# Between Knowing and Believing

The Cinematic Dispositive after Cinema

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## Introduction

The *Imagined Futures* research project, coordinated with two of my colleagues (Wanda Strauven at the University of Amsterdam, and Michael Wedel at the University of Film and Television, Potsdam), concerns itself with the conditions, dynamics and consequences of rapid media transfer and transformation. "Media" in our case refers in principle to all imaging techniques and sound technologies, but cinema has provided the conceptual starting point and primary historical focus. While changes in basic technology, public perception and artistic practice in sound and image media may often evolve over long historical cycles, our main working assumption is that there are also factors, not of steady and gradual process, but moments when transfer occurs in discontinuous, unevenly distributed fashion, during much shorter periods of time, and with mutually interdependent determinations.

*Imagined Futures* initially identified two such relatively abrupt periods of transformation taking place across a broad spectrum of media technologies and social developments: the period between the 1870s and 1900, and the period between 1970 and 2000. The first witnessed the popularization of photography, the emergence of cinema, the international, transatlantic use of the telegraph and the domestic use of the telephone, the invention of radio and of the theories as well as the basic technology of television. The second period saw the consolidation of video as a popular storage medium and avant-garde artistic practice, the rise of installation art and its hybridization with cinema, the universal adoption of the personal computer, the change from analogue to digital sound and image, the invention of the mobile phone and the emergence of the Internet and the world wide web.

A key characteristic of such periods of rapid media change is the volatility, unpredictability and contradictory nature of the dynamics between these technologies' practical implications (such as industrial uses and the resulting potential for economic profit), their perception by the popular imagination (in the form of narratives of anxiety, of utopia, dystopia and fantasy) and the mixed response (eager adoption or stiff resistance) from artists, writers and intellectuals. These shifting configurations among dif-

ferent agents offer a rich field of investigation for cultural analysis, posing methodological challenges and requiring specific case studies.

As far as the earlier period is concerned, our research has identified a number of iconic figures and their historical contexts: *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Italian Futurism* (Marinetti and Marconi: speed; radio and the wireless; cinema as the "destroyer" of art and of the museum; cinema, war and aviation as major agents of modernization);[1] *Oskar Messter and the three S/M practices of early German cinema* (the chief promoter of a film industry in Germany since the 1910s, as well as the first systematic proponent of what I have elsewhere called the three S/M practices of the cinematic dispositive[2] – science and medicine, surveillance and the military, sensor and monitor – all of which play their part in the formation of early German cinema, obliging us to recast what we consider to be its particular identity);[3] and *Eadweard Muybridge versus Etienne-Jules Marey: photography in motion versus the visualization of data*, a project where we compare Muybridge, who initially devoted himself to the art-historical issue of how to represent movement in the still image, and Marey, who was one of the first scientific photographers to capture, record, measure and represent living phenomena and processes (i.e. biological, atmospheric, geological) in real time, graphically as well as iconographically, with the aid of the cinematic dispositive.[4]

Finally, our overall project is driven by another consideration: we see neither the need nor the wisdom of making the history of the cinema begin in 1895 and end a hundred years later with the dominance of the digital image. In other words, we do not endorse the much-discussed "death of cinema," which assumes the break between photographic and post-photographic cinema to be fundamental. No more than in earlier times, when such breaks

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1    See Wanda Strauven, *Marinetti e il cinema: tra attrazione e sperimentazione* (Udine: Campanotto, 2006).

2    Thomas Elsaesser, "Digital Cinema and the Apparatus: Archaeologies, Epistemologies, Ontologies," in *Cinema and Technology: Cultures, Theories, Practices*, Marc Furstenau, Bruce Bennett and Adrian Mackenzie, eds. (London: Palgrave, 2008) 226-40; and Wanda Strauven, "S/M," in *Mind the Screen*, J.Kooijman, P. Pisters and W. Strauven, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008) 276-87.

3    The German cinema of the silent period is usually identified with Expressionism and fantasy subjects. For a revision of this perception, see *Kino der Kaiserzeit*, Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, eds. (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2002); and Michael Wedel, *Der deutsche Musikfilm Archäologie eines Genres 1914 – 1945* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2007).

4    Thomas Elsaesser, "Kontingenz und Handlungsmacht," in *Unmenge - Wie verteilt sich Handlungsmacht?* Ilka Becker, Michael Cuntz and Astrid Kusser, eds. (Munich: Fink, 2008) 157-90.

were posited (several such deaths of cinema have been foretold) – notably with the coming of sound, the emergence of television or the invention of the video-cassette – do we believe that a new technology introduced in one specific area (of what is always a constellation of overlapping, mutually amplifying but also interfering dispositives) is the cause of radical change by itself. Insofar as such ruptures (in technology or cultural practice) do occur, we believe that they are also welcome opportunities to revise one's habitual ways of thinking and to test one's implicit assumptions.[5]

To give conceptual muscle and a body of empirical evidence to our particular perspective, we are engaged in *three kinds of* "revisionism." The first we call "media-archaeology," which entails a re-investigation into the "origins" of the cinema and the cultural context of so-called pre-cinema, while also pushing for a history of the discourses generated by the different debates around the cinematic dispositive.

The second revisionism is of a more theoretical and conceptual kind. Re-reading key thinkers on the cinema, such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, but also Hugo Münsterberg, Béla Balázs and Rudolf Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein and Jean Epstein, we attempt to recover a more comprehensive view of the cinema – whether based on notions of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "anti-art," on cinematic anthropomorphism or animation; whether committed to formalism and abstraction, or to an aesthetics genuinely belonging in the ephemeral, the instant, the contingent and the multiple (elaborating on Baudelaire's "riot of details" as well as on Walter Benjamin's "optical unconscious"). In short, our second revisionism re-maps the semantic field of relevant concepts as well as methods in our discipline. Evidently, we can only conduct such a review in the light of the present, which is to say, mindful of the media environment of the twenty-first century.[6] Thus, the reading of the "classics" is complemented by similarly "holistic" or crisis/emergency-driven attempts at reading the cinema from within the digital domain by contemporary scholars such as Friedrich Kittler, Lev Manovich, David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Sean Cubitt, Mary Ann Doane, Jeffrey Sconce, Garrett Stewart and others.

Classic texts, as we know, have to be re-read: they have to be put in dialogue with contemporary practices and re-assessed in a wider conceptual

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5    For an extended argument, see Thomas Elsaesser, "Early Film History and Multi-Media: An Archaeology of Possible Futures?" in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Tom Keenan, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2005) 13-26.

6    One of the results has been a new approach to (classical and modern) film theory. See Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

network. This bi-focal perspective on the cultural mesh of cinema around 1900 and 2000 is what we are collectively proposing to elaborate. Hence the suitably open title *Imagined Futures*, which includes the "history of imagined futures in the past," and the "rewriting of the past in light of the future." Even as we refrain from identifying "the future" with the "digital era" as such, we think that the inclusion of sound and telephony or the extension of the corpus to scientific and non-fictional films, for instance, significantly enlarges our understanding of "what is cinema." Likewise, our special attention to how the cinema has affected the perception of time and the experience of place and space will allow us to redefine the cinematic dispositive without being either reductive or all-inclusive.

The third revisionism concerns the application, appropriation and implementation of cinematic techniques, technologies and ways of seeing in fields other than the mainstream of film. While alternatives to the narrative feature film usually see themselves in terms of antagonism, critique and resistance, our revisionism is less interested in addressing the division between high culture and popular culture (the ideological-polemical thrust of postmodernism) or the split between arts and hard sciences (the "two cultures" of C. P. Snow). Instead we focus on breaking down the division between an avant-garde at the margins or in opposition, and the technological-industrial mainstream. What we are trying to explore is how sound and image media and other information technologies have contributed to or even spearheaded changes in the relation between an artistic practice said to be hostile to any kind of application or transfer to the realm of industry, commerce and functional use, and an industrial practice, supposedly concerned merely with mass-production and maximizing profit. Whether we call it "design and advertising," "post-Fordism" or "research and development," the twenty-first century has seen a shift or even a reversal in the balance of power between an entrepreneurial avant-garde and an avant-garde entrepreneurism. The parallels between avant-garde art and industrial application are often surprisingly evident and direct, just as the marketing skills of artists and curators easily bear comparison with those of industrial conglomerates and commercial companies. We would be arguing – on the basis of the episteme 1900 – that the cinema needs to be understood in its double role in this respect. It emerged at a time of crisis for the self-understanding of the first industrial revolution, where the spectacle of moving images was meant to mediate between technology, education and entertainment. Such a division had not existed during the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie earlier in the nineteenth century and may no longer exist today. Indeed, one way of understanding the rapid rise of the cinema would

be to highlight the role it played as both symptom (of the division between education about the world and entertainment extracted from the world) and cure (in that it seemed to heal the breach between work and leisure), a role also played by the large world fairs in London (1851), Chicago (1893), Paris (1889, 1900) and St. Louis (1904), which sought to reconcile the split between industry, technology, the public sphere and everyday life.

Thus, our third revisionism tries to track a trend that, from the 1970s onwards, has seen these divisions between high-tech, entertainment and information – but also between the avant-garde and the mainstream – as increasingly blurred and merging, "returning" us to the period prior to the 1890s. Although we have not yet fully conceptualized the dynamics and forces that are bringing style, design, advertising, technological break-throughs, avant-garde and the mass market together, we note that the result is infotainment, advertising-driven education, design following technology and "theory" becoming design.

To the extent that we are concerned with often counter-intuitive as-sociations, heterogeneous networks and non-convergent connections, we are sympathetic to the idea of re-investigating the concept of "dispositif." Its capacity to think in terms of bricolage and assemblages, its renewed regard for the conditions of reception (envisaging "agents" with different roles and functions) and its interest in new pedigrees and genealogies all reaffirm the concept's value and uses. For instance, the proposal to draw upon gene-alogies that can "distinguish between successive mechanical and military paradigms and theatrical, libidinal models"[7] would seem to be quite close to our aims as well. It is by attending to non-technological factors, drawing connections between agents, sites and practices usually not associated with each other, that the more recent term dispositive, central to this volume, opens up valuable discursive space, by identifying common denominators between and across media. However, "dispositif" – if merely translated as *cinematic apparatus* in British or American English – is less useful to our research, since it fails to account fully for what we think is the complexity of the present situation. The same goes for the historical period preceding "the cinema": only if we think of "dispositif" as neither synonymous with the technological apparatus nor analogous to the Freudian psychic *Apparat*, and retain Jean Louis Baudry's distinction between "appareil de base" and "dispositif," with the latter signifying different kinds of assemblages and arrangements, can we adequately understand the nature of the interac-

7    François Albera and Maria Tortajada, call for papers, conference on "Viewing and Listening Dispositives," Université de Lausanne, Switzerland, May 29-31, 2008.

tions, the degrees of antagonism and the kinds of interdependencies we are tracking for the period around 1900.


## The Dispositive Cinema: Conditions of Possibility

In what follows I want to stress one of the main lessons to retain from the history of "apparatus theory," the name by which the discussions around the "dispositif cinéma" have come to be known in Anglo-American criticism. Rather than repeating the well-known definitions[8] and subsequent polemics[9] surrounding this particular ocular-centric arrangement of screen, projector and spectator, we need a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions that bring different media together into relations of interdependence, competition and complementarity, as they appear to us in the twenty-first century. Therefore it cannot be our purpose to confine ourselves primarily to a given (audio-visual) technology and construct around it a new "dispositif" without also elaborating a coherent and historically sound model for grasping their mutually interacting dynamics. Put differently: it is clearly desirable to have a better account of what constitutes the character and historical specificity of the "dispositif cinéma," "dispositif photographie," "dispositif vidéo," "dispositif télévision," "dispositif téléphone." At the same time, however – and mindful of the phrase that "technology is the name for stuff that doesn't yet work" – one should remember that the study of a "dispositif," theorized around a basic technology, cannot by itself specify its cultural impact and consequences. Rather, media technologies tend to be culturally most productive where, besides their performativity, their disruptive and failure-prone dimensions are also taken into consideration. Borrowing from systems theory, one might argue with Niklas Luhmann that an "irritant" (*Störfaktor*) can act as stabilizing or energizing element in a given system.[10] Hence the attention paid in *Imagined Futures* to dystopias, anxieties and panics as cultural indicators of media change.

If we want to understand the place of cinema in the digital environment today – as just such an irritant, stabilizing force and counter-practice –

8    Representative collections in English are *The Cinematic Apparatus*, Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds. (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's, 1980) and *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).

9    For a useful summary of the polemics, see Richard Allen, *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

10   Niklas Luhmann, *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990).

amidst the expanded field of the media interaction typical of the episteme 2000 (and retrospectively also making a good case for the episteme 1900), then we need to study the constitutive parts of the classic "dispositifs" in their separate developments, as well as identify their analogues or functional equivalents across a range of media technologies and practices. With this in mind, we have been undertaking separate studies of the "archaeology of the camera," the "archaeology of the screen and frame," the "archaeology of projection and transparency," the "archaeology of motion and stillness," the "archaeology of sound and color," and so forth. Such studies are the methodological consequences of speaking of media "transfer" or media "change" in the context of what I have termed a *Medienverbund*, that is, a tactical alliance of media practices: not a "transfer" or "change" of the properties of one medium into another, be it photographic, video or digital, nor the assumption that these are historically successive modes of production, be they hand-crafted, mechanical, electronic, replacing each other in a trajectory of linear progress.[11] Rather, what the idea of a *Medienverbund* requires is the ability to bring to the debate a different level of generality or abstraction, on the strength of which fresh comparisons can be made and new genealogies generated. Lev Manovich has done this in his book *The Language of New Media* (2001); Edward Branigan has tried to do it in *Projecting a Camera* (2006), as has Sean Cubitt in *The Cinema Effect* (2005). None of them use the word "dispositif," but their efforts (just as ours in Amsterdam, around the archaeologies of screen, projection, camera, frame) are consonant with re-situating "apparatus theory," still valuable and an indispensable reference point, not least because it was the first attempt at a comprehensive theoretical-philosophical articulation of the cinema.

In the same spirit, the *Imagined Futures* project has as its working assumption the notion that a viewing and listening dispositive is predicated on several dimensions, working together: it implies a spatial extension, it involves a temporal register and it has a subjective reference as historically variable but conceptually indispensable elements. Our approach specifies that a dispositive is a dispositive only when it entails a – material – medium (most often a combination of technologies), an image (a representation, including a sound representation) and a spectator (liable to be solicited,

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11    Thomas Elsaesser, "Archives and Archaeologies: The Place of Non-Fiction Film in Contemporary Media," in *Films that Work: Cinematic Means and Industrial Ends*, Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009) 19-34.

subjectified, addressed or affectively and cognitively engaged).[12] Such a conception of the dispositive echoes, for instance, the definition proposed by Hans Belting. Arguing from the perspective of a post-art history, Belting advocates "a new approach to iconology" as part of his image-anthropology: "[...] W.J.T. Mitchell [uses] the terms *image, text, ideology.* [...] I also use a triad of terms in which [...] *image* remains but now is framed by the terms *medium* and *body.*" Belting goes on to explain that images can only be understood if one takes account of other, non-iconic determinants, and that medium needs to be understood "in the sense of the agent by which images are transmitted, while *body* means either the performing or the perceiving body on which images depend no less than on their respective media."[13]

These attempts at re-description across the humanities underline the variable nature of what is to be understood by "image," "medium" and "the moving image" today. What film studies can contribute are conceptual precisions and historical clarifications. For instance, in Belting's definition, the term "framed" seems to me a problematic metaphor in two respects: it brings back the picture frame, and thus the picture, as opposed to the image; and it is a static-geometrical term, when what is required is a term that can encompass processual and time-based phenomena that are in flux. A similar caveat applies to the term "dispositif": it seems to imply a fixed assemblage rather than a dynamic, ongoing process of re-alignment and interaction. On the other hand, Belting's definition of the body as both "performing" and "perceiving" is helpful in that it is also clearly in line with major trends in film studies, where "agency" is now applied to characters within the fiction, to spectators/viewers/users, but also to objects and machines.[14]

This brings me to another general point: the debate about the cinematic apparatus, with its emphasis on subject position as a consequence of miscognition and disavowal, seems (negatively) predicated on a notion of the cinema as ideally a source of secure knowledge about the world. When theorists ask "how we know what we know" in the cinema – or, to quote Christian Metz's famous words, want "to understand how films

12    Each of these terms refers to a different theoretical paradigm: "subjectified" belongs to the psychoanalytic terminology of miscognition or disavowal; "addressed" recalls Marxist cultural studies, via interpellation and negotiation; while "affectively and cognitively engaged" comes from studies of narrative comprehension and cognitivist film theory.

13    Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body. A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31.2 (Winter 2005): 302-19, 302.

14    Discussions around "agency" seem to point to the influence of Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

are understood"[15] – are they not committing themselves too exclusively to an *epistemological* theory of film centered on "realism," even as they denounce its realism as an ideological effect? By extension, some of the difficulties and deadlocks – not only of apparatus theory in the 1980s but also of film theory at its present conjuncture (where cognitivists are ranged on one side, Deleuzians and phenomenologists on the other, united only in their rejection of psychoanalysis and semiotics) – might be due in part to an insufficiently articulated debate as to the status of cinema between "ontology" and "epistemology." Cognitivism tends to assume a positive relationship between representation, knowledge and truth, depending on pre-formed expectations, evidence and ocular verification. By contrast, psycho-semiotics subscribes to such an epistemology mainly in its negative mode, critiquing films for failing to live up to this presumption of realism: the very term "illusionism" requires a faith in "realism" as its foil, as does the charge that film produces its "effects of the real" through fetishism. Feminist theory equates scoptophilia with epistemophilia, attacking both, while in the discourse of social constructivism and cultural studies, epistemic pretensions of films capable of speaking the truth are no less firmly and no less negatively implied (for instance, when accusing Hollywood of mis-representations, stereotyping, etc.). A tendency towards cinephobia, in other words, underpins a radical epistemic critique of cinema, largely ignoring both the aesthetic value that "mere appearance" or the so-called "illusion of presence" might have, and the possibility, put forward by Deleuze and others, that in the cinema we do not so much gain knowledge *about the world*, as we learn about ourselves *being in the world* (which would amount to an "ontological" position).

## Dispositive Mark 1: What Was Cinema

The problem, here, is perhaps a broader one, namely the need to reflect once more quite fundamentally about what is cinema/what was cinema, and to try and locate its place or purpose within human history in general and the history of what is called "modernity" in particular. My suggestion is that we should, for the sake of clarification, differentiate between *anthropological, philosophical* and *aesthetic* theories of the cinema, if we are to find a level of generality where dispositives are not defined solely

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15    Christian Metz, "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," in *Film Language*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford UP, 1974) 145.

by their basic technology. Evidently these are not mutually exclusive approaches. Anthropological theories, for instance, comprise a wide range of views, including André Bazin's ideas about the cinema as photographically based, and of photography being related to the bodily imprint: hence his references to mummies, the Turin shroud, plaster casts and other forms of effigies. But it also encompasses Walter Benjamin's ideas about cinema and modernity, his influential concept of the optical unconscious and his notion that cinema "trains" the senses, in order for us to cope with the shocks and traumata of modern urban life. Also under a broadly anthropological perspective, one can count the implications drawn from Foucault's theories of the disciplinary and self-monitoring effects of vision machines, notably his theory of the Panopticon, which has been revived – around surveillance – as a generalized paradigm of vision in the twenty-first century, replacing both window and mirror as the "epistemes" of the twentieth century.

The epistemological theories already alluded to would fall under the more generally *philosophical* approaches to the cinema. Film philosophy ranges from phenomenological theories to cognitivist ones and also includes various ontologies of the cinema (as attributed to Bazin, as proclaimed by Stanley Cavell or as imputed to Gilles Deleuze), while the third general category would be *aesthetic* theories of the cinema, whether these call themselves "poetics" and are derived from Aristotelian theories of drama, or "formalist" as influenced by Russian semiotics, whether they stem from "theatricality" as first defined by Plato, or more specifically have to do with Romantic theories of play, of appearance and presence, and concern themselves with the status of the image in the arts or with the representation of movement and motion.[16]

In most theories of the cinema proposed over the past eighty years or so, there is an overlap between epistemological and aesthetic categories, as in the different theories of realism, or in the different ideological critiques, where epistemological questions and anthropological concerns are not easily kept apart. Likewise, ontological theories tend to overlap with aesthetic ones, as do phenomenological ones. But the advantage of making such distinctions at all is that they encourage another look at existing theories

16    The publications alluded to here are André Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What is Cinema?* vol. I, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 9-16; Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I. The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) and *Cinema II. The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); David Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); and Sam Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2004).

in light of present concerns, notably the media change we are concerned with here. Past theories can be productively studied for how they formulate the problems, even if one does not agree with their answers.

The question "what was cinema," formulated across these distinctions between anthropological, philosophical and aesthetic "regimes," would determine the agenda for our second type of revisionism, one that re-reads the history of film theory. An example of how such a revision might work involves André Bazin, one of the undisputed founders of our discipline. Bazin has been chided as a misguided epistemologist of realism, when another look at his writings suggests a) that he was the most inter-disciplinary thinker imaginable; b) that his anthropological conception of cinema is still pertinent, since it even allows for a "cinema after cinema"; and c) that there are quite different ways of understanding what he meant by "realism." Re-reading Bazin in 2008, on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, I could find little that would indict him as a naïve realist, and much that showed him to be a sophisticated advocate of illusionism – not only as a matter of aesthetics, but also as a matter of belief and mutually negotiated rules of the game – rather than as a dogmatic idealist.[17]

In short, the current state of theory leaves a number of unresolved issues, which complicates a historically grounded and theoretically consistent approach to the "episteme 1900" and its contemporary analogue, the "episteme 2000." The very idea of "episteme" evidently implies a broadly Foucauldian approach: "the machine (its technology), its location and the place given to the spectator/hearer form in this way a three-unit structure."[18] In such a formulation, the dispositive is associated with power, "and especially with the coercive, disciplinary or controlling power of libidinal assemblages." On the other hand, this idea of a contact space or contact zone between human perceptual faculties and mechanical elements may lead one to opt, not for "dispositive," but instead for the term "interface," understood as a boundary across which different systems meet, act on, interfere or communicate with one another.[19]

As indicated, ontological theories have also been revived in order to overcome what is now seen as the historicity of the technology that formed

17   Thomas Elsaesser, "A Bazinian Half-Century," *Opening Bazin*, ed. Dudley Andrew, with Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 3-12.
18   François Albera and Maria Tortajada, call for papers, conference on "Viewing and Listening Dispositives."
19   See for instance Lev Manovich, "Cinema as a Cultural Interface," http://www.manovich. net/TEXT/cinema-cultural.html (last accessed on February 4, 2013) and Seung-hoon Jeong, *Cinematic Interfaces: Film Theory After New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

the basis of the cinematic dispositive in its classical articulation: namely, the photographic image, projection and the fixed spectator. Accommodating its importance without being limited by the specificity of the dispositive, such an ontological approach places greater emphasis on "belief" or "trust" rather than on "knowledge" or "truth." Such trust in the "image" (as a field of forces and intensities, rather than a "representation" with a particular "reference") is secured either as an existential choice or as an interpersonal, pragmatic value, and does not depend on a particular "essence" of cinema or on photographic indexicality in explaining what binds the film spectator to the world (of images).

Recent work in aesthetics has challenged the ocular-centric geometry of the cinematic dispositive on several fronts, as part of yet another critique of perspectival projection, with "infinity" as the implied vanishing point and the "singular source" or solitary observer as the necessary point of view.[20] Other objections concern the fact that the cinematic "cone of vision" privileges space and stasis ("staging in depth") over time and process; that it relies too much on the bounded frame (off-screen/on-screen) or on the centrifugal frame (in cinema) versus the centripetal (picture) frame (in painting); that it assumes as a given the upright, frontal orientation of human vision and the image, and that it tends to "freeze" the individual frame, thus reducing the cinematic image to the still image, mechanically animated, rather than start from the moving image, temporarily stilled in the photograph. The "new art history," in particular, turned to cinema as a vital element of visual culture in the late 1980s.[21] In the 1990s, however, overtly Marxist and/or psychoanalytic epistemological critiques of apparatus theory began to give way to ideas about vision and the observer that revived the multi-perspectival theories of the different avant-gardes, while also acknowledging the influence of video and installation art and the general opening up of museum culture to include the moving image. In the process, the "archaeological" interest in early cinema gained new traction and topical relevance: its dispositive – once considered "primitive" because it focused more on performance and less on narrative – could now be understood as a kind of "deconstruction" of monocular perspective, as if a return to the origins of cinema would be

20   Among the many critiques of the "Albertian window" applied to the cinema, see Victor Burgin, "Geometry and Abjection," *Public* 1 (Winter 1988): 12-30; and Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
21   Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988) 87-113.

a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*, of stepping back for a new leap forward, towards cinema and the moving image in the twenty-first century.


## Dispositive Mark 2: Early Cinema

The turn/return to early cinema has proved fertile in many different ways. Besides documenting the enormous variety of entertainment and scientific uses of the *Cinématographe* in the urban environment of evolving modernity (the *anthropological* aspect) and identifying a different *aesthetics*, whether called a "primitive mode of representation" (Burch) or "the cinema of attractions" (Gunning and Gaudreault),[22] early cinema studies also recovered an *epistemological* dimension that tended to be lost in the negative epistemology of the 1970s: the close alliance of chronophotography with the empirical and observational sciences. As already noted, pioneers like Jules Janssen, Etienne-Jules Marey and even the Lumière Brothers (who from 1902 onwards devoted their best energies to experiments with color, with echographic topology and with medical appliances for war veterans) have returned as important figures in a genealogy of new media and expanded cinema. In France, a belatedly recognized hero has emerged in Georges Demenÿ, who dreamed up, explored and tested many applications of the moving image for sports training, teaching lip-reading to the deaf and more generally for educational, military and medical uses. In Britain, the multi-talent of R.W. Paul is beginning to be recognized,[23] and in Germany, it was Oskar Messter who received special attention from scholars working on documentary and non-fiction film, but also on more adventurous aspects of the dispositive such as sound-image synchronization, color and 3-D projection.[24] Messter holds a special place in our project and his extensive oeuvre allowed me to speak of the S/M practices of the apparatus, meaning: the scientific and medical imaging dispositive (his work for hospitals touched upon by Lisa

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22    See the essays by Burch, Gunning and Gaudreault in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990) and a new contextualization of these positions in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

23    See Ian Christie, sleeve notes, biography and filmography in R.W. Paul, *The Collected Films 1895-1908* (London: BFI DVD Edition, 2006).

24    *Oskar Messter, Erfinder und Geschäftsmann*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger, *KINtop* 3, special issue (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1994).

Cartwright),[25] the surveillance and military dispositive (linking Messter to Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema*),[26] the sensory-motor-schema dispositive (showing him to be a contemporary of Henri Bergson), and the sensoring and monitoring dispositive (pioneered, besides Marey, by Albert Londe and documented, among others, by Siegfried Zielinski[27]).

In other words, by going back to early and pre-cinema, and duly noting the non-entertainment uses of the cinematic apparatus, one can advance the proposition that "the cinema has many histories, only some of which belong to the movies."[28] Evidently, at least in part, it is the topicality of the non- or para-entertainment uses at the turn of the twenty-first century that has once more given prominence to these earlier applications of the moving image and the cinematograph. While the historical and theoretical studies of Virilio and Friedrich Kittler helped to make the connections between war and cinema much more present in our minds, this new awareness was helped by the daily news bulletins about smart bombs during the first Iraq War, which in turn found their resonance in Harun Farocki's work. For three decades, his films and video installations have been examining the different genealogies of what he calls "operational images" from the late nineteenth century, when photography was used for measuring the elevation of buildings, through gathering reconnaissance footage from spotter planes during WWII, all the way to the use of surveillance cameras in Californian prisons and the data-gathering sensors in Berlin supermarkets. Farocki's investigations of hand, eye and machine are exemplary in showing how the cinematic dispositive – especially in its observational, monitoring and controlling functions – has become a pervasive presence in our everyday lives, joining art and entertainment with the industrial and bureaucratic uses of the moving image.[29] In this sense, Farocki is returning to Muybridge's time-and-motion studies, to which his own researches into social routines, stress tests and service-industry training exercises provide a contemporary update.[30]

25   Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

26   Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).

27   Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions: Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

28   *Harun Farocki – Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004) 17.

29   Harun Farocki, *AUGE/MASCHINE* (video-installation, 23 mn, 2000) http://www.farocki-film.de/augem1.htm (last accessed on February 4, 2013).

30   See Harun Farocki, *Reconnaître et poursuivre* (Paris: Théâtre Typographique, 2002).

New media theorists, on the other hand, have benefited from another look at Marey, whose work can now be re-appreciated as part of the archaeology of data-visualization and pattern recognition, which is beginning to get close consideration not just in the analysis of surveillance footage, but also among film scholars and theorists of the articulations of cinematic time and the management of real-time data.[31] *Imagined Futures* has a number of projects that investigate time and temporality in relation to mainstream cinema and installation art, as well as looking at the locative aspects of film history and the archive.[32] One of my own attempts at an epistemo-anthropological analysis is an essay on so-called "Rube" films (or Uncle Josh films), arguing that earlier views of the phenomenon might have missed a crucial aspect, a double layer of reflexivity and agency. Uncle Josh films – in which a simpleton mistakes the representation on the screen for physically present objects and people and personally intervenes in the action, only to destroy the spectacle – pose several questions to the modern viewer.[33] Are they intended, as is often claimed, to be didactic parables, teaching a rural or immigrant audience how not to behave in the cinema, by putting up to ridicule someone like themselves? Yet it is doubtful that there ever existed such an audience, or a moment of "infancy" and simplicity in the history of the movies, where such an ontological confusion with regard to objects and persons might have occurred. To me, then, these films imply a meta-level of self-reference, in order to explore, not the epistemic conundrum of reality versus representation or truth versus fiction, but the anthropological one, namely of how to "discipline" an audience through comedy and laughter. Do the Rube films not teach their audience how not to use their bodies as spectators by allowing them to enjoy their own superior form of spectatorship, even if that superiority is achieved at the price of self-censorship and self-restraint? The audience laughs at a simpleton and village idiot, thereby flattering itself with a self-image of urban sophistication. The punishment meted out to Uncle Josh by the projectionist is both allegorized as the reverse side of cinematic pleasure (watch out, "behind" the screen lies the figure of the "master") and internalized as self-control: in the cinema – as elsewhere

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31   Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

32   Among the various projects of the Imagined Futures group, see especially Jennifer Steetskamp, "Specters of Lessing: The Time-Spaces of the Moving Image Installation," doctoral diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012; Pepita Hesselberth, "Chronoscopy: Affective Encounters with Cinematic Temporalities," doctoral diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012.

33   Thomas Elsaesser, "Discipline through Diegesis: The Rube Film between 'Attractions' and 'Narrative Integration,' " in Strauven, *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* 205-26.

in the modern world of display of commodities, and the self-display of bodies – the rule is "you may look, but don't touch."[34]

Adding a further twist, one can argue that the figure of the Rube has returned, and re-appears in our contemporary media-world, this time as the incarnation of the visitor/user, not in the cinema, but in the gallery space and also on the net, in the latter case learning how to be an "avatar" or to behave as a "fan," a "nerd" or an "activist."[35] The same ambivalence applies to the museum, where visitors no longer know how to respond when confronted with, say, video installation art. Under the regime of "relational aesthetics,"[36] the visitor's role is destabilized by works that are like an enigmatic appliance or a gadget, but lacking the instruction manual: they invite participation, or require a special mental act for their comprehension or completion, while giving little or no overt clue about how they "want to be understood." The "epistemological" aspect seems like a lure or tease, an invitation to a more ludic form of engagement, but on the other hand, it implies a reflexive turn that is epistemic in intent. In fact, there is now a general uncertainty about what role to play as spectators in the art world, just as there is in the media world of television and video-games: are we "witnesses" or "bystanders," "players" or "users," "observers" or "dupes" (Rubes), inadvertently delivering "data" to machine archives? My "return of the Rube" would thus be a specific or "situated" instance of the more general (and generally productive) problematic category of "agency" which, as André Gaudreault has pointed out, should be understood to comprise both *agitant* and *agité* in early cinema.[37]

Yet this shift from the "old" Cartesian subject-object divisions to something closer to an actor-network theory does not altogether resolve the question of the spectator's emotional investments, so central to apparatus theory, but also to any appreciation of the aesthetics of cinema. If scholars are now more cautious about speaking of "mis-cognition" and "disavowal" as the features typical of cinematic subjectivity, there are still good arguments

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34   See Wanda Strauven, "Re-Disciplining the Audience: Godard's Rube-Carabinier," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005) 125-33; and Wanda Strauven, "Touch, Don't Look," *I cinque sensi del cinema/The Five Senses of Cinema*, Alice Autelitano et al., eds. (Udine: Forum, 2005) 283-91.

35   Thomas Elsaesser, "Archaeologies of Interactivity: Early Cinema, Narrative and Spectatorship," *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture*, K. Kreimeier and A. Ligensa, eds. (Luton: John Libbey, 2009) 9-21.

36   The term "relational aesthetics" was made famous by Nicolas Bourriaud. See his *Relational Aesthetics* (1998; Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

37   See also the preface by François Albéra in Alain Boillat, *Du Bonimenteur À La Voix-Over - Voix-Attraction et Voix-Narration Au Cinéma* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2007).

for characterizing the cinema as a *dispositif* for subjectification. This is not so much because of the particular spatial arrangement (projection), but thanks to the cinema's temporal dimension, marked by "delay" and "interval" in the sense of re-inscribing duration into the cinematic experience (the time image, energy, modulation, in Deleuzian language; "entropy," "intermittence" in the language of cybernetics). This also makes it possible to distinguish cinema from "real-time" electronic media on the basis of "delay" and "deferral," i.e. on the basis of a phenomenological distinction (if we take these terms in their Derridean sense) rather than a technological one (as the difference between photographic and electronic images). We thus would have to add "time" to "agency" in order to build up a model of a dispositive that does not privilege a particular technology and still proves relevant to both photographic and non-photographic moving images.

## Dispositive Mark 3: Installation Art and the Moving Image

Temporality and time economies, in particular, raise a further dimension in our consideration of the dispositive, which conveniently leads us to re-investigate the *aesthetic* theories of the cinema, albeit in only one, admittedly prominent, manifestation: that of the "entry" of the cinema and the moving image onto the scene of contemporary art, where the cinema now seems to have a permanent place, however ambiguous a place it may appear in practice.

One of the most significant phenomena in the history of the "dispositive cinema" is the way the moving image has taken over and has been taken over by the museum and gallery spaces. From the mid-1990s onward, major shows in London, Los Angeles, Paris, Oxford, New York, Vienna and other cities affirmed the museums' intention to "represent" the cinema and claim it as "art."[38] Despite the success of such exhibitions, matters are not straightforward when the moving image enters the museum. Different actor-agents, power relations and policy agendas, different competences, egos and sensibilities, different elements of the complex puzzle that is the contemporary art world and its commercial counterpart inevitably come

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38   Some of the landmark exhibitions were "Spellbound" (Hayward Gallery, London, 1995), "Art and Cinema since 1945: Hall of Mirrors" (Moca, Los Angeles, 1996), "Notorious – Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art" (Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1999), "Hitchcock et l'art: coïncidences fatales" (Montreal/Paris, 2000/2001), "Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964 – 1977" (Whitney Museum, 2001), "X-Screen – Filmic Installations from the 1960s and 70s" (MuMoK, Vienna, 2004).

into play. However easy it might be to project a film inside a gallery with just a few mobile walls and lots of dark fabric, the museum is no cinema and the cinema no museum: mainly because of the different time economies already alluded to, which oblige the viewer in the museum to "sample" a film, rather than make it the occasion for "two hours at the movies." Time is thus one of the reasons why cinema and museum constitute two quite distinct, and in the past often mutually exclusive, dispositives.

The fact that cinema and the gallery space are, both historically and philosophically, two antagonistic visual arrangements and spatial dispositives is usually expressed in the juxtaposition of "black box" and "white cube." Each space is culturally pre-determined, has its own historically conditioned but deeply ingrained traditions, and follows particular architectonics, ordering principles or "logics" which amount to distinct ontologies. As we saw, the classical (or "black box") cinematic dispositive requires a unique layout and geometry, in the way that screen-space, auditorium space and projector are aligned in relation to one another for the "cinema-effect" to occur. The museum/gallery (or "white box") is itself a specific dispositive. With its white walls, its preference for "natural" light and its emphasis on smooth surfaces, it organizes space in such a way that the objects visible to the spectator are brought close and maintain their distance at the same time. The placing and hanging of pictures subtly privileges the upright, forward orientation of our gaze, directed at the formation of an "picture," distinctly framed and positioned at eye-level. Still paying tribute to the "open window" of Renaissance perspective, the white wall into which the image space is cut allows for generous margins and empty surfaces to surround each picture, while the heavily gilded frames are a reminder of the fundamental difference between the picture, what it contains, the look it retains and the space that surrounds it. In the museum, there is never any off-screen space, to speak in the language of cinema: the classical oil painting is wholly contained – self-contained, indeed – within the frame, while cinema lives from the tension between off-screen and on-screen, what the frame delimits and what it creates a passage for. As I already pointed out, it was André Bazin who famously distinguished the "centrifugal" cinema frame from the "centripetal" painting frame.[39]

The difference between these vectors helps explain why the gallery and the cinema are distinguished by the mode of attention they afford their respective viewers. The kind of presence produced by standing in front of

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39   André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema" [1959], *What Is Cinema?* vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press 1967) 164-69.

a work of art in a museum or a gallery carries very strong indices of time and place (of a "now" and a "here"), which in turn imply a special type of viewing subject, highly aware of itself and its surroundings and thus receptive to reflection, introspection and auto-reflection. Walter Benjamin famously called this presence "aura" and was careful to specify its conditions of possibility, along with the slippages the aura undergoes in the age of mechanically reproducible images and the commodity form. Speculating on the mode of presence typical of the cinema, Benjamin speaks of the desire to touch and the simultaneous barring of this desire, generating the cycles of disavowal and fetish-formation which psychoanalytic film theory famously identified, albeit via a different route of analysis. Simplifying a little, one could say that the museum produces a particular kind of presence (a "me," a "here" and a "now"), whereas the cinema produces a split self-presence of multiple temporalities (a "me/not me" in an endlessly deferred "here/not here" and "now/not now"): Roland Barthes, in his several essays devoted to photography and the cinema, highlighted some of these differences in terms of *tense*.[40]

In their distinctive logics, the dispositives "cinema" and "museum" entail a further set of differential coordinates, which come into play or conflict when the moving image enters the museum: a fixed image and a mobile spectator (museum) have to be aligned with a moving image and a fixed spectator (cinema). From what has been said about the cinematic apparatus, the combination of the moving image and the mobile spectator drastically redefines, if not destroys the "cinema-effect," while for the contemplative-reflexive spectator of the picture gallery, the moving image is a distraction and an irritation. Painting and sculpture are about the *representation* of movement, not its instantiation. The encounter of cinema and museum thus obliges even art history to rethink the place and role of the viewer in front of an artwork, as well as examine the kinds of self-enclosure or "exposure" afforded to the moving image not just by the physical display (the monitor or screen), but also by the manner in which the look of the image frames the viewer's gaze in the gallery's surroundings.[41] The new configuration of cinema/museum also affects what Belting calls "the body," i.e. the respective degrees of embodiment of the "spectator" and the "visitor." Compared to the

40   Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (1981) and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).
41   One may recall the famous scene in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, where Scotty watches – in the sense of "spying on" – "Carlotta"/Judy looking at – in the sense of "contemplating" – the painting of her "ancestor."

cinema's originally disembodied look, the gallery's default value is always embodied perception, aware as we are of our surroundings and other bodies. Also part of "the body" are the different relations of size, scale and detail in the museum and on the cinema screen. A further disruption or transgression is implied by the entry of sound and sound-spaces into the museum, traditionally a site of silence and stillness (in both senses of the word). In other words, there are some fundamental antinomies between cinema and museum that require serious consideration by both film scholars and art historians.

## Dispositive Mark 4: Encounter and Event

Yet the salient argument to make here is that these apparent incompatibilities (and the many contradictory relations that obtain between the respective dispositives) are precisely among the theoretically most fruitful and in practice most productive factors about the fine arts and visual culture today, not only enabling but necessitating the new kinds of encounter alluded to, as moving image and museum enter into sustained and no doubt permanent contact and alliance with each other. For is it not the case that these starkly distinct dispositives are themselves "on the move" and in flux, each in its own way undergoing internal transformation, and for reasons that at first glance do not seem to be interconnected or mutually dependent? Take as one example the upright forward orientation, the prevalence of the wall, the rectangle cut out like a window: modern art, at least since the 1950s, has subverted or ignored this arrangement with artists like Jackson Pollock, Carl Andre, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys and many others. In very different ways, these artists have made the floor, rather than the wall, the site of display, not least because it challenges the canonical model of bodily-perceptual orientation and thus creates a new "moment" of art: a challenge only very gradually taken up by the cinema.

More drastic, but also more banal (because they are so often commented upon) are the changes that the cinematic dispositive has undergone: television long ago subverted it, merely by substituting the small screen for the movie theater and phosphoric glow for projection, provoking in turn different kinds of re-assertions of the power of the projected image, whether through Cinemascope (in the 1950s) or the Dolby surround-sound design (in the 1970s). Since then, screens have become both bigger and smaller, but above all, they have become more "mobile": in their proliferation as monitors on every table top, in the home and at work, in their locations

(such as urban screens, electronic notice-boards, airplanes, motor-cars or public transport) but also embedded in the hand-held devices we carry on our bodies, such as music players or mobile phones. This means that the opposition between "collective reception" in ranked and regimented seating (cinema) and "individual absorption" in a state of solitary contemplation (museum) is no longer valid, at least not in any absolute way. Meanwhile, and notably for the blockbuster shows that international museums habitually organize, the throng of massed visitors makes the solitary study of individual works a thing of the past or of another era, as more and more let their eyes be guided by portable "audio-tours."

The black box and the white cube are thus, strictly speaking, no longer either an oppositional or a complementary pair: we are, as it were, in the "grey room." Their similarities and differences come into play at another level of generality that exceeds both types of dispositive, generating new sets of parameters and taxonomies. What, for instance, is the status of *projection*, now that the moving image is mostly digital, and illumination means something quite different? In what sense can we still speak of a light cone and "scopic vision" (cinema) versus diffused light and "ambient vision" (museum)? A cinephile may regard projection as the defining feature of cinema and logically conclude that without projection, there is "no more cinema." Or one might decide that the litmus test, as it were, of "what is cinema" lies with luminosity, achieved through transparency, and not with illumination as a layering effect. In either case, one would have to seriously revisit familiar genealogies: traditionally, a (tenuous) line of continuity could be drawn from the light-sensitive silver salts of photography to the electrons hitting the cathode ray tube, and from the vertical scan-lines of a television set to the pixel-grid of the digital image – in the sense that in each case, a surface is impacted by light, leaving the particular arrangement of traces or the pattern of particles that we call an image. At the same time, a radical break is posited between photographic index and digital code. Yet arguably, at least as fundamental a break occurred in the switch from luminosity through transparency (which still photography and cinema have in common) to luminosity through refraction, opacity and saturation. In this respect, the "opacity" of the digital pixel is closer to the opacity of pigment in painting than either is to photography, leading to the many – admittedly also deceiving – painterly metaphors used to describe or advertise computer-generated image-processing software, or

to the "slippages" between the media of photography and painting in the work of an artist like Jeff Wall.[42]

Contrasting the dispositive of installation art with that of the cinema on the basis of these precise but diverse parameters presents several further advantages: first of all, it de-emphasizes technological determinism (the technological fix which I see as so problematic in the theories that posit a radical break between photographic and digital cinema), allowing instead for very different technologies and materials to achieve similar effects and experiences. Secondly, it de-centers the "performing and perceiving" subject (Belting), thus redirecting our thinking toward the relations that exist in the realm of images – between humans and things, humans and plants, humans and machines, machines and machines, all considered as agents (the reverse side and complement of the famous anthropomorphism discussed by the avant-garde under the heading of *photogénie* or celebrated in the "science is fiction" films of Jean Painlevé and others).

Perhaps most crucially, however, an installation – especially one involving the moving image – has a particular relation to time and temporality, in the sense that many such installations introduce a structural non-alignment between their own temporality and that of the spectator's time economy of the gallery visit, producing (as suggested above) typical effects of "subjectification": the anxiety of missing the crucial moment, the potential conflict between curiosity and boredom when confronted with a video, signaling a duration ranging anywhere from three minutes to three hours. In this non-alignment, the encounter of viewer and installation acts as both a continuation and a critique of the cinematic dispositive, not only in the way that installations can deviate from the frontal orientation and Renaissance perspective already discussed, but also in the manner they subvert the temporal regime of both the cinema (where I know in advance that I commit a substantial portion of my time, and where narrative maps the order of succession and closure) and the art gallery (where the amount of time I choose to spend in front of a painting or sculpture is my own decision, unstructured, and not in any way pre-given by the work).

The (video-)installation, by contrast, suspends me: I wait for the proverbial shoe to drop, for the unique moment of rupture, I attach myself to or fantasize *para*-narrative elements; I experience a configuration of time-space, which puts me in a different relation to self-perception and body-awareness – no longer the *kairos* or *chronos* of linear narrative, but

42    See, for instance, Sven Lütticken, "The Story of Art According to Jeff Wall," in Sven Lütticken, *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2005) 69-82.

an un-pulsed time of "too much" and "not enough." Elements that appear to my eyes as contiguous in space may have to be read as successive in time, or vice versa: their succession has to be retroactively reconstructed as spatially distinct. In any case, there is no longer a "norm" by which to measure the deviations, the extremes or the excesses, while any sense of the work's overall shape and extension necessarily escapes me, forcing a radical reconsideration of the relation between fragment and totality so crucial to Western aesthetics, but also to the cinema ("montage"/editing), and challenging any notion of spatial capture or closure, even as the black box mimics the darkened movie theater. Yet in some ways this anxiety of the "too much/not enough" of installation art, turned into an aesthetic effect, is reminiscent of one of the panic discourses in early cinema, when movie theaters switched from short programs to full-length features, with doctors warning about eyestrain, physiological damage and nervous disorders that might result from watching a continuous action on screen for more than a few minutes.

## Conclusion: the Dispositive as Interface?

The detour via the museum and installation art has been necessary in order to explain – including to myself – where I think the term "dispositif" might be problematic, and where it offers scope for clarifying the situation we find ourselves in, the episteme 2000, when compared to the episteme 1900. With the emphasis now on parameters such as temporality, duration, process, "relationality," contact, mobility, event and encounter, the traditional definitions (and translations) of "dispositif," even without the question of "technology," become problematic because they are too fixed spatially (beholden to Euclidian geometry) and too vague epistemologically (what is the status of film as semiotic object, if time intervenes and bridges the binary pair absence/presence?). Furthermore, the "dispositif" thus conceived still keeps the "subject" in a disciplinary-libidinal double bind (the "subject effect" of fetishism and disavowal, as theorized by Lacan, being replaced by the "subject effect" of power, knowledge, discourse, as analyzed by Foucault).

What might nonetheless make it worth adopting the term dispositive is its semantic flexibility and metaphoric openness (compared to "apparatus"). If I am right in thinking that, besides being defined by "image," "medium," and "body" (Belting) and "the machine, its location and the place given to the spectator/hearer" (Albera/Tortajada), the cinema today should also be

regarded as an "event and encounter, taking place" (my definition, intended to both supersede and contain the idea of films as "works" and "texts"), a term (or set of terms) is needed that can establish a viable conjunction between the variables "agency," "time," "space"/"place." Can dispositive connote this, while still covering these other meanings?

In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich puts forward the term "interface" to designate this meta-space, i.e. the different kinds of contact zones, spatial relations or visual surfaces that cinema audiences have in common with computer users and their interaction with the software, but also for the kinds of encounters between object, space, duration and beholder that I have sketched as "taking place" in the museum. Manovich sees the cinema as an important set of references for the new media environment, what he calls "the cinema as cultural interface":

> despite frequent pronouncements that cinema is dead, it is actually on its own way to becoming a general purpose cultural interface, a set of techniques and tools which can be used to interact with any cultural data. [...] "Cinema" [here] includes mobile camera, representation of space, editing techniques, narrative conventions, activity of a spectator – in short, different elements of cinematic perception, language and reception. Their presence is not limited to the twentieth-century institution of fiction films, they can already be found in panoramas, magic lantern slides, theatre and other nineteenth-century cultural forms.[43]

Manovich's eminently pragmatic approach tries to give some historical depth as well as breadth of applicability to "interface." Yet where "dispositif" (as "apparatus") seemed overly restrictive, "interface" looks unduly capacious. If, like myself, one travels in the opposite direction and comes to contemporary media practice from the study of cinema, one of the questions that concern me is: under what circumstances or conditions (cultural-historical, technological-industrial or aesthetic-formal) is it conceivable that the moving image no longer requires as its main medium the particular form of time/space/agency we know as "narrative" (perhaps the most "viable conjunction" of these variables so far developed), while still managing to establish a coherent "world," which is to say, turn an "event" (a singular time/space occurrence) into an "encounter" (addressing a spectator in his/her here-and-now)? Is a time/space continuum possible that is differently

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43   Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 86. See also http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/cinema-cultural.html (last accessed on February 4, 2013).

organized, yet still accommodates the "body" and gives the impression of "virtual presence"? What forms of indexicality (material link, pointer) or iconicity (mimesis, resemblance) are available, for combinations of sounds and images to credibly mark a "here" and "now," while also relating them to a "me"?

In other words, I am looking for a term that captures this "here-now-me" as the variable "grounding" of my cinematic experience. Whether I watch a Hollywood blockbuster on my iPod or see a mere five minutes of Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* in a gallery, I can call either a "cinematic" encounter and event, not because of questions of LCD-screen vs. projection, digital vs. photographic image, black box vs. white cube, film vs. video, optical vs. haptic, fragment vs. totality; but because in each case, I can specify that the relation of a "here," a "now" and a "me" constituted a consistent spatio-temporal world, whose "rules" I understand and whose effects I experience as "presence," under conditions of assent that I can call "belief" (which, of course, includes the "suspension of disbelief" as well as the "as-if" belief of the fictional contract). What is also clear, however, is that with such a definition of "dispositif," I am no longer in the realm of epistemological questions to put to the cinema. Rather, I am on the road to "(re-)ontologizing" the cinema: experiencing it not as a way of knowing the world, or seeking to attribute to it a specific meaning, but instead, living the cinema as a particular way of being-in-the-world, and participating in its disclosure, its unfolding, its becoming-present: with all the affects, cognitive dissonances or bodily states that this might entail.

If this sounds unexpectedly Deleuzian, I feel bound to point out that for me, such a definition of the "dispositif" actually rests as much on media-archaeological foundations as it does on philosophy, and that it has its own genealogy and pedigree in early and pre-cinematic practice. Suppose we went back to the *laterna magica* of Athanasius Kircher, as the agreed ancestor of cinematic projection. Yet instead of tracing its mode of representation via Renaissance perspective to the rigid geometry of the cinematic apparatus, where do we arrive at, if we choose an alternative route? What if, from the *laterna magica*, we derived in the first instance Étienne-Gaspard Robert's (or Robertson's) phantasmagoria as the most popular, but also conceptually most challenging precursor of cinema? We might then find ourselves in a position to argue that a direct line runs from phantasmagoria to Pepper's Ghost and other spectral productions of presence in the nineteenth century to certain genres of cinema, mainly those featuring special effects, with horror and fantasy, but not only: the lineage of phantasmagoria also initiates a form of cinema that does not project itself as

a window on the world, nor requires fixed boundaries of space like a frame. Rather, it functions as an ambient form of spectacle and event, where no clear spatial divisions between inside and outside pertain, and where there are strong indices of presence, while its temporality reaches into past and future (calling up the dead, soothsaying and predicting events yet to come), while the senses are anchored and the body situated in a "here and now." As such, phantasmagoria would be the dispositive that also most closely approximates the genealogical ancestor of what I described as installation art above, one that does not depend on the frame or even on the upright forward orientation, one that furthermore takes "sound" into account, but also the one whose epistemological effects are, as it were, grounded in an aesthetics of appearance as presence, rather than the other way round.

However, the modification I am proposing has not one, but two nodes in the nineteenth century: besides that of the phantasmagoria, as it comes down to us via Robertson's adaptation of the magic lantern, this cinematic dispositive also includes the work of Marey, notably insofar as he pioneered the non-human, dare I say "spectral" visualization of data, both photographing and graphing statistical (mathematical, numeric), optical (visible to the machine eye, but too fast or too slow for the human eye) and dynamic phenomena (emanating from organisms and sentient beings). I can here only hint at this aspect – which might involve reconsidering the Kantian "sublime" as a crucial dimension or property of this dispositif. Still, as I said at the beginning, Marey remains a key reference point for our project, due to its inherently ontological scope. Although his efforts, experiments and ambitions would normally be called "epistemological" (aimed at producing new knowledge about the world), considered from the standpoint of making all emanations of life manifest, Marey's thinking also introduces a new taxonomy of things, of what exists and what does not, of what is visible and what is not, and of what is actual and what is virtual – linking him, with Bergson, to Gilles Deleuze.

I come to my conclusion. My initial proposition has been that, in order to understand what the episteme 1900 and the episteme 2000 have in common, we need to overcome the division between photographic and post-photographic cinema, and see it, not as a break, but as an occasion for revising our previous notion of "what is cinema." If for some thirty or forty years, the answer to "what is cinema" has involved some version of the dispositive cinema (such as "cinematic apparatus"), then the task *inter alia* is to redefine this central concept. This is what my essay has attempted to do: first I reviewed the canonical definition, as it has been specified around the particular geometry of representation that Jean-Louis Baudry

was the first to identify with the parable of Plato's cave, with Renaissance perspective and with the Freudian psychic apparatus. Following references to the various critiques of this formation, I proposed and discussed several other possible articulations of the dispositive cinema, whose properties were more institutional than technological, more time-based than geo-metrical, more anthropological than ideological and more "ontologizing" than epistemological. Starting out from early cinema, making a leisurely detour via installation art and the museum and a brief one through digital media and interface, I ended up by returning to pre-cinema: the double and possibly improbable pedigree of Robertson's phantasmagoria joined to Marey's chronophotography. The trajectory has provided me with a set of parameters and priorities that in my opinion need to inform our definition of the "dispositif," for which notions of space, time and agency (the "here-now-me"), as well as of "belief," "appearance" and "presence" play as great a role as the semiotics of absence and presence, the dynamics of voyeurism and disavowal or the notion of "vision-knowledge-power" (*voir, savoir, pouvoir*).

This "perspective correction"[44] has led me to posit a further proposition or rather, to formulate a challenge, namely that we may have to supplement our traditional epistemological interest in the cinema (around "realism," the subject-object split, questions of ideology, illusionism, power) with a tentatively ontological view (as well as a renewed aesthetic investigation) of the cinema – here called, perhaps somewhat imprecisely, "cinema as event and encounter, taking place." Another way of highlighting the difference of emphasis, again in a somewhat rough-and-ready fashion, would be to suggest that whereas our Renaissance ocular-centric orientation has *infinity* as its vanishing point (the all-seeing God of the Dollar Bill, or of Bishop Berkeley's *esse est percipi*: to be is to be seen) and the singular source as its point of view, the orientation I am trying to identify has as its salient feature, not Euclidean space, but *ubiquity*. I would define ubiquity as the felt presence of pure space, whose temporality is neither *chronos* nor *kairos*, but an "indefinite," reversible time, and whose ocular counterpart would be not be surveillance as sight, knowledge, power, but as the unlocalizable experience of sight without an eye and as the human-machine equivalent of Nicolas de Cusa's God: "to be at the centre of the world and yet at every point of its circumference," i.e. the paradox (or mystery) of an *un-located situated-ness*. Such ubiquity, in other words, produces its own forms of embodiment

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44   I borrow the phrase "perspective correction" from Rod Stoneman, "Perspective Correction: Early Film to the Avant-Garde," *Afterimage* 8/9 (Spring 1981): 50-63.

and agency in response to unrepresentability and to the unlocalizable sense of presence. Ubiquity gives imagined vision and sight to non-sentient objects, to machines, organisms or "things," as these enter the realm of the visible in seemingly contradictory forms: as effigies (imprints, moulds, installations, photographs) and as apparitions (ghosts, revenants, zombies and other post-mortem creatures). Together, the effigy (as index) and the apparition (as presence) constitute elements of a new modality of evidence and authenticity, sometimes called "the virtual," but which I prefer to regard as constitutive for all cinema.

The conclusion I would draw, then, is that such a post- or para-epistemological idea of cinema means accepting, not only the groundless ground of cinematic "representation" and its dispositive in the way that Foucault, for instance, deconstructed the Renaissance painterly *dispositif* in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*. It would require a further step of "renegotiating" belief, appearance and presence, in the full knowledge that such a "belief in the cinema" inherits and accommodates both the hopes and the skepticism of the epistemological view, rather than denying or transcending it. A cinematic dispositive grounded in "belief" and "presence" is contradictory and counter-intuitive, but it would see time, space and agency as the (necessary) relational terms for any form of cinema, whose impure and mixed, mechanical and spiritual, material and mental, semiotic and mimetic "nature" alienates us from our bodies and senses, takes us away from the "here-and-now" – in the very act of constituting possibly their most historically potent and in all likelihood most permanent manifestations.