moon; "it will be something of an anti-climax," he says. A bowler-hatted city gent with newspaper and umbrella concurs and asks bluntly, "what's the point?" The most positive response comes from a shaggy-haired youth. A man walking on the moon will not prevent humanity from "destroying himself," he says, but if a moon landing is a step toward reaching Mars where men "find something very much better and they could live agreeably together [...] then it does mean something." The prospect of a moon landing provides an opportunity for these random *vox pop* citizens to imaginatively make the journey into outer space but, like many in the USA, their priorities are with conditions back here on earth. For the British citizens, the moon becomes a mirror to both humankind's folly and ingenuity and, in 1969, these witnesses left us with little hope that ingenuity would eradicate the destructive impulses of the earth's dominant species.

6 Country Joe McDonald sang the "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" at Woodstock in 1969. The song summed up the feelings of the crowd who sang along to the chorus: "And its one, two, three what are we fighting for? / Don't ask me I don't give a damn, / The next stop is Vietnam; / And its five, six, seven open up the pearly gates, / Well there ain't no time to wonder why, / Whoopee! we're all gonna die."

Ian Breakwell and Mike Leggett, One (1971)

Breakwell and Leggett gave us no more reason for optimism in their gently satirical work. One also flies us to the moon but maintains the physical distance of 240,000 miles between our two celestial bodies as a conceptual registration – two points in the universe, held in tension. They do this by replicating back here on earth one of the activities the Apollo 11 astronauts engaged in when they first set foot on the lunar desert in July 1969. All the TV shops in London celebrated "one giant leap for mankind" by displaying live images of the astronauts in their absurdly inflated space suits bobbing along and gathering samples of lunar dust and rock. In 1971 at the Angela Flowers gallery a different image was exhibited in its street-level window. On an analogue monitor, in grainy black-and-white, Breakwell and Leggett relayed live footage of four long-haired workmen shoveling dirt from one pile to the next in an upstairs gallery space. The pointless earth moving task parodied the historic moment when Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong set about collecting inert soil and silent stones with their lunar buckets and spades. Breakwell and Leggett combined footage of the workmen laboring on earth with shots of bemused passersby pausing in front of the gallery window and rescanned footage of the astronauts boldly going where no rational humanoid should tread. The pictorial weave was escorted by an indistinct, crackly soundtrack of instructions beamed to the moon from Houston. The ability of the monitor in the gallery window to hold lunchtime strollers in thrall to its flickering monochrome images testified to the relative novelty of television screens in those days and brings to mind a video installation by Nam June Paik entitled Moon Is the Oldest TV (1965). The Korean artist spatialized twelve phases of the moon – from a slither of a crescent to a full, glowing orb – and displayed them across an arc of analogue monitors.[7] This work seems to imply that where the ancients gazed at the ensorcelling moon to seek wisdom and unlock the secrets of the universe, in the 1960s, modern humans were beginning to feel the narcotic magnetism of television and the shift to screen-based addiction was set in motion.

As Breakwell and Leggett's One progressed, the re-filmed footage of the diggers displayed in the gallery window became increasingly degraded acquiring an equivalent pulse and granularity to that of the oneiric moon walking sequences (did it really happen?). The two image sources became almost indistinguishable. While the visual processing by analogue video of

7 The work was first installed at Galeria Bonino in New York in 1965. Paik subsequently made many different versions.

two instances of men engaged in excavating base planetary matter appeared to collapse the differences between them, it also illuminated the absurdity of both endeavors separated by 240,000 miles of space and budgets of £150 for Breakwell and $28 billion for NASA. This investment enabled the American people to witness their spacemen beating the Russians to the moon. As Leggett recalled,

> the simple expedient of placing a monitor in a West End street with an image that had not been pre-processed by a multi-million corporation whether NASA or the BBC [...] not only challenged the monopolist situation of broadcast television but additionally made a mockery of one of its more extravagant and nauseous spectacles. (1973)[8]

The bowler-hatted Londoner interviewed by Lamelas echoed Leggett's indignation when he asked "What's the point?" For me, the point of One is the elegance and wit deployed by Leggett and Breakwell in constructing their critique of the space program and its promotional arm, the television networks. I also appreciate their enactment of galactic spatial contraction through mimesis and the homogenizing effect of early video. They nonetheless left enough sonic and visual data in place to maintain the physical separation of our planet and its moon – the astronauts cavorting in the lunar landscape, Breakwell's workers having a fag and drinking tea during a break in their travails. From the perspective of the digital age, one can also revel in nostalgia for the big hair and flares of the 1960s, but we must look elsewhere for insight into the gravitational pull that heavenly bodies and space exploration exert on so many human hearts.

Rachel Rose, Everything and More (2015)

To retrieve some of the enchantments of space travel requires a shift away from the earthbound skeptics featured in Lamelas's *vox pop* and Breakwell and Leggett's parody of the moon landings in 1969. Some thirty-six years later, Rachel Rose relied on a recorded interview with the astronaut David Wolf to communicate how the cosmos and the limitless space in which our earth is suspended present themselves to the interplanetary traveler. She

8 According to the physiologist Uwe Ackermann, at the time of the moon landings, electronic biomedical recording instruments became "markedly more expensive." Profiteering was a feature of the space program. (Conversation with Catherine Elwes, Oxford, January 8, 2021).

combined Wolf's testimony with her own interpretation of weightlessness and the dizzying spectacle of distant stars, comets, and asteroids as well the foaming drifts of the Milky Way that, said Wolf, "came out bright and clear" from the vantage point of his space shuttle. Inspired by Wolf's visions of deep space, Rose revisited the techniques of light shows from the 1960s. She combined pigment with oil, liquid detergent and various foodstuffs, and, encouraged by puffs of compressed air and magnets, these substances interacted chemically on a glass plate under the rostrum camera. Considering the work today, the psychedelic effect of merging and flowing colors speaks more of the artist's imaginary than any real attempt to simulate the visual and sonic conditions of an expanding universe (Semiconductor's computer-generated abstractions and soundscapes are infinitely more convincing). As if to mitigate the effect of the crude, makeshift quality of the lightshow footage, Rose added sequences shot in a neutral buoyancy lab, a huge tank of water where astronauts learn to tolerate zero gravity in a sea of liquid blue. The camera rises from the deep in a vortex of bubbles and as it comes up for air, it shatters the surface of the water into a kaleidoscope of watery shards. Rather than reaching a breathable atmosphere, we seem to have crossed into a kind of oceanic astral dimension. Everything is in a state of flux; as in space, there is no way to establish a discernible boundary between above and below, no orientation of "up" or "down." Gravity holds no dominion in Rose's galactic abstractions.

These home-grown effects provided a backdrop for Wolf's narration, a candid account of his physical and perceptual experiences of spacewalking. The astronaut's voice is level and his words are carefully chosen while eerie electronic sounds and a stripped-down recording of Aretha Franklin singing "Amazing Grace" are added to the mix. Christopher Lew has argued that Franklin's vocals provide "the awe, transcendence, and emotion that Wolf's dispassionate delivery fails to express" (Lew n.d.).[9] However, the astronaut's account speaks eloquently of the sensation of drifting away from the Mir space station into the great beyond where he has "a full view of the universe." His space suit was so well adapted to his body temperature that he "couldn't feel [its] edges." Attached to Mir by a lifeline, he is "just floating relaxed looking out into space." At one point Wolf is surrounded by an impenetrable darkness, what he calls "a deep black void," in which he can see nothing, no stars and no planets. This sense of total disorientation

9 Lew also establishes the influence on Rose of Jordan Belson who in the 1950s created "Laserium" events and in 1964 made Re-Entry, a short film based on John Glenn's first space journey.

is caused by the earth blocking his view of the star field. However, it is not until Wolf re-enters the earth's atmosphere that he becomes aware of the extent to which his senses have been distorted by the conditions of space travel. "Re-adapting to earth is even harder than adapting to space," he says. When re-entering the earth's gravitational field "the weight of your body is overwhelming," says Wolf; "even my ears felt heavy on my head." The return to earth from space also produces a heightened acuity in the human sensorium. The air conditioning units on board spacecrafts are so efficient that they eliminate most odors. When Wolf lands back on earth and the door to the shuttle is flung open, he is intoxicated "with the smell of grass and the air." Colors and textures seem more vivid and, says Wolf, "all these feelings of weight and odors [...] are kind of overwhelming after their absence for so long in space."

The almost inconceivable distances traversed by space travelers such as Wolf are reduced to more earthly dimensions by the physical configuration of Everything and More as it was installed in a gallery environment. When I saw the work in London at The Store in 2016, Rose had placed the projection screen in front of a large plate glass window overlooking an empty building site, the river, and, beyond it, the built environment of the Thames's south bank. The screen was made of finely perforated Mylar that allowed the view of the cityscape to emerge when the projected image was darker than the light outside. In London, the unseasonal heat of late September gifted the work an intense blue sky scattered with tufts of white cloud, and the buildings of the Hayward Gallery and its surrounding architecture on the far bank of the river made a shadowy frieze of civilization below the empyreal vault. Periodically, when the projected image surged in brightness and color intensity, the landscape beyond the membrane of the screen first fused with the invading footage then disappeared, defeated by artificial light. This play between transparency and opacity, between serried surfaces appearing and vanishing as if seen through a camera shifting focus, compromised viewers' ability to perceive stable boundaries between adjacent spaces. Trying to make sense of the spatial organization of the work gave rise to cognitive dissonance and a heightened awareness of how we routinely use distance cues to make instantaneous and continuous calculations that help to orient our bodies in space. Within the physical arrangement of Rose's installation, depth perception became as unreliable as the misjudgments of distance and scale recorded by Wolf and other astronauts on their travels into the limitlessness of outer space.

From his God's-eye-view, Wolf saw the earth as a fragile "jewel floating in blackness." He was dazzled by the "amazing" colors in which the planet

was mantled as it drew near on re-entry, "like it was alive with vegetation and water." "Africa," he said, "is red and each continent looks different, has a different color." The strangeness of its palette endowed the earth with greater value in Wolf's eyes. The arguments of environmentalists have benefitted from images of our vulnerable planet, taken from the perspective of astronauts with cameras, but why was Rose so beguiled by the phenomenon of deep space travel? What meanings did she invest in the celestial sequences she choreographed back on earth? In an interview in 2018, the artist revealed that she made a connection between Wolf's "experience of his body within the void of outer space" and the sudden sense of alienation she felt one day as she was walking down a New York street (Rose 2018). This "out-of-body state" in turn conjured for Rose an image of mortality, which she correlated to Wolf's account of drifting in outer space where he reached "the brink of nothingness." Rose went on to speculate that "when we die […] maybe we're also thinking about nothing." These readings were hard to derive from a viewing of the work itself, but they demonstrate the degree to which artists are capable of projecting their sentiments into external phenomena, both proximate and far distant in the form of stars, galaxies, nebulae, and our nearest celestial companion, our personal satellite, the moon.

"The Moon, the Governess of Floods …"[10]

Joan Jonas, Duet (1972); Catherine Elwes, Menstruation I and II (1979)
Where Rose grafted a vision of her own mortality onto the limitlessness of outer space, the moon has long served as a projection screen for the human heart. Over the centuries, our immediate planetary neighbor has embodied our beliefs, terrors, dreams, and aspirations. The moon has featured prominently in the cosmologies and religions of nations from ancient Egypt, Rome, and Greece to pre-colonial Africa and Australia, and remains prominent in children's stories and rhymes in the West – "the cow jumped over the moon." In this secular age, our moon has been reserved a role in blockbuster Hollywood space odysseys (Apollo 13, Ron Howard, 1995), in rock music (*The Dark Side of the Moon*, Pink Floyd, 1973) and in various contemporary therapies that encourage adherents to tune into the healing power of lunar phases. The moon has been endowed with a life force

10 Titania in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 2, scene 2: "Therefore the moon, the governess of floods / Pale in her anger, washes all the air / That rheumatic diseases do abound" (Shakespeare 1923, 172).

in the same way that we anthropomorphize nature on earth – mountains glower and the ocean, according to Walt Whitman, is a "capricious and dainty sea" (quoted in Mack 2002, 69). The pathetic fallacy extends to the heavens. We see multitudes in the clouds and faces on the surface of Mars while the Man in the Moon has taken his place in what John Welshman calls "a facialized cosmology."[11] In 1902, the pioneer filmmaker Georges Méliès made his iconic A Trip to the Moon in which hapless space travelers crash land on the cheese-faced moon, rudely impaling their rocket in his right eye. Some eighty years later, technology had evolved to the point where in Echoes from the Moon (1987-1999) Pauline Oliveros could invite participants to send their voices to the moon as "vocal astronauts" and listen to the echo returned to them from our cratered satellite.[12] Into the digital age, in Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon), 2007, Katie Paterson transmitted Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* (*Sonata quasi una fantasia*, 1801) to the moon in the form of Morse code and recaptured the altered signal as it returned to earth. She converted the code back into notes and Beethoven's atmospheric classic played on an automated piano, on repeat, somewhat degraded by its space travels.

Children, poets, mystics, filmmakers, and conceptual artists all find meaning in the moon, however obtuse, and I would like to end with two works that call on the moon to serve a political imperative that arose in the 1970s. At that time, the legitimate occupation of space by women in a male-dominated art world was a crucial objective for feminist artists. Their strategic resistance to centuries of marginalization coincided with women excavating folk traditions and ancient matrilineal civilizations in search of alternatives to the existing "master narratives" dominating art, religion, and public life. Feminists called up the Sibylline oracles, who were said to have made their revelations in the throes of menstrual frenzy, and looked to the Moon Goddesses of Greek, Babylonian, and Roman traditions (Artemis, Ishtar, and Luna) for inspiration. These hidden histories gave rise to a renewed interest in women's relationship to the waxing and waning of the moon, in my case prompting a series of works about the culturally invisible processes of menstruation (etymology: moon-change).

11 John Welshman speaking at the Drawn Encounters conference, Rome, September 17-18, 2008. Accurate to my notes.

12 The contemporary sound artist Martine Nicole Rojina also bounces messages off the moon and translates them into music.

Fig. 10.1: MENSTRUATION I, 1979, Catherine Elwes.

While still a student at the Slade, I staged MENSTRUATION I (1979) and MENSTRUATION II (1979), two four-day performances that were subsequently reworked as slide-tape presentations. In the first iteration of the work, I lived on a large, circular sheet of paper for the duration of a period and wrote, drew, ate, and flowed bodily onto my paper "planet." This absorbent surface captured the periodic turbulence of dreams, sensations, and emotions, what the Maori call "moon sickness," as well as the discharge of blood that visited me once a month. In the second iteration, I built a glass-fronted cell and filled the space with another mosaic of writings and stains (matter out of place), but this time, I used the membrane of the glass partition to communicate with visitors to the work, transcribing the written exchanges between us onto the glass and gradually obscuring my body with words as the performance unfolded. The focus on language and communication was an attempt to mitigate the "zoo animal" spectacle that I presented as well as forestalling accusations that live artists who focused on women's reproductive functions were reinforcing biological determinism. In response to a scribbled question from Stuart Brisley, "what is the purpose of the work?," I wrote in reply that menstruation "isn't a disease, it's a normal human function, which has been used against women for centuries. A source of strength has been appropriated by men and outlawed to placate their fear and loathing of women." Although this handwritten statement was, at some level, a provocation, it did draw on the work of contemporary

writers such as Esther Harding, Paula Weideger, and Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove.[13] These commentators sought to establish the relationship between the phases of the moon and women's menstrual cycles, their "tidal vibrations" (Shuttle and Redgrove 1978, 140) and decried the historic taboos against the "impurity" of menstruating women as well as the contemporary medicalization of pre-menstrual tension and dysmenorrhea.[14] While my menses prompted me to create a constricted space in which I could enact menstrual seclusion – my Slade version of a menstrual hut – it nonetheless drew its references from the far-distant moon, "the governess of floods" (the tides) and the rhythm of women's fertility. The work washed these rhythms into a hostile cultural space that ignored both the physical manifestations of menstruation and what Erich Neumann called women's "fiery productivity" during their periods (quoted in Shuttle and Redgrove 1978, 138).

Menstruation I & II made visible the recurring episodes in every woman's life when her "liquid" body responds to the gravitational fluctuations of the moon.[15] Simultaneously, the works constituted an incursion into the territory of a testosterone-fuelled (Brisley-dominated) performance culture at the Slade – insisting that only women bleed.[16] Talking a great deal was my other method of taking up air space. An early video work by Joan Jonas similarly evoked the volubility and the "fiery productivity" of menstruation, but approached it from the perspective of the mythical relationship between the Moon Goddess and those animals that reflect her cyclical changes. Familiars and alter-egos include snakes, cats, hares, and dogs – for instance, the hounds of Artemis/Diana the huntress.[17] In the black-and-white video Duet, Jonas impersonates a dog howling at the moon. However, the moon she gazes upon is a close-up image of her own moon-face on a monitor, and together, the two Jonases duet a cacophony of praise to the lunar mistress of our water world.

13 See, for instance, Weideger 1978; and Shuttle and Redgrove 1978.

14 Taboos against menstruating women abound in different cultures: Catholics discourage sex during "the curse," a time of heightened libido for women; Brahmin women in India are forbidden to cook; Jewish women may not enter the temple etc. In the Middle Ages, both menstruating women and witches were believed to have the power to blight crops and cause mares to miscarry.

15 When I was at a convent boarding school in the early 1960s, as the term progressed, the girls' and the nuns' menses gradually synchronized.

16 Stuart Brisley is known for a series of visceral live works beginning in the 1960s. By exposing himself to hunger, physical exhaustion, and different forms of violence, Brisley has explored the extremes of human endurance. See https://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/4 (accessed 30 August 2023).

17 Ovid recounts that when Actaeon accidentally beheld the naked goddess as she bathed in a woodland pond, in her fury she turned him into a stag and set his own dogs upon him.

When Jonas created DUET in 1972 commentators such as Rosalind Krauss, Stuart Marshall, and Micki McGee were objecting to video artists who featured their own bodies in their work. They argued that an artist's self-images became "bracketed out" in the hermetically-sealed feedback loop of a live relay video system, creating a posed, idealized reflection, as in a mirror. This technological insularity, they said, encouraged the narcissism that women were taught to cultivate from childhood. The obsession with appearance, McGee contended, drove women to undertake cosmetic work to enhance their erotic capital. They embellished their natural attributes, by whatever means, to smooth their way in a consumer culture run by men. Furthermore, ran the critique, analogue video, by its instrumental isolation of the subject, forestalled a reading of autobiographical testimonies within the feminist principle of "the personal is political"; moreover, said McGee, video severed the "connection between individual women's experience and a larger social context" (1981, 88).[18] However, while Jonas sequestered her two ululating selves into the container of an analogue monitor, doubly incarcerated in a box within a box, the tape, far from being restrained by its material conditions of display, was copied and distributed across the globe, theoretically making connections out into space. Furthermore, the wild howling at the moon that Jonas enacted in DUET was hardly sexually provocative. Hers was not a pretty performance of canine vocals.

The artist has revealed that in the course of a long career, the impersonation of animals has given her a license that her socialization as a woman naturally inhibited; entering the spirit of non-human creatures has "allowed me to behave in different ways," she says (Jonas 2019).[19] This freedom to re-imagine femininity was won by the expansion of cultural references in DUET. It encompassed the invocation of ancient narratives in which women are linked to the power of the moon and secondary allusions to its dark side: "ill-met" witches and their familiars, as well as a tumultuous, hormonal interiority that Jonas "extended […] to include the audience" (1975, 73). Jonas also propelled the work forward into a future in which the efflorescence of women's creativity might occupy an equal place of autonomy and recognition to that of men within the expanding territories of video art. In the 1970s, video constituted the newest moving image technology since the invention of film and was relatively unencumbered by male precedent. As Griselda Pollock (2016) declared of feminism, video offered women a

18 McGee's critique is still valid today and can be readily applied to social media.

19 Jonas speaking at the Blavatnik School of Government. Accurate to my notes.

space "to revolt [...] to imagine something radically different [...] to bring worlds into being."[20]

"I See the Moon and the Moon Sees Me ..."[21]

I will end by reflecting on Paik's epithet that the moon is the oldest TV, or in this context, oldest monitor, which, in its analogue phase, was a mysterious entanglement of wires and components that acted as electronic superhighways for coded messages about the world. The alchemical processes that awakened the bulbous cathode ray tube, the beating heart of the monitor, were boxed and hidden behind a thick glass membrane. When the power surged and the image miraculously flickered to life, the glowing monitor snared the eye and inspired rapt contemplation. Like the moon, a monitor was a monochrome orb suspended in darkness, emitting gently pulsating light; we were attracted to those pearlescent screens as we might be drawn to a charismatic person or captivated by the sight of the full moon. The same anthropomorphism so often overlaid on the moon was also applied to monitors, so much so that Paik turned old receivers into families of robotic figures.[22] The sculptural properties of video monitors or TV sets were exploited by installation artists who used them as multiples, as building blocks for media assemblages.[23] However, their function as a source of illumination was equally important, not only as an indicator of the internal dynamics of the electronic image, but as a means of casting light on their immediate surroundings.

Joan Jonas used the anaemic gleam of monitors as a source of illumination in her early performances. For his part, Brian Eno, in Crystals (1983), installed lines of upended monitors that projected drifts of pure color onto static, abstract structures, creating slowly changing chromatic displays. However, it is the earlier black-and-white stargazing works by Lamelas, Jonas, and Breakwell and Leggett, as they were first shown in the 1970s, that exploited not only the physical resemblance, to scale, of the glowing "box" to

20 Griselda Pollock in conversation with Nina Wakeford and Adrian Rifkin. Accurate to my notes.

21 From the nursery rhyme, "I see the moon and the moon sees me. God bless the moon and God bless me."

22 For instance, Nam June Paik's Family of Robot: Mother and Father (1986) featured a parental duo constructed from various vintage television sets on which he displayed his own mash-ups of off-air material.

23 See Elwes 2015, 226.

the moon, but also the lunar quality of the light radiating from the screen. In the *Wise Wound*, Shuttle and Redgrove maintain that where the pitiless glare of the sun "divides and discriminates," the "soft light" of the moon "appears to unite everything, like love or intuition. Objects merge one into the other, ghosts and visions walk […]" (1978, 154). The homogenizing effect of the impoverished analogue image with its grey world of shadows and liquid luminescence enabled Breakwell and Leggett to align the moon-shot footage with the repetitive actions of the performers in the gallery on earth. The activities of astronauts and earth-bound diggers appeared to be taking place on two mysteriously twinned planets, bathed in each other's light. Jonas's face on a black-and-white monitor glowed with the same preternatural light as the planet she was worshipping with her canine keening; she became the numinous bitch in the moon.

The artists I have discussed in these pages boldly embarked on centrifugal flights of imagination, creating poetic lunar actions and out-of-this-world images of space travel. In the case of Rose, Lamelas, and Breakwell and Leggett, they combined earth-bound projections into space with words and images harvested from those who actually went there. However, these space flights were not undertaken to discover the secrets of our dusty planetary neighbor nor the unfathomable depths of the galactic manifold. Theirs are glances cast down onto the earth from above, ones that, in a centripetal motion, collapse back into the terrestrial center of gravity. I sense in these works the artists' desire to renew their vision of their planetary origins and seek them in the deeper vibrations of the universe. They re-tune to the cycle of death and renewal, which beats time for all life on earth, as it does in the heavens. The inevitable return to the horizontal, to the *terra firma* of home also brings with it a heightened sensitivity to what David Attenborough calls our "perfect planet," whose elemental forces make it possible for us to conduct our lives on our uniquely habitable earth.[24] For some, it is a question of gravity. "From nape to heel, I discovered myself bound to earth," Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1967) recalled after he crashed his plane in the Sahara, "I felt a sort of appeasement in surrendering to it my weight." For the author of *Le Petit Prince* (1946), "gravitation had become as sovereign as love" (1967). Notwithstanding the restoration of nostophiles to the bosom of the mother ship, what strikes me on reviewing these works

24 David Attenborough, A Perfect Planet, BBC 1, January 2020. In the trailer for the series, Attenborough declares his objective: to show "how our world with its incredible natural forces keeps our planet in perfect balance." Whether ours is the only habitable planet in space has yet to be discovered.

is how they express the solitariness and fragility of both the individual and our little planet, suspended like a Christmas bauble, cast adrift in space. I am reminded of Nietzsche's Wanderer, who reflected that however far one travels, "in the final analysis one experiences only oneself" (1969, 173). Jonas howls at her moon-monitor and, like Echo, hears only her own cries returned to her; Paterson and Oliveros use the moon as a sounding box from which they retrieve only a facsimile of their own transmissions. Rose's obsession with space walkers and the condition of weightlessness yields but an intimation of her own death. Breakwell and Leggett link the futility of their diggers' poorly paid labor with the pointlessness of expending earthly resources to land men on a barren, empty lump of rock orbiting the earth.

One evening, as I sat in splendid isolation at the Slade on my circular paper moon and adjusted my bloody menstrual dress, a man approached smoking a cigarette. He snorted his disapproval at what I was doing and flicked his fag end at my feet. I wrote, "I can smell the bitterness in his smoke." In that moment, faced by the gulf of incomprehension between us, I too experienced the fundamental aloneness of the human condition. I looked up through the window of the studio and silently saluted the pale crescent of the "companionless" moon as a cloud passed across, momentarily obstructing her from view.[25]

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25 In his poem, "To the Moon" (c. 1822), Percy Bysshe Shelley describes the moon as "wandering companionless among the stars […]." See Shelley 1824, 263.

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About the Author

Catherine Elwes retired as Professor of Moving Image Art at Chelsea College of Arts in 2017. A writer, also known as a video artist and curator, she was active in the feminist art movement in the late 1970s. She co-curated the exhibitions *Women's Images of Men* and *About Time* at the ICA in 1980 and was the director of the biennial UK/Canadian Film & Video Exchange (1998-2006), and co-curator of *Figuring Landscapes* (2008-2010), an international screening exhibition on themes of landscape. Elwes has written extensively about feminist art, performance, installation, landscape, and the moving image and is author of *Video Loupe* (2000), *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (2005), *Installation and the Moving Image* (2015), and *Landscape and the Moving Image* (2022). Elwes was Founding Editor of *the Moving Image Review and Art Journal* (MIRAJ). Her online exhibition, *Landscape and the Moving Image*, is available at LUX: https://lux.org.uk/event/landscape-and-the-moving-image/.

11. Stereoscopic Space in Cinema

An Embodied Experience

Yosr Ben Romdhane

Abstract

The perception of stereoscopic images is linked to a certain number of objective and quantifiable stimuli, which are translated by the viewer's body into a range of sensations. A number of examples from 3D films[1] enable these subjective sensations, physically experienced although rarely verbalized, to be distinguished and described. They are also linked with the stereoscopic techniques that allow the body to experience them, confirming their objective character. Haptic sensation is perhaps the most interesting of the bodily effects resulting from the basic apparatus of 3D cinema, recalling Wheatstone's original aim of simulating the actual presence of an object. Examples of ignoring what is normally considered "good practice" in modern stereoscopy, to produce the sensations of "Liliputism" or "Gigantism," are explored; as well as the stimulation of such visceral sensations as vertigo, acceleration and displacement in films as varied as Gravity, Maleficent, and The Walk, leading to the conclusion that 3D cinema can now offer fundamentally new bodily experiences, potentially leading to the creation of new meanings.

Keywords: stereoscopy, depth, parallax, sensation, immersion, haptic, visceral

The Perception of Stereoscopic Depth and Sensations of Volume and Roundness

Stereoscopic relief or depth is certainly the primary feature of the 3D image that we perceive.[2] From this perception emerge feelings of both volume and

1 Although stereoscopic films made with CGI are sometimes referred to as S3D, 3D has been used for all stereoscopic films throughout this chapter.

2 Stereoscopic illusion is normally discussed in terms of "*relief*" in French, while in English it is "depth."

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
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roundness. These are all the more evident when the same shot is compared in 2D and 3D versions. In the case of Cave of Forgotten Dreams (Werner Herzog, 2010), the presence of blisters and hollows in the cave wall is visible in both versions. However, the 3D image is able to provide the viewer with a real feeling of volume and roundness, while the 2D version only suggests this. It is also interesting that appreciation of the content of the image changes. The perception of depth in 3D, as compared with the 2D image, makes it possible to better appreciate all the plastic features of the rock paintings. We come to realize how the typology of wall surfaces was taken into account in creating this work over thirty thousand years ago.

We now know that the perception of depth is created by the stereo baseline which controls the size of the narrative box.[3] Sensations of volume and roundness are also directly linked to this parameter. Indeed, when an image is represented in a small narrative box, the volume of objects and decor it contains seems compressed, or very similar to the 2D image. Conversely, an extended box accentuates the sensations of volume and roundness. However, these can also be accentuated by monocular cues that are already used in 2D cinema. Camera movements, the choice of focal length and depth of field contribute considerably to sculpting stereoscopic depth and to sharpening the sensations which result from it.

We should note, however, that the size of the narrative box is unable to create volume for a flat object. The initial shape of the object represented is decisive for the sensations of volume and roundness that it can provide. Thus, it is possible to have a very deep narrative box yet containing flat objects, such as we find in the credits of Oz the Great and Powerful (2013) by Sam Raimi. Despite the image's extension, its decoration is made up of different layers of solid color that extend to the bottom of the hollow part. In this case, the three-dimensionality of the image does not bring a feeling of volume to these elements – quite the contrary, it accentuates their two-dimensionality.

The Perception of Distances and Sensations of Depth and Proximity

The perception of distances in 3D cinema is linked to the depth of the narrative box as well as the spatial composition of the scene. When the stereographer chooses a stereo baseline, they determine its depth, establishing

3 The "scene box" consists of two parts: negative space in front of the screen and positive space behind it, which provide a container, or "scene box." See Ben Romdhane 2018, 423.

a depth budget: "the depth budget determines the size of the narrative box [...] within the scenic box" (Tricart 2013, 71).

Depth budget is a technical concept that governs the overall intensity of stereoscopic depth in the image by combining the values of the maximum parallax in the positive zone with that in the negative zone.[4] The distance between the left and right images determines the positioning of the object inside the scenic box when it is rendered. Since the left and right images can be reversed, depending on the positioning of an object in the pyramid of vision, the parallax value can be positive or negative. Therefore, on a screen of 10 meters, a parallax of -200 millimeters positions the object in the positive space (*jaillissement*) zone; conversely, a parallax of 150 millimeters places the object represented in the negative space (*creuse*) zone.[5]

This distance will vary depending on the size of the screen. To avoid having to systematically specify the size of this, a convention has been adopted, which converts this separation distance into a percentage of the total size of the screen. Thus, if a parallax of 50 millimeters is the maximum separation of distant objects, this is equivalent to 0.5% in positive space, and if the intensity of the maximum protuberance is due to a parallax of -200 millimeters, it is equivalent to 2% in negative space. In this case, the depth budget for this image is calculated as follows: 0.5+2= 2.5%.

An image with a depth budget of 0% is a flat image. However, an image with a depth budget of 3% contains a deep narrative box. And there will be a difference according to the intended viewing context: "the average depth budget of a program intended for television is between 2.5 and 3.5%, that of a feature film between 1.5 and 3%" (Tricart 2013, 71). Examples of this difference would be certain shots in How to Train Your Dragon (Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois, 2010), with a depth budget close to 0%, and those with an unusually large depth budget in The Walk (Robert Zemeckis, 2015).

Varying the depth of the narrative box by varying the baseline distance amounts to modifying the distance between front and rear limits in the depth axis. This has an impact on the volume of the image, but also the amount of space it occupies. The filmic content is thus spread out more or less in front of the observer and also close to him, making it possible to compose the image in space.

In this shot (Fig. 11.1) from Alice in Wonderland (Tim Burton, 2010), the viewer is faced with a fairly deep narrative box. In the foreground, on

4 Parallax here refers to the distance between right and left images.

5 Translation of the terms widely used in discussing 3D cinema in French into English presents difficulties.

Fig. 11.1: Composition of the shot in depth, Alice in Wonderland (Tim Burton, 2010).

the threshold of the window, is the character of The Red Queen, played by Helena Bonham Carter, accompanied by her dodo valet. In the background, in the zone of positive relief, he sees the castle in the depth of the scenic box. Then, between these two planes, an interval of intermediate depth unfolds. It extends from the garden walls to the female figure to the left of the window and contains the entire Queen's Court.

The notion of "scene box" takes on its full meaning here. The 3D image is structured in space on three levels as if on a stage. Dispersed within the volume of the scene box, these characters are perceived by the observer at different distances. Therefore the deeper the narrative box is, these distances will be perceived as greater.

As the perceiving agent, the observer is positioned at the peak of the pyramid of vision. This position not only embraces the point of view from which the environment is represented, but also serves as a landmark in the structure of the filmic space. The perception of distances then translates into a feeling of proximity. In the previous shot from Alice in Wonderland, for example, the viewer feels physically closer to the position of the Queen of Hearts than to the castle grounds or the rest of the court.

Concerning the perception of distances and magnitudes, it would be interesting to dwell on a fact already noted by Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century: "there are ways and modes wherein the same quantity of extension shall produce greater effects than it is found to do in others" (1757, 76). In particular, he emphasizes the difference between the impact of perception of length, height, and depth. He names length as the dimension that has the least effect, followed by height and finally depth, taking the example of the small effect that the length of a field of a hundred yards can produce, compared to the height of a rock of the same size. And this will always remain less than the impact of "looking down from a precipice" of equal height. These observations are equally relevant in the case of distance perception in 3D cinema. Faced with two narrative boxes of equal depth budget, one containing a landscape with a horizon in the distance will

have less impact than one representing a bird's eye view from the top of a skyscraper. Although initially resulting from the perception of the same distance, the impact of the depth budget of the image will be felt differently depending on the orientation of its content. Here we could compare two narrative boxes of similar depth yet very different impact, in CORALINE (Henry Selick, 2009) and THE WALK.[6]

In general, the size of the narrative box will vary from one shot to another, or from one sequence to another. However, a variation of depth budget can be performed during a single shot. An example of this can be seen in CORALINE, where a dark hole opens up and turns into a mysterious tunnel by extending the depth of the narrative box. During this transformation, the accordion-like deployment of the tunnel is accompanied by the gradual increase in the distance that separates the observer from its end. The feeling of depth increases and affects the observer's apprehension of the space represented. It is not a case of a tracking shot signifying the expansion or compression of filmic space by an effect of style, but of 3D technique acting objectively on the image's structure and volume. Although the shot is fixed from start to finish, the door at the end of the tunnel no longer occupies the same position in the observer's environment. Thus, in 3D cinema, filmic space becomes totally malleable; it can stretch and shrink according to the imperatives of the *mise en scène*.

In a case where the narrative box is less voluminous than the scenic box, the stereographer must decide on its positioning in depth. This involves determining which object will be positioned on the fusion plane, at the level of the screen's surface. This choice will affect the positioning of all the elements of the scene in the place of projection, as well as the understanding of the organization of both filmic and real spaces.

There are three main possibilities for the positioning of the narrative box. First, the narrative box can be completely positioned in the positive space as seen in a shot from the film IRON MAN 3 (Shane Black, 2013), where a female character and a glazed entrance door are positioned on the fusion plane, so that the character is perceived as behind the surface of the screen, in a different place from the spectator. The surface of the glass window creates a separation. Filmic space and real space are thus felt as distinct.

A second possibility is that the narrative box can be positioned in the protruding space, as in the snake shot in A TURTLE'S TALE: SAMMY'S ADVENTURES (Ben Stassen and Mimi Maynard, 2010). Here, the narrative box is in the negative space, so that the snake is perceived as floating in the

6 THE WALK reconstructs a high-wire crossing between the towers of the World Trade Center.

auditorium, above the spectators. Such shots recur throughout this film, with turtles, fish, et cetera floating, detached from any decor. Having the narrative box in the protruding space creates the feeling that the whole viewing space is submerged under water. An exaggerated positioning of the narrative box in this way favors the creation of spectacular effects. The feeling of proximity is very strong, with elements of the film interfering in a space that is forbidden in traditional cinema.

These kinds of examples are an illustration of the superimposition of the filmic environment and the real environment. As suggested earlier, the stimuli from direct vision and those from the image are unified by the body. The latter does not perceive two environments but only one, whose real and imaginary components are superimposed. For the viewer, the characters of the film in the negative space are perceived and felt as close at hand as the head of the spectator seated two rows in front – as long as they don't stretch out their hand to catch them!

Finally, the third type of positioning is the most common in stereoscopic films. The narrative box is here positioned across the two relief zones. The observer perceives the elements of the film on either side of the window. This positioning creates a feeling of continuity between filmic and real space, as in How to Train Your Dragon, where the dragon, initially in the recessed part of the image, advances toward the observer until it crosses the window and springs into the auditorium.

In this third type of positioning, the sensation of continuity of spaces that the viewer feels is linked both to the homogeneous reproduction of the two spaces but also to movement. The displacement of filmic elements which cross the window to access the auditorium affects the sensation of their proximity and creates a bridge between the two spaces. Perceived by the viewer in relation to their own body, the variation in the depth of the narrative box and the position it occupies in the scene box vary the distances that separate the viewer from elements of the film. This variation uses the ability of binocular vision to assess distances and establishes a feeling of proximity.

Furthermore, through the arrangement of elements in the image and their movement, *mise en scène* makes it possible to establish links between the filmic and real spaces, which will contribute – or not – to consolidating this sensation. According to the anthropologist Edward T. Hall: "Human perception of space is dynamic because it is related to action – to what can be accomplished in a given space – rather than to what can be seen in passive contemplation" (1988, 145). In other words, there is a relationship between action, the distance at which it takes place in relation to the observer, and

its apprehension by the latter. The proximity of the body to an action affects the mobilization of the observer and influences their involvement and empathy with regard to what they see.

Highlighting the possibility of modulating the distance between the observer and the content of the image in stereoscopy, François Garnier (2016) has proposed the use of Hall's proxemic scale during a symposium on "Stereoscopy and Illusions." This would be a stereoscopic equivalent of the graphic notion of shot value in monoscopic cinema. The application of such a scale to 3D cinema still involves some reservations, not least because Hall himself insisted on the cultural relativity of his indicators. Inter-individual relationships and their relationship to interaction distance vary according to cultures and regions of the world where elements such as kinship, social affiliation (caste and non-caste), or social status affect the relationship between individuals and their proximity in interactions. However, he emphasizes that awareness of the spatial envelope, and identification of these different affective zones, as well as activities, relations, and emotions which are respectively associated with them, are now accepted. These are of considerable importance in understanding our societies and human behavior. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the very nature of the 3D image eliminates a large number of stimuli which contribute to establishing the organization proposed by Hall. Smell, the heat given off by bodies, and also contact are all absent in stereoscopy. Similarly, the convergence limit threshold sets a limit to the possible proximity in 3D cinema. This is probably why Garnier does not include Hall's entire organization of four levels, consisting of intimate, personal, social, and public distance, but keeps only the last three.

The zone of personal distance would be that of emotion. This extends from the position closest to the observer that visual comfort allows up to 125 centimeters. In this space, personal and intimate discussions usually take place, because such proximity implies a degree of trust. By positioning action in this zone, the viewer's empathy is solicited, where they are exposed in spite of themselves. After this, the social distance zone would be that of action, extending from 120 to 360 centimeters. At this distance, no one can be touched or intended to be touched. The viewer is more sheltered, but remains concerned by the action. Their attention is engaged because they are included in what is happening. And finally, the zone of public distance would be that of contemplation and exploration. Beyond 750 centimeters, everything is out of reach. The viewer is no longer directly involved, but is sheltered, able to explore with their gaze the full extent of the landscape and the events taking place there.

As can be seen, passing between zones of distance implies change in relation to the other, also different amounts of perceptible and discernible elements, and different potential impacts of the action on the viewer. Thus *mise en scène* in 3D cinema not only has to take the body as a reference point, in relation to its proximity to the action, but also its effect on the intensity of its engagement.

Immersion

The phenomenon of immersion in 3D cinema obviously depends on several factors. This is not the occasion to discuss it as a whole, but merely to isolate and describe the feeling of immersion exclusively connected to the basic apparatus, leaving aside all that can be linked with storytelling. In order to make this distinction, I make use of the concept of phasing (*mise en phase*). This is defined by Roger Odin as "[the] process that leads me to vibrate to the rhythm of what the film gives me to see and hear. Phasing is a modality of the spectator's affective participation in the film" (2015, 38).

Odin specifies two types of phasing: a narrative phasing where the observer vibrates to the rhythm of the events portrayed, and an energetic phasing which involves vibrating to the rhythm of images and sounds as perceptual stimuli. While the first type of phasing mobilizes a descending scale of mental mechanisms related to the processing of data provided by perceptual processes, the second merely uses ascending mechanisms related to perception and resulting sensations. Thus, to be interested in the feeling of immersion exclusively linked to the basic mechanism is to be interested in the process of energic phasing. It requires considering the act of seeing as spectatorial participation, but also of studying the sensation of immersion as an objective sensation.

In this context, I approach the body as a physiological machine whose perceptual mechanisms are identical in all normally constituted observers. Likewise, by focusing on bottom-up mechanisms, I set aside the mobilization of psychological operations, such as emotional identification or the oedipal structure, which may be implemented in narrative phasing. Through this approach, I remove psychological individuality from the matrix of sensation production. Differences in gender, class, or cultural origin of observers do not affect the production of immersive sensation.

The sensation of immersion is based on two characteristics of perception in the basic apparatus of 3D cinema previously discussed: the first being its similarity to direct perception in the form and process of its synthesis, the

second concerning the refractive nature of this perception. In her reflection on immersion in 3D cinema, Miriam Ross (2015, 89) highlights the capacity for mimetic duplication of the basic device, the two most important characteristics of which are: on one hand, the geometric perception of distances between objects as they are filmed, and on the other hand, the similarity between perception of the filmed scene and experience of the real world. For Ross, these two characteristics allow 3D films to move toward an authentic portrayal of visual experience, and the observer to invest in the reality of the image. In other words, the feeling of immersion is based in part on the realism of the stereoscopic image. However, this realism is also linked to the bodily experience of 3D cinema. This means that the 3D image draws its realism both from the similarity of the experience it offers to that of the real world and also from the same processes of perception. It should be remembered that the form of stereopsis is both identical and interchangeable with the perception that results from direct vision, because both are based on the same visual stimuli and processes. It is thanks to this plausible confusion that the 3D image is charged with reality. The portion of the environment that it represents is capable of instilling in the observer a feeling of envelopment, which gives the visual experience its authenticity. We can also compare this sensation to that linked to the notion of "presence," defined by Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton as "the perceptual illusion of nonmediation" (2017):

> The term "perceptual" indicates that this phenomenon involves continuous (real-time) responses of human sensory, cognitive, and affective processing systems to objects and entities in a person's environment. A "nonmediation illusion" occurs when a person does not perceive or recognize the existence of a medium in their communication environment and reacts as if the medium is not there.

But also:

> The illusion of nonmediation can occur in two distinct ways: (a) the medium can appear invisible or transparent and function like a large open window, the user of the medium, and the contents of the medium (objects and entities) sharing the same physical environment; and (b) the medium may appear to transform into something other than a medium, a social entity.

In my view, it is important to insist on the authenticity of the experience and to distinguish it from the authenticity of the image. Because, as we have

seen with Crary (1990, 132), the basic device of 3D cinema creates a new "real" in the absence of a referent to the world. Its reality does not depend on its true existence, since it does not maintain an identity relationship with the world. It depends on the process of its production. It is through the manipulation of subjective vision as a process in which the subject is at the same time an object of knowledge and an object of methods of control and normalization that this form of reality is produced, to which the world represented in stereopsis corresponds.

This is why the feeling of immersion relates more to the form of the space represented than to its content in 3D cinema. Whether the film depicts, as in Avatar (James Cameron, 2009), an imaginary world, or as in U2 3D (Catherine Owens and Mark Pellington, 2007), the recording of a real concert, viewers are immersed in it, despite themselves, because the image is presented to them in the same modality as vision of the real world. By "despite themselves," I mean that the observer does not reflect or judge the presence of the reality presented, but perceives it and experiences it. This feeling of immersion is all the more intense as the filmic and real environments are perceived as entangled. The presence in the projection space of the elements of the film and their proximity to the observer establish a relationship of spatial coexistence, a cohabitation in the same space which is almost literal.

Of course, the sense of immersion is limited by the aspectual nature of stereopsis. If the viewer moves or closes an eye, they will alter the shape of the image and above all the smooth running of the perceptual experience. In the first case, it highlights the allocentric nature of the image. In the second, it completely cancels out its stereoscopic depth. It thus destroys the fluid entanglement of the two environments. The image is again confined to the surface of the screen and its content no longer has access to the place of projection.

However, when the viewer respects the conditions necessary for the smooth operation of 3D cinema's perceptual experience, when there is entanglement between the filmic space and the real space, they are still able to distinguish the origin and the nature of each of the elements represented. Indeed, the feeling of immersion produced in 3D cinema is made with knowledge of the refractive nature of stereopsis, or at least of its illusory character. Awareness of this difference in the viewer invites us to enrich the notion of immersion with the nuances contained in the use made of it by Alison Griffiths (2008, 2):

> [Griffiths] uses the term "immersion" to explain the sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the

> world and that eschews conventional modes of spectatorship in favor of a more bodily participation in the experience, including allowing the spectator to move freely around the viewing space (although this is not a requirement). (quoted in Ross 2015, 89-90)

What is interesting about this definition of immersion is that it emphasizes the sensation of entering a place of observation, the new real world, which is done through the basic apparatus. But it also highlights the existence of two spaces of a different nature, one of which is positioned from the outset as separate from the real world. This opposition real/illusory, where the illusion immediately shows itself as such, is important because it includes the essential idea that the environment produced does not seek to deceive the spectator, or to make them believe that it is real; indeed quite the opposite. Unlike the fictionalizing process and its conventional spectatorial modalities which seek to blur the line between reality and fiction, the sensation of immersion in energetic phasing bypasses the hypnosis of the spectator in favor of bodily participation. The issue of the passage from one world to another does not require belief in the reality of the filmic world but depends on the possibility of its active exploration. Griffiths points out in the quotation above that this exploration is done by free movement in the space of observation, without making it a requirement. In the case of 3D cinema, the freedom of movement is that of the gaze. This can wander through the different depth levels of stereopsis and focus its attention on the objects of its choice present in the filmic environment.

Thus, in the basic apparatus of 3D cinema to be immersed and aware are not two contradictory states. It is the ability to act, if only through the gaze, which reinforces the feeling of immersion in the filmic environment. This in fact becomes a potential space of action.

Haptic Sensations

Haptic sensation is, in my view, the most interesting of the bodily productions resulting from the basic apparatus of 3D cinema. Complex and multifaceted, its nature is closely linked to the historic origins of stereoscopic apparatus. Indeed, it should be remembered that "in devising the stereoscope, Wheatstone aimed to simulate the actual presence of a physical object or scene, not to discover another way to exhibit a print or drawing" (Crary 1990, 122). The goal was not to create a form of visual representation, but to use the body to reproduce a form of reality from the device alone:

> What he seeks, then, is a complete equivalence of stereoscopic image and object. [T]he desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent, *tangibility.* [A] tangibility that has been transformed into a purely visual experience. (124)

When Wheatstone achieved his goal, we realize that the tangibility that initially related to the tactile is also a visual experience. The stereoscope demonstrates the gap between the tangible and the visual. It allows a redefinition of the tactile from the visual. In other words, in 3D cinema, the spectator's body not only produces and perceives visual sensation, but it also produces and receives a sensation that belongs to the tactile.

In cinema, the link between the visual and the tactile has been explored by Laura U. Marks, who explains the spectator's bodily sensation in terms of haptic visuality:

> Haptic perception is usually defined by psychologists as the combination of tactile, kinesthetic and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside of our bodies. (2000, 161-162)

The haptic sensations discussed in this section therefore correspond to the tangibility described by Wheatstone, which evokes the tactile from the visual, kinaesthetic sensation, and finally proprioceptive sensation.

The notion of haptic visuality that Marks uses is derived from the work of the art historian Alois Riegl, who distinguished the haptic from the optical image. "He associated the haptic image with a "sharpness that provoked the sense of touch, while the optical image invites the viewer to perceive depth, for example, through the blurring of chiaroscuro" (Marks 2000, 162). Riegl borrowed the term haptic from physiology, in particular to distinguish it from the term "tactile," which relates more literally to touch, thus emphasizing the purely visual character of the sensory experience linked to these images. According to Marks, the most important element in Riegl's distinction lies in the difference of relationship these images create with the viewer. Riegl believed a haptic composition makes use of tactile connections with the flat surface of the image, it takes on an "objective" character, I would even say tangible, whereas an optical composition abandons its nature as a physical object to allow remote observation that allows the observer to position themselves as an all-perceiving subject.

Marks therefore proposes to differentiate haptic visuality from optical visuality. She explains that optical visuality is related to the separation between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. It is above all a matter of being

able to see from a distance, which makes it possible to discern objects in the depth of space, while in haptic visuality, the eyes function as an organ of touch. Here the gaze sees surfaces and textures more closely rather than plunging into the illusion of depth and grasping their forms. "It [the haptic gaze] is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze" (2000, 162). Consequently, works that Marks designates as haptic are those that invite the gaze to move over the surface of the screen before realizing what it is looking at. In these images, representation is secondary. Rather, they draw the viewer closer to details by circumventing distant and encompassing views. The latter perceives both the texture and the objects themselves. Rather than appealing to optical perception, which favors the representational power of the image, these works mobilize haptic perception, which privileges its material presence. However, since this perception draws on other forms of sensory experience, mainly touch and kinaesthesia, which are senses of contact, Marks concludes that "thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole" (163).

Ultimately the difference between haptic visuality and the optical visuality Marks emphasizes is a matter of degree, since vision involves both. The gaze operates in a constant to and fro between the distant and the near. Thus, the distinction between the two visualities is a way of accounting for bodily engagement in the spectator's experience of cinema and its variation. In the case of films favoring optical visuality, this engagement is less. According to Marks, the optical image corresponds to Gilles Deleuze's "movement-image" and gives the illusion of being complete.[7] This illusion of wholeness lends itself to storytelling. Consequently, it is the top-down mechanisms of content organization and meaning production that are more mobilized. The body, on the other hand, is very little involved, which allows the viewer to position themselves as an all-perceiving subject.

However, in the case of haptic films, rather than letting the spectator be absorbed in the narration, the image imposes its material presence, forcing the viewer to contemplate it as such. In this, according to Marks, it is similar to the time-image.[8] It gives itself to be touched, and calls for tactile connection and contact through haptic perception and the tactile memory of the body: "Haptic cinema does not invite identification with the figure – a sensory-motor reaction – so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image" (163). In this case, the

7 On Deleuze's concept of "movement image," see for instance Deleuze 1986-1989, 91-104. (Translator's note).

8 *The Time-Image* (1985) was Deleuze's second volume on cinema (Translator's note).

body is fully engaged. Through haptic perception, it experiences the image, feeling its texture and its materiality. Marks speaks of co-presence in the relationship that is established between the viewer and the perceived object: the content of the image is not isolated by the gaze but present in the same place. Is this not a description of the spectator configuration in the basic operation of 3D cinema? Surely we can make a direct connection between Wheatstone's discoveries and Marks's considerations. Is not the relationship between the visual and the tangible that the stereoscope emphasized akin to the distinction that Marks describes between optical and haptic visuality in visual perception?

In both cases, we are faced with a totally visual experience. Each is composed of two types of perceptions: the first purely optical, where the subject perceives a scene, an object, a figure at a distance; and a second that engages the body more intensely and communicates the tangibility of the object, which comes from the tactile field. In both cases, the two perceptions are distinct and complementary. In other words, the sensation of tangibility perceived visually thanks to the stereoscope is haptic visuality. But by visually reproducing tangibility, the stereoscope creates intensely haptic images, even if their initial composition is optical.

A convenient demonstration of this was provided by the 3D advertisement for Haribo sweets (Dauphin 2014), which accompanied the release of A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures in 2012. This staged a series of mini situations that bring together the product and elements of the film. The optical character of the composition of the advertising images is obvious. The sets and the characters are arranged in such a way as to narrate these mini situations. All elements necessary to understand the action are present in the image. However, by presenting it stereoscopically, the 3D image introduces haptic elements into the scene and intensifies the material presence of the characters for the viewer. The stereoscopic depth and protuberance of these elements brings them within reach, seeming almost graspable. This changes the relationship that the perceiving subject might have had with the image. They can no longer be outside it, but become co-present in the space in which it unfolds.

Not only does stereoscopy transform an optical composition into an intensely haptic image, but as in everyday life, the basic apparatus of 3D cinema constantly alternates between optical and haptic visuality. Unlike 2D cinema, where images both optical and haptic tend toward two different, sometimes even opposed spectator experiences, the images of 3D films can be both optical and haptic. They are able both to narrate and to create feeling, to allow identification with the character, and at the same time to make the spectator and the world of the film coexist.

Marks sheds important light on the duality of the relationship between the 3D image and its viewer. Stereoscopy intensifies the corporeal experience of film without eliminating the representational and narrative power of the cinema. Marks also makes it possible to conclude that 3D gilds the image with a haptic visuality, and that the addition of this is at the heart of stereoscopy's contribution to cinema. If sensation is only evoked in 2D cinema by forms of *mise en scène*, it is automatically present in 3D cinema, intrinsically linked to the stereoscopic apparatus. Since sensation was at the heart of its historic invention, it is through the connection between the visual and the tactile that 3D cinema deepens our understanding of bodily engagement in cinema.[9]

Tangibility

The first component of haptic perception is tactile function. However, the film spectator's experience does not include contact. Yet as we have seen with Marks, thanks to tactile visuality, the eye is transformed into an organ of touch, and communicates the sensation of tangibility. This sensation is all the more present when the object represented in depth is close to the observer, as in the case of the Haribo advertisement. This effect is all the more striking in live-action movies, as can be seen in a sequence toward the end of Alfred Hitchcock's Dial M for Murder (1954) in which the police inspector hands a key to a character who is positioned in the negative zone. The outstretched hand is a few centimeters from us, seemingly present in flesh and bone. The 3D depth, supported by photographic modeling through lighting and focusing, intensifies the sensation of tangibility: the hand and the object it holds become almost palpable.

Like the sensation of volume, that of tangibility can be amplified by non-stereoscopic elements. The way the represented object moves also reflects its material. Sound also gives the image its consistency. Like movement, it is a reflection of the physical properties of matter. The sound of a brush scraping a smooth surface will be different from the sound of the same brush scraping a grainy surface. From differences in the sounds emitted, it will be possible for the spectator, who is also a listener, to deduce the respective tactile properties of these surfaces. It is from this imaginative and associative capacity between sound, image, and matter that techniques such as synchresis play with perceptual elaborations.[10]

9 See also Ben Romdhane 2018.

10 Synchresis is an acronym formed from "synchronism" and "synthesis," proposed by Michel Chion in his book *Audio-Vision* (1994). See also http://filmsound.org/chion/sync.htm (accessed April 25, 2023) (Translator's note).

Fig. 11.2: Dial M for Murder (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).

The more clearly these different perceptual elements are articulated in 3D cinema, the more intensely the sensation of tangibility will be felt by the observer. And the more intense this sensation, the feeling of the real co-presence of the spectator and the filmic environment will be enhanced, bringing the stereoscopic film experience closer to our experience of the world.

The Perception of Body Scale and the Effects of Gigantism and Miniaturization

We have seen how the choice of baseline distance determines the depth of the narrative box in 3D. We turn now to how it influences self-recognition and more particularly perception of the size of the body. Indeed, since the stereo baseline distance simulates interocular distance, if it is increased, the viewer experiences hyperstereo. But with a very small baseline distance value hyper-stereoscopy allows us to see as if from a very reduced interocular distance.

These two ranges simulate bodily configurations beyond physiological norms, and consequently give access to the world from different, even totally new, corporealities. For example, a center distance of 650 centimeters would make it possible to film a distant landscape on a scale that would correspond to perception from a head and a body a hundred times greater than normal – making the resulting landscape much smaller than in reality. This is called "Liliputism" or the "miniaturization effect." On the other hand, a baseline distance of one or two centimeters makes it possible to film nearby objects, such as flower petals, insects, portraits, and so on, as if seen by a much smaller head, and hence appearing immense. This is the "giantism effect."

Such effects of extreme baseline distance parameters have long been perceived as defects in the stereoscopic process. But recently they have been put to use in *mise en scène*. In JACK THE GIANT SLAYER (Bryan Singer, 2013) wide variations of baseline distance allow the viewer first to experience the physical perspectives of humans and of giants, and to distinguish these two worlds. Secondly, it is used to signify the shift in power relations. The character of Roderick, initially perceived as tiny by means of a large baseline distance, returns to an almost human scale when he gains the crown which gives him power over the giants. Here, the change of scale contributes to signifying the shift in the balance of power. Thus, subject to the center distance used, the scale of the virtual body can vary. And this variation will produce the sensation of expansion or contraction of the viewer's body. The change of scale disrupts self-awareness and brings it to the fore. The spectator experience of 3D cinema is therefore not only a lived experience, it is also an experience that is lived in a body capable of transformation.

Monoscopic cinema has long made it possible to see "through the eyes of" by means of "point of view" cinematography. Now, thanks to stereo baseline variation, it is possible to perceive "on the scale of," and "to perceive oneself in the body of," with objective representation of the subjective perception of body scale. And at the same time, our relationship to scale in 3D cinema differs from that of the natural world. We move away from anthropocentric representation, where everything is represented on a human scale, toward scales of the immense or the tiny.

Kinaesthetic and Proprioceptive Sensation or Visceral Sensations

Proprioception or deep sensibility refers to the perception of oneself, consciously or otherwise, in relation to gravity. We are aware of our situation in the world, which allows the brain to insert our body into a three-dimensional apprehension of the world, which comes largely from stereoscopy, at least at close range. Kinaesthesia is a process that allows the subject to know the dynamics of their body and all their limbs. The kinaesthetic sensations that the 3D apparatus provokes in the viewer are visceral sensations, such as those of vertigo, acceleration, and displacement, intrinsically linked to the positioning and mobility of the virtual body. These sensations correspond, among other things, to those of passive locomotion. When an individual is transported thus, he sees his locomotion without being the origin. He can neither govern it nor guide it. In Gibson's (et al. 2014) terminology,

in this case "the observer has visual kinaesthesia but no visual control of movement" (347). This is,

> Awareness of movement or of a stationary state, of moving and stopping, of approaching or moving away, of moving in one direction or another, and of an immanent encounter with an object. (364).

It is this same visual kinaesthesia that many films provoke in their "ride" sequences, also referred to as "on-board camera." In Oz the Great and Powerful, the character of Oz is in the basket of a hot air balloon carried away by the current of the river. The camera is placed in front of the basket, and thanks to its movement experienced in a POV shot, the viewer, although motionless, perceives the movement represented in the image as his own movement.

In a more subtle way, in the opening sequence of Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013), the slow and fluid movement of the camera throughout the first sequence-shot, harmoniously accompanies the movement of the characters, without being linked to it, giving the observer the feeling of floating in space alongside the astronauts. The sensation of vertigo can be felt in this, and in sequences where the spatial landmarks are suddenly altered, or even in certain aerial viewpoints, such as the flying pirouette sequences in Maleficent (Robert Stromberg, 2014) and the overhead shots in The Walk.

Despite their differences, these sensations are due to a flow of information that links the body to the environment represented in the image. If the choice of stereo baseline affects the constitution of the virtual body and the perception of its own scale, the content of the image as well as the way of representing it (in a fixed shot or in movement, in high or low angle, etc.) are perceived as changes in the environment that the virtual body experiences and responds to.[11] Similarly, when visceral sensations are communicated, the viewer not only perceives the virtual body, but also perceives the impact of the depicted environment on that body. They not only see the displacement, but experience it bodily.

11 We also find this phenomenon in amusement park simulators which use, in addition to the basic devices of 3D cinema, a certain number of artifices such as moving seats, water jets, or even jets of air. In these attractions, the body reacts to the environment in which it finds itself, from an image offering a full visual field. Then other mechanisms of the simulator create correspondences between the real environment and the simulated environment, by means of other artifices. If, for example, the observer sees themself on board a boat, when they see a wave hitting the front of the ship, they are splashed by a jet of water. Thus, a correspondence between the visual field and the tactilo-corporeal field establishes a feeling of the environment's real existence, within which the simulated environment and the observer are located.

Conclusion

All these sensations are the product of simulation of features of the environment. They participate, in various ways, in building and intensifying the embodiment of spectatorial experience. They are both the result and proof of the incorporation of the body into the basic apparatus of 3D cinema, as well as of its simulating power. Their evocation is not a matter of representation, but of the simulation of a situation. The body is made to feel these sensations entirely due to a flow of stimuli that create a certain environmental configuration. At no time does it pass through figuration, narration, or any other form of symbolic mediation. A predisposition of the basic apparatus emerges then as a mode of representation based on simulation, in which the observer and the technical apparatus maintain a relationship based on direct contact between body and stimuli, establishing the basis of a "viewing position" in which the observer finds themself in a situation of co-presence with the film.

Finally, 3D cinema can now offer bodily experiences different from that of anthropocentric experience; the experience of "being in the world" becomes a common reference for all observers. This reference would be equivalent to the shared knowledge that governs "fictional communication" in narration (Odin 2015, 167). Anthropocentric embodied experience could thus become, within the framework of the basic apparatus of 3D cinema, the symbolic third of purely bodily forms of communication, potentially conveying new meanings.

Translated by Ian Christie

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12. Of Drones and the Environmental Crisis in the Year 2020[1]

Teresa Castro

Abstract
As coronavirus lockdowns left the world's cities deserted, drone footage of empty towns made its appearance on video-sharing platforms. Across the globe, observers insisted on the melancholic feelings that such "eerie," "post-apocalyptic" images aroused. This chapter proposes to highlight some of the political and affective dimensions of coronavirus drone footage and to insist on their problematic aestheticization of politics, especially in relation to ecological thinking.

Keywords: drone, pandemic, lockdown, environment, protest, aestheticization

As I write this text, in June 2020, George Floyd's body has just been put to rest. Across the globe, people have taken to the streets, protesting against racial discrimination and toppling statues of slave traders and colonialist rulers. In mid-March, when the world was progressively brought to a standstill by a bewildering pandemic, it was hard to imagine that the year 2020 would be remembered for anything else than COVID-19, a cunning virus strain that spilled over from bats to humans and is still taking lives. But our current and elusive enemy has brutally exposed a world fraught with economic and racial inequalities.

1 An earlier version of this text appeared in *Pandemic Media: Preliminary Notes Toward an Inventory* (Keidl et al. 2020), a project initiated by the Graduate Research Training Program at the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt, in cooperation with the Institute of Media Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg, the Institute of Film, Theater, Media and Culture Studies at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, and the Hochschule für Gestaltung (University of Arts and Design) Offenbach am Main.

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
DOI 10.5117/9789048563265_CH12

Fig. 12.1: Los Angeles on March 20 and on June 8, 2020.

What do anti-racist protests have to do with coronavirus drone footage? I bring them up for two reasons. First, because this text is an immediate reaction to the political questions raised by such footage, and as such, a response deeply embedded in the present moment. We've had little time to reflect on the massive number of images inspired by the outbreak. If the history of aerial imagery can help us to better grasp some of the issues at stake, some of these problems strike me as intimately related to the nature of our times. In this sense, the powerful George Floyd protests that we are witnessing are part of the equation: they're all the more relevant as enormous crowds filled the streets, shortly after virus lockdowns across all continents left them deserted. Against the rising specter of surveillance societies, drone flyovers of such massive demonstrations – and this is my second point – have become inseparable from aerial views of cities transformed into ghost towns. The uncanniness of Los Angeles's eerily quiet streets, shot on March 20, appears even more staggering when compared to the extraordinary images of Hollywood Boulevard swarming with protesters on June 8.[2]

My discussion of coronavirus drone footage will keep these images in mind – as it will summon very different pictures made during the pandemic, such as footage of wild animals taking over lockdown cities around the world. By juxtaposing these apparently disparate elements, I wish to highlight their underground connection. On the one hand, they all evoke the policing and monitoring of human and non-human bodies, as well as the belief that some lives are more valuable than others. On the other hand, they refer to

2 See "Empty Cities: Drone footage of Los Angeles as coronavirus shuts down the city" (Washington Post, March 20, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://youtu.be/O51LOuQzROI?si=WtYeCcZy_iRrUcd8; as well as Ron Kurokawa's viral drone footage, documenting a march organized by Black Lives Matter, BLD PWR ,and local LA rapper YG: "LA showed up today!!! #blacklivesmatter" (yakooza, June 8, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBKLOkAhGEV/.

a problematic "aestheticization of politics," in particular when it comes to ecological thinking.

Coronavirus Drone Footage

"Uncanniness" is a good starting point. As drone footage of unusually desolate cities popped up on video-sharing platforms, the words "awe-inspiring" and "post-apocalyptic" appeared almost immediately. In early February, an evocative assemblage of drone sequences captured in the city of Wuhan, then under strict lockdown, was widely relayed.[3] Some qualified it as "haunting," mentioning "scenes reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic movie"; others evoked a "spectral situation" (Anonymous 2020). As the pandemic spread to more than 200 countries and aerial footage of other cities under lockdown was broadly circulated, observers insisted on the "eerie beauty" of such once familiar and now "ghostly towns," as well as on the melancholic feelings they aroused.

As vehicles that have access to humanly impossible movements and points of view, drones are uncanny by nature. So are the images they produce: Harun Farocki's (2004) expression, "subjective phantom images," evokes such uncanniness well. Police surveillance drones generated much of this footage, destined first and foremost for humans and machines to monitor and therefore inseparable from disciplinary power structures.[4] Despite this (whether shot by the police, civilians, or major news organizations, coronavirus drone footage is strongly embedded in the surveillance society), such pictures cannot be described as fully "operative," that is, as images made by machines for machines, "neither to entertain nor to inform" (Farocki 2004, 17). While illustrating an iteration of logistical images, coronavirus

3 See "Drone Footage Shows Wuhan Under Lockdown" (*New York Times*, February 4, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/100000006960506/wuhan-coronavirus-drone.html. The footage was shot by a Chinese photojournalist and edited by *The New York Times*.

4 See, for instance, drone and time-lapse footage of Paris before and under lockdown, put together by the French police (On Demand News, March 28, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://youtu.be/bpe-ARGSi-w?si=TYLunPxY6z05FKeq; and drone footage from the Barcelona lockdown shot by the Catalonian "Mossos de esquadra" (On Demand News, April 20, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://youtu.be/ND1EIf7s2d4?si=PQ9MXL6SYf7PjFCD. I will not address other features of these so-called "pandemic drones" in this essay, which, beyond monitoring social distance and quarantined individuals, claim to remotely pick up the heart rate and temperature of people, or to know if they're wearing a mask. Note also that talking drones equipped with speakers were used in different countries during lockdown, from China to Portugal.

drone footage doesn't totally exclude the human eye. Its horizon might be full automation, but human intermediaries are still present. Moreover, as they enter the maelstrom of visual culture, such images escape their purely instrumental destiny and become aesthetic objects offered to the contemplation of their anxious, confined spectators. Drone footage of cities under lockdown evokes the longer history of urban cinematic views (Castro 2017). The feeling of flight, as well as the extraordinary mobility of their point of view, was (and is) as important as the enjoyment experienced in observing the city from an unusual point of view. The pleasure inherent to coronavirus drone footage equally lies in this oscillation between visual and kinaesthetic perception, referring to cultural practices of looking that go beyond the military expediency of drones.[5]

Like some of these earlier views, coronavirus drone footage has a strong affective dimension. Even sequences documenting deserted tourist hotspots, inviting their viewers to experience entertaining virtual tours from the safety of their homes, seem shrouded in an elegiac veil, often reinforced by atmospheric soundtracks.[6] A clip entitled "The Silence of Rome" is absolutely exemplary.[7] While the video's aesthetics perfectly illustrates the corporate, promotional look in which its maker specializes, the ambient soundtrack encourages contemplation.[8] In one of the first pieces on coronavirus drone

5 In addition to this, it should be noted that despite its military origins, drone technology is sometimes used in order to undermine the same power regime that produced them. See, for instance, the way in which the No Dakota Access Pipeline movement used drones to monitor police activities. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxwwoy44xam (#NoDAPL, December 2, 2016).

6 See, among countless examples, drone footage of quarantined San Francisco, https://youtu.be/yQky8qARcwc?si=2us93TQBiaeasrx1 (Voice of America, April 2, 2020); Chicago, https://youtu.be/ALlJjqVlFTs?si=ifySahgDoIXPlBW8 (PrimoMedia – Chris Biela, April 19, 2020); Florence, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztjve7bizto (Florence Tv, March 28, 2020); or Lisbon, https://youtu.be/VSsarnHMXbA?feature=shared (Hindustan Times, April 3, 2020). All accessed June 11, 2020. The platform Airvūz, "the premiere online video sharing community for the emerging Drone Age," compiles a large number of drone lockdown footage shot all over the world; see https://www.airvuz.com/. Drone DJ, a website specialized in the drone industry, also made compilations of coronavirus drone footage; see https://dronedj.com/2020/04/01/ultimate-coronavirus-drone-footage-roundup-usa-china-italy-spain-and-more/ (Stephen Hall, April 1, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020.

7 The video was shot by a certain Luigi Palumbo, a professional drone operator. See "Il silenzio di Roma" (Invidiosrl, April 7, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://youtu.be/kFGZKUxJwkM?si=uOAdL82L7D-0YURy.

8 Some viewers' responses, left on the comments section, are worth quoting: "beautiful and sad" or "wonderful and truly moving video clip, poetically beautiful Rome, wounded in the heart by the sirens in their sad silence, in order to rescue lives from the virus" (Stupendo video clip davvero commovente, Roma poeticamente meravigliosa, ferita al cuore dalle sirene nel suo triste silenzio, per strappare vite al virus). On the author's Instagram account, an aerial

footage, Patricia Zimmerman and Caren Kaplan (2020) have pointed out the melancholic, almost mournful nostalgia, of such aerial images. Despite their innocuous appearance, such reactions are deeply political. As Zimmerman observes, "the affective response [...] seems like a form of romanticism available only to the privileged with time to meditate on emptiness and revel in it" (2020). Indeed, coronavirus drone footage illustrates in many ways a worrying aestheticization of politics, and not only because it primarily speaks to the world's privileged.

Drones and the Aestheticization of Ecological Politics

The expression "aestheticization of politics" was first used by Walter Benjamin in order to address fascism's "glorification of war" (2008, 41). Siegfried Kracauer's discussion of the mass ornament (and aerial views), illustrates well what the aestheticization of political life meant during those gloomy interwar years (Kracauer 1995; Castro 2013). I will use this idea in a different way. It seems to me that the pleasurable and affective dimensions of coronavirus drone footage – their inherently aesthetic features – induce, in the public sphere, a worrying victory of spectacle over criticism. This is particularly evident when it comes to ecological thought – an aspect otherwise disregarded by discussions on the automation of vision. As a human-made crisis (not because the virus was fabricated in a lab, but because its spill-over was driven by human activities), the current pandemic links explicitly to ecology and to our troubled relationship with the "natural" world. As governments imposed more or less strict social distancing regulations, commentators were quick to suggest that this was the first major crisis of the Anthropocene (Tooze 2020).

Discussions on the positive and negative environmental outcomes of the outbreak thrived: the most optimistic anticipated a new era of ecological consciousness. As satellite images revealed significant drops in air pollution across the planet, drone footage of emptied cities came to embody, for some, what the world would look like without humans – or, at least, with considerably fewer humans. Images (many of them fake) of wild animals returning to human-deserted metropolises were widely shared.[9] In the UK and some

photograph of the Victor Emmanuel II Monument is accompanied by the comment "mala tempora currunt" (bad times are upon us). See https://www.instagram.com/p/cbimizqh8tu/ (Luigi Palumbo [invidio.produzione.video], June 8, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020.

9 See, among others, "Coronavirus Outbreak: Animals Take to Streets Amid Lockdown" (India Today, April 10, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DSLP95CR2k;

Fig. 12.2: Two ducks in front of the restaurant Tour d'Argent, Paris. Photograph posted on Twitter by @sisyphe007 on March 31, 2020. And False Extinction Rebellion sticker: "Corona is the cure, humans are the disease."

parts of Europe, false Extinction Rebellion (XR) stickers proclaimed: "Corona is the cure, humans are the disease." XR quickly dismissed them: they were the creation of far-right activists who not only wished to discredit the group, but to promote "eco-fascism" (Manavis 2020).

In what feels like a long time ago, in the far-away galaxy of our pre-pandemic world, self-proclaimed eco-fascists murdered a significant number of people in El Paso and Christchurch (Darby 2019). Eco-fascism certainly precedes the outbreak (Gardiner 2020). But as drone footage of emptied cities suggested that the world had turned into a nuclear-disaster exclusion zone where "nature" was regaining its rights, eco-fascists seized the occasion. Their credo: to preserve the planet over *certain* lives, in particular black, indigenous, and other minority ethnic lives. The very idea that "humans are the virus" – a meme tweeted and relayed countless times during lockdown, and somewhat inseparable from drone footage and satellite images – is inherently problematic. While human activities are certainly behind the environmental crisis, the genocidal view according to which COVID-19 is the planet's answer to the "human virus" is untenable. In practical terms, those being "sacrificed" are the frailest in terms of health, age, and economic position: the poor, the homeless, the incarcerated, the displaced, the marginalized, and so on. If drone footage of emptied cities and "cute" images of wild animals exploring the world's metropolises serve the "humans are the virus" credo, environmental politics is neutralized (if not aestheticized): the real reasons behind our current crisis are not addressed, they become a spectacle.

and "6 Things That Prove That the Earth Is Healing" (Curly Tales, March 23, 2020), accessed June 11, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3M908TJG9M.

The link between racial justice and the environmental crisis must be acknowledged. Racial (and gender) inequality and environmental destruction go hand in hand (Ferdinand 2019). In this context, the human and non-human bodies absent or present in drone footage of lockdown (and post-lockdown) cities are significant. While the real impact of the crisis on environmental consciousness still needs to be seen, the pandemic feels like an occasion *to land on Earth* (Latour 2018, 2020).[10] According to the French sociologist Bruno Latour, the modern project has been "in flight," detached from the soil, plants, animals, life. But we cannot escape the ecological urgency anymore: the reality of anthropogenic climate change is making the planet uninhabitable and now begs for a terrestrial politics. Latour's argument appears as particularly relevant for a discussion of aerial imagery: if the disjunction between the world we live *in* and the world we live *from* is at the heart of our current environmental crisis, points of view matter. In other words, from where do we see the world? In this context, the mapping and surveying of the planet from an aerial perspective undoubtedly contributed to our remoteness from it. Beyond the general feeling of mastery and control over space that maps procure, cartography has played (and still plays) a decisive role in the process of extracting natural resources from the Earth. Maps have helped to transform "nature" into an entity to be mastered and exploited. Transitioning from what we could call a cartographic to an ecological reason means, among other things, adjusting our standpoints to more small-scale and non-objectifying points of view, imagining counter-mappings. In order to truly inhabit the planet and to make it a world worth living in, we need to tackle its problems. As far as environmental politics is concerned, so long drone hovering and detached views: we need to put our feet back on Earth.

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10 In addition to Bruno Latour's idea that politics should be redefined as what leads toward the Earth (and not the global or the national – the "ethnonational" according to eco-fascism), "landing" should potentially be a way to think about the necessary articulation between a "cartographic" and an "ecological" reason. For more or less obvious reasons, aerial views play an important role in this conundrum.

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Teresa Castro is Associate Professor in Film Studies at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris 3. She has worked extensively on aerial imagery and was associate curator of the exhibition *Vues d'en haut*, at the Centre Pompidou Metz in 2013. She has published *La pensée cartographique des images. Cinéma et culture* visuelle (2011), co-edited three collective books (*Palmanova*, 2006; *Reimagining African Independence: Film, Visual Arts and the Fall of the Portuguese Empire*, 2017; *Puissance du vegetal et cinema animiste: La vitalité révélée par la technique*, 2020); and has written over sixty articles and book chapters. Her current research interests include the links between film and animism, and the environmental histories of film and photography.

13. Afterword – Beyond the Frame: "Immersion," New Technologies and Old Ambitions

Ian Christie

As this book appears, we seem to be living through a media revolution, which may prove no less dramatic than that of the 1890s, when moving pictures first reached screens around the world (Christie 2017-2018). What the current revolution – if it is one – offers is "immersion," with "experience" and "sensation" as its currency. Some manifestations of this recently available in London have been essentially theatrical, ranging from Punchdrunk's *The Burnt City*, an epic recreation of the fall of Troy set in giant abandoned warehouses, to the more bathetic *Faulty Towers: The Dining Experience*, in which guests participate in a recreation of a popular 1970s BBC television comedy about a dysfunctional seaside hotel, or *Mamma Mia! The Party*, "an immersive Abba-themed dinner experience set in a ropey taverna on an idyllic Greek island" (Lukowski 2022).[1] These might be considered an updating of the older concept of "promenade" or "site-specific theater."[2]

Another example, dating back to 2007, has been the UK company Secret Cinema "spatializing" the experience of classic films by means of creating elaborate environments based on these films, in which audience members "become part of the story," roaming amid recreations of settings and characters, and climaxing in a screening of the production's source film.[3] Other earlier experiments that included immersive elements were the British Film

1 It should be noted that Abba, whose songs provide the basis for the show *Mamma Mia!* on stage and on screen, have also launched an innovative "virtual" concert, *Abba Voyage*, making use of holographic avatars of the band members and elaborate projection inside a specially-constructed 3000-seat auditorium. See https://abbavoyage.com/.

2 See the Wikipedia entry, "Site-Specific Theatre," for its useful bibliography (Last modified September 28, 2023, accessed August 8, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Site-specific_theatre).

3 These have included films ranging from Lawrence of Arabia (1962) and The Battle of Algiers (1966) to The Red Shoes (1948), The Third Man (1949), and The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014). See https://www.secretcinema.com/en_GB.

Christie, I. (ed.), *Spaces: Exploring Spatial Experiences of Representation and Reception in Screen Media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
DOI 10.5117/9789048563265_CH13

Institute's exhibition for the centenary of cinema, *Spellbound: Art and Film in Britain* (1996), at the Hayward Gallery in London; the Montreal-Paris exhibition *Alfred Hitchcock et l'art: Coincidences fatales* (2001);[4] and Patrick Keillor's exhibitions *Londres-Bombay* (Le Fresnoy, 2006) and *The Robinson Institute* at Tate Britain, discussed earlier in chapter 7.[5]

Alongside these essentially theatrical and cinematic phenomena, there has also been a trend in museum exhibitions toward "world-building," going considerably beyond mere scenographic decoration. In 2021, the Victoria & Albert Museum's *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser* exhibition offered "a mind-bending journey into Wonderland [...] exploring the origins, adaptations and artistic reinventions of Lewis Carroll's stories" (V&A 2021). At the Royal Academy in 2022, an exhibition by William Kentridge invited visitors to "enter a new, immersive world by the multi-sensory artist," billing this as "the immersive art experience of the year" (RA 2022). But perhaps more significantly, and wholly outside the museum sector, there has been a proliferation of new forms of commercial exhibition that make use of digital projection and "XR" technologies to create a new kind of "art experience."[6] Recent examples in the UK have ranged from the large-scale enveloping projection of exhibitions such as *David Hockney: Bigger and Closer* (*Not smaller and Further Away*) and *Frameless*, to an increasing number that incorporate Virtual Reality (VR) "experiences," as in two other exhibitions currently running in London, *Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience* and *Dalí: Cybernetics – The Immersive Experience*.[7]

These latter belong to an international portfolio of "experiences" devised by Fever, initially a Spanish company launched in 2014, and self-described as a "live entertainment discovery platform [...] with a mission to democratize access to culture and entertainment in real life." Fever relates its success to enabling "traditional producers and creators like museums or classical music organizers" to adapt to a "new reality" post-COVID, "by making their experiences more accessible to a full new range of customers" (Fever 2022).

4 On *Spellbound*, see https://artsandculture.google.com/story/spellbound-art-and-film-in-britain/QQWxbZ8oh8egIA; and on *Hitchcock*, see https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/program/calendar/event/cd6Ajp.

5 See also Yosr Ben Romdhane's discussion of "immersion" in chapter 11 of this book.

6 XR, standing for eXtended Reality, is widely used to refer to such technologies as Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR), and Virtual Reality (VR), which seamlessly blend virtual and physical realms to create fully immersive experiences.

7 The Dalí exhibition has been advertised online as "the first collective metaverse show in London," apparently aiming to exploit the currency of the term "metaverse." See brief overview below.

Unlike "massive multiplayer online games" (MMOs), such as *Minecraft*, Epic Games' many titles, or Facebook's *Horizon*, whose players are linked only by being online via computer terminals, Fever equips venues which must be visited by paying customers.[8] These offer conventional orientation by means of wall panels, photo reproductions, and projected images, which lead to communal spaces of all-surface animated projection, followed in some venues by a custom "VR experience." In the case of *Van Gogh*, this consists of being transported (while seated) through a series of rooms and environments extrapolated from well-known paintings by the artist; while in *Dalí*, audience members are free to move around a room, which is transformed by VR into the deck of a ship, apparently sailing amongst gigantic, animated motifs from Dalí's surreal iconography.

In both, the experience is perhaps comparable to visiting a 3D game environment, described by one of the largest game production companies as

> a persistent open world for all the players to explore and play in. These worlds can be anything. Large swathes of fantasy landscapes, with continents and cities; galaxies or solar systems; or abandoned real-world cities, full of places to loot and hide. (Epic Games 2023)

An important difference, however, is that in exhibitions there is little or no scope for the interactive "play" that has created the major industry of video or computer gaming. Nor indeed is the rendering of their "artscapes" as finely wrought as the fantasy landscapes of many games.

Avatars of Immersion

To gain perspective on current attitudes toward "immersive" displays and experiences, it may be useful to review some of the key concepts that have guided them, initially within cinema. One of the earliest appeared in Terry Ramsaye's (1926) pioneer *A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925*. Here Ramsaye, an experienced industry figure, offered an elaborate "prehistory of the screen," tracing the impulse that led to cinema back to the earliest forms of storytelling, in a lineage that would become familiar from repetition in later histories. His overarching claim for cinema as "the one fundamental art" cast a wide net, drawing on art history and on

8 Fever is also involved in the recreation of more traditional ambient effects such as "candlelight concerts."

recent psychology, observing that film is "specific, primitive, actual, faster than life and twice as natural" (Ramsaye 1986, lxix) – this in the year that Sergei Eisenstein's The Battleship Potemkin would draw admiration around the world. Unusually, Ramsaye also cited recent psychoanalytic sources, referring to Sandor Ferenczi's concept of a "period of unconditional omnipotence," which it is suggested cinema can irresponsibly gratify (lxix; Ferenczi 1925; Low 1925).

Twenty years later, in 1946, the influential French critic André Bazin reviewed a study of the nineteenth-century precursors of cinema under the title "The Myth of Total Cinema," arguing that[9]

> The guiding myth, then inspiring the invention of cinema is the accomplishment of what dominated [...] all the techniques of mechanical reproduction of reality [...] from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image. (1967, 21)

Cinema, he concluded, was not the product of industrialists or scientists, but of a number of "converging obsessions," which combined to produce what he dubbed "the myth of total cinema," even if this was hardly what Georges Sadoul's research pointed to. In fact, the idea of a "total cinema" indistinguishable from reality owed more to *fin de siècle* authors such as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, with his *The Future Eve* (1886) and Jules Verne's *The Carpathian Castle* (1892), which anticipated the actual launch of moving pictures by Edison, Lumière, Paul, and others in 1894-1896.[10]

Fiction had indeed continued to be the source of key concepts that have dominated recent discussion and speculation about virtual spaces. "Cyberspace" was popularized by the science-fiction writer William Gibson in a 1982 story and then in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, in which it is evoked as:

> A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines

9 Bazin's review, initially published in *Critique* in 1946, was of volume 1 of Georges Sadoul's *Histoire Generale du cinema*, titled *L'invention du cinema 1832-1897*, covering the range of optical entertainments that preceded moving picture exhibition.

10 On this conjunction of invention and imagination, see both Christie 2001, 3-12; and Gunning 2001, 13-31; also Christie 2019, 83-93.

> of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. (1984, 69)

Less poetically, Gibson's coinage was quickly adopted to refer to the evolving linkage of computer networks in the 1980s, and by artists working in different media. And it is now routinely used by technologists to explain "the modern internet-supported interaction space," as in a recent book on *The Origins of Cyberspace*, which invokes the same extended lineage as Ramsaye:

> "Cyberspace" is a romantic term, introduced in the elegant science-fiction writing of William Gibson, but the concepts that make up the environment called "cyberspace" are the stuff of real science, with origins that can be traced to ancient Greece. (Pym 2021)

And ten years later, it would be joined by another term coined by a science-fiction writer, "metaverse," in Neal Stephenson's 1992 novel *Snow Crash*, where human avatars and programmed agent-actors can interact in a virtual space that mimics the real world:

> So Hiro's not actually here at all. He's in a computer-generated universe that his computer is drawing onto his goggles and pumping into his earphones. In the lingo, this imaginary place is known as the Metaverse. Hiro spends a lot of time in the metaverse. (1992, 22)

The adoption and realization of Stephenson's "metaverse" has been rapid – at least within social and mobile media – with the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, renaming his company Meta and announcing in 2021 that "the metaverse will be the successor to the mobile internet [where] we'll be able to feel present [...] right there with people no matter how far apart we actually are" (quoted in Milmo 2021).

As this brief overview indicates, the guiding concepts for a growing sense of how technologies of reproduction can simulate, and potentially substitute for, quotidian material reality, have consistently come from imaginative artists – apparently attuned to both innovation and expectation. For Bazin, it was a paradox that "every new development added to cinema must take it nearer to its origins" (1967, 21); while for a later critic, Noel Burch, these manifested "the thrusting progress of [...] the bourgeois ideology of representation," which had the Frankensteinian ambition "to exorcise the supreme phantasm, to abolish death" (1981, 21).

Medium Specificity and the Depth Illusion

But if both cyberspace and more recently the metaverse have now been naturalized, as descriptive terms for technological realities (or at least ambitions), there remain important unresolved, indeed exacerbated issues of cultural status. Put simply, to see or experience something virtually is often regarded as inferior or untrue to "the real thing" – not in many areas of practical life, where it has become routine, especially since the period of COVID lockdowns, but in fields where first-hand sensory contact is deemed essential.

Here, in confronting "real objects in real spaces," as distinct from their virtual forms, we are perhaps encountering a new phase of what has long been known in aesthetics as the "medium specificity thesis" (Carroll 1985). The basic argument can be traced back to Gotthold Lessing's ([1766] 1984) observation that poetry and painting should not be confused as arts, even if we may speak of poetic qualities in painting or painterly effects in poetry. But it was revived during the twentieth century, first by Clement Greenberg, in his writings on abstract painting, insisting that this be considered strictly and solely in terms of its materiality; and second within moving image media, when video artists started to differentiate their work from that of film artists in terms of electronic rather than photo-mechanical reproduction. This differentiation would then be restated in the early 2000s as a fundamental distinction between analogue and digital media.[11]

Rather than rehearse the current state of this long-running debate, it may be more useful to observe that the long history of creating spatial illusion, whether by optical devices or by "mixed media," has provoked relatively consistent hostility from arbiters of aesthetic taste – except perhaps in stage design or when practiced by noted artists. An early example of the latter would be the "show box" created by the painter Thomas Gainsborough in the late eighteenth century.[12] The back-lit miniature landscapes that Gainsborough painted for this have rightly been admired for their dream-like qualities, with the art historian Ann Bermingham suggesting that it "provides us with a tool for thinking about the differences between art and technology and their powers to realize imagination"

11 By, among others, Rodowick (2007), who maintained that Russian Ark (Alexander Sokurov, 2002) could not be considered a "film," since it had been filmed on a video camera and captured on a computer hard drive.

12 Currently on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. See https://artlark.org/2022/08/02/thomas-gainsboroughs-showbox-paintings/.

(2007, 203). But this example of what was a fairly common optical device of the era, the peep-show, is commended in the context of disparaging most nineteenth-century "technologies of illusion," such as panoramas and stereoscopes.[13] Yet it could equally be argued that stereoscopy, the century's most popular optical entertainment, not only served to make painting accessible to a popular audience, but had a major influence on many of the pioneers of literary modernism and the creators of cinema (Wedel 2009, 203-205).

In cinema, stereoscopy has long had a contested history. One of the key figures in film aesthetics, Sergei Eisenstein, was confident at the end of his life in 1948 that the future of cinema would be stereoscopic – prompted by having seen the USSR's first 3D feature, Robinson Crusoe (1947), but also on the basis of a substantial review of the history of theater (Eisenstein 2013). He argued that, despite the apparently mature "proscenium" form of theater, separating performance from audience, there were persistent challenges dating back to Ancient Greece, and renewed during the Baroque period. He also pointed to the tradition of the *hanamachi* or "runway" in Japanese kabuki theater, linking the playing space with the auditorium. And in cinema, he saw a concerted trend in Western production toward "immersive" strategies, citing Hitchcock's Spellbound (1945) and Powell-Pressburger's A Matter of Life and Death (1946) among the Western films he had seen recently.[14]

Eisenstein's 1947 essay anticipated what would be an early, though short-lived boom in stereoscopic cinema during 1951-1953, which included, among a number of routine genre features, such outstanding works as Norman Maclaren's experimental 3D animation for the Festival of Britain, Now Is the Time (1951) and Alfred Hitchcock's Dial M for Murder (1954). Although popular with audiences, the hostility of exhibitors helped bring 3D as a commercial phenomenon of to a premature end. But the taste for "depth illusion" would persist, with a number of alternative formats emerging. One of these was the elaborate multi-projector immersive system Cinerama, launched during the heyday of 3D in 1952. A response to this by a leading mainstream American critic is worth quoting, especially as it directly evoked the 1890s:

13 For a trenchant attempt to restore the status of photographic stereographs in relation to Victorian painting, see Pellerin and May 2014, and their website, The Poor Man's Picture Gallery, https://www.thepoormanspicturegallery.com/.

14 The USSR had developed an "autostereoscopic" 3D system which did not require the spectacles needed for anaglyptic and polarized systems used elsewhere; and a number of stereo cinemas flourished across its territory for some decades. On this, see Christie 2014, 115-203.

> Somewhat the same sensations that the audience in Koster and Bial's Music Hall must have felt on that night,[15] years ago, when motion pictures were first publicly flashed on a large screen were probably felt by the people who witnessed the first public showing of Cinerama the other night … the shrill screams of the ladies and the pop-eyed amazement of the men when the huge screen was opened to its full size and a thrillingly realistic ride on a roller-coaster was pictured upon it, attested to the shock of the surprise. People sat back in spellbound wonder as the scenic program flowed across the screen. It was really as though most of them were seeing motion pictures for the first time … the effect of Cinerama in this its initial display is frankly and exclusively "sensational," in the literal sense of that word. (Crowther 1952, 1).

Bosley Crowther faithfully registered the impact of Cinerama, but judged this to be "exclusively sensational," implying that it lacked aesthetic or dramatic significance. Indeed, for Crowther, it was intrinsically meretricious, belonging more to the fairground than the cinema as a cultural medium. And yet, despite the film industry's abandonment of 3D, a cheaper quasi-immersive substitute would appear in 1953, CinemaScope, which was soon integrated into mainstream production; followed by yet another innovation that would increase the definition and scale of the film image, VistaVision.[16]

From Wagner to IMAX and VR

Two technological trajectories would define the future of a truly immersive cinematic experience from the 1970s onward. One was the development of the large-format IMAX system, first demonstrated at the 1970 Osaka Expo; and the other was Dolby multi-channel stereo sound, heard to impressive effect in Star Wars in 1977. Alison Griffiths has traced the lineage that runs from panoramas at the turn of the eighteenth century, through the development of IMAX and up to 360-degree internet technologies – all offering at different moments of technological achievement "the illusion of material presence" (Ackland 1998 quoted in Griffiths 2008, 83). And her

15 Reference to the premiere of Edison's Vitascope program on Broadway in April 1896, prompted by his realization that projection on screen was already a runaway success in London and Paris, eclipsing the earlier success of his Kinetoscope viewer.

16 VistaVision did not prove a commercially viable format, although its high-quality camera continued in use after the format ceased to be available in cinema exhibition. See Abreu 2021.

book, *Shivers Down Your Spine* (2008), usefully explores the development of IMAX as an immersive spectacle, first widely seen in museum contexts, with emphases on travel, topography, and natural history subjects.

Sound is of course also an integral aspect of spectacle, whether as music or atmospheric "effects" (or both). Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, audiovisual spectacle had grown in importance with new developments in opera houses, theaters, and exhibition venues, with Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth (1876) an early benchmark venue.[17] Synchronized sound on film would consolidate this fusion from the 1930s onward, with music and ambient recorded sound becoming an essential part of mid-century cinematic spectacle. But it was digital "surround sound" in the 1990s that enhanced the immersive quality of cinema, paving the way for digital projection and the return of 3D in 2009, with IMAX theaters now an established part of the cinema exhibition infrastructure, after the format converted to digital in 2008.[18]

Yet once again – or rather still – there is undoubtedly cultural opposition to the kind of immersive spectacle offered by such films as James Cameron's Avatar (2009) and to its sequel Avatar 2: The Way of Water (2022), even as optimally seen under IMAX conditions. These films may be immensely successful in commercial terms, among the highest earning films of all time, but for many this seems to compound or confirm their aesthetic nullity. And such dismissals find an echo in the tone of hostile reviews of popular immersive art exhibitions. Typical is the *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones's dismissive review of *David Hockney Bigger and Closer*:

> This hour-long "immersion" in gigantic projections makes less impact than a brief glance at an actual original work of art by Hockney in a gallery. At his best he is a great painter but there is not a single real work by him here to catch your memory and hold on to your soul. Without real art, this entertainment goes the same way as all the other immersive exhibitions of art icons: into the weightless, passionless dustbin of forgetting. (2023)

Similarly, in a *New York Times* review of "Immersive Van Gogh" by Jason Farago, which also broadened the attack to include disparaging comparisons

17 See Wikipedia entry, "Bayreuth Festspielhaus," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayreuth_Festspielhaus.

18 Digital IMAX does not deliver the same image resolution as the earlier film-strip form, although it offers significantly larger screen-size and a wider range of films displayed. See IMAX history summary at Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IMAX.

with dramatic films inspired by Van Gogh's life, as well as with Japanese animation and contemporary fantasy franchises:

> the digital reproductions – particularly of the 1888 Arles street scene *Café Terrace at Night* – strongly recall the escapist fantasies of *anime*, and the childish moral sentiments that go with them. Contrasted with the immoderate passions of the 1956 movie *Lust for Life*, or the 2018 biopic *At Eternity's Gate*, these selfie chambers are as benign as the Japanese animated film *My Neighbor Totoro*. The art's personal anguish and social tensions both dissolve into a mist of let's-pretend; this van Gogh is less an artist than a craftsman of other worlds. (A "universe," as the Marvel or Harry Potter fans say.). (2021)

However, the *New York Times* critic extended his review with a reflection:

> after a few hours in these sensoria, I had to believe that the millions of visitors who enjoy these immersive van Gogh displays are getting *something* out of it. There's a speechless and irreducible quality to great art, a value that goes beyond communication or advocacy. And if audiences find that quality more immediately here than they do in our traditional institutions, maybe we should be asking why.

Farago's solution, however, amounted to a restatement of the "essentialist" or Greenbergian position adopted by most art critics faced with such immersive shows:

> In the Metropolitan Museum of Art's gallery 822, you can stand as long as you like in front of van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, the agitated clouds rolling like waves, its climbing greenery edged with trembling blacks. I want everyone to discover, right there in the thick grooves of the oil paint, the wonder and vitality of art that needs no animation. There has got to be a way to lead people back to that discovery, even if some of us take a selfie afterward.

Perhaps significantly, as further evidence of the revolution under way, the Musée d'Orsay is offering "an innovative immersive interactive experience" as an adjunct to its 2003-2004 *Van Gogh in Auvers-sur-Oise* exhibition, based on detailed scanning of the artist's palette.[19]

19 See https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/whats-on/exhibitions/virtual-reality-van-goghs-palette.

It may be inevitable that today's professional art critics balk at highly commodified presentations of artists whose life and work have become melodramatic cliché. Frida Kahlo, Diego Riviera, and Claude Monet have so far been given similar treatment, while Dalí might be considered the pioneer of such populist presentation, having launched his own Theatre-Museum in Figueres in the 1970s after a lifetime of cultivating his lurid public image.[20] But in a wider context Farago could perhaps pursue his reflection on why audiences are finding such shows so attractive.

Rather than suggest that museums and galleries are underselling "the emotional impact of the art they show," he and other skeptics might pause to consider the significance of "immersive" exhibitions as a new genre, closely linked to the pervasive use of digital technologies to enhance many forms of entertainment. Not only cinema, but sport, music, and other forms of performance-based art have all been transformed by new modes of projection and amplification. XR technologies are already well established in popular cinema and in the wholly new domain of online video gaming, which has a global audience of many millions, yet remains largely ignored by older and more conservative cultural commentators.[21]

Yet it's important to recognize that none of this is really "new," even if it is undergoing renewal in the digital era. The foundational role of stereography in establishing photography as a significant medium in the mid-nineteenth century was for long ignored, despite museums belatedly acknowledging this in their new historical displays. On a more popular level, Denis Pellerin and Brian May's recent efforts to stimulate awareness of the importance of stereoscopy in Victorian culture, as in their *Poor Man's Picture Gallery* (2014),[22] can be linked to Richard Altick's (1978) pioneering scholarship on the myriad ephemeral and sensational "shows of London," which preceded the establishment of the public museums and galleries that provide the benchmark of "high" culture today. Altick showed how the new media of cheap engravings and eventually photography emerged alongside the showmanship of the Egyptian Hall, and of the London's immersive Panoramas and Dioramas. He also noted that the painters Benjamin Haydon and John Martin

20 For the history of Salvador Dalí's involvement with the Dalí Theatre-Museum, see https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/museums/dali-theatre-museum-in-figueres/historia/.

21 While this may reflect lack of first-hand experience among those who are not "digital natives," it must surely also be due to gaming being described and sold as "play," even if many of its forms and tropes are used in professional training programs.

22 See The London Stereoscopic Company website at https://www.londonstereo.com/, and especially Pellerin and May's website, The Poor Man's Picture Gallery, https://www.thepoormanspicturegallery.com/.

were both mocked by contemporaries for the vastness of their canvases, and neither are among the Victorian artists highly regarded now, even if the influence of the latter is apparent in later forms of spectacle.[23] Yet the interplay between that era's popular immersive displays and other respected contemporary work, such as Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* – which toured Britain with great success in 1820 (Altick 1978, 409) – is surely instructive, if we wish to consider the ongoing relationship between "old" and "new" media.

Does it need to be said that today's immersive presentations about popular artists such as Van Gogh, Dalí, and Kahlo are clearly not claiming the status of museum exhibitions, although Hockney's *Bigger and Closer* builds upon his previous digital work exhibited in gallery spaces such as the Royal Academy in London, and does carry his artistic imprimatur despite Jones's denial of this. Potentially, the Musée d'Orsay exhibition will change perceptions of what XR and AI techniques can add to conventional exhibitions. Yet these shows – and following Altick, this is surely the right term – are arguably best understood through the concept of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin 2000). In their book consciously aimed at updating Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), Bolter and Grusin demonstrated that new reproductive media in the digital era characteristically claim their cultural status by refashioning earlier analogue media – just as those analogue media of the twentieth century remediated their immediate predecessors.[24]

Today's immersive displays themed around familiar artists belong to a much wider spectrum of recreational popular culture, which includes television programs, printed magazines and partworks, and cultural tourism – elements of which have been in play since the Victorian *fin de siècle* (when stereograph sets and early travelogue lectures using lantern slides and eventually films anticipated many later television formats). They are also serving to attract audiences to the "discovery platforms" of new media entrepreneurs, and to initiate many of these into the *cultural experience* of cyberspace and the metaverse.[25]

23 A major John Martin exhibition, *John Martin: Apocalypse*, at Tate Britain in 2011-2012 provided an occasion to reassess Martin and his reputation, see https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/john-martin-apocalypse. See also my article, "Kings of the Vast: John Martin II" (Christie 2011).

24 Specifically, Bolter and Grusin observe that "photography remediated painting, film remediated stage production and photography, and television remediated film, vaudeville, and radio" (2000, rear cover blurb), following a pattern of argument derived from Marshall McLuhan's (1964) analysis of media succession and inheritance.

25 For a report on the range of immersive "experiences" available in the UK, and their audiences, see Tait 2022.

To join such audiences, embracing a wide age-range and striking ethnic and cultural diversity (many of whom will certainly be familiar with material artworks in museums and galleries) is to experience what may well be a media revolution in progress – one that will profoundly change our conceptions of culture, communication, and indeed space, as cinema once did. To become part of the "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators" that Gibson so accurately predicted.[26] But this need not amount to a capitulation to technological or political determinism. As the cultural geographer Doreen Massey, a passionate advocate of rethinking attitudes to space and one of the guiding influences on this collection, wrote in her manifesto, *For Space*:

> If time is to be open to a future of the new then space cannot be equated with the closures and horizontalities of representation [...] if time is to be open, then space must be open too. Conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics. (2005, 59)

Looking back at the long history of "optical remediation," it is difficult not to conclude that opposition to its innovations and technologies has often been motivated by a conservative wish to resist change, to oppose the "trickery" of mediation, effectively to freeze time. As Walter Benjamin argued in his great 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

> The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form. The extravagances and crudities of art which thus appear, particularly in the so-called decadent epochs, actually arise from the nucleus of its richest historical energies. (1969, 16)

Benjamin was defending the then-recent "barbarism" of Dada, which he believed had helped to pave the way for film to emerge as a new and essentially popular art form. He cited the scorn of George Duhamel for "the kind of participation which the movie elicits from the masses [...] a spectacle which required no concentration and requires no intelligence," dismissing

26 David Pym, information scientist and fellow at the Alan Turing Institute London, and author of "The Origins of Cyberspace," cited earlier, confirms the accuracy of Gibson's definition.

this as "an ancient lament" (1969, 17-18). And as we witness the early stages of immersive technologies reaching toward the creation of new modes of experience, relying on the remediation of past achievements – as both photography and film did – we might bear in mind the prophetic epigraph that Benjamin chose, from Paul Valéry's 1928 essay "The Conquest of Ubiquity":

> For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art. (1964)[27]

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27 Valery's essay dealt mainly with the "ubiquity" of recorded and broadcast music. But it included an anticipation of the possibility of "visual or auditory images which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand," and even the future possibility of "a company engaged in the home delivery of Sensory Reality" (see online text and translation by Tyka 2015).

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Although long defined as a temporal art, most famously by André Bazin and Andrei Tarkovsky, film has always been more fundamentally a spatiotemporal medium, transporting its viewers imaginatively to spaces and places other than those they literally inhabit. In the digital era, this capacity for spatial illusion and paradox has been greatly expanded – by the predominance of domestic viewing, new extra-terrestrial perspectives, and the promise of novel kinesthetic experiences with 3D, Virtual Reality and "immersion", renewing the promise of 19th century new media. The international authors in this collection address the history and aesthetics of screen media as spatial transposition, in a range of exemplary analyses that run from the landscapes of John Ford's westerns to Chantal Akerman's claustrophobic domestic spaces, from the conventions of the English country house film to Patrick Keiller's Robinson roaming a changed country, and from the experiences of Covid pandemic confinement to those of un-homed van-dwellers in Chloe Zhao's award-winning NOMADLAND.

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Mutations and Appropriations in
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