Cinematic chronotopes: affective encounters in space-time
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Introduction

In 2009 Philips released an online advertisement for their 21:9 “cinema proportioned” LCD television entitled Carousel, directed by Adam Berg in collaboration with Stink Digital. A single continuous tracking shot, the advertisement takes the viewer on a three-dimensional journey through frozen time. The scene contains generic images of cops and robbers, the latter playfully dressed in yellow clown suits, an overt reference to the opening sequence of the just-released Batman sequel The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008), featuring the Joker as its villain. The soundtrack, which unlike the image seems to unfold in time, offers a suggestion of what we are about to see: sounds of chaos, sirens, and voices. Music is used to build up suspense, even though, as in a video game, it never reaches a real climax. Rather, it is repetitive, it reiterates. This commercial proposes in a nutshell what I will argue in this study. It demonstrates what it means to deploy the cinematic outside of the cinema, specifically in terms of the experience of time.

The image fades in on an officer on his knees, yelling and pointing to the left in what appears to be a freeze frame, except that the frame is not frozen. Instead, the camera follows the direction of the officer’s gaze and index finger. Circumventing people and police vehicles, as well as floating paper money, bullets, and various damaged goods suspended in midair, it enters a building where police and criminals are embroiled in a shootout. It then circles around an officer who is being pushed through a glass window by one of the villains. The shattering glass is stock-still around him. Another officer is holding up his rifle in full swing. The camera then ascends a stairwell where, on the second floor, it moves through an arrested explosion until, via a corridor with more cops and robbers battling it out, it eventually enters a small room on the right, moving more slowly now.

Here, a wounded man in nothing but his underwear lies on the floor in an awkward position. A yellow clown suit is placed beside him; an officer kneels by his side. It is a prototypical image, but the scene nonetheless needs more images to become fully intelligible. Following a trail of blood and money, the camera floats up and out of the window and then moves down towards a police vehicle, circling...
around a hand holding a big sack of money and a clown’s mask. Only when the camera zooms out do we realize that the hand belongs to the officer of the opening sequence, pointing left, his posture unchanged. (see fig. 0.1-0.6)¹

It is significant for my view as laid out in this study that a web-based ad for a television technology claiming to be cinematic should foreground its potential to “thicken” time as the key feature of the cinematic experience it is trying to sell. During its two minutes and nineteen seconds, Carousel forms a continuous loop in which story time is empty, even as the instant is stretched out, expanded and folded back onto itself on the level of discourse, in part due to a logic of retroactive causality and the many intertextual references contained in the clip. Apart from the obvious references to movie blockbusters and television shows about cops and robbers, the clip playfully touches upon a number of recent interventions in moving image technologies, from complex real-time tracking shots to bullet-time, and from the wonders of digital post-production to the seemingly free-floating camera and the spatial storytelling familiar from computer games.² My study is devoted to such new deployments of the cinematic.

In Carousel, images constantly play off each other, and everything we see has already been seen, fragments of a collective memory on which and out of which the ad’s imagery is knowingly built. Yet Carousel does more than symbolize time’s
thickening; it makes such thickening tangible to our bodies, primarily through its affective appeal. Time, in other words, is made thick in the event of the encounter, and such thickness endows Carousel with “something cinematic,” as creative director Chris Baylis has characterized it.³ When it comes to cinema, the ad seems to suggest, we are always in multiple temporalities at once.

This study is about the thickness of time that is inherent in our contemporary encounter with the cinematic. This thickness can perhaps best be described as a temporal density, an excess of temporality in the face of the increased timelessness of our mediated encounters, at once event-like and ubiquitous.⁴

The Site of Cinema

My starting point is the observation that the site of cinema is on the move. In addition to the movie theatre, we may now encounter cinematic images in galleries, on urban screens and architectural facades; in our home cinemas or places of transit, from subways to airports, or on the numerous portable playback and recording devices that accompany us every day in a media-saturated world. We may also encounter cinematic images on YouTube, as machinima, or as cut-scenes in video games.⁵ Applications like Google Maps and Layar, but also the possibility to easily record, edit, and distribute our own moving images, using affordable and often technologically integrated video devices, add another cinematic layer to our lived experience. At the same time the likelihood of being captured by the relentless mechanical eyes of surveillance cameras, webcams and all sorts of portable camera devices has arguably turned our whole world cinematic, a condition that now exists prior to and regardless of any actual intervention of recording and display.

While these developments have led some scholars to declare cinema dead (e.g., Usai, 2001), or, alternatively, to stake a claim for its specificity (e.g., Andrew, 2010; Bordwell, 2006), a more productive approach in my view can be found in the writings of those scholars who have tried to frame the changing spatio-temporal configuration of the cinematic against the backdrop of a more wide-ranging set of cultural and technological transformations. In The Language of New Media, Lev Manovich, for example, has referred to the cinematic as a cultural interface that informs a plethora of contemporary media practices. (2001) Comparably, David Rodowick, in The Virtual Life of Film, suggests that “new” media practices are unrelentingly fashioned upon a cinematic metaphor. (2007) Sean Cubitt, in his turn,
speaks of cinema as an effect that arises from a complex intertwining of different kinds of mediated times, spaces, and movements. (2005) And Vivian Sobchack speaks of the cinematic as a body that is constitutive of the life-world we inhabit and that interferes with our lived bodies in complex and dynamic ways. (2005a)

What these writings have in common is that they all, in one way or another, confront the question of how to analyze the cinematic within a world that is increasingly made up of technologically mediated sounds and images, even as they acknowledge that there no longer is (and perhaps never was) a place outside of it from which it can be analyzed. This question seems to have haunted cinema studies over the last two decades, as most theories of cinema that served to legitimize it as an academic discipline are premised on a strict separation between spectatorial and representational space, thus placing the observer at a (theoretically maintained) safe distance from the world observed.

Much can be gained from placing the plethora of phenomena described above against the backdrop of theories premised on a more limited notion of cinema, I argue, especially if we want to grasp the commonality on the grounds of which they are experienced as belonging to the same category, while others are not necessarily so. For, more than an institutional or technological category and well before becoming a theoretical one, the cinematic is a category of experience, a performative that comes into being in the encounter between the human body and its environment, whether the latter be digital or analogue, projected or displayed on small or large screens, and experienced with or without the apparent intervention of the participating viewer.⁶

Conversely, it seems equally important to critically reassess theories premised on a more limited notion of cinema in light of contemporary phenomena that, according to any strict definition, would not qualify as “cinematic” at all, even if they are often recognized and perceived as such. The cinematic, I propose, is a category that is larger than cinema, an observation to which the many essays in David Campany’s edited volume entitled *The Cinematic* attest. (2007) Not only have photographic, cinematic, and electronic imaging technologies borrowed from and transformed each other, they have often relied on each other for self-definition.⁷ With the movie theatre being only one among the many platforms on which we can encounter moving images today, today’s media-infused environment arguably constitutes what media artist and scholar Victor Burgin, in the same volume, has called a cinematic heterotopia, summarized by Campany as a “network of overlapping interfaces and viewing habits,” an environment where technologically mediated sounds and images intersect with our lived bodies in forceful ways. (2007, 16)
More relevant in tracking the logic behind the complex and dynamic changes described above for our understanding of the cinematic today, therefore, seems to be the question of how certain sound and imaging technologies engage the participating viewer so as to challenge his or her perception of self-existence by constituting a lived environment that is recognized and experienced as being cinematic, as distinct from other environments that are not necessarily experienced that way. This question is more relevant than notions of medium specificity or media convergence. Key to the answer to this question, in my view, is the potential of the cinematic to intensify our experience of time’s thickening.

In this study I will trace this thickening of time across four cinematic configurations that often have traditionally been conceived as different from, or even antagonistic to, each other. The first two configurations, though sited outside of the realm of the movie theater, are nonetheless polemically engaged with cinema: a multi-media exhibition featuring avant-garde films and a large-scale interactive media installation operated by computational systems. In addition, I will examine several feature films made for theatrical release stemming from two rather discrete corpuses – i.e., the handheld aesthetics of European art-house films, and the recurring trope of the flash-forward in mainstream (Hollywood) productions – to suggest the affinity between them and the extra-theatrical configurations. Juxtaposing these examples highlights the intensified thickness of time that they share. Only by looking at these cases in tandem, I argue, can we grasp the complexity of the changes that the cinematic is currently undergoing.

Cinematic Time

The objective of this study is to uncover the ways that the cinematic reworks our sense of time, space, and agency in an era of pervasive media presence, so as to resituate the embodied subject. In relating cinema’s potential to thicken the present to the participating viewer’s experience of being, I take my cue from the writings of scholars like Gilles Deleuze (1986, 1989), Vivian Sobchack (2005a; orig. 1994), and Mary Ann Doane (2002), who have each, notwithstanding their differences in perspective and approach, called attention to this linkage. In Cinema 1: The Movement-Image (1986) and Cinema 2: The Time-Image (1989), Deleuze does so by looking at cinema’s radically new ways of rendering time and space perceptible through the body. The books are part of Deleuze’s more complex and wider philosophical mediations on time and art, developed over the course of some thirty
years of writings. The cinema books, writes David Rodowick, in particular reveal Deleuze’s sensitivity to a “century-long transformation wherein we have come to represent and understand ourselves socially through spatial and temporal articulations founded in cinema.” (1997: xii)

Deleuze argues that cinema in its most radical mode, in his view the modernist cinema of the 1960s and 70s, allows us to perceive time in its pure form, that is, in its multiplicity, and as pure duration liberated from movement. Important for our purposes here is Deleuze’s suggestion that it is through this multiplicity, this ambiguous temporality, that the cinematic challenges the ontological foundations of human existence traditionally organized around the subject, and thereby allows new modes of existence to emerge. Although I do not share Deleuze’s assessment of film history and the teleological taxonomies it inspired, I am unmistakably indebted to Deleuze’s mediations on time, cinema, art, and philosophy, as well as their more general bearings on the practice of cultural theory and the developing field of what is now commonly labeled film-philosophy. My project differs from Deleuze’s, however, in that it is not concerned with a more general philosophy of time, but rather seeks to address the cultural and theoretical implications of the changing spatio-temporal configuration of the cinematic today for the kinds of analysis it affords and necessitates.

Writing from a very different perspective that can at times be difficult to reconcile with Deleuze’s, Vivian Sobchack, in “The Scene of the Screen,” also suggests that the cinematic impinges on our experience of being, or presence to the world, through its particular renderings of time. Drawing on the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in particular, Sobchack ardently argues that as an objective phenomenon, the cinematic affirms both embodied being and the world, and as such “constitutes its ‘presence’ as always presently engaged in the experiential process of signifying and coming-into-being.” (2005a: 135) Hinting at the temporal simultaneity of the “objective” time of the film’s unfolding (here) and the “subjective” temporality of captured and experienced world (there), Sobchack insists that the cinematic is characterized by a thickening of time and, consequently, an expansion of space. “[T]he cinematic makes time visibly heterogeneous,” she writes; it thickens the present in the event of its unfolding. Conversely, the photographic arguably objectifies the moment and preserves a singular point of view as a being-that-has-been, whereas in her view the electronic flattens time and turns it back onto itself, establishing a being-in-itself in which time and space are disembodied and randomly dispersed across a network, intentional agency is distributed, and referentiality is turned into intertextuality.
Sobchack’s insistence on the disembodied nature of the electronic is remarkable, given her own efforts to restore the cinematic to the conditions of embodiment. Nonetheless, I share her interest in the materialities of communications and their enabling of new perceptual modes of embodied presence. I am also sensitive to her suggestion that the cinematic is distinguished by its potential to make the thickness of time perceptible to our bodies. I part ways with her argument, however, in my view that this thickening is not unique to the particular material condition of classical cinema, as Sobchack seems to suggest. For, as Anna Munster has noted in *Materializing New Media*, the reported “loss” of experiential time in our encounter with the electronic must be understood precisely at the “juncture of the processes of negotiation between technologically produced and corporeal habitual space and time.” (2006: 96) We can only begin to account for our sense of presence within electronic environments if we accept that the temporality negotiated here does not unfold horizontally, i.e., according to a logic of past-present-future, but “is instead compressed into vertical strata of nonlinear, simultaneously existing layers,” allowing for temporality to be experienced in a qualitatively different – i.e., nonsequential, multidirectional, and multi-accessible – way. (2006: 98) Time here is thus not so much lost or flattened as it is laterally rearranged, “compacted into stacked and varying rhythms.” (2006: 101)

A third scholar who has extensively dealt with the relation between the thick time of the cinematic and the sense of self-presence it produces is Mary Ann Doane. Addressing the preoccupation with time and its representability around the turn of the 20th century, Doane in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* equally considers cinema “a crucial participant in an ongoing rethinking of temporality [...] and the situatedness of the subject” rather than merely an effect or symptom of the development of modernity. (2002: 20) She convincingly argues that the emergence of cinematic time took place in an era marked by two seemingly contradictory tendencies: i.e., first, the progressive abstraction and rationalization of time, and second, an increased emphasis on the contingent, on chance and the ephemeral. Rather than placing these tendencies in opposition, Doane maintains that the production of the contingent was in fact a structural necessity to counter the ideologies of capitalist modernity, a form of resistance, freedom, and indeterminacy, which paradoxically became the “basis for social stability in modernity.” (2002: 230)

Touching on fields as wide-ranging as philosophy, psychoanalysis, physiology, statistics, and thermodynamics, Doane stipulates the historicity and discursive importance of the cinematic as preeminently a technology of representation.
characterized by a curious merger of structure and contingency, which becomes most pertinent in the tension between cinema’s archival and performative dimensions. That is, cinema offers a record of time and takes up time in the event of its unfolding. Although Doane maintains that it is in particular the photographic index’s privileged yet ambivalent relationship to the contingent that demarcates cinematic time as explicitly heterogeneous, and makes the cinematic emblematic of the pressure to rethink time, she also suggests that the demise of photochemical indexicality does not cause this renegotiation to end. In fact, she states that indexically ensured contingency is available to a wide range of media, including television and other real-time media, that continue to participate in structuring the access to the contingent and the indeterminable.

I will take up Doane’s suggestion, expressed towards the end of *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* as well as in her more recent writings on cinematic scale (2003, 2009a, 2009b) and the concept of medium-specificity (2007a, 2007b), that we need to rethink cinematic indexicality as deixis rather than trace in order to account for contemporary cinematic renegotiations of time and being. The difference is temporal: trace connects to the past; deixis to the present. Where the index as trace promises the archivability of the experience of presence, albeit a presence relived, “haunted by historicity” (2002: 23), the index as deixis is contingent on the spatio-temporal frame of its articulation in the moment. This study further builds on Doane’s writing in that I will address the tension between structure and contingency that is emblematic of cinematic time by looking into several contemporary cinematic practices, especially when touching upon the absent, unattainable, or volatile presence of the observer. In the following chapters, I examine this tension in four different manifestations of cinematic time as sited outside classical cinema in relation to the three corners of the deictic triangle: here, now, me.

**Deixis**

As my title indicates, I focus here on cinematic chronotopes, which etymologically means time-space. I borrow the term chronotope from the Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who uses it to name “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed,” in his case in literature. In the chronotope, Bakhtin writes, “Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history.” (1981: 84) In cinema studies
the concept has been used primarily to historicize the debate on filmic genre. In this study, however, I follow literary and media critic Esther Peeren, who, in her *Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture*, rejects the opposition between actual and textual chronotopes, and eloquently expands “Bakthin’s chronotope from a literary concept into a social one that designates the intersubjectively established and maintained practice of constructing the spatio-temporal worlds in which we live and through which we define ourselves.” (2007: 28) The cinematic, I argue, produces such chronotopes.

Significantly, Peeren deploys the concept first and foremost to shed light on the spatio-temporal specificity and situatedness of identity, while insisting on the constructed quality of the physical environment with which and through which we interact, and from which our perception of self-presence emerges, here and now. Taken “beyond Bakhtin,” as Peeren does, the term chronotope thus expresses the inseparability of time, space and identity constructions. Subjects, she writes, “are within a chronotope – indeed, of it [...]” (2007: 23; emphasis in text) In this study I look at the contested and contingent time/space/subjectivity configurations that the cinematic gives rise to, as well as at the mobile, fleeting, embedded, and embodied selves that the cinematic, para-cinematic and post-cinematic leaves us with, selves that are necessarily entrapped in (mediated) space-times, indeed can be said to exist of it.

My analysis of cinematic chronotopes will help clarify how, within our contemporary media-saturated world, technologically mediated times and spaces are transformed into constitutive categories of subjectivity via their intensification of the participating viewer’s sense of being “here,” “now” and “me.” In so doing, my study builds on the writings of Thomas Elsaesser, who on various occasions has addressed the paradox of cinema’s death and its new ubiquity in terms of the distinction between the “space/time/agency/subject [here/now/me] articulation” afforded by cinema. The key to understanding such an articulation is the bond, established and confirmed in an ongoing process, between cinematic time-spaces and the viewer who engages with them. This bond is built up and kept, I argue, through a form of indexicality, specifically through a structure that linguistic theory calls “deixis.”

Deixis is a linguistic term that refers to the study of indexical references, or deictics, that require the presence of the participants and the specific spatio-temporal context of their expression in order to make sense: the “this” of a pointing finger, or words such as “here,” “now,” “I,” or “you.” What is striking about deictics is that they involve what American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sand-
ers Peirce called a “dynamical coexistence” of sign and referent in order to become meaningful. (1955; here quoted in Levinson, 2004: 103) That is to say, in deixis the referent, rather than being made available by an expression’s semantic conditions, is achieved by means of contextual support. “This contextual support,” writes Stephen C. Levinson, “is provided by the mutual attention of the interlocutors and their ability to reconstruct the speaker’s referential intentions given clues in the environment.” (2004: 103) Deixis thus has intentional as well as attentional features that both depend on what Karl Bühler has called the deictic origo, i.e., the spatio-temporal frame of the articulation, centered on the interlocutor at the time and place of the utterance.¹¹

In cinema studies, the concept of deixis was picked up in the 1980s by Francesco Casetti, who used it in Inside the Gaze to develop his rigorous theory of filmic enunciation based on personal pronouns. (1999; orig. 1986) In the book, Casetti departs from the psychoanalytical and ideological approaches to cinema of his contemporaries, including Christian Metz (to whom I will turn below), who conceived the spectator as a pre-given entity within a self-enclosed system, a divided subject unified through cinematic suture.¹² To account for the ways that a film orients itself towards the actual viewer in the auditorium, Casetti proposes a semiotic framework of analysis, based on a face-to-face model of communication. For Casetti, film viewing always involves three deictic categories: an “I” (i.e., the enunciator, or filmmaker), a “you” (i.e., the addressee, or spectator) and a “he” (a character or a thing, i.e., the film itself). From this, he derives a typology of shots, each indicating a different way that a film can say “you,” thus demarcating a place to be filled in by the spectator. Yet, as Warren Buckland has pointed out, despite his interest in the actual spectator, Casetti pursues his research primarily on the formal level of the film. That is to say, he is mostly concerned with the ways a film precribes the spectator’s position through its particular mode of address. (2001: 215)

Cassetti’s use of personal pronouns and deictic terms was fiercely criticized by Metz, who wrote his final work “The Impersonal Enunciation, or the Site of Film” (1991; orig. 1987) largely in response to Casetti. For Metz, deixis is not adequate to describe the reality of film, because in the cinema situation, no “I” (filmmaker, character) speaks directly to a “you” (viewer). Filmic enunciation is impersonal, he states; therefore, there can be no analogy between film and natural languages. Rather, film displaces the enunciation from the actual place and time of the enunciator: its reality is recorded and produced before the actual viewer engages with
the film. As a result, the relation between enunciator and addressee is always asymmetrical and mediate rather than immediate, as in dialogue.\(^1\)

Important for our purpose here is that Metz rejects the use of deictic terms to describe the reality of film, because he conceives film as *histoire* rather than *discourse*, in Emile Benveniste’s sense of the terms, where *histoire* is “defined by the absence of deictic markers.” As Buckland puts it: “In rejecting the presence of deixis in film, Metz limits his discussion of filmic enunciation to the articulation of space and time within narrative films [...].” (2000: 69; emphasis added) In the famous essay “Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism),” (1986) Metz had already used Benveniste’s distinction *discourse* and *histoire* to argue that the cinematic situation is inherently voyeuristic (and thus *histoire*), because it lacks the deictic markers that acknowledge the viewer’s presence. The viewer can look into a filmic world, but the film does not look back, because it cannot; it is impersonal.

Metz’s rejection of deixis is thus founded on specific material grounds. One of the material conditions of cinema, he argues in “Story/Discourse,” is its positing of a radical “segregation of spaces” (1986: 64) between the viewer and the screen. Rather than referring to an external reality, cinema in his view thus constructs a reality of its own. A film is a world opened up through projection, separated from the real world by means of the frame. Hence his subtitle “the site of film.” This leads Metz to conclude that reference in film is necessarily meta-linguistic and anaphoric rather than deictic. More importantly, Metz suggests that a cinematic work acknowledges the spectator only to the extent that it constructs an absent centre on the other side of the screen, i.e., a subject position that offers the viewer a point of entry into the filmic space by means of identification and mirroring.

I share Metz’s view that the filmic enunciation is impersonal, but I am critical of his rejection of deixis, and the radical segregation of spaces he proposes. The impact of Metz’s theory of filmic enunciation cannot easily be overestimated. Film theory has most commonly dealt with the duplicitous relationship between seeing and being seen in terms of variations of the mirror, with an emphasis on the classic voyeuristic position of the observer.\(^1\) We tend to understand our own involvement in these terms. More recently, however, we can observe a shift of attention in film theory, away from the centrality of vision and voyeurism towards an attentiveness to the body and embodiment. Scholars such as Gilles Deleuze (1986), Vivian Sobchack (1992), Laura Marks (2000), and Giuliana Bruno (2002), for example, have each theorized the cinematic in terms of its affective, embodied, tactile, or haptic appeal, thus foregrounding embodiment and engagement as one of the axes alongside which the registers of the cinematic need to be, can be,
and to some extent already have been revised and redefined. This paradigm shift has not only encroached on developments within contemporary cinematic practices but is also influencing how we evaluate and understand earlier theories and practices of cinema. In *Film Theory: An Introduction*... Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, therefore, have convincingly argued for a retrospective rewriting of film theory *...through the Senses*. In line with these writings, I will here foreground the relationality between cinematic environments and the participating viewer in terms of the specific experience of being here, now, and me that it affords. The cinematic now confronts us in all kinds of places no longer dependent on the screen/frame paradigm of projection. Therefore the old paradigm of the mirror, of reflexivity, and the dominance of the eye seems no longer to hold. Within the ever-expanding field of contemporary cinematics the old registers of perception, organized around the image as framed view, experienced at a distance by a seated viewer, and channeled exclusively through the eye and ear, no longer necessarily apply. They need to be replaced with a different register that, for the purposes of this study, I will call the affective encounter.

Focusing on the body and embodiment enables a different understanding of deixis, one that cannot be reduced to linguistic forms of discourse. For as psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler writes, who used the term deixis in the 1930s to theorize how (human) beings orient themselves in relation to their environment, an individual “senses his body, too, in relation to his optical orientation, and employs it to point. His (conscious, experienced) tactile body image has a position in relation to visual space.” (here quoted in Buckland, 2000: 70; emphasis in text) Kaja Silverman, in *The Threshold of the Visual World*, has referred to this tactile body-image as the individual’s “proproceptive frame of reference,” thus stipulating the importance of the constant wavering, back and forth, between body and space entailed by vision. (1996: 24) Cultural theorist Mieke Bal uses the term wavering, in turn, to refer to our dialogic relation to visual space, expanding on Silverman and calling attention to the proprioceptive base of deixis. (2001)

Thus, even though I will be speaking, to a certain degree, about the different kinds of mirroring afforded by contemporary cinematic environments, as well as about the position of the viewer within them, I am no longer placing these terms in a classical cinema setting. From the viewpoint of visuality, looking both emanates from and points back to a body. Deictics, in this sense, do not contribute to the propositional content derived from a given context, but rather serve to slot in an element of that context, i.e., the referent, in the proposition expressed, so as to
validate its being. The act of looking, in other words, is part of the object, or that which is looked at, so that any movement in or of the observer necessarily triggers movement in or of the world observed, and vice versa, here and now. This principle of co-variance radically differs from the principle of co-dependence fundamental to Renaissance perspective and the ocular-centric models of cinema it inspired. It is different because it does not place the viewer at a distance from the world observed, and by the same token does not consider the object as given or fixed. For “what can subject-centredness be,” asks Bal, “when the subject is by definition a wavering double I/you subject that is impossible to pin down at any moment in any one spatial position.” (2001: 152-153; emphasis in text)

In this study I adhere to this bodily-spatial form of deixis, but this entails two provisos. First, it is imperative to grant that in the bodily-spatial studies of deixis proposed above, the environment is recognized as actant in the construction of meaning and in processes of self-validation. Second, and significantly, the wavering just described is a temporal process. “Where space meets the body,” writes Bal, “time is involved.”(2001: 164) The wavering between our body and the world imbues visuality with a temporal thickness. Key to this thickening is actuality, and actuality is the time of discourse. What sets apart the cinematic, I argue, is its potential to intensify this temporal thickening, and so to intensify our sense not only of “now” but also of “here” and “me.”

Embodiment is the condition of visuality. My reflections on the thick time of the cinematic are thus intimately tied up with necessary reflections on the spatializing practices that condition this temporal thickening, as well as on the perceptions of self-existence that it affords. For, as Elsaesser has noted, embodiment is but one of the semantic fields of cinematic experience, alongside of which he identifies two others: time and agency (2009c). The first two of these three fields, according to Bal, are already linked. So, if I focus primarily on time, it is time with and through the body that can be thickened. In foregrounding the specific experience of time that is mediated through our encounter with the cinematic, I will unavoidably address all three of these domains throughout the chapters, with a slight focus on each of them during the three chapters. Deixis will allow me to demonstrate coherently that the cinematic exceeds cinema and yet is still sufficiently central to our experience of time and being within our contemporary media-saturated world. My thesis, in this sense, can be understood to offer a different reading of the apparent paradox of the death of cinema and its proclaimed ubiquity.
Flashing Forward

In 2006-2007 the Centre Pompidou in Paris held an exhibition entitled *Le Mouvement des Images: Art & Cinema*, which took as its point of departure the observation that we now encounter moving images in different formations and across a variety of platforms. The exhibition’s aim, as stated by curator Philippe-Alain Michaud, was to “redefine cinema and the way in which it has been accepted in terms of experience over the last century.” The exhibition offered a thematic presentation of works from the museum’s film and video collection alongside photographs, paintings, and sculptures, along with works related to architecture and design. “At the dawn of the digital revolution,” states the press release, “this new presentation, based on the fundamental components of film-making – scrolling, projection, narrative and editing – is offering a completely new cinematographic experience encompassing the visual arts.”

The exhibition indeed called for a dialogic rethinking of art from the viewpoint of cinema. Yet, mounted in spacious surroundings with darkened walls and floors that accentuated light contrasts, it also did something else: it constituted a cinematic environment of its own. The experience it offered, however, radically differs from the one commonly known from theatrical cinema, with its fixed spectators and single back projection, its divided spaces and linear unfolding. For here, instead, the visitor was free to wander through various spaces filled with multiple light projections, displays, and other artifacts that, in their conjunction and potential for interaction, allowed the visitor to tell cinema’s history differently.

In chapter one, I will address the theoretical implications of the tension between the mobility and situatedness of the participating viewer within our media-infused world, in part by embarking on the specific, that is, situated mediations of time afforded by such environments. Using the 2007 multi-media exhibition *Andy Warhol: Other Voices, Other Rooms* as a case study, I will argue for a rethinking of the cinematic in terms of an intensified sense of “here-ness,” of being physically present within a given cinematic environment.

The Warhol exhibition is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the exhibition consisted both of Warhol’s films, generally conceived as both “avant-garde films” and part of the “expanded cinema” of the 1960s, and many of Warhol’s television programs from the 1980s. That these works were presented in and as part of a contemporary “media scape” allows me to discuss the current relocation of the cinematic against the backdrop of its earlier expansions. Second, and significantly, Warhol’s cinematic endeavors are most widely known for and discussed in terms
of their treatment and manipulation of cinematic time. In recent discussions, the early films in particular are often affiliated with reality television and (the aesthetics of) real-time surveillance. Their reliance on a suggested liveness will help me to tackle how the cinematic establishes a sense of “here” that pertains first and foremost to the viewer’s body within the physical space of the encounter, “now.”

Third, Warhol’s cinematic work is often conceived to be prototypical of our contemporary desire for self-monitoring and mediated self-presence; thus it foregrounds how the cinematic increasingly impinges on the way we perceive our presence in the world. The commonality and differences among Warhol’s films, the discussions they trigger, and the cinematic practices under scrutiny in this chapter (i.e., a multi-media exhibition of his work) stipulate the significance of the collapse of the spaces of representation and reception, in a discussion that largely revolves around the renegotiation of scale. In the first chapter, then, I will look into the multiple ways the body relates to and interacts with the augmented and often mixed reality of its environment, here. It is in this “hereness” that the cinematic’s paradoxical reliance on notions like mobility and situatedness come together and can properly be addressed and unraveled.

In chapter two I will turn to the increased mobility of the camera itself by exploring the use of handheld camera devices in European art-house films of the 1990s and their establishment of what I have dubbed a handheld aesthetics. As in the first chapter, I take an extreme case to elucidate what is essential to the cinematic in general – namely, its potential to intensify, thicken, our sense of being there in the present, in a performative “now” that is not identical to the time of the present tense. A particularly early example of this aesthetics can be found in John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s mini-feature *Rape* from 1968 (see fig. 0.7). The premise of the film is simple. A young girl (Eva Majlath) is brutally harassed by a relentless (all male) camera crew for the entire film. The handheld camera follows her everywhere and tracks her every move: first on the streets, then at her workplace, and eventually in her home. The camera is too close for comfort, the frame is tight, the imagery shaky and there is

![Fig. 0.7: The actress yelling at the camera in Rape (Film No. 5) (Yoko Ono, 1969)](image-url)
no closure; the film just ends. Shot in what appears to be real-time, the film is interrupted only when the camera runs out of film and needs to be recharged, until, finally, it is not. The turning point for the audience comes approximately halfway through the film, when, due to the handheld camera’s uncom-promising behavior, i.e., its extreme proximity to the main character, its lack of spatial overview, and its refusal to look away, the film steadily turns its gaze back upon the audience, making us uncomfortably aware of own complicity in the act of looking. The film is extremely violent to watch.

Shot in the late 1960s, Rape preceded the publication of Laura Mulvey’s famous essay on “The Visual Pleasure of Narrative Cinema” (1975) by a few years, and it is easy to read the film as a hyperbolic proclamation of her argument concerning the power structures involved in the regimes of looking. The film’s relevance within the context of this study, however, lies in something not easily explained in these terms, namely the way in which the film weighs on the body. It does so, I suggest in chapter two, because of the particular mediations of time and space afforded by the handheld camera.

Aesthetically, the use of the handheld camera is compelling because of the ways it draws attention to a bodily presence, i.e., to a hand holding the camera, which is sustained in the image. In addition, throughout film history and its discourses handheld camera devices have come to connote both authenticity and reflexivity: handheld imagery is commonly perceived either as more “true” or more “self-conscious.” In chapter two I will demonstrate how these issues of authenticity, reflexivity, and corporeality are reworked in the handheld aesthetics of the 1990s. The popularity of handheld-camera devices in the 90s, around the time of the advent of the digital, is crucial because it marks a shift away from cinema’s dependence on spatial forms of indexicality, towards an increased prevalence of the temporal index. Handheld aesthetics is characterized by a strong reorientation in a “now” that makes up for the camera’s spatially disorienting point of view. The “now” it affords, however, I maintain, is ultimately untenable, as it is beset with the time of affect and trauma. It is this mediation of time through the body, I argue, that endows the “now” of our encounter with the cinematic with its thickness.

In the third chapter, I will turn to the sense of “me” that the cinematic affords. Again I have chosen an extreme case, a large-scale urban media installation – i.e., Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s Body Movies (2001) – in which the participating viewer’s projected body image is a constitutive part of the cinematic experience the installation conveys. Again, the case is not unique but is rather exemplary of a more gen-
eral trend that marks the relocation of the cinematic today. Other examples that come to mind, besides Body Movies’ virtual inversions Under Scan (2005) and Sand Box (2010), can be found in the oeuvres of, for example, Christian Moeller and David Rokeby. In his installation Nosy (2006) set up in Osaki City (Tokyo), Moeller uses a robotically controlled surveillance camera to monitor, track, and then display its immediate surroundings, including the participating viewer, onto three towered LED-screens in bitmap graphics. As city-dwellers pass by, images of their bodies are fed back onto the façade of a building, resulting in a playful engagement between the city dweller and his or her image on the building’s surface.¹⁹ Also worthy of note are David Rokeby’s “artificial perception systems,” from his renowned sound interface Very Nervous System (1986–90) to his “distorted surveillance” systems like Sorting Daemon (2003), Watch (1995), Seen (2002, see fig. 0.8) and San Marco Flow (2004-5).²⁰ In each of these installations, the body-image of the (unknowing) city dweller is monitored, tracked, processed, and fed back to the participating viewer in significantly different ways: as sounds (in Very Nervous System), as visual patterns (in Seen and San Marco Flow) and visual data bits (as in Sorting Daemon). In Body Movies, the case at hand, feedback occurs largely via the shadow-projections of the viewer’s body, and via visual interruptions and midi-signals.

The installations’ participation in the media-infused city at large will allow me to address our encounter with the cinematic in terms of spatial augmentation,
embodied interaction, and the sense of event-ness they impart. I will place the installations against the backdrop of earlier practices and fantasies of cinema’s expansion beyond the cinematic screen, most notably in discussions on cinematic three-dimensionality. These fantasies are symptomatic of a fear of and desire for the collapse of the difference between spectatorial and representational space, and mark the gradual demise of the Euclidian subject within theories of the cinematic. I will argue that the cases under scrutiny challenge us to rethink the cinematic in terms of the tangibility- or presence-effect it produces, rather than the subject-effect it is said to fabricate. This presence-effect, I maintain, revolves around three important pillars: first, projection as emanating from the body; second, presence as relationality; and third, agency as limit. In chapter three, I will unpack these notions of projection, presence, and agency, and suggest that the cinematic intensifies our perception of our self-existence by postulating a sense of presence, of “me,” that does not exist in isolation, but rather emerges from our encounter with other entities, both sentient and non-sentient.

In the Coda, I will consider some mainstream Hollywood examples and assess the relevance of the proposed approach for the analysis of contemporary Hollywood films characterized by their complex narrative unfolding, their often affective appeal, and their reliance on the logics of retroactive causality. In particular I will look into the use of the trope of the flash-forward, as used in films like The Source Code (Jones, 2011), Sherlock Holmes (Ritchie, 2009), Next (Tamahori, 2007), Donnie Darko (2001), and the HBO/ABC television series Flash Forward (Braga & Goyer, 2009-2010), and many others, and explore the theoretical ramifications of the paradigm shift I seek to capture in this study for their analysis.

The cases I have chosen are, as I have said, extreme cases. As theoretical objects they actively contribute to the film-philosophical debates on the changing spatio-temporal configuration of the cinematic; they revisit some of the basic premises undergirding most classical film theories, such as perspectival vision, linearity, and subjectivity, and the related categorical oppositions of motion and stillness, real and virtual, cause and effect, body and mind. They are theoretical objects in that they are “brought into existence in the encounter between object and analyst, mediated by the theoretical baggage each brings to that encounter.” (Bal, 2003: 24). Yet, they also function as media-archeological objects, because they offer us a place to see from, a searchlight that allows for a critical and retroactive re-examination of cinema’s (pre)history in such a way as to “overcome the opposition between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media.” (Elsaesser, 2004a: 75). Each chapter, therefore, contains a brief media-archeological section so that I can address cru-
cial consistencies and divergences: the historically recurrent fantasy of cinematic three-dimensionality in chapter three, the pre-1990s usages of the handheld camera in chapter two, and the avant-gardes and expanded cinema of the 1960s in chapter one, to which I will now turn.