Cinematic chronotopes: affective encounters in space-time
Hesselberth, P.

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Coda

Flash Forward

In this study I have made a case for analyzing the chronotopes of the cinematic as affective encounters in space-time. I have argued that, while the site of cinema is on the move, the extent to which technologically mediated sounds and images continue to be experienced as cinematic today is largely dependent on the intensified sense of a “here,” a “now,” and a “me” that they convey. This intensification, I have suggested, is fundamentally rooted in the cinematic’s potential to intensify our experience of time, to convey time’s thickening, of which the sense of space or place, and a sense of self or self-presence are the correlatives.

We are in a better position to understand the extended habitat of the cinematic and the bearing it has on the viewer, I have argued, if we approach the cinematic as a lived environment that affords certain embodied interactions while prohibiting others. It is in the encounter that the thickness of time becomes tangible to our bodies, and that the fleeting image of that thickness emerges from that body. The encounter is thus inherently synesthetic, affect-laden, and it entails all kinds of cognitive and interpretative processes that cannot be disentangled from the event of the encounter itself. A focus on the encounter, I have demonstrated in chapters one, two, and three, therefore intimates a focus on the dialogic relationship between the participating viewer and the concrete cinematic environment he or she inhabits. To study this dialogic relation I have proposed the paradigm of a bodily-spatial deixis, the notion of the chronotope, and the deictic terms “here,” “now,” and “me.”

Cinematic chronotopes can be encountered in different kinds of settings and on various kinds of platforms. Each require their own in-depth analysis. In this study I have addressed three such spatio-temporal configurations: a multi-media exhibition featuring the early avant-garde films of Andy Warhol in chapter one; the handheld aesthetics of European art-house films in chapter two; and a large-scale interactive media installation in public space in chapter three. None of these
configurations, I have shown, can be considered as a self-enclosed entity, because each necessarily partakes of a much larger lived environment, that of our contemporary media-saturated world. Moreover, they all reflect on the viewer's own viewing and/or mediating position within this network of mediations from which there no longer appears to be an outside position available to occupy.

In my attempts to think through the terminology used to describe my cases, and to develop a conceptual toolbox to analyze them so as to do justice to the theoretical challenges they put forth, I have often placed the cases in opposition to classical theories of film that elaborate cinema's theatrical viewing situation, in particular to those pertaining to classical (Hollywood) cinema. The cases discussed, I contend, call for such a comparative probing precisely because of their resemblances to and significant differences from classical cinema. Insofar as my cases can be called post-cinematic, in the sense that they both resemble and differ from those of so-called classical or theatrical cinema, I have argued, they are also suggestive of the survival of the cinematic within a world increasingly made up of technologically mediated sounds and images.

By way of synthesis, and conversely, in this Coda, I will revert to some examples of contemporary mainstream Hollywood cinema, as a way to expound on the artistic as well as the theoretical implications of the paradigm shift that I have elucidated in this study. Drawing, once again, on an extreme example, i.e., the innovative use of the trope of the flash-forward in mainstream Hollywood films, I will argue that the model of analysis I have developed, using examples that significantly differ from what transpires in classical cinema, is equally apt to illuminate our encounter with contemporary post-classical Hollywood films that are commonly described in terms of their narrative complexity. This is so because, from the viewpoint of a bodily-spatial deixis, each encounter with technologically mediated sounds and images in which the thickening of time becomes tangible to our bodies and affects our sense of self-presence and agency can be considered a cinematic environment. This is also the case when that encounter is organized, once more, around an arguably immobilized viewer in a darkened auditorium watching a “single-channel” linear narrative film. In fact, I would argue that being seated while watching is part and parcel of the embodied interactions afforded by feature-length films such as those under consideration here.

Like the 1990s, the first decade of the 21st century saw the release of several films that are decidedly self-referential about time and invoke a sophisticated media-literacy on the part of the viewer. In these films past, present, and future are often portrayed as highly mutable domains that can easily be accessed, erased,
(re)designed, or modified. Examples include films such as *The Source Code* (Jones, 2011), the main case-study of this Coda, as well as *Inception* (Nolan, 2010), *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie, 2009), *Next* (Tamahori, 2007), *Deja Vu* (Scott, 2006), *The Butterfly Effect* (Bress & Gruber, 2004), *Paycheck* (Woo, 2003), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004), *Minority Report* (Spielberg, 2002), *Donnie Darko* (Kelly, 2001), and many more. As theoretical objects, these cases stand out for the ways they deploy their own artistic potential to foreground, articulate, and conjure up critical thought about their own temporality and the modes of existence they afford. These films can be called post-classical to the extent that they resist classical modes of cinematic storytelling in favor of what Warren Buckland has called “puzzle plots,” i.e., they are films in which the “arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing.” (2009: 3)

In many early reflections, these films and others like them were often placed against the backdrop of classical modes of cinematic storytelling. Their narratives have thus been referred to as “non-linear” (Isaacs, 2005), “parallel” (Smith, 2001), “disordered” (Denby, 2007), “circular” (Villella, 2000), “forked” (Branigan, 2002), “networked” (Bordwell, 2002), and “episodic” (Diffrient, 2006). In the recent discussions, however, a number of scholars, in a more thought-provoking vein, have opted for a terminology that defies such a normative view that sets off these films against cinematic narrative proper. They introduce notions like the “mind game film” (Elsaesser, 2009b), “modularity” (Cameron, 2008), “narratography” (Stewart, 2007), “the cinema effect” (Cubitt, 2005), or a “data base aesthetics” (Manovich, 2001; Kinder, 2003), or consider the films against the backdrop of what they refer to as the “neuro-image” (Pisters, 2011), “cinematic complexity” (Poulaki, 2011) and “post-cinematic affect” (Shaviro, 2010). Such terms speak to different aspects and workings of the films, but they all suggest, in one way or another, that we need to come up with ordering principles other than – or at least in addition to – narrative if we want to come to grips with the complexity of contemporary cinematics and the kind of viewer engagement it demands. Here I have proposed the deictic terms “here,” “now,” and “me” as one such alternate ordering principle, which I will now bring to bear on one of these Hollywood films, *The Source Code*. 111

In chapter one I showed that the multi-media exhibition’s ambulant visitor and its expanded cinematic site prompts us to readdress the tension between the situatedness and mobility of the viewer, as well as the reversals of “inside” and “outside” of the image, its framing and unframing – in short, what I have called the destabilization of the figure-ground relationship between image and world. Here I will argue that *The Source Code*, and by extension many of the aforementioned
films, similarly renegotiate the tension between situatedness and mobility, framing and unframing, figure and ground, image and world, via the film’s multiple plots, its take on the embodied interaction, and its suggestive play with the paradox of higher-order observation.

The “performed immediacy” of handheld aesthetics addressed in chapter two, in turn, I argued, challenges us to rethink our engagement with cinematic time on grounds other than that of past, present, and future, of linearity and logical coherence, as it draws the viewer into a disjointed and multifaceted “now” that is beset with the time of affect and trauma. It is my contention here that, despite the much-theorized differences between European art-house films and mainstream Hollywood cinema, differences that cannot (and need not) be disregarded, the innovative usage of the flash-forward in the aforementioned films fulfills a significantly similar function, albeit by different means. Moreover, like the interactive media installation addressed in chapter three, the film, I will demonstrate, compels us to confront our encounter with the cinematic in terms of an embodied interaction and a distributed sense of agency, thus further destabilizing a view of the cinematic based on a strict separation between spectatorial and representational space.

Like most of the aforementioned films, Duncan Jones’ *The Source Code* quite explicitly challenges us to rethink our encounter with technologically mediated sounds and images in terms of a bodily-spatial deixis by way of its particular mediations of time, space, and embodied agency. The film centers on Capt. Colter Stevens, a decorated US Army helicopter pilot, played by Jake Gyllenhaal, who is forced to relive the last eight minutes of someone else’s life just before being blown up by a bomb on a commuter train, over and over again. Initially unknowingly, Stevens partakes in a military experiment called Source Code, a complex contraption that allows him to enter the body of Sean Fentress, a schoolteacher from Chicago, in the last eight minutes before his death. His mission is to obtain information to prevent a possible future terrorist attack. The premise of the film is simple: each time Stevens re-enters the body of Sean Fentress on the train, a parallel universe is opened that ceases to exist when Stevens/Fentress dies – until, eventually, he doesn’t.

The film, like so many of these mind game or puzzle films, opens *in medias res*. Stevens/Fentress awakes on the train. He doesn’t know where he is, how he got there, or who his fellow passengers are, even though they appear to know him. His state of spatial and temporal disorientation mirrors that of the viewer,
who equally is denied reassurance about his or her whereabouts within the filmic diegesis. Stevens’ anxiety grows even greater when he catches glimpses of his reflection in the train window and restroom mirror and realizes, as does the viewer, that his projected self-image does not match the reflection that he sees, for he sees Fentress (see fig. 4.1). This is the beginning of a mise-en-abyme of bodily projections that ends at Cloud Gate, the gigantic sculpture that Stevens/Fentress encounters towards the end of the film, set in Chicago, designed by Anish Kapoor, and known for its warped and multiplied refractions of the city scape as well as of the visitor’s projected body-image. Or arguably, it ends at (or begins with?) the viewer’s own projected body-image, which, though unobservable to him or her in the encounter, is nonetheless there (I will return to this issue shortly). Seconds later a bomb explodes.

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Fig. 4.1 (left): Stevens/Fentress in the mirror. The Source Code (Duncan Jones, 2011)

A myriad of images pass by, including the first of many flash-forwards to Cloud Gate, before Stevens awakes for the second time in what appears to be a flight capsule, grim and claustrophobic. (see fig. 4.2) Once again he is spatially and temporally disoriented. He is hanging upside down, a recurring motif in many of these films. He has no knowledge of where he is, no recollection of how he got there, and no recognition of who is talking to him via the small screen and audio signal. His only memory is of being under siege in Afghanistan. It takes some “rotation adjustments” and a “pattern recognition” procedure before Capt. Stevens can identify the person talking to him as Capt. Goodwin (Vera Farmiga), who refers
to her location and unit as Beleaguered Castle. The remainder of the film is spent shifting from scenes of Stevens/Fentress on the train, continually reliving his last eight minutes; of Stevens in the capsule, tormented by existential questions, as well as by Source Code's continuous physical assault on his body; and of Goodwin, in what appears to be a media control-room at Beleaguered Castle, growing ever more sympathetic towards Stevens' personal quest.

How, then, does the film challenge us to address our encounter with the cinematic in terms of an intensified “here,” “now” and “me,” and how does the concept of deixis help us understand this challenge? It is significant for my view as laid out in this study that the film attends to the relation between situatedness and mobility, embodiment and projection, image and world, quite literally, through the main characters’ explicit and repeated references to their bodies’ presence in space in terms of a “here.” For example, when Stevens awakes in the capsule for (what appears to be) the first time, he states: “I was on a mission, I was flying, and then I woke up on a train…. Now I am here. I need to be briefed.” When Goodwin later informs him that he has actually been present as Stevens/Fentress on the train, in a parallel universe, he skeptically answers: “No, no, I am right here, you are talking to me, right now.” Moreover, when Goodwin tells him during another debriefing that, in fact, only his brain still remains active, he incredulously asks, while looking at his body: “What about the rest of me? I can see my hands and my feet, they still move.” Yet Stevens does not only refer to his own presence and whereabouts in the capsule in terms of a “here.” When he is sent back on the train for the third or fourth time, Stevens/Fentress utters in aggravation to Christina, one of the other characters on the train: “You’re still here.” And Goodwin, too, repeatedly refers to her immediate surroundings as “here,” for example when she states, “Out here, the clocks only move in one direction,” or when she contrasts her presence-to-the-world to that of Stevens, declaring: “What you experienced was a shadow. It was the afterimage of a victim on a train. This is real life, here.” To which Stevens, incidentally, cynically answers, “The one where you are talking to a dead helicopter pilot?”

Each perceived environment thus emanates from and points back to a body, a concrete material existence, here/now/me, whether the environment is referred to as “just a manifestation,” (Stevens in the capsule) “a shadow,” an “afterimage” but “not a simulation,” (Stevens/Fentress on the train), or “real life,” and a “parallel universe” (Goodwin at Beleaguered Castle). In fact, the film works towards a disintegration of classifications such as “real,” “virtual,” or “illusionary,” in favor
of a view of the “here” of the encounter as necessarily augmented, punctuated, and rescaled. In chapter one I used the terms augmentation to indicate the collision between physical and mediated timespaces; punctuation, to refer the viewer’s presence in this augmented space as at once situated and ambulant and thus intensified; and rescaling to stipulate the disintegration of an “inner” and “outer” perspective on this place/space once the body is reinserted a measure of distance and proximity, presence and absence, situatedness and mobility.

This is underscored by the fact that, on plot level, the film does not discriminate among the various environments. None of its realms are distinguished as being more or less real or illusionary than the others. The capsule is repeatedly transformed in front of our eyes, as is Stevens’ presence in it. At times it looks big, at other times cramped; sometimes Stevens is fixed and seated, at other times he can walk around; at one point he wears a t-shirt, the next moment he is fully dressed in his military uniform. (see fig. 4.2-4.3) Likewise, on the train, events are continually re-wound, re-lived, fast-forwarded, altered, or frozen, while characters break up into pixel-like glitches, produce uncanny mirror-images, or die a dozen deaths. And even Goodwin’s “real-life” environment cannot be considered as such the moment we learn that she continues to exist in what is now, and was perhaps all along, a “parallel” universe. However, regardless of the scale of (technological) mediation involved, each perceived environment is always actual from the point of view of the person or persons observing it, “here.”

Fig. 4.2-4.3 Stevens in the capsule.

Three “heres” converge first and foremost in the figure of the participating viewer, Capt. Colter Stevens, whose existence on the train appears to emanate from his non-actual existence in Source Code (the capsule), which in turn emanates from and points back from his wired and mutilated body at Beleaguered Castle. Without Stevens’ body, environments cease to exist, as in the event of his death, first in Afghanistan, then many times on the train, and eventually also at Beleaguered Castle. Significantly, Stevens aptitude to observe is based on his abil-
ity to distinguish between his own “being alive” and “being dead,” his presence and absence to the world, from a position which can perhaps best be described as being undead, or not dead but not quite alive either. This distinction is the prerequisite for all of his (and our) observations, yet throughout the film it remains unobservable and incommunicable to him. Even though he is the only character who can observe the various environments from the perspective of his peripatetic and intensified “here,” he cannot observe himself as an observer, at least not in an act of self-transparency, and not while simultaneously observing himself as “being alive” elsewhere (e.g., in the capsule, on the train). It requires a second-order observer, Capt. Goodwin, to observe and reveal his undead body to us and, therewith, the operation of his observation. Yet her observation is dealt the same fate, as it too would require an even higher order of observation to become observable and communicable, for example by the viewer in the cinema or at home, ad infinitum.

In a very rudimentary manner, the film can be said to entangle us in a paradox that social systems theorist Niklas Luhmann considered to be inherent to all observation. To observe, in Luhmann’s theoretically dense and complex argument, means to distinguish and to indicate, i.e., to implement a distinction, and to indicate one side of this distinction in one single, simultaneous operation. Luhmann thus upholds a purely formal conception of observation that is not limited to consciousness, and goes well beyond the strictly optical or specular sense of the word. Important for our purposes here is Luhmann’s suggestion that all observation necessarily produces its opposite: by indicating something, something else is simultaneously excluded, concealed. What is concealed is not observation’s negative, or what Luhmann calls the “unmarked space,” i.e., that which lies beyond the frame of that which is indicated, like in our example Stevens’ “being dead” (absent) with which his “being alive” (present) is affectively charged. What is concealed in the act of observation, according to Luhmann, rather, is the frame of reference itself, the distinction utilized by the observer, sentient or non-sentient, whose own observation remains unobservable to him-, her-, or itself in an act of self-transparency.112

By re-entering the distinction between presence and absence, real and illusionary, actual and virtual, into the film’s plot in the form of Stevens’ undead present-absent, real-illusionary, actual-virtual body, The Source Code thus actively engages the participating viewer in Luhmann’s paradox of observation. Via an exploration of this paradox the film slots its viewer into its mise-en-abyme-like structuring of the “here” of the encounter, in which neither viewer nor representation is held in place. According to Luhmann such a communication of paradoxes is productive,
precisely because it “fixes attention to the frames of common sense, frames that normally go unattended.” (2002: 81) This is what keeps a system dynamic and open to transformation. Thus even if we were to subscribe to classical film theorist David Bordwell’s claim, on the subject of puzzle films, that their “[n]arratives are built not upon philosophy or physics but folk psychology, the ordinary processes we use to make sense of the world” (2002: 90), we cannot but acknowledge that the film’s narrativity serves precisely to “deframe and reframe the frame of normal thinking, the frame of common sense.” (Luhmann, 2002: 81)

How, then, does this expansion of the cinematic material into the thickened “here” of the encounter intersect with the thickening of its “now”? As I have argued in this study, what is deframed in our encounter with the cinematic today is a framed view on the cinematic image itself (as window, threshold, or mirror), as it is reframed in and through the body, through affect. This brings me to a second paradox introduced by The Source Code, pertaining more directly to the fragment-ed, multiple, and disconcerting “now” that it negotiates, namely the paradox of the flash-forward. As Sean Cubitt has pointed out in his reflections on what he calls the neoclassical cinema of the 1960s, historically, flash-forwards are rare in cinema, because, he writes:

Future events cannot be thought, much less displayed, without betraying the secret of narrative cinema: that everything is either pre-determined (the film plays to its end) or nonexistent (the film breaks down in projection), in either case removing motivation from the diegesis. (2005: 212)

The use of the flash-forward in cinema thus produces a paradox in the sense that the conditions of its possibility are on par with the conditions of its impossibility. This is so, Cubitt suggests, because “in cinema the future has either already been written – the script preexists the film – or, bluntly, does not exist.” (2005: 211) The future, thus, is the unmarked space that lies beyond the frame of that which is indicated, but with which the event-ness of our encounter with the cinematic, in my view, is nonetheless affectively charged.

Contrary to Cubitt’s observation, today, the trope of the flash-forward is a particularly widespread phenomenon in mainstream Hollywood, and beyond. Its innovative usage unites all of the aforementioned examples, and links them to a series that carries its name, Flash Forward (which ran from 2009 to 2010). In fact, the trope has been so popular since the turn of the millennium that it has
led media scholar Richard Grusin to argue, only a few years after his renowned publication with Jay Bolter, that now *premediation*, not *remediation*, is the primary underlying logic of technologically mediated sounds and images within today’s media-saturated world. (Grusin, 2004; Bolter and Grusin, 1999) To support his argument Grusin draws both on news footage from the dawn of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and on Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report*, in which so-called precogs, evolved human beings that have the extraordinary capacity to see and project the future, are exploited to prevent future crimes from happening.

It is because of its paradoxical operation, I contend, that the flash-forward can help us demonstrate most clearly that it is no longer tenable to think of our encounter with contemporary Hollywood films in terms of linear, or consecutive time, but, rather, that this encounter needs to be reconsidered as beset with the time of affect and trauma. My thesis demands that the flash-forward, which one would assume entails a “thinning” along the reversibility of the arrow or line of time, in fact entails a thickening of time. To explain how this works, it seems useful to draw, briefly, on another, more condensed example of the usage of a flash-forward, which is the opening sequence of Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), starring Robert Downey Jr. (Sherlock) and Jude Law (Watson).

Once again the film opens *in medias res*. Two horse-drawn carriages chase through the night; a man rushes through labyrinthine passageways; there are bombastic music, rapid cuts, and many close-ups. Then: silence. Sherlock has entered a building. He pauses for a moment when he spots a guard, contemplating his attack. As he leans back, in utmost concentration, his voice-over recites: “Head cocked to the left, partial deafness in ear: first point of attack.” The image cuts to an extreme slow-motion shot of the first blow, a flash-forward (or is it, now, a flashback?). The sound is now nearly completely turned off, except for a thunder-like clatter that accompanies the blow, and a decelerating high-pitched tone that calls attention to the physicality of its impact. “Two: throat; paralyze vocal chords, stop screaming.” Another jolt. “Three: got to be a heavy drinker, floating rib to the liver. Four: finally, drag in left leg, fist to patella.” Two more close-ups of fists striking in slow motion follow, accompanied by more rumbling. “Summary prognosis: unconscious in ninety seconds, martial efficacy quarter of an hour at best. Full faculty recovery: unlikely.” The image then cuts back to Sherlock, leaning against the corridor wall. The sound his cloak makes is amplified as he covers up his face. As the guard reaches the corridor the music swells again. One, two, three, four, and the guard is down on the floor. Sherlock picks up the man’s hat and lantern and disappears, running into the night.
Significantly, the flash-forward here is forcefully presented through the use of 3D sound effects and slow motion. As I have indicated in my reflections on the fear and desire of cinematic three-dimensionality in chapter three, the deframing instigated by the use of Dolby Surround Sound contributes considerably to (the discussion of) the annihilation of the screen as threshold, and therewith to the demise of the Euclidian subject, as 3D sound refigures the cinematic as a realm of constantly moving centers with no unifying subject to speak of. As I have argued in chapter one, moreover, slow motion can be seen as the temporal equivalent of the close-up, the affection image par excellence, because it abstracts the image from the spatiotemporal coordinates of the diegesis and presents it as an entity in itself, thus, to speak with Cubitt, “removing motivation from diegesis.” What the usage of the flash-forward in *Sherlock Holmes* makes explicitly clear, and tangible to our bodies, is the simultaneity of mapping out time and mapping with time that is inherent to our encounter with the cinematic today. Although it can be said that this is the case for all cinematic images, its potential is taken to the extreme in the flash-forward. This is what makes this figure an exceptional theoretical object.

The flash-forward cannot be caught in any one moment. To the extent that we can even speak of a flash-forward we can do so only by virtue of the film’s further narrative unfolding, at which point the flash-forward becomes a flashback. At once revealing the film’s pre-scripted-ness and requiring the viewer to rerun it through the logics of a retroactive causality, the film – if only momentarily – draws us into a temporality that is other than that of linear causation. It reveals the emerging quality of each encountered (moving) image by drawing us into a discontinuous, multiplicitous, and thickened “now” that is intimately linked to both past and future, but which nonetheless takes shape in the present, where it resists localization. It is this emergent, wavering temporality that is indicative of the film’s narrative thrust.

In *The Source Code*, the flash-forward is most clearly introduced in the film’s final sequence, when Stevens has managed to create a sustainable parallel universe from which he sends a now unknowing Goodwin a text message that informs her of a bomb explosion that has been averted before the actual occurrence of the event, thus turning the whole film, with hindsight, into an extended flash-forward masquerading as a flashback; a view of the present from the perspective of a memory of a future that doesn’t exist. Cubitt draws on philosopher of science Mauro Dorato, who refers to this position as an “empty view of the future.” Dorato explains that, “the essence of the present event is, not that it precedes future events, but that it quite literally has nothing to which it has a relation of precedence.”
Cubitt stresses that according to Dorato, therefore, “this view is best suited for mind-independent theories of becoming.” (2005: 211)

Yet the trope of the flash-forward has already been introduced much earlier in the film, through not only the figure of Cloud Gate but also through Stevens/Fentress’ many reentries on the commuter train, which alternately function as a flashback and a flash-forward for Stevens as well as the viewer. Because of his aptitude for observation, and his ability to build up new memories, Stevens’ knowhow of the situation on the train accumulates, and this helps him to anticipate and change “the future” with mounting accuracy, to the point that the event of the explosion itself turns out to have been nothing but a diverted future, a flash-forward. Significantly, as in Zusje, repetition here is conflated with revision, as well as with habit, recollection, and excess. This kind of conflation has prompted media scholar Patricia Pisters to argue, in direct relation to the innovative usage of the flash-forward, that contemporary cinema is predominantly based in what Deleuze calls the third synthesis of time, which she describes as “the time of (endless) serial variations and remixes of pasts and presents,” and to which Deleuze refers as “the repetition of the future as eternal return.” (Deleuze, 2004: 90; here in Pisters, 2011: 106) This is what governs the flash-forward’s peculiar relation to the future: an “empty view of the future” that presents itself as a “repetition of the future as eternal return.”

It is through the limitation imposed on us in our encounter with the cinematic that this inherent futurity becomes tangible to our bodies. The encounter, which is in fact a mode of embodied spectatorship, therefore, can be called traumatic, not so much because the film portrays a traumatic event, i.e., of Stevens who is forced to relive his death over and over again, but rather because it negotiates a sense of self, of “me,” in relation to a mediated “here” and “now” that is no longer necessarily knowable, as it is perceived from the point of view of a future anticipated yet not there, except as a promise of an eternal return. The film thus underscores Elsaesser’s claim that a traumatic mode of spectatorship might very well have become the default value of cinematic experience today.

This brings me to the third and final aspect of our encounter with the chronotopes of the cinematic that I have addressed in this study: the intensification and thickening of “me.” As we have seen, The Source Code attends to the loss of the screen as a protective shield against living-presence, as a threshold that separates what is seen and heard from the viewer’s identity. It challenges us to rethink projection as emanating from the body, as located in and operated by a “me” that is at once situ-
ated in and mobilized by the “here” and “now” of the encounter. Significantly, this “me” becomes tangible to Stevens only in his encounter with others, like Goodwin at Beleaguered Castle and the passengers on the train, and only by means of the technologies of sound and vision, that is, Source Code, that valorize his being in the world. His being is a being-with, in the sense of both being with others and being with technology.

From the outset, Stevens is seen as becoming one with himself as other, a condensed and thickened “me.” This becomes most clear when he confronts Fentress’ reflection on the train (see Fig. 4.1), a motif that bears a striking resemblance to the viewer’s engagement with the projected portraits in Body Movies. In fact, Stevens has no perception of self-existence, of “me,” outside his mediated encounter with others through Source Code, despite the presence of his body at Beleaguered Castle; his sense of self-presence is wholly dependent on his being part of a complex network of mediated interactions with other entities, sentient as well as non-sentient.

Stevens only gradually learns the conditions under which he can perform his tasks, and as to why he is the only “viable candidate” for his observations. He has died in Afghanistan, and the military are using the memory capacity of his brain in the afterglow of his death. He is, quite literally, a body without organs: a brain, in a head, with only half a trunk, held in a container, on life support, and physically connected to Source Code via a number of tubes, wires, and data streams. (see Fig. 4.4) He is the catatonic (re)action-hero of post-classical cinema about which
Elsaesser writes: he is haunted by a traumatic “failure of experience,” in the most radical manifestation of it, namely his death. Only when he overcomes his initial resistance to this fact does he regains his sense of agency, at which point he starts referring to himself as “the new me.”

The film thus precludes a vision of the cinematic in terms of a unified, coherent subject-position, as Stevens’ “subjectivity” is dispersed across the multiple flexible networks of the many mediated worlds he observes, while nonetheless being situated and singular in its very multiplicity. It is from the point of view of this renegotiation of the sense of self that we can also understand the significance of recurring figure of Cloud Gate, the odd bean-shaped sculpture made up of transforming mirror surfaces that Stevens comes across in the film’s final sequence, after he has managed to create a sustainable universe in which he survives as Sean Fentress. Stevens/Fentress faces the sculpture twice, once while standing in front of it, and once while passing through it. The first image shows Stevens facing Fentress at the center of the sculpture’s fish-eye exterior with the whole of Chicago in the background, centered but not unified; the second shows Stevens/Fentress in a vertigo of refractions in the interior hall of mirrors, his reflection undistinguishable from those of his fellow city-dwellers, yet clearly projected from his situated bodily presence. (see fig. 4.5 & 4.6)

Yet the true moment of surprise in The Source Code comes not so much when we learn that all we have witnessed so far has not yet taken place and never will, nor necessarily when Goodwin discloses Stevens’ mutilated body, but rather, when the film reveals to us, while still concealing, how Source Code has in fact observed Stevens, Goodwin, and the world at large. This moment occurs just before Goodwin decides to help Stevens by “uploading” him one last time into Fentress' body on the train before unplugging his undead body from the machine. In the brief conversation that follows, we observe Stevens sitting on the capsule’s flour, his back turned to the little screen that contains Goodwin’s talking head. Throughout
the conversation, Goodwin looks straight into the camera, seemingly at him. When Stevens asks Goodwin to send him back in, he resolutely turns to face Goodwin on what appears to be the other end of the screen/webcam. “I’m asking you,” he utters insistently, “I’m asking you. Send me bacin. Then switch me off.” (see fig. 4.7-4.10) Yet, rather than the anticipated reverse-shot over Goodwin’s shoulder facing Stevens on screen, we are confronted with an elongated close-up of the webcam itself, an image that has recurred throughout the film from various angles, but up until then has never faced us directly. (see fig. 4.11)

The image cannot be attributed to Goodwin’s point-of-view, nor to anyone else’s for that matter. It is not looked at by her, but looking at (at her, at the diegetic world, and arguably out of the diegetic world, at us). As the image tilts down to the screen she has been facing from the beginning, but which has been blocked from our view by her presence, we realize that all it contains are words, a chat history saying

I’m asking you. I’m asking you.
Send me back in.
Then switch me off.

This is how Goodwin has observed Stevens all along, as a chat, a brain scan, a pulse, a temperature, an oxygen level, as data-bits and data-bases amid live-streamings of the world “out there.” (see fig. 4.12 & fig. 4.10)

Even more important than this revelation is its implication, i.e., the realization that Stevens does not so much observe via Source Code, but rather as source
code: whatever we have seen him “see” up until then – his presence in the capsule and on the train, the audio-tracks and pattern recognition program, the news footage that is fed to him, the image-feed of Goodwin’s presence at Beleaguered Castle – all is observable to him only as uploaded data, as algorithm. His entire perceptible existence is source code. And in this the true function of the depicted camera is revealed to us; its role is not to observe, nor to record, but rather to project. What it projects, media artist and critic David Rokeby states, are judgments based solely on quantifiable features, as an algorithm can only respond to and assess quantifiable data. This raises the question of what other kinds of tangible, artificial subjectivities the cinematic gives rise to. For, if projection can be described as the “pre-reflexive corporeal opening to the world” (as I have suggested in chapter three), and if the “empty view of the future” on which the flash-forward relies is indeed “best suited for mind-independent theories of becoming” (as Dorato insists, in Cubitt, 2005: 211), and if, moreover, cinematic chronotopes enable us “to enter into dialogue with autonomous affects in the system cinema” (as Cubitt concludes; 2005: 363), then it is possible, not to say necessary, to also address the forms of subjectivation that take place on the side of technologies of sound and vision themselves. Future studies will have to show what this kind of cinematic subjectivation amounts to and what it might tell us about the participating viewer’s own limits of self-knowledge, self-explanation, and self-presence within our increasingly media-saturated world.

Over the last two decades, cinema studies has sought to come to terms with the transformation, and what is arguably the loss, of its initial object of inquiry, cinema. I have demonstrated that it is productive to build on and rethink certain film theoretical notions such as time, movement, and scale (chapter one); authenticity, reflexivity, and corporeality (chapter two); projection, presence, and agency (chapter three) for the analysis of cases that by any strict definition do not belong to the category of cinema. Conversely, I have used these cases to stipulate the limita-
tions of such classical theories of film, e.g., their reliance on a strict segregation of spaces, on a unified self-enclosed notion of the subject, and on an essentialist understanding of the materiality, and therewith the specificity, of film. The Source Code actively contributes to these discussions via its negotiations of the (linear) time of narrative, of the position of the viewer, and of the different networks of mediation of which it partakes.

This study has been devoted to the search for new ways to analyze the cinematic within our increasingly media-saturated world in order to resituate the embodied subject. The key concepts I have introduced to rethink the cinematic through embodiment – the cinematic chronotope, the affective encounter, and the deictic terms “here,” “now” and “me” – provide a framework for such an analysis, which opposes the seemingly open-ended indeterminacy of approaches that focus merely on the radical eclecticism, the hyperconscious awareness, and the convergence culture of our time.

The notion of cinematic chronotope highlights the constructed character and interrelatedness of spatial and temporal configurations of the cinematic, while stipulating that it is with and through these configurations that we interact and give shape to our sense of self within our media-saturated world. A focus on the affective encounter redirects our attention away from the processes of sense-making (without refuting their relevance), towards the bodily-spatial aspects of our engagement with the technologies of sound and vision that valorize our being in the world. The emphasis on the three corners of the deictic triangle, “here,” “now” and “me,” is instrumental for rethinking our encounter with the cinematic in terms of the intensified sense of space, time, and being that it brings about.

This intensification, which becomes apparent in our encounter with the cinematic, makes tangible a more general (critique of the) “spatialization of time” that is a symptom of our cultural moment. Therefore it is not surprising to find such intensification across a wide spectrum of art practices, as well as in the discourses that revolve around them. Juxtaposing these practices and discourses by looking at what they have in common, this study contributes to bridging the gap between museum art and art-house cinema, between avant-garde and mainstream, between analog and digital. Moreover, my framework offers a way to overcome the limitations of classical film theory by opening up the debate to include concepts derived from theories of “new” media that are grounded in philosophy and critical theory. In doing so, it is my hope that my thesis offers a timely contribution to media-theoretical debates.