Cinematic chronotopes: affective encounters in space-time
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3 Situating Cinematic Presence

A large black shadow dances on a highly illuminated surface, a building façade consisting of one square and two more or less triangular planes. In the shadow a reflection, not of the person casting the shadow, but rather a residue of a projected body, much smaller than the silhouette that traverses it. Next to it another shadow, bevel-edged, and slightly moving to adjust its size and posture to match one of the portraits beneath the bright layer of light. At the bottom, assemblies of smaller, high-contrast shadows pass by. King-sized hands hover above them, as if belonging to a puppeteer, pulling their strings. Some playfully respond; others appear oblivious to their surroundings. Then one of the tiny shadows faces up and shakes one of the enormous hands. A gigantic – initially decapitated – silhouette approaches the building’s surface, only to shrink to minimal size. After a while, props such as bags, bottles and bikes enter the scene: two rotating wheels imprison a dwarflike figure behind its spokes; a gigantic handbag crushes one of the silhouettes; liquid pouring from an oversized bottle becomes a waterfall from which another miniature drinks.

This is the playground of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s large-scale media installation *Body Movies*, commissioned by the institute for Unstable Media V2, and first presented at the Schouwburgplein in the centre of Rotterdam in 2001 when the city was Cultural Capital of Europe.\(^80\) (see fig. 3.1) In its 2001 installation the work transformed the public square into a participatory stage for city dwellers, by projecting more than a thousand portraits onto the façade of the Pathé cinema in random sets of seven at a time. These images were then overexposed by a bright layer of light coming from two extremely powerful Xerox light projectors placed at ground level. Between the building and the projectors lay the large public square, populated by peripatetic urbanites whose bodies intercept the light and cast onto the façade shadows that vary from two to twenty-five meters in length, depending on the participants’ positions between projector and screen. Encouraged to
match the portraits on screen, or rather, on the wall, the shadows at times appear in tandem with the underlying imagery. Most of the time, however, we find the visitor-dweller in “playful, if ephemeral, engagement” (Fernández 2009, 83) with his or her own shadow or with those of others. For, as a result of the play with scale and size, shadows can be stepped on, kicked, and cuddled; while their owners may be physically meters apart, shades can stroke and pat, hit and tease each other under the observing eyes of the motionless projected portraits that await their mirroring match.

Based on Samuel van Hoogstaten’s engraving The Shadow Dance (Rotterdam, 1675, see fig. 3.2), Body Movies calls to mind Plato’s allegory of the cave from the Republic, so often employed within film theory to explain its conception of cinema’s theatrical dispositif. In Plato’s allegory, the shadows on the cave’s wall represent the distortion of the world of ideas by the world of things. For Plato, a perfect, “authentic” world is one in which the light is omnipresent. This world, in fact a hermeneutics of seeing, is not only non-communicable to those that dwell in the dark, but can also only be obtained by those few who manage to endure the pain inflicted on them in the process of mastering the light. In his essays on “the cinematic apparatus,” Jean-Louis Baudry draws a parallel between Plato’s cave and
the spatial arrangement of the cinematic apparatus, set-up in the darkened hall, with back projection, and a seemingly disembodied and immobile spectator who frontally faces the screen, deluded into mistaking the shadowy projections for “real.”

Yet *Body Movies*’ spatial configuration is radically different from that of a traditional cinema setting: it is designed to be set up in a large, empty public space, outside, in between buildings and urban displays, using the façade of one of the buildings as its central “screen.” Unlike in traditional cinema the visitor is mobile and can navigate between screen and projector, and beyond. Moreover, the projected imagery and sounds can be altered, depending on the visitors’ engagement on the public square. What continuity, then, exists between *Body Movies* and the organization of the visual we call cinematic? And what insights can be gained from analyzing the particular ways that *Body Movies*, in constituting a cinematic environment, situates and engages the participating viewer through the use of luminous projection and the real-time technologies that are contingent on the visitor’s participation in the square?

In the first chapter, I addressed the mobilization and thickening of the “here” in our encounter with the cinematic, through the thick time of the Warhol exhibition that foregrounds this “hereness.” In the second chapter, I explicated how the thick time of the cinematic manifests itself physically to the viewer-user in the cinematic “now,” by looking into our encounter with the handheld aesthetics of European art-house films. In the present chapter, I will focus in particular on the “me” within our encounter with the cinematic. Taking the large-scale urban media installation *Body Movies* as, again, a particularly strong emblematic case in point, I will argue that we are in a better position to understand the ever-expanding habitat of the cinematic and its bearing on the viewer engaged with it if we approach the cinematic as a lived environment. This environment consists of a mixed reality that affords certain site-specific, embodied interactions while prohibiting others. It does so by thickening the time and space of the encounter through the use of sound and imaging technologies. In the following sections I will unpack these aspects of embodied interaction, site-specificity, and sound and image in relation to the “me” of the participating viewer.
Much in synch with our contemporary media-saturated world, *Body Movies* is full of cross-medial references to practices varying from early immersive environments like the panorama and the phantasmagoria, to illuminated surfaces and light shows, and from stereoscopic fantasies to responsive environments. As was the case in the nineteenth century panorama, for example, the visitor is implied in the space of the encounter. As a reactive installation, however, *Body Movies* offers more than a panoramic view: it dynamically implicates the participant’s projected body-image and augments the space of the encounter, thereby enhancing the impression of a lived or even “living” environment. *Body Movies* thus revisits – or remediates, if you will – many pre-existing (pre)cinematic forms, drawing on and taking issue with the central concerns and fantasies that surround them. Although I will address some of these forms in passing, I will focus on the form of classical cinema in particular. For if my aim is to establish the conceptual relevance of our recognition that *Body Movies* belongs to the experiential category of the *cinematic* for the “me” within the encounter, then it is important first to determine how the installation resembles and departs from its theatrical counterpart – the “Movies,” unambiguously referred to in the work’s title.

By effectively displacing the concept of cinema from the confined spaces of the theatre and resuscitating it within the augmented space of the city, I contend, in the first section of this chapter, that the installation breathes new life into a fantasy pervading the histories, discourses, and technologies of the cinema, i.e., that of cinematic three-dimensionality. The notion of cinematic three-dimensionality surfaces primarily in the context of and the debates on cinema’s traditional apparatus, yet its persistence throughout the history of and discourses on cinema pertains to a number of fantasies and fears, most notably those orbiting around the collapse of representational and spectatorial space and the demise of the Euclidian subject. I will expand on these fears and fantasies in the first section, and demonstrate that not only do they reappear in the debates on and practices of non-theatrical cinema, but they also bear on our understanding of today’s media-infused world. The case at hand figures as an example.

In the subsequent sections I will then consider the critical implications of the collapse of representational and spectatorial space for the “me” that emerges in the encounter with the cinematic today. Using *Body Movies* as my interlocutor, I will, in section two, address the changing role and use of projection. I will argue that *Body Movies* challenges traditional conceptualizations of luminous projection and corresponding notions of the cinematic based on perspectival vision, and forces us to rethink projection as emanating from the body, from a “me” situated...
in the “here” and “now” of the encounter. In doing so, I argue in the third section, *Body Movies* produces a particular presence-effect, where presence is understood as the perception of self-existence, of a “me” that becomes tangible to our bodies in our encounter with sound and imaging technologies. What becomes tangible to our bodies through the embodied interactions afforded by *Body Movies*, I propose, is a sense of self in its interrelationality, a condensed and thickened “me,” part of a complex network of mediated interactions that continually feed the viewer’s body-image back to him or her in real-time and real-space. In the final section I will end by suggesting that *Body Movies*, as a cinematic encounter, further intensifies our perception of self-existence, of “me,” through a conjunction of affect and agency in the experience of limits, which in *Body Movies* is sidetracked through the probing of a narrativity that cannot be integrated.

### 3D and the Demise of the Euclidian Subject

Desire for and resistance to cinematic three-dimensionality have been recurrent tendencies throughout cinema’s (pre)history and its imagined futures alike, and have often been associated with the desire, paradoxical regarding cinema, to eliminate the screen altogether. This desire is paradoxical because it amounts to giving up on what is considered to be one of cinema’s primary characteristics, essential to its ontology (Lippit, 1999). The notion of three-dimensionality materializes along different axes, two pertaining to the space of the image, i.e., depth and relief, and one addressing the potential extension of the composite cinematic space itself, an expansion that goes well beyond the auditorium, into the museum and beyond. What unites these axes is their shared allusion to a fear of, and coexisting desire for, a compound merger of representational and spectatorial space, of cinema and the world at large.

For example, as Jonathan Crary has argued in *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), around the end of the nineteenth century – the era of the dawn of cinema – there were many competing visual regimes associated with different media technologies and forms of art and entertainment. Crary convincingly demonstrates that besides photography, stereoscopy was one of the most dominant visual regimes that had a significant impact on early modern visual imagery, including that of cinema. Stereoscopy offered a model of perception based on binocular disparity, not only suggesting depth or relief but also enhancing a sense of tangibility and immediacy of the space-time represented in the image. As such it posed a radical break with
the visual regime of the camera obscura, which maintained a strong division between the viewing subject and the object viewed.

Early cinema also struggled with the potential three-dimensionality of the cinematic image, a struggle that lies as much at the heart of Méliès’ avowal of the cinematic surface as it is central to Lumière’s affirmation of scenic depth. It also re-occurs in (the analysis of) so-called primitive cinema’s building of a “haptic space” through the physical expansion of the tableaux (Burch, 1991: 162–185); as well as in what Michael Wedel has referred to as early cinema’s relief-effect, i.e., its potential to seemingly invade the auditorium space, suggesting relief through a “sculpting with light.” (Wedel, 2009) The tension between the three-dimensionality of the projected image and the potential negation of the difference between “real” and “unreal” space, i.e., between auditorium and narrative space, also characterizes the denial of the “frame” as limit of the visible in the discourses on widescreen cinema, consolidated in the 1950s. As Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, drawing on John Belton’s Wide Screen Cinema (1993), the “illusion of limitless horizontal vision’ intensified the spectator’s sense of immersion or absorption in the space of film.” (2009b: 74) Yet although widescreen cinema denies the existence of an outside, its promise of the infinite depth of the image, Doane insists, served above all to compensate for widescreen cinema’s being “paradoxically only a more intense demonstration of the aspiration of the cinema to represent, within a finite image, the sense of an infinite expanse of space.” As such, it thus reestablishing the difference between the space of the auditorium and that opened up through projection. (2009a, 75)

The same holds true for stereoscopic 3D cinema, which is now enjoying a monumental revival. Although 3D cinema seems especially to revitalize fears and desires along the depth axes of three-dimensionality, alluding to discourses on virtual reality, i.e., of being “immersed” in or teleported to the films’ virtual world – as evidenced by CNN’s item on the “Avatar Blues” (Piazza 2010) – there are other issues at stake in the persistence of the discussion about 3D cinema. These include, first, a fear of or desire for the (de)materialization of the cinematic image; second, the expansion of cinematic perception beyond the visual; and, finally, the augmentation and possible merger of formerly discrete cinematic spaces. Fear and desire, that is, concerning the relationship between what is seen and the identity or sense of self of the participating viewer, of “me.”

As Akira Mizatu Lippit convincingly argues, 3D cinema has been celebrated for its potential to reproduce reality to the fullest, to “become” reality or, in Bazinian terms, to bring cinema closer to its origin, i.e., to the pro-filmic real on which
it is based. It has also been applauded for its mimetic promise, for its potential to extend our perception beyond the merely audio-visual, to involve the full sensorium. Yet, Lippit argues, 3D has also been fiercely criticized on grounds that reveal a number of anxieties associated with the annihilation of (the flatness of) the screen. Although this critique is partly informed by a desire to protect the screen as the sanctuary of cinema as art, it also exposes another anxiety, namely, the uncertainty associated with the disappearance of the screen as a protective shield against living presence, delineating inside from outside, public from private, spectacle from spectator, and real from virtual experience, or even psychosis. (Lippit, 1999: 219) Together these three fantasies – of reproduction, mimesis, and annihilation – that circulate in the discussions of 3D cinema thus paradoxically hint at once at cinema’s disappearance and its ontological completion. In all three, the “me” of the viewer is either augmented or under threat.

In this context the three-dimensionality of cinema’s spatial configuration, and its potential to expand beyond the confines of its traditional theatrical setting, become particularly relevant. Cinematic projections have always taken place outside the movie theatre, for example at fairs and in vaudeville shows in the early days, during the performances and happenings of the avant-gardes of the 1920s/30s and 1960s/70s, and today more and more often in museums, in galleries, at festivals and biennales, and in public spaces. Of these non-theatrical projections, one particular pre-cinematic habitat draws our attention in the context of the expanded media-rich environments under investigation. This is the phantasmagoria, whose current relevance is underscored by its popularity as a historical locale for staging the rise of optical media in a mainstream Hollywood film like *The Illusionist* (Burger, 2006).

The phantasmagoria was one of the most popular forms of entertainment and awe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Tom Gunning has pointed out, unlike in theatrical cinema, within the phantasmagoria as presented by Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, the space where the projection takes place is simultaneously cancelled out by darkness, as well as conjured up through a play with light and shadows. (Gunning, 2009: 24) Owing to a complex trajectory of sensual withholding and overstimulation preceding the introduction of images, and the near invisibility or even apparent absence of both magic lantern and screen, the projected imagery seemed to appear out of nowhere, as if summoning the dead into the room.

Apart from the ideological implications of taking place in-between and giving shape to the relation between science and superstition (as elaborated on by Gunning), what is important for our purposes here is that the phantasmagoria’s
engagement with space is marked by an ongoing transition between the physical and the illusionary. This oscillation takes place not along the axis of the depth of the image, but through a suggestive play with the relief of the image and, above all, through the apparent merger of the space of illusion opened up through projection with the space within which the visitor resides. Thus the fears and desires surrounding the spatial augmentation of the cinematic habitat were to some extent already awakened in the phantasmagoria. Moreover, the case of the phantasmagoria highlights once again the importance, in each of these discourses, of the presence of a threshold separating representational from spectatorial space, and the fear or desire of losing it. That the screen frame is more often than not considered to be the form in which this threshold (de)materializes is, I believe, of less importance. Of greater significance is that in lowering the threshold, the viewer’s situated yet mobile body becomes more important as the locus of perspective, a ubiquitous “here” from which the participating viewer’s sense of “now” and “me” emanate.

It is on this note that I want to turn to the multi-layered urban interface of Lozano-Hemmer’s *Body Movies*. Here, in my view, the sensation of an entire world “rendered filmic” – which Lippit ascribes to the potential elimination of the screen in the ideal of 3D cinema – returns with a difference. (1999: 221) This difference can perhaps best be described as a conceptual shift away from a focus on a subjective conception of space towards an attentiveness to the physical space of the encounter, and therewith from a discourse of immersion to one of augmentation. I propose this view because it concerns the positioning and activity of the viewer. Unlike (stereoscopic) theatrical cinema – or early fantasies of VR, for that matter – *Body Movies* is not shaped by its potential to virtually teleport the viewer into a representational world, as the metaphor of “immersion,” frequently used as a perspectival one, would have it. Instead, *Body Movies* offers a form of engagement characterized by an explicitly embodied situatedness within an acutely technology-driven, but most importantly, everyday urban milieu. In this environment, the cinematic screen is not so much eliminated as it is multiplied, mobilized, and complemented – augmented, that is, by other, more pervasive, multi-sensory sound and image technologies that thicken the time and space of our everyday urban environments.

This friction between the physical space of the encounter and sound and imaging technologies through which it is augmented is epitomized in *Body Movies* by the sonic amalgam of the installation’s projected sound, a jittery tapping that is indicative of the conversion of real space and movement into dynamic data, and
the haphazard soundscape of the city of Rotterdam: its means of transport, its noisy dwellers, the sonic evidence of its overall dynamism. Here in particular does the installation reveal the permeability of its borders. It does so by bringing home to us the ramifications of the discussions on cinematic three-dimensionality for the positioning of the viewer. These ramifications and dilemmas, rather than 3D-ness as such, are particularly perceptible in the debates invigorated by 3D (Dolby Surround) sound, according to which the space-time of the cinematic needs to be reconsidered as a realm of constantly moving centers with no unifying subject to speak of. Thus the demise of the Euclidian subject positions the omni-present “me” in a whole world that is, so to speak, rendered cinematic.

Projection: From Subject-Effect to Presence-Effect

The changing role and uses of projection are crucial here, because they underscore in multiple ways the relevance of rethinking the changing spatio-temporal configuration of the cinematic today from the perspective of the “me” within the encounter. Apart from its numerous connotations in debates varying from alchemy and geography, to philosophy and psychology, psychoanalysis and aesthetic theory, the notion of projection has been a recurrent point of reference in traditional film theory. There, Mary Ann Doane notes, this notion became “instrumental to the establishment of the opposition between internal and external, subject and object” through its linkage with the conception of both “representation” and “subjectivity.” (2009a: 160) For this fundamental reason, a few remarks seem in order so as to clarify the ways that, through projection, Body Movies interpellates the viewer-visitor differently from theatrical cinema, and thereby clarifies what happens in the latter encounter. Crucial to classical theories of cinema, in particular those known as apparatus or Screen theory, is the equation of cinematic with psychoanalytical projection. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, the latter is what the “projection room scrupulously reproduces.” (1986a, 286) According to this view, based as it is on Euclidian perspective, theatrical cinema produces “the subject’ as the active centre and origin of meaning.” (1986a: 286) The transcendence that this necessitates, however, is an ideological construction brought about by the black-boxed operation we call cinema. The camera’s monocural creation of “ideal” vision; the feigned multiplication of points of view through camera movement; the meticulous selection of images through decoupage and montage; and the restoration of the illusion of continuity of time and movement through projection: all
these devices work to conceal the fact that (theatrical) cinema lives off the negation of difference, which is effectuated through luminous projection.\footnote{108}

By its title alone, \textit{Body Movies} alludes starkly enough to cinema for a comparative probing. For if this work is affiliated with cinema, what precisely, then, is projected, and perhaps more importantly, where, how, and to what effect for the “me” of the participating viewer? Projection is there in the display of the gigantic portraits, in the bright layer of light that delineates the fluid space of the encounter, and in the casting of the shadows. Projection, incidentally, is also there inside the multiple-screen cinema on whose surface these portraits, lights, and shadows are displayed (that is, in the Rotterdam exhibition). Whereas the shadows abide by the causal chain of spatial analogy between the viewer’s body and the shadow it projects, the portraits – stripped from their background, and composed in random sets and sizes on the Pathé façade – overtly lack any such spatial continuity and duration. Accentuating the vertical stretch of the projective surface rather than its depth, they call attention to the scale of the viewer’s body in relation to the size of the images, on the square, in-between other tall and monstrous buildings within the city at large. This is how \textit{Body Movies} both resonates with and responds to cinema. Although it can be argued that all projected and blown-up images have this quality, its potential is taken to the extreme in \textit{Body Movies}. This is underscored by the random play with the sizes of the portraits that differ in each set of projections, hindering any mapping of scale in terms of a fixed distance. (see fig. 3.3)

\textit{Body Movies} is not the first installation to both acknowledge and gloss traditional cinema. In making the viewer’s body-image part of the installation’s interface, \textit{Body Movies} draws on a rich tradition of interactive installations and responsive environments, with pioneers like Peter Campus’ \textit{Interface} (1972, see fig. 3.4), Dan Graham’s \textit{Present Continuous Past(s)} (1974, see fig. 3.5), and Myron Krueger’s \textit{Videoplace} (1975, see fig. 3.6). Like these works, \textit{Body Movies} extends the viewer’s physical body through projection, so that it becomes part of the installation’s (audio)visual in- and output. It departs from these earlier examples, however, by not treating the relation between body and projected body-image as a bi-location.\footnote{109} This is how Erkki Huhtamo characterizes the “experience whereby the body seems to be in two places simultaneously,” one grounded in physical presence, the other operated through remote control. (1995) Instead, the shadows primarily serve to gauge space in relation to the time and movement of the participating viewer, at once spatializing his/her body on-screen and stipulating the importance of the space of the in-between.
In activating the space of reception, *Body Movies* forces us to rethink a deep-seated disorientation caused by the “trauma of scale” (Doane, 2009b: 65) and the arguable dematerialization of the moving image through luminous projection: its “larger than life” appearance, its (lack of) indexical grounding, its event-like status, and its dependence on the illusion of movement and light itself. The fact that the dematerialization of the image – especially in its classical-cinema incarnation – is seen as controversial, states Mary-Ann Doane, has to do with cinema’s struggle with a fundamental undecidability about the location of the image. This is what disorients the viewer in terms of time, space, and vision. Doane writes:

> the screen intercepts a beam of light, but the perception of the moving image takes place somewhere between the projector and screen, and the temporary, ephemeral nature of that image is reaffirmed by its continual movement and change (2009b, 152)

Whereas classical cinema can be seen as an attempt to resolve this disorientation by domesticating scale from within, thus providing “an abstract space populated...
by virtual bodies,” *Body Movies* explicitly abandons the screen/frame paradigm. Instead, it confronts the anxiety of dematerialization associated with luminous projection head-on by resuscitating the body as a measure of scale and materiality. In doing so the work operates much in line with the so-called para-cinema of the 1960s and 70s of, for example, Anthony McCall and Paul Sharits. Body Movies differs from these works, however, in its displacement of the encounter from the gallery to the augmented space of the city, thus offering new ways to inhabit an already existing physical space and epitomizing an urban milieu that is frequently encountered.

![Fig. 3.4 (left): Dan Graham's Present Continuous Past(s) (1974); Fig. 3.5 (middle): Peter Campus' Interface (1972); Fig. 3.6 (right): Myron Krueger's Videoplace (1975)](image)

By engaging the viewer’s body in its mobility and linking it to the malleability of its projected body-image and those of others, *Body Movies* intimates a conception of projection as something embodied (“here”) rather than abstracted, lived (“now”) rather than figuratively inhabitable. Crucially, projection here is located in as well as operated by “me.” As a theoretical object, then, *Body Movies* forces us to rethink cinematic projection along the lines of embodiment. I use the term embodiment here largely to capture the sense of “presence” or being-in-the-world that arises from our corporeal engagement with a given environment. It thus refers to the common way we encounter our everyday world, in real-time and in real-space, while being embedded in it. Rather than a property of a thing – a physical reality, a body, a technology – embodiment is a property of interaction, a participatory status that precedes the body, any body, as spatialization precedes space. It exists not prior to relations, but it is the substance of those relations, produced between the body’s corporeal capacities on the one hand, and the environment where it operates on the other. With embodied interaction as a generative principle, the viewer’s body and the environment of the installation can still be recognized as separate entities, though it must be acknowledged that they can never be fully understood apart from this figurative third, which is embodied interaction. In this context Phillip E. Agre speaks of the interactionism (as opposed to
mentalism) between human experience and a given technological (in his example computational) environment. Interactionism, he states, is “more than the study of interaction; it is, more fundamentally, the use of theoretical categories (units of analysis) that are defined in terms of interaction.” (Agre 1997, 53; emphasis in text)

Projection would be one of those theoretical categories. Understood as such it refers to our (pre-reflexive) corporeal opening towards the world via perception, in real-time. It is through this, rather than solely through psychic or unconscious mechanisms, that we make the world part of our bodies, spatially, and through this our body-image is reciprocally transformed. Such a conception of projection means that our orientation in space is no longer a fixed point of reference in relation to a horizon or vanishing point but a ubiquitous “here,” a being all over the place, just as the temporal vector is no longer past-present-future, but a perpetual “now.” Important for our purposes here is that this sense both of “here” and “now” emerges from and contributes to the sense of “me” that is tied to the viewer’s embodied interaction with the installation’s responsive environment. Within such an environment, states Elsaesser in a somewhat different context, perspective still survives – not in the form of infinity, but rather as ubiquity, here simply understood as the “pure presence as felt space” inherent to the unlocatable omnipresence of the technologies of vision that valorize our being-in-the-world. (2009a)

Therefore, through close engagement with Body Movies as my interlocutor, I propose the following generalization regarding the notion of projection vis-à-vis the positioning of the “me” within a given cinematic environment. It is more productive to contemplate the cinematic in terms of the presence Effect it produces in the viewer, the “me” within the encounter, than in terms of the subject-effect it is said to fabricate. In the following section I will address this presence-effect produced by Body Movies and argue that it is intimately tied to the thickened time of the encounter, thereby justifying its classification as cinematic.

Presence and the Temporality of the Event

In the discussions on mediated environments, presence is often defined as the subjective experience of “being there,” commonly understood as the “perceptual illusion of non-mediation” during a technologically mediated experience. (Lombard and Ditton, 1997) According to this view, presence is provided by suitable technologies – often associated with notions like immersion, perceptual realism, and interactivity – that allow for a narrative, physical, or social involvement with
a mediated world.\textsuperscript{96} I do not wish to draw on this understanding of presence here, however, because it builds on an ontological view that, like the discussions on luminous projection described above, is firmly rooted in Cartesian dualisms between mind and body, between subjective and objective space, despite its emphasis on the relation between them. An alternative, and philosophically more grounded view of presence can be found in several more recent reflections on imaging technologies, and in particular on computation, that favor the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1977) and the ecological psychology of J. J. Gibson (1986) as points of reference.\textsuperscript{97} Presence, here, is understood not in reference to metaphysics but as being within reach, tangible with our bodies, of what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has referred to as the “materialities of communication.”\textsuperscript{98}

Reacting against a specific epistemological fixation of the humanities on interpretation, described as the “identification and attribution of meaning,” Gumbrecht traces the rise of what he calls the hermeneutic field to the transition from a medieval cosmology to the subject-object paradigm of the Renaissance and early modernity. (2004: 21) This transition, he states, corresponds with two major changes. First, men were no longer perceived to be part of God’s universe, but rather were considered to be eccentric to the World, which incidentally also included the human body. Second, the human being was conceived of as a purely intellectual, and above all disembodied, self. Known as the subject-object paradigm, this new form of self-reference, states Gumbrecht, defines the relation between human and world along two axes that together are constitutive of the hermeneutic field. The first axis is that of the subject, the eccentric, disembodied observer within a material world; the second is the act of interpretation, where the subject extracts knowledge from the surface of the world to establish the underlying truth. (Gumbrecht, 2004: 8–20). In Gumbrecht’s view, systems theory brought about a major crisis in this epistemological worldview, as it gave rise to a growing awareness to the infinity of renditions, dependent on the angle of observation, as well as to a rediscovery of “the human senses as integral point of any world observation.” (2004: 39) Yet the subsequent struggle with the incompatibility of experience (understood as world-appropriation through concepts) and perception (understood as world-appropriation through the senses), states Gumbrecht, has come at a great price. This price is the loss of, first, any non-Cartesian, non-experience-based type of world reference, and, second, of the dimensions of perception, most notably in Heidegger’s reaffirmation of the materiality of Being. (2004: 21–49) Both structuralism and constructivism can be seen as attempts to overcome this double loss; but the subsequent alternation between the two approaches resulted in a kind of
circularism, which has not brought us back in touch with the world. This being-in-touch-with-the-world is what I am interested here, and is what my understanding of the presence-effect brought about by the cinematic refers to.

Presence, here, is tied to action, or to be more precise: it is tied to the perception of the possibilities for actions, or affordances, that emerge from the environment where one is situated.\textsuperscript{99} Originally coined by J. J. Gibson (1982 orig. 1977), the term \textit{affordance} was appropriated to the field of human-machine interaction by Donald Norman (1990), who used it in reference to only those possibilities for action perceptible to the viewer, the “me” in question. As a projectable property, then, presence – understood as the perception of self-existence, of “me” – arises from the embodied interactions afforded within a given environment, in real-time and real-space.

As I have argued in the introduction to this study, drawing on the writings of Mary Ann Doane, Gilles Deleuze, and Vivian Sobchack, the cinematic offers our lived body a specific way of being-in-the-world that is set apart by its potential to thicken the present in the process of negotiation between a technologically produced and a corporeal habitual time and space. This potential, in my view, is not unique to one specific viewing situation, i.e., theatrical cinema, nor is it tied to one material carrier, i.e., the film-strip. In fact, I would argue that a focus on presence intimates a different conception of materiality, one that is much more in synch with the cinematic project as a whole, as it picks up precisely where the fear of the dematerialization of the image associated with luminous projection has left us: at the loss of the image’s indexical grounding in a material object – be it celluloid or, as in the case of the optical toy, in the “afterimage.” The title of Gumbrecht’s treatise, \textit{The Production of Presence}, suggests as much. Besides noting that presence refers to that which is “in reach of and tangible for our bodies,” the author further explains that

\begin{quote}
if \textit{producere} means, literally, “to bring forth,” “to pull forth,” then the phrase “production of presence” would emphasize that the effect of tangibility that comes from the materialities of communication is also an effect in \textit{constant movement}. (2004: 17; second emphasis added)
\end{quote}

Crucial for our view of how the “me” is entangled in these processes is Gumbrecht’s insistence on tangibility as \textit{effect}. The production of presence, of being in touch with the world, that is induced by media technologies thus has a spatial as well as a specific temporal dimension: it refers both to physical closeness and to
the process of emergence. For if tangibility is something that is effectuated by the “materialities of communication” and cannot be fixed in time, then materiality must be understood as something other than mere objecthood. Put differently, the idea of presence intimates a conception of materiality as process, as a coming into being, a “becoming.” More specifically, materiality then refers to the specific ways in which sound and imaging technologies manifest themselves physically to the participating viewer in the event of the encounter. Following this line of reasoning it can be argued that the cinematic, as an experiential category, emerges when the thickness of time becomes tangible to our bodies in the event of our encounter with sound and imaging technologies.

How, then, does this happen in *Body Movies*, and how does this relate to the perception of self-existence, of “me,” that it allows? To answer this question it is important first to establish what kind of environment *Body Movies* constitutes. Key to the embodied interaction afforded by *Body Movies* is the technological possibility to monitor, track, and display digitized information in real-time. I have addressed the theoretical ramifications of the concept of real-time in the previous chapters; here it seems important to briefly consider the technical side. Interaction with the work can only take place in real-time, and the real-time principle is one of the technological imperatives of its mixed reality. The installation is operated by several surveillance cameras that monitor and track the matching of shadows and portraits, as well as by three network computers: a camera server, a video tracker, and a robotic controller. These are used to process and feed back this information to the participating viewer on the square. Feedback occurs by means of, first, the projected shadows; second, the blackouts that occur when all portraits are matched; and third, a midi-signal, a jittery tapping, rhythmic yet unpredictable, with a logic seemingly dictated by speed and volume. The more portraits are matched by shadows, the faster the clicking goes, accelerating and every so often decelerating its speed, vaguely hinting at the volatile monitoring of human motion.\footnote{100}

The real-time imperative thus refers not only to the interaction between the viewer’s activated body and the reactive interface of the installation, which takes place in real-time. It also refers to the installation’s ongoing algorithmic transformation of data, drawn from and fed back into the work’s overall environment, and dependent on a dynamic system of feedback between the situated viewer and the context-aware interface. Its operational logic is one of process and communication, made possible by the massive increase in computational power and the expansion of contexts in which they are put to use. In the digital event, carefully
defined by David Rodowick as “any discrete alternation of image or sound data at whatever scale internal to the image,” (2007: 167) sounds and images have no spatial unity, nor do they have a unique duration. Instead, they are modulated, transcoded into discrete and variable bits of information that are constantly degenerated and regenerated when put on display.

In a slightly different context, Wendy Chun has referred to this temporal mode as the enduring ephemeral of digital information: its ongoing process of degeneration and regeneration, passing and repetitive. (2008) Thus, despite the installation’s unambiguous references to the praxis of cinema – which are present in the work’s title, its use of projection, and its initial display on the façade of the Pathé cinema – *Body Movies* explicitly departs from classical cinema’s dependence on photographic (i.e., spatial) indexicality, or the trace, as the contested ground of the real. In its place another form of indexicality is foregrounded: a temporal indexicality that intimates real-time monitoring, tracking, and display as the new (but by no means less contested) ground of the “real.” While the prevalence of the spatial index in classical cinema is closely linked to the archival order of modernism, marked by its desire to record and document the “external world” and an obsession with the possibility of archiving time itself, the temporal index meets the demands of today’s relational paradigm. Informed by the logic of computation, by systems theory and cybernetics, the relational paradigm is governed by a self-referentiality that is inherently time-critical, invested in the present, and oriented towards future events.

*Body Movies*’ reliance not only on the technologies but also on the rhetoric of real-time surveillance – cumulating in what Thomas Levin has called a form of surveillant enunciation – suggests as much. (2002) Rather than addressing a world at a distance, and interpellating the participating viewer as at once “here” and “elsewhere,” the installation engages us in a perpetual present that emerges from the dynamic conjunction of seeing, anticipating, and responding, and of being seen, processed and fed-back to ourselves. Media-artist and critic David Rokeby has discussed this specific feedback quality of real-time media in terms of its potential to refract, rather than reflect, our self-image to ourselves. This quality, in his view, lies at the heart of their potential to establish a dynamic-dialogue between the self and the world, between the participating viewer and the surrounding media-infused environment that surrounds him. (1995)

The image of self-existence refracted to the viewer in *Body Movies* is one of a self that emerges in its embodied encounter with other entities, both sentient and non-sentient. *Body Movies* explicitly underscores both forms of relationality. First,
it interpellates the viewer not as singular but as “being singular plural,” in the phrase of Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), as being-with, part of a community, interchangeable with others, but a “me” nonetheless.

Like the experiments with illuminated surfaces at World’s Fairs and other grand expositions, and those staged in nineteenth-century cities that aimed at demonstrating the omnipotence of electricity as a new form of energy (Canogar, 2004), the illuminated façade in Body Movies unveils an at times equally invisible though by no means imperceptible energy. This is the energy, not only of omnipresent media technologies, but also of what Villem Flusser has described as the city as an intersubjective field of relations, where the self emerges only in its embodied encounter with other entities (2005). It is through our interaction with images of strangers – both as portraits and as shadows, the one relayed, the other more or less immediate – that the “me” is revealed, interpellated if you like, as a constitutive part of a complex network of mediated interactions that make up the city at large.

This is accentuated by the actions afforded by the installation: the matching of portraits and shadows, and the playful interactions between the shadows themselves. Taken on the streets of Rotterdam, Montreal, and Mexico City, the portraits neither suture nor mirror a “ beholder” placed at distance. Instead, they first and foremost serve to establish a relation between the viewer and the local-global urban city-dweller, the other self of the visitor on the square. This is emphasized by the fact that the portraits only become visible in the viewer’s reflection, his or her shadow, offering an asymmetrical portraiture in which the viewer becomes one with him- or herself as a stranger. Likewise, the playful interactions among the projected shadows underscore the relationality between the participant’s own projected body-image and those of other viewers.

Much in line with the participatory art experiments of Fluxus and the Happenings of the 1960s and 70s, the installation celebrates public space as a site of experimentation, and creates an audience where none had seemed to exist. Scott McQuire has referred to this social dimension of Body Movies as a technically enhanced version of what Richard Sennett has called “playacting”: a form of social role-playing among strangers that generates a sense of public culture within an otherwise anonymous city. (Sennett, 1977; McQuire, 2008) What becomes tangible to our bodies is the simultaneous and reciprocal presence of others. “Me,” that is, cannot exist in isolation.

Second, the perception of self-existence, of “me,” afforded by Body Movies underscores the viewer’s interconnectivity with the technologies of vision that
valorize our being-in-the-world. “The self-image,” writes Rokeby, “is the known reference against which the phenomena of transformation are witnessed.” (1995) Yet the refracted self-image in *Body Movies* is an image of the self from the point of view of someone or something else, a vantage largely dependent on the non-sentient technologies that feed back our self-image to us. This presence-effect is produced, in particular, at the dynamic junction of what I earlier described as the “the processes of seeing, anticipating and responding, and of being seen, processed and fed-back to ourselves.” Important for our purposes here is that action, in *Body Movies*, is contingent on anticipated environmental response. Or, to phrase it differently, the embodied interaction afforded by *Body Movies* is governed by the projected body-images the viewer anticipates seeing or hearing in real-time. Time is thus made perceptibly thick in the event of the encounter. This links the notion of presence explicitly to the temporality of the event, described by Doane in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* as “the most condensed and semantically wealthy unit of time.” (2002: 141)

The cinematic and the event stand in a peculiar relation, as the former is often considered to provide the technological means to capture, tame, or structure the contingency of the latter. This also holds true for live coverage on television and real-time surveillance, especially in the event of a catastrophe. A striking example, coming from the realm of media art, is Wolfgang Staehle’s solo exhibition “2001,” which was on view at Manhattan’s Postmasters Gallery from September 6 to October 6 of that year. A follow-up on his Warhol adaptation *Empire 24/7* (1999-2004), the exhibition comprised three real-time video renderings of different – and supposedly eventless – locations: the Fernsehturm in Berlin, Comberg in Baden-Württemberg, and the skyline of lower Manhattan. Needless to say, the camera of the latter fortuitously witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

What this grim coincidence makes evident, Lee Rodney points out, is that surveillance is the formal complement of disaster. Or, to phrase it differently, more in line with the discussion above: surveillance makes (the potential of observed) disaster tangible to our bodies, even when it is not captured “on tape.” For even then it is there in each “tragic moment, rendered over and over again”: absent yet anticipated. (2005: 39) Even though *Body Movies* is less complementary to catastrophe than the example mentioned above, the implication of the observation made by Rodney and others, namely that the event of our encounter with real-time media is subject to contingency and hinges on anticipation, holds equally true for *Body Movies*, even if real-time surveillance here is put to use for self-reference.
In Doane’s view of the event, no event is possible without a “me.” For the event “is a deictic marker of time, a ‘this is happening, this is taking place.’” (2002: 140) It is a pure indicator, a pure assurance of existence. As such it is resistant to meaning. It is that which is unassimilable. Writing about the actualities of early cinema in particular – i.e., films in the tradition of Lumière that, to quote Tom Gunning, place “the world within one’s reach” (1990: 96) – Doane maintains that the cinematic is marked by its aspiration to capture and store the “real-time” of the event, and as such, to archive presence. But like trauma, Doane insists,

the event somehow persists, in a semiotic limbo, as a kernel of the real that awaits only a second event whose collusion with the first generates readability. In a sense, any event is by its nature that which is unassimilable, that which resists meaning, that which like the index, serves primarily as an assurance of the real. (2002: 140)

In *Body Movies*, the “captured” event and the event of capturing and display are folded into one thick temporality that, together with the event’s inherent futurity, makes the thick time of the event itself perceptible to our bodies. The tension between structure and contingency here still exists in the unattainable “now” of the event itself and in the absent presence of a future, anticipated but not yet there. And if we consider the event as a deictic marker of time, as Doane suggests, then the perceptibility of its thickness afforded by *Body Movies* necessarily affects our perception of self-existence, of “me.” It thickens our being-in-the world, postulating a sense of self, of “me,” in its relationality, interconnectivity, and co-dependency on the environment in which it operates. Moreover, the temporal excess of the event vis-à-vis an emphasis on embodied interaction intimates a third and final condition of the “me” in our encounter with the cinematic that I wish to address here: the experience of agency through the perception of boundaries, or limits. I will therefore address the experience of agency in *Body Movies* in the third and final section of this chapter, and relate it to the intensification of the sense of “me” that the installation conveys.

**The Experience of Agency**

The notion of experience has been a central concern throughout this study, a point of departure upon which the valorization of my classification of the cinematic
depends. I have referred to the cinematic as an experiential category, an encounter, a lived environment. I have also alluded to here-ness and now-ness as the terms on which the lived experience of the cinematic is grounded. In all these accounts, I have used the concept of experience neither in reference to the personal or the subjective, as in “subjective experience,” nor in reference to a fixed form, a past tense, a representation. Rather, I have used the term to refer to the cinematic as it is lived, as a chronotope, “at the edge of semantic availability.” (Williams 1977, 134) I have thus referred to experience as event, or rather, to the event-ness of cinematic experience.

To consider experience as event requires us to consider being as emergent. It intimates a performative understanding of being as becoming. One way to frame this emergent quality of being is through the writings of Deleuze. Being, in Deleuze’s vision, cannot possess or presuppose itself, as we are made up of (time-space) relations. It is in, or rather, of these relations embedded in experience that subjects are constituted. Experience, then, refers to the a-subjective and impersonal “milieu which provides the capacity to affect and be affected,” Inna Semetski summarizes. It is rendered meaningful to us only if we grasp the difference embedded in the said experience, “thereby transcending the faculty of perception beyond the ‘given’ data of sense impressions.” (2005: 91–92) Deleuze invokes the term singularity to indicate the condensed event, or “a decisive point and a place where perception is felt in movement,” which allows for the world to be perceived as, at once, infinitesimal and infinitely. (Conley, 2005: 255)

What sets apart the cinematic, Elsaesser has convincingly argued, is its potential to offer an extreme experience, or rather, a limit experience or an experience of limits that enables recovery from extremes. (2009c: 297) Drawing on the writings of Walter Benjamin in particular, Elsaesser suggests that there are “three kinds of ‘limits’ that are the conditions of possibility of the cinematic experience as *Erlebnis* always at the edge of *Erfahrung*: the body as limit, time as limit, and agency as limit.” (2009c: 298) Whereas I have attended to the first two kinds of limit experiences in the previous two chapters, when addressing, respectively, the intensified “here” of the projected body-image in the Warhol exhibition, and the intensified and thickened “now” of trauma and affect of handheld aesthetics, here I focus on the intensification of the “me” that is afforded through the “conjuncture of affect and agency” in *Body Movies*. (2009c: 297)

What, then, does it mean to experience agency as limit? Elsaesser confronts this question by drawing on examples mainly from narrative cinema, suggesting
that the limit experience of agency is above all enacted through the action-hero of post-classical Hollywood cinema. He meets the limits of experience head-on, often through an excess of action and bodily exposure, habitually depicted as spectacle; through catatonia (he's either undead or mentally troubled); and through a “failure of experience” as such, here understood in terms of trauma. The latter limit experience is especially indicative of a more general mode of contemporary spectatorship, Elsaesser writes, a “new mode of Erlebnis without Erfahrung” that is not only symptomatic of our encounter with the media-infused environments we inhabit today, but has in fact become the default value of technologically mediated experience. (2009c: 308–309) For, Elsaesser writes,

“Successful” immersion in this environment would have as its correlative a “traumatic” mode of spectatorship, by which I mean the kind of flexible attention and selective numbness that absorbs the intermittent intensity of affect, the shallowness of memory, the ennui of repetition, the psychic tracelessness of violence which constant contact with our contemporary mediatised world implies. (2009c: 309)

Although the cinematic environment that Body Movies constitutes is different from the theatrical narrative cinema referred to by Elsaesser, his observations regarding the conjuncture of affect and agency hold equally true for Body Movies. For, what is Body Movies if not a hyperbolic “larger than life” version of precisely the kind of environment saturated with media-experiences he seeks to describe?

Capitalizing on our skills and experiences in dealing with the now unavoidably familiar, media-infused world that surrounds us every day, Body Movies challenges these skills and experiences by conjuring up an alternate “world” – in part physical, in part virtual – that is governed by its own set of rules. The affective impact of the installation, I contend, is precisely grounded in the participating viewer’s unfamiliarity with these rules, or if you like, with the untried contract of the encounter in which he or she is challenged to improvise, negotiate and evolve a system of practice of embodied interaction with the work. Experience here hinges on experiment, on improvisation. For rather than constituting an unchangeable object for public display, Body Movies remains in process for its full duration, an infinitely half-finished product, emergent in its encounter with the viewers who engage with it. In this the work draws on a central tendency within twentieth-century media art to engage the viewer as an active participant in aesthetic creation.
As we become more familiar with the rules of engagement, or others like it, improvisation may give way to repetition, playfulness, or even – at its worst – lack of interest. While familiarity with the encounter’s contract or protocol may well dull the sharp edges of the desires and anxieties associated with the event, as a form of literacy that comes with the passing of time, such familiarity also makes it more difficult to grasp how these encounters (continue to) affect our sense of being-in-the-world, of “me.” A compelling association can be made with the incubation time of a film like *Memento* (Nolan) released in 2000, or the first season of the television series *Big Brother*, broadcast in the Netherlands in 1999. The initial impact of both was largely caused by their invitation to an unprecedented contract, in the first case of the viewer unfamiliar with the film’s cognitive switch, in the second case of the participants unaware of the impact of their behavior on a growing audience of viewers. Once familiarized with the cognitive switch of the reversed narrative in *Memento*, or with the desired (i.e., profitable) behavior in *Big Brother*, comparable films and television had less of an impact and were not as successful. Such diminishment did not occur because their initial principles ceased to exist or ceased to affect us; on the contrary, these principles have become so commonplace and we have become so used to (though not unaffected by) them, that they are now almost invisible. This highlights the importance of the historicity of the event and the contemporaneity of the encounter, an analysis of which, I contend, gives insight into the ways that the cinematic, in its various constellations and each time anew, affects our sense of being, or coming being, in a world where sound and imaging technologies are ever more pervasive.

Whereas experience is linked to experiment, agency in *Body Movies* is contingent on possibilities for action afforded by the work. In discussions of multimedia forms, the concept of agency is often placed alongside that of interactivity, which in turn is habitually conceived as a technological formal property. Drawing on a long philosophical tradition, the concept here is tied to notions like volition, freedom, and intention, and therewith to a coherent sense of individual identity. In the more recent debates, however, as for example in those inspired by Bruno Latour’s reflections on technological mediation, agency is a trait no longer considered particular to humans. (1994) For Latour, agency is always hybrid and distributed, formed in the alliance between human and nonhuman actors. Here, as in much poststructuralist philosophy, Katerine Stiles and Edward Shanken maintain, “the centered, autonomous, humanist subject ceases to exist as subject *qua* sub-
ject.” This is so because the perception of self-existence, of “me,” according to this view, “is always already constructed as a social entity in relation to technology.” (2011) Or, to phrase it more in line with the terminology used above, our sense of agency is contingent on affordances or, if you will, on the performativity of the environments in and with which we engage, to the extent that these environments demand conformity, which they do by setting limits to the possibility for actions.

Important for our purposes here is that agency is thus perceived not so much as the freedom to act but rather as the faculty to act. Agency, as the faculty to act, must not be mistaken for freedom: there is no possibility to exert meaningful action when there is total freedom, for total freedom implies chaos. David Rokeby’s reflections on his own interactive sound installation Very Nervous System (1986-1990) are salient here. Very Nervous System is an audio-environment, in which various video cameras, imaging processors, and computers, as well as a synthesizer and a sound system are used to create a space where the movements of the participant’s body are interpreted and fed back to the interactant as sound and/or music. To grasp the implications of this, it is worth quoting Rokeby at some length:

In the early days of Very Nervous System I tried to reflect the actions of the user in as many parameters of the system’s behaviour as possible. I worked out ways to map velocity, gestural quality, acceleration, dynamics, and direction onto as many parameters of sound synthesis as I could. What I found was that people simply got lost. Every movement they made affected several aspects of the sound simultaneously, in different ways. Ironically, the system was interactive on so many levels that the interaction became indigestible. People’s most common response was to decide that the sounds from the system were not interactive at all, but were being played back on a cassette deck. I found that as I reduced the number of dimensions of interaction, the user’s sense of empowerment grew. (Rokeby, 1997)

Rokeby’s reflections thus underscore Elsaesser’s suggestion that agency is only experienced when (if!) it is recognized as such through the experience of its limits. Seeing one’s “volition” materialized through the projection and movement of one’s body-images in Body Movies, which in fact is the experience of agency through limitation, thus arguably increases the engagement of the viewer on the square with the installation, with others, and with the world at large. Action here is consid-
erected meaningful to the extent that it “change[s] (or affirm[s]) the way viewers see, understand, and act upon the world.” (Stiles and Shanken, 2011) In this process, which I earlier identified as experiment, consciousness always lags behind the body, because it is first and foremost through affect that limits are experienced, i.e., they are lived through. The conjunction of affect and agency increases interrelation – in the sense of both inter-subjectivity and inter-connectivity – through synecdoche, and thus invokes an intensified sense of “me.”

Elsaesser’s insistence on trauma as a way of mastering the exposure to extremes raises another issue, namely that of the relationship between experience, event, and narrative, that primary mode of classical cinema, so thoroughly sidetracked or ignored in Body Movies. Reminiscent of what Noel Burch (1991) has called the punitive ending of early cinema – in which the catching and beating of the tramp or voyeur announces the film’s ending – the patting, teasing, hitting, and kicking that is typical of the viewer’s interactions with the projected shadows, foreground a desire for narrative closure in an encounter marked by an overstimulation of the senses and an abundance of affect. (see fig. 3.7-3.18) Here the point of reference is thus once more early cinema, which Maxim Gorky in his 1896 review of the Lumière brothers’ cinematograph appropriately described as the kingdom of shadows. “It is not life but its shadows,” he wrote, “It is not motion but its soundless specters.” (1896)

Conjuring up the motif of the doppelgänger, Body Movies, like these early cinematic encounters, invokes a tension between our living bodies and their technological double: not dead, but not quite alive either. This brings home to us Doane’s discussion of the curious merger of structure and contingency that marks the cinematic event. For the true element of chance in our encounter with the real-time interface of Body Movies is the self-same observed observer on whose refracted self-observation that interface depends. Catastrophe, in the event of live-coverage associated with death, is here linked to the undead, or rather to the fear of being halfliving, perhaps best described as a fear not of distributed agency, but of becoming the distributed agency of “something” else. Yet, rather than threatening and emptied out, the relation between body and double in Body Movies is immediate and playful. In it, the work revitalized the figure of the Rube, described by Elsaesser elsewhere as the simpleton spectator of early films like Uncle Josh at the moving picture show (Porter 1902) and Sherlock Jr. (Keaton, 1924). This is the stock figure who – dwelling in ontological confusion – grasps at the images mistaking them for real. Like these early films, Body Movies promotes “a form of spectatorship where the spectator watches, reacts to and interacts with a motion picture,” yet unlike
in theatrical cinema the viewer of *Body Movies* does so without “remaining seated and still.” (Elsaesser, 2006: 213) We become the Rube, not in (usually) his naiveté or illiteracy, but rather in our attempt to cope with a more profound philosophical-ontological ambiguity regarding our own position in a world increasingly made up of images.

The punitive mode of interacting, thus, can be seen as an attempt to overcome a resistance to meaning in the face of an abundance of affect: a search for narrative, for a closure to make the event of the encounter “readable” to the viewer. It is at once invested in a now that is unattainable and in a future that is not there, anticipated yet unknown, a “something about to happen” endlessly reiterated in the present. There lies its ambiguous narrativity. It is a narrativity

*Fig. 3.7-3.18: Body Movies’ Rube, probing narrativity. Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam, 2001.*
probed and explored, but one that does not add up to story. The same holds true for the participating viewers who end up playing wheelbarrow or puppeteer. (see fig. 3.19-3.22) Legibility marks presence as time-out-of-joint; hence the formulation, here and in the previous chapters, of presence as unattainable. There is no closure to presence.

In sum, as a site for experimentation, *Body Movies* disarticulates the present and intensifies the event of our encounter with real-time sound and imaging technologies. Rather than leaving us powerless before the sound and imaging technologies that surround us, *Body Movies* returns the participating viewer his or her agency in the form of this narrative probing. Through this probing the self emerges – not in the classical sense as a coherent subject, but rather as intensity, a coming being. This is what the thickening of the “me” in *Body Movies* amounts to: a condensed and concentrated “me,” encapsulated by restriction and empowered through a “traumatic” mode of spectatorship.” A “me” for whom the perception of self-existence is inseparable from the perceived necessity to relate oneself to the world and to others. It is me, but I can’t do it alone.

*Fig. 3.19-3.22: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s Body Movies. New Zealand International Arts Festival, Wellington, 2008.*
Situating Cinematic Presence: Me

In this chapter I have used *Body Movies* to assess the thickening of our perception of self-presence, of “me,” that in my view characterizes our encounter with the cinematic today. After a brief consideration of *Body Movies* against the backdrop of the discourses on and practices of cinematic three-dimensionality, I have argued that *Body Movies* breaks away from a Cartesian conception of space. This conception is anchored in the tradition of Euclidean perspective and has been secured via the gamut of modern technologies of vision, i.e., from the photographic lens “engineered to produce perspectival vision,” (Lister, 2005: 39) to the “perspectival grid” of computer graphics (Manovich, 2001: 254). *Body Movies* leaves this conception behind first and foremost through its lack of pictorial “depth,” and through a systematic breakdown of the so-called privileged point of view, resulting in an adaptable dispersion of omniscient perspectives that are reinscribed into the many eyes/ I’s of the installation’s interface. Through the use of shadows, moreover, the installation emphasizes the viewer’s body as the locus of his or her projected body-image, thus forcing us to rethink projection as emanating from and pointing back to the body, from and to “me.” In doing so *Body Movies* challenges us to reassess the cinematic in terms of the tangibility or presence-effect it produces, and opposes the classical understanding that cinema is to be organized around the subject as a self-contained entity, outside of time and at a distance from the world viewed.

What becomes tangible to our bodies in our encounter with the cinematic, I have argued through my analysis of *Body Movies*, is an intensified sense of self, a “me” interrelated with other entities, both human and non-human, and co-dependent on the environment in which it operates. Our encounter with the cinematic is necessarily embodied, and interactive, I have suggested, as our perception of self-existence, of “me,” is largely dependent on our corporeal engagement with our environment. In *Body Movies* this intensification is achieved mainly through the usage of real-time technologies, as well as through the viewer’s anticipatory engagement with the installation in real-time. *Body Movies*, I argued, coerces us to rethink the cinematic as a lived environment that affords certain actions while prohibiting others. Cinematic experience here hinges on experiment, which becomes most clear by looking into the historicity of the event, and the contemporaneity of our encounter with the cinematic, in its various constellations, each time anew.

A focus on presence, I have further argued, intimates a different conception of materiality, and therewith of the material condition of the cinematic, because
the effect of tangibility, or presence, is one of constant motion. It is inherent to our encounter with the cinematic as event, or to the event-ness of cinematic experience. What distinguishes our encounter with the cinematic is its potential to make the event-ness of mediated experience perceptible to our bodies. The linkage between our embodied interaction and the temporal excess of the event led me to address a third and final condition of our perception of self-existence, of “me,” besides projection and presence, and that is the experience of agency. I argued that our sense of agency in the encounter with the cinematic is contingent on the possibilities for actions afforded by a given work. Agency, in other words, is perceived through limitation and partially distributed to the technologies of sound and vision with which we engage. In Body Movies, these limitations, I have suggested, are affectively lived through by way of a failed and therefore traumatic attempt of self-narrativization, a narrative probing, in which participating viewers engage with their own technologically mediated doubles and those of others, in an attempt to gain narrative mastery in the face of an abundance of affect. Closure, however, is unattainable.

The sense of self that emerges through this encounter with the thick time of the cinematic in Body Movies, therefore, is that of a “me” that does not exist in isolation, but comes into being in dynamic conjunction with its environment. This thickened, intensified “me” differs both from the self-enclosed unified subject of classical cinema and film theory and what is arguably the bi-located subject of early installation art, as well as, philosophically, from the post-humanist, post-Lacanian subject for whom the ideal of a self fully knowing and embodying itself is put into doubt. It also competes with the Deleuzian schizo-subject or other “dispersed” subjects, whose radical instability disrupts any notion of self-presence. The thickened and condensed “me” that emerges in the encounter with the cinematic is at once singular and plural, mobile and fleeting, embedded and embodied, distributed and intensified.