Summary

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. I have traced this thickening of time across four different spatio-temporal configurations of the cinematic that have traditionally been conceived as different from, or even antagonistic to, each other: 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; a large-scale interactive media installation set-up in public space in chapter three; and the usage of the trope of the flash-forward in mainstream Hollywood cinema in the Coda. Only by juxtaposing these cases by looking at what they have in common, i.e. intensified thickening of time that they share, I argue, can we grasp the complexity of the changes that the cinematic is currently undergoing.

In my attempts to think through the terminology used to describe my cases, and to develop a conceptual toolbox to analyze them in a way so as to do justice to the theoretical challenges they put forth, I have often placed these 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 maintain that they are also suggestive of the survival of the cinematic within a world increasingly made up of technologically mediated sounds and images.

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. For, 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 thus 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 notions of the chronotope, and the deictic terms “here,” “now,” and “me.”

The notion of the cinematic chronotopes helps clarify how, within our contemporary media-saturated world, technologically mediated times and spaces are transformed into constitutive categories of subjectivity via their intensification of the participating viewer’s sense of being “here,” “now” and “me.” Throughout the chapters, I have looked at the contested and contingent time/space/subjectivity configurations that the cinematic gives rise to, as well as at the mobile, fleeting, embedded, and embodied selves that the cinematic, para-cinematic and post-cinematic leaves us with, selves that are necessarily entrapped in (mediated) space-times, indeed can be said to exists of it. An emphasis on the three corners of the deictic triangle, “here,” “now,” and “me,” moreover, I maintain, is instrumental for rethinking our encounter with the cinematic in terms of the intensified sense of space, time, and being that it brings about. Deixis allows me to demonstrate coherently that the cinematic exceeds cinema and yet is still sufficiently central to our experience of time and being within our contemporary media-saturated world. My thesis, in this sense, can be understood to offer a different reading of the apparent paradox of the death of cinema and its proclaimed ubiquity.

In chapter one I look into the 2007 multi-media exhibition Andy Warhol: Other Voices, Other Rooms which took place at the Post CS building which offered a temporary home to Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. I argue that the multi-media exhibition’s ambulant visitor and its expanded cinematic site prompts us to readress 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. I argue that in the multi-media exhibition the “here” is at once augmented, punctuated, and rescaled through mediation. I use 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. In this thickened “here,” neither viewer nor representation is held in place. Nor is it necessarily possible, at least within our everyday media-infused urban environments, to occupy a place outside of this thick “here” that is the cinematic.

In chapter two I then look at the aesthetics of the handheld camera in European art house films of the 1990s to assess the thickening of the “now” that in my view is key to our encounter with the cinematic today. I argue that these films cultivate the “now” as their primary temporal marker through their suggested real-time recording that points towards the handheld camera’s propensity to shoot “as live.” This is enhanced by the spatial disorientation prompted by the camera’s constrained optical range, i.e., the fact that we seldom see beyond the subjective or otherwise restricted camera’s eye that stays in close proximity to the action. The result is a disorienting space-affect that puts the viewer in a state of anticipatory alertness, provoking a sensation of untimeliness that is comparable to the lack of spatial orientation caused by the camera’s limited point of view. What we are dealing with here, thus, is a type of film that disjoints time in certain ways, generating a sense of “now” that is ultimately inaccessible to the viewer – unless, I have argued, he or she navigates the films with and within the time of affect and trauma, a temporality that forces us to renegotiate our sense of self in relation to a potentially mediated here and now that are no longer necessarily knowable. It is by navigating the film with and within the time of trauma, I maintain, that we are challenged to renegotiate a sense of self in relation to a potentially mediated here-and-now that is no longer necessarily knowable.

Using Body Movies as my interlocutor in chapter three, finally, I consider the critical implications of the collapse of representational and spectatorial space for the “me” that emerges in the encounter with the cinematic today. I argue that 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, 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. 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. Finally, in the Coda, I have assessed the relevance of the proposed approach for the analysis of contemporary Hollywood films characterized by their complex narrative unfolding, their often affective appeal, and their reliance on the logics of retroactive causality. In particular I look into the use of the trope of the flash-forward in The Source Code (Jones, 2011), to explore the theoretical ramifications of the paradigm shift I seek to capture in this study for their analysis.

The cases I have chosen are extreme cases. I approach them as theoretical objects, in the sense that they actively contribute to the film-philosophical debates on the changing spatio-temporal configuration of the cinematic; they revisit some of the basic premises undergirding most classical film theories, such as perspectival vision, linearity, and subjectivity, and the related categorical oppositions of motion and stillness, real and virtual, cause and effect, body and mind. They are theoretical objects in that they are “brought into existence in the encounter between object and analyst, mediated by the theoretical baggage each brings to that encounter.” (Bal, 2003: 24) Yet, thoughout the chapters they also function as media-archeological objects, in the sense that they offer us a place to see from, a searchlight that allows for a critical and retroactive re-examination of cinema’s (pre)history so as to “overcome the opposition between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media.” (Elsaesser, 2004a: 75) In doing so, it is my hope that my thesis offers a timely contribution to media-theoretical debates.