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Film and Art After Cinema

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Preface

to the First Edition

Philo Fine Arts, 2012

... dans le miroir glacé de l'écran, les spectateurs ne voient présentement rien qui évoque les citoyens respectables d'une démocratie. (Guy Debord)

This book is about how film is disappearing from cinema. It deals with the decline of the cinema as a place to appreciate films – both industrially and artistically – and as a place that turned film into an autonomous social mode of perception, which distinguished it from all other forms of art for about 100 years. This is therefore also a book about films that were conceived for this specific place. It discusses films whose images were technically produced and reproduced in a particular way, which is why they shape our perception in a historically unique manner. Yet above all, this book also deals with films that already refer to a mode of perception beyond the space of cinema. The decline of cinema is taking place not only in a directly

economic and indirectly urban sense, in that traditional places for viewing films (and the corresponding architectural spaces) are disappearing. This would hardly be worth mentioning, since films continue to be produced (for a specific market, or none at all) and are simply shown elsewhere. This development is not new; it has been apparent since at least the early 1960s. What is new is that cinema is also declining in terms of the mode of perception that film owes precisely and exclusively to cinema: a cognitive space in which the viewer no longer observes, reflects on, or envisions reality, but – lost in time – *is compelled to perceive*. This social mode of perception is what I term *cinema*.

The decline of cinema is played out simultaneously at the movie theater and within the films themselves. Cinema is almost imperceptibly fading from films, which in turn are disappearing from cinema. This book is therefore about a social mode of perception that once constituted a particular historical manifestation of cinema. The technological and economic grounds for this development – cinema as a venue for viewing films is increasingly losing importance; changes in the leisure habits of society mean the social pact linked to cinema-going is becoming ever less relevant – have been described many times before and shall therefore not be dealt with again in this book. The decline of cinema can

be traced back to both societal reasons, with other leisure activities replacing the trip to the movie theater, and technological reasons, as leisure society began using other means to regulate access to film. First television, then new storage media for private use: VHS, later DVD, the internet, mobile devices, etc. However, as cinema declines – a decline which began as gradual destruction and will ultimately lead to cinema’s disappearance – not only are films being released that are meant to be viewed outside the cinema (in private as well as in public, on computer screens and as part of art exhibitions), they have also changed in appearance and in the way they are perceived. Cinema was intrinsic to film as a mode of perception. Film was once the visible expression of cinema, visualizing both it and the unknown world within it. Film structured social experience *through* cinema. How film is used, where and how it is shown, and the specific cultural practice of film all determine the way it is perceived.

Never have so many films been produced, never have so many films been available to us thanks to the internet and DVDs, and never have we watched as many films as we do today. Strictly speaking, this book is not about aesthetic appraisal, but about asking how film is produced, presented and perceived beyond the scope of cinema.

This book is less about the “death of cinema” than it is about the mutation and migration of films, for example the relocation of artistic film to the spaces of the art world. Therefore, this book looks at a development in which viewing film takes place outside the cinema, and at the consequences of this on its specific forms of appearance and presentation. Film has been acknowledged within the art world under conditions we did not expect. For a few films and filmmakers, this has resulted in unforeseen recognition and a new source of income. At the same time, this also has had an impact on how films are produced and perceived in this context. Any kind of institutional logic – that is, a system of discourses and values, of spaces and techniques – is inevitably mapped onto the films, onto their presentation and reception; it dictates what we perceive, what we think.

Therefore, this book is not about film as an art form considered from the vantage point of philosophical aesthetics, but rather about the current conditions under which films are created and shown. This book is a critique of the cognitive space we call cinema, which has occasionally allowed us access to an alternative mode of perception and a different existence; and it is above all a critique of the social and economic, architectural and technical conditions and formats – be they television, DVD,

internet, film festivals, exhibitions or museums – insofar as they structure our perception and determine how we view films and what we perceive of the world at present. Specific films (by Steven Spielberg, Andy Warhol, Douglas Gordon, and others), historical manifestations (experimental film, found footage, music videos, etc.) as well as a specific kind of institutional logic – particularly that of the art world – serve as points of departure. It is almost inevitable that certain generalizations will be made that cannot do justice to the individual institution, specific exhibition, museum, film festival, or, generally speaking, to the simultaneity of various practices. Some pointedly critical remarks may therefore be contestable from a film-historical or theoretical perspective. If cinema is in retrospect speculatively and emphatically understood as an autonomous mode of perception – a mode of perception presently in danger of being lost – then perhaps this is a result of us not yet having fully grasped what cinema once was. Furthermore, for the purposes of this book cinema is understood as a possibility, meaning that although indeed feasible, it is an always-unstable alternative to the gaze currently prescribed by the majority of television programs, film festivals, museums and exhibitions.

This book is the result of texts I have written and presentations and interviews I have given since 1995. Parts have been published in newspapers, magazines and books, as well as in the catalogues of the KunstFilmBiennale in Cologne and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. I would like to thank everyone who has encouraged the creation and publication of these texts. They were often contributions, or interventions made for a specific occasion. This concern for the present remains. References and footnotes are deliberately omitted for better readability. I wish to thank Jan-Frederik Bandel, Alexander Horwath and Stefan Ripplinger for their critical reading of the manuscript.

Preface to the Second Expanded Edition

StrzeleckiBooks, 2017

Two years after its publication in 2012, the first edition of this book was out of print. As no agreement on a reissue could be reached with the original publisher, I had to find another publishing house that could be convinced to continue the journey. This enabled – or even compelled – me to revise the texts in order to remedy any shortcomings I had allowed myself, due to impatience or lack of ability, and to expand on my understanding of the issues at stake based on the many new exhibitions and films I have seen, the countless articles and books I have read, and the myriad presentations and discussions I have witnessed since 2012. Upon its release I was convinced that this book could be discarded within two years, as it was thought to be a response to current events and would have lost its significance by then. Thanks to the many reactions to this book I was able to realize exactly what I had written, or at least had wanted to write; and this may now allow

me to delve more precisely into the questions I had already answered. This book was meant to be a critical intervention into the present; it was meant to bring about change, while being firmly rooted in the now. So why not tackle the matter again today, five years later?

Film and Art after Cinema advocates an emphatic concept of cinema and therefore mainly attempts to understand what cinema once was, to what extent it has changed us, and grasp what we might not yet have thought through to the end. The book deals with cinema not primarily as a semiotic system, but as a *cultural practice* in the process of disappearing, while the films themselves transform into new shapes as they are distributed beyond the cinema. This book is about both the migration of films from the cinema as well as the disappearance of cinema from film, hence it also explores how we perceive reality without cinema. As a consequence, this book is undoubtedly at times melancholy, but never nostalgic. It is always unfortunate when something that made life more meaningful, that allowed us to feel more deeply, is in the process of disappearing. Sometimes it becomes necessary to be conservative in order to preserve something – even if it's only in the form of an idea. The tone of these texts, therefore, oscillates between polemic opposition and ironic absolutism.

To my surprise, it was people who manage cinemas who rejected this book the most. Opinions and figures were brought to my attention to demonstrate that film and cinema were not faring all that badly. Therefore, while some accused me of “cultural pessimism,” others felt I had a lack of “love for cinema” (which usually entails dealing with films uncritically). Against the backdrop of a “post-cinematic reality” (Manfred Hermes), it is more necessary than ever to defend cinemas against those who manage them, as well as against those who no longer find them essential for showing films. This book is concerned with establishing a deeper comprehension – socially, historically, media-theoretically – of cinema and the new institutional and medial typologies that are currently formatting films with their inherent logics and specific techniques. These observations are intended to contribute to the better understanding and assessment of the accelerated aesthetic, social and technical changes with regard to the moving image. How does the reformatting of film beyond the cinema modify the way we perceive both it and the world?

Since the release of the first edition of this book, the correlation between the emergence of a new subjectivity and the decline of cinema in post-industrial societies has become ever more apparent

to me. The compulsion to perceive that cinema's particular media technology exerts upon the individual establishes a link to reality (or rather, it forces one). This link is currently being replaced by a new understanding of the self and an altered role of subjectivity, not only when dealing with culture and technology. Increasing privatization and mobility of viewing, the trend towards limitless networks emerging on the internet, and the participatory and interactive references to and between images in general all point toward a subjectivity that individually shapes and regulates – that is manipulates – an external reality. Cinema, on the other hand, has stood for a predominantly passive, cognitive connection to an unfamiliar and inaccessible reality. For this new subjectivity, however, practically nothing seems impossible or inaccessible. It is reflected in the technological developments of digital media as well as in the rationales and practices of new institutional typologies, which are formatting and regulating access to images even as it becomes an expression of them. This comprehensively changes our understanding of external reality, thereby also our notion of the normalizing power of facts and objects, which are then no longer an equal opposite to subjectivity. In short, the decline of cinema is accompanied by processes happening in post-industrial societies,

which are having to readjust their approach to reality, meaning both their communicative bases as well as, in a narrow sense, their democratic constitution. Although there is no direct causal correlation between the emergence of a new subjectivity (from the “independent” appraisal of art to populist opinions in the political sphere) and the disappearance of cinema from films and in the handling of films, there is a social and technological connection that we are only now beginning to understand.

Apart from the unchanged preface to the first edition, all texts have been significantly expanded and altered. Even though there aren’t endless ways to “say something,” I took this opportunity to enhance the sentences representing my central ideas; the text has been freshened up, yet the song remains the same. As can be seen from the table of contents, all chapters now have proper titles, replacing the rather dry numbers from the first edition. The intention is to provide clearer orientation and structure, but by no means should it invite you to read the chapters individually. The term “film” is consistently used for technical moving images, irrespective of whether they are analog or digital or of where they are shown; exceptions to this rule are clearly marked as such in the text.

Many of the insights at the heart of this book would not have been possible without the

International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. I would like to thank Carmen Strzelecki, who has accepted the challenge to reissue this book, Jan-Frederik Bandel for his diligent editing, and everyone who has supported me over the years. I regret that my friend Klaus Behnken, who enlightened me so much during the past 25 years, has passed away too early to read the revised edition and discuss it with me. This book is therefore dedicated to his memory.

Oberhausen, March 2017

Cinema is Disappearing from Films

The market, which created the commercial distribution of films, has up to now determined what film is. This fact, among others, distinguishes film from the arts. It is therefore more than likely that the current changes in the distribution of films, which in all probability will bypass the movie theater, will impact both the films' aesthetic design as well as their social significance and our mode of perception. These films will look different and they will be perceived differently. They will have nothing in common with films as we have known them. This change will not be noticeable as a rupture; it will not be evident within the films. Instead, it will happen almost invisibly. Stories will continue to be told; some that deeply impress us and others that bore us. But film has also always been more than just the story it tells us. It has always represented a

piece of alternative reality, perceived in and through cinema. In that moment when I watch a film at home instead of at the movie theater, where I am compelled to perceive, the film is something else: the other.

From an economic standpoint, cinema is no longer relevant, says American film producer James Schamus; cinema is dead. In the future, distributors will release their products to the audience more or less simultaneously in cinemas and on digital platforms. Cinemas are thereby confronted with increasingly shorter theatrical windows. Anybody wanting to learn how the current cinema industry is faring is more likely to find this information in the newspaper's business section than in the culture pages. Per capita, an average of one and a half visits per year were registered in Germany in 2015, meaning there were a third fewer visitors to cinemas in the first fifteen years of the new millennium. Movie theater attendance in Germany dropped from roughly 800 million admissions in the 1950s to roughly 121 million in 2016. Movie theater attendance in Germany dropped from roughly 800 million admissions in the 1950s to roughly 121 million in 2016. Higher admission fees, for example for 3D films, and an increase in screens somewhat conceal the statistical downward curve of analog film distribution. Cinemas have vanished

not only in many cities, but even in entire countries. At the same time, audiences are growing older and more sophisticated. A film's average theatrical release window has been drastically reduced within the last few years. Various distribution channels are currently serviced more or less simultaneously. New technological opportunities entail new economic considerations.

It is highly probable that in the medium-term, films will only make back their investments within the private spaces of home cinema. Video stores – also on the verge of dying out – have most recently generated twice the revenue of cinemas. Already around 2010, only roughly a quarter of a film's revenues were generated by cinemas in Germany (even less in the USA). In 2016, an online Goldmedia survey showed that 43 percent, or roughly 24 million online users, access fee-based VoD services in Germany. As a result, the commercial value of these services has more than doubled in the last two years. Right now, distributors are saving both films and their own business models at the expense of cinemas. Considering how poorly many films are screened and the conditions these cinemas (also at film festivals) are in, this is quite understandable. Cinemas have become too expensive for distributors. Certain profit expectations can only be met by reducing costs. It has already become more efficient

to sell a film on DVD or release it on demand for smart TVs or on the internet. DVDs are now so affordable that it's more attractive to watch films at home or on mobile devices while traveling – where I can smoke and drink as I please. I can put my feet up without disturbing anyone. I can interrupt the film when the phone rings or if I want more snacks from the kitchen. I don't need a parking space or a babysitter, I don't have to stand in line or endure the smell of nachos. No one enforces rating guidelines based on age and I can choose from different languages and subtitles. Most importantly, the films are available to me anytime. I don't have to show consideration to anyone. In short, there are only benefits. The movie theater will certainly be used for marketing purposes in the future, to reenact its status as a social, architectonic space. The essential creation of added value, however, will no longer take place in the movie theater. In this way, the movie theater has long since become the object of “nostalgic reflections” (Constance Ruhm).

Digital projection, which aims to suspend the decline of “cinema” as a business model in Europe (granted thanks to incredibly high subsidies), will at best slow down the process, but not stop it. Initially, this development will result in severely restricting what can still be shown in cinemas. Both the digital quality of reproduced old films – i.e.

analog film copies – and the production of new films are subject to rapid technological change, so that the respective standards of quality for digitization (and the digital copies themselves) will soon become obsolete. Digitization can only achieve what is technically possible now; it quickly becomes outdated. The history of film can therefore only be preserved and shown within the framework of the technical standards of a specific time. Inevitably, this raises the question of how we can keep film history accessible under optimum technical conditions. Digitized films will basically have to be updated with the newest technologies at regular intervals, admittedly at enormous cost. Digital scanning under the best possible conditions is far more expensive than producing a new analog screening copy. Each digital master has to be copied and saved to a higher standard at regular intervals, too. The analog part of film history will only be available in a screenable, technically up-to-date format to a very limited extent. Cinema has been cut off from its own history through a technological rupture. If old films are digitally restored and screened, it's usually for an event under special conditions, often in the form of classic silent films accompanied by live music. Such screenings are neither the norm nor will they ever be, because film archives or film festivals can only finance them with

third-party funds in exceptional cases. These events are essentially already a symptom of the crisis at hand; they only reenact cinema, they are fake. It is uncertain whether – and how – the digitization of analog and the preservation of digital film history can be funded, and whether there will even be a future demand for such offerings in cinemas. The moment analog film projectors – and with them the technical knowledge of film projection – disappear, we risk removing analog film history from cinemas. At the same time, film laboratories for analog films are also disappearing. In this respect, the decision to favor subsidizing larger cinemas with big audiences for digital upgrades over smaller ones was wrong. Film history should, even in a digital environment, have its place in smaller venues. Of course we are all grateful that digital films are finally being projected in focus on the screen. Seen from an economic standpoint, however, the digitalization of cinema implies there is a prospect for films in refinancing themselves beyond the movie theater, which is illusory. Digitalization therefore presents us with a helpless reflex – one with no alternative – in the face of a new distribution system with which the movie theater won't be able to compete. Quite the contrary: presumably, the subsidization of digital movie theater projection will indirectly help finance a future of films without cinemas.

The DVD and subsequent generations of digital carriers also seem merely to be transitional forms on the way to carrier-free, individual distribution for private spaces (*on demand*). DVDs can most definitely offer new visibility to old, as of yet inaccessible films. Who among us isn't glad to see films finally available that we waited so long or even in vain to see in cinemas or at festivals, and which have also disappeared from television? Doesn't encountering film history now predominantly take place on DVD (also because we have neither the time nor the option of watching films at the movie theater or on television, if they are even shown there)? It's all the more sobering that there is something about these films that cannot be transported home through DVD, and not just because the digital reproduction will never meet the quality of a film copy. Film is something else beyond the screen and collective perception. It is the other. The feature of being always available contributes to the erosion of cinema as a mode of perception.

When we used to watch films on television, we got an inkling of and a desire for cinema. Today, these films can no longer be viewed under the circumstances they were previously shown, which lent them their impact. What remains is only the story – that which can be told. Television has conquered film by taking away everything that,

through cinema as a mode of perception, let film reveal a different reality. Watching a Ford, an Ozu or a Tati on television has always been torture, but the situation has changed fundamentally since films started being made predominantly because of and for television. This is mostly a consequence of the (European) film funding system, which requires films to be co-financed by television stations and therefore comply with their aesthetic and commercial stipulations – and those responsible expect gratitude in return without realizing that they are actively playing a part in the decline of cinema. After all, who wants to watch TV movies at the cinema, where they will be even worse? A TV movie cannot allow itself certain types of images or durations. The decline of cinema is therefore not only about the economic decline of a specific way of distributing film, which will likely have an impact on urban retail and restaurant industries, nor is it just about nostalgia for cinemas as architectural spaces. The decline of cinema reflects a societal shift toward ever greater individualization. Even though everyone is supposed to consume the same things, they are meant to be able to do it anytime and at any location. The privatization of film reception redirects the purchasing power of the whole movie theater audience towards television as a principle for individual access to film. However, the images

of television are essentially different from those of the movie theater, because from the outset they address someone who can change channels or switch off at any time. I have to disagree with Jacques Rancière, who posits that a film on television and a film in a movie theater are the same, even though a television show screened in a movie theater certainly remains the same. A film tailored for, or at least including, distribution on DVD, television or even the internet also adopts their respective modes of use and perception. Films have to be distributable to increasingly smaller devices. In view of social mobility, they have to be perceptible and understandable in ever smaller image sizes and shorter units of time. Television stations or providers on the internet don't sell a film as a product to a viewer, instead they sell the viewer (the "user") of the film as a product to the advertising industry (in the abstract: the "ratings").

In view of our deregulated work environment and increasingly individualized leisure society, cinema today is more of an opposing force to the trend toward individual consumption. Not readily available at all times, cinema – like other performing arts or musical performances – reflects and requires a certain form of social engagement. The experience of the other, only possible when perceived at the movie theater, must necessarily remain fiction;

film without cinema. The social engagement corresponding to this cultural practice already resembles a throwback. Even television, at least insofar as it is still *live on the air*, requires me to sit in front of the screen at a specific time. For cinema, the same essentially archaic social format holds true as for concerts, opera or theater. You have to meet at a certain point in time at a specific place. This agreement equals a liminal experience, which entails certain collective obligations (punctuality, sitting still, keeping quiet, etc.). The effect of the internet resulted in considerable pressure to innovate regarding this cultural practice, to loosen social engagements and to release “content” as products available everywhere and anytime. At the same time, it is evident that the arts have come under pressure to be like or operate like they would on the internet. As it happens, the internet and thereby the mode of *individual* usage regulate today’s cultural mainstream. Theaters, even opera houses and concert halls, are not just expanding their offerings online, they are reformatting them according to the same logic, for example by using mobile devices as part of a performance on site, thereby raising the question of why cinema, music, opera or theater still even need a site. Liminal experience: physical, sensory and social experience and conventions, etc. are increasingly receding into the

background. How “non-liminal” must culture be today? Are certain social engagements even desired any longer? Countless cultural policy issues are linked to these questions, not only regarding the brick-and-mortar aspect of these sites, but mainly in the debate about the social function of art. To what extent must society remain outside, and to what extent is or must art generally be tied to liminal experiences and conventions? And where should art be perceived collectively? In an attempt to newly legitimize culture, the trend towards dissolving boundaries between different media and arts is doing the opposite by delegitimizing the very same.

Although it keeps a critical distance, the central finding of Walter Benjamin’s “Work of Art” essay remains that film was primarily a profound innovation in media history thanks to its impact on a social mode of perception, rather than as an artifact in itself. In the first decades of film theory, the general consensus – no matter on which side of the debate you stood – was that cinema represented an attack on the classical arts and bourgeois forms of reception. Benjamin was one of the first to recognize the social relevance of film as an imposing mode of perception. To not have a choice, not even in your imagination (if film were not simply the continuation of your own imagination through the

means of another), is exactly what rendered film so powerful a mode of collective perception and why it attracted so much suspicion from the art world and bourgeois perception: the entirely authoritarian compulsion of having to perceive a different reality for a certain duration of time (and not simply contemplating or imagining it).

The collective and public experience of cinema should soon be a thing of the past, or at least of minor importance. A new, scattered public is emerging on the internet – a public that participates: through voting, insider knowledge, opinions, rankings. Whoever gets involved can believe they are part of something and actually matter. Reduced to a few keywords, the public presents a platform for new marketing strategies and accurately trackable consumer targeting. The decline of the political public (the idealization of whom was hardly ever justified) is currently being trivialized as a “political disenchantment” (even though the populist departure from democracy is indeed becoming increasingly militant) and is occurring in parallel to the decline of cinema. On the internet, people behave as they have learned to participate in politics: they vote. No knowledge required, opinions suffice. Totalitarian subjectivity abolishes reality and begins to ignore factuality. Users in front of a DVD player or on the internet are the

people entitled to vote in Western democracies. Every four to five years they can tick a box: they form a public whose limits and rules are defined by others.

Jaron Lanier showed that the knowledge generated by the networked society on the internet is not resourceful, it is instead highly conservative or “retro.” Simon Reynolds notes that the internet produces a proper “retromania”, “a digital regime of complete and immediate access to the cultural artifacts of the past – a type of excess that has become a form of predicament and crisis.” The return of the vampire movie in the past few years is a symptom: nothing is ever forgotten, nothing is ever dead once it has become a part of the digital world. The vampire movie articulates the return of a past that can never vanish in music and film; it represents a farewell to the new in the form of a genre we cannot escape from. Everything becomes a pastiche, a set-piece, a reference: everything that returns is necessarily undead and cannot die. The vampire, embodying the crises of modernity and cinema itself, draws only from traditional images: endless analogies, revenants and repetition as horror.

Terry Gilliam in *12 MONKEYS* (1995) and Kathryn Bigelow in *STRANGE DAYS* (1995) anticipated the inescapable simultaneity of information and

visibility, the end of cinema and the end of memories, long before moving images became available everywhere and anytime on mobile devices, long before digital images. In *STRANGE DAYS*, memories migrate to a digital storage device, a sort of visual Walkman, allowing everyone to perceive the sensations of others and individually access the past. Film is suffering the same fate music did once personal playback devices created “portable intimacy” (Diedrich Diedrichsen), which Raymond Williams already called “mobile privatization” back in 1974. The past is short-circuited by the present. The perceptive body is attached to a machine that “perceives” for it, as is the case in the movie theater. The privatization of film viewing, however, is the antithesis to cinema: cinema understands that it ceases to be when it is viewed on a personal device. In the strictest sense, the decline of cinema is not just an economic consequence of new modes of distribution for films, nor is it the result of a new aesthetic. Instead it is the consequence of the social crisis of the image. Cinema is disappearing from screens and films. If cinema is vanishing as a space, this signifies much more than simply the collapse of a venue for screening films. It signifies the disappearance of the collective and of a mode of perception. The possibility of showing films in a private space because it is more

convenient, it saves time and money, and films look even better and bigger on an HD monitor than they used to, considerably alters the perception of film. But cinema once represented a dissident space of perception, one that compelled me to watch for a certain duration of time, in material immersion, so to speak. Film thereby also loses reference to its outside. Its visibility articulated itself in contrast to the conditions of the world found outside of the cinema. Cinema didn't provide a reference to the world by depicting it in films, but rather by suggesting another mode of perception of the world – a world not yet known to me. Television, but mostly the possibilities of the DVD and the internet, offer me a choice that in fact doesn't exist. "Cinema's death date was 31 September 1983, when the remote-control zapper was introduced to the living room," says Peter Greenaway. Home cinema knows no outside, no liminal experience. It always addresses the private, individual person who subjectively decides what to watch, where and when. The private person is a different social being than the viewer in the movie theater. They do not differentiate between the film they are watching and all the other things at their disposal at home. They are no longer subjected to an alternative concept of reality for the strange, random and sometimes strenuous duration of the film. The film

turns into a *game*, the consequence of the moving image after cinema and television. A narcissistic image, because it is a manipulable image (which in turn can itself be manipulative, as Harun Farocki analyzed in his last works). It's the terror of subjectivity. The human being in the movie theater and the one outside it may be the same one in sociological terms, but not in their perception, because there they stand outside of society – if not de facto, then at least cognitively. In the movie theater, they are *with themselves*. They feel and think differently for the duration of this experimental time unfolding before their eyes, compelling them to be someone different. The film's other, alternative and "irresponsible" (Roland Barthes) life reveals itself to them not through viewing, contemplation and concentration, but solely through the movie theater itself, which leaves them no choice, neither in how they see things nor in how they imagine them. "Cinema has always observed the world less than it has observed the world watching it," said Jean-Luc Godard at the ceremony for the Adorno prize. "So when Ingrid Bergman hides a key in her hand, [on television] you no longer see that the key is looking at you." As long as the movie theater was more or less the only place to watch films and generate added value, it was the cinema that decided what film should look like and how we looked at the

world through it. The movie theater shaped and structured our perception of the film, which in turn was the most visible expression of cinema. If the majority of a film's profits is generated outside the movie theater, these distribution processes also determine both how a film manifests itself and how we perceive it.

Against the backdrop of the new power of television and advertising of the late 1980s, Serge Daney already described how the cinematic image in the works of Jean-Jacques Annaud, Jean-Jacques Beineix and Luc Besson was replaced by a new visuality, by film after cinema (in his posthumously published conversations and annotations: *Devant la recrudescence des vols de sacs à mains, cinéma, télévision, information; L'Exercice a été profitable; Monsieur; and Persévérance*). These films no longer discover reality, they create it, he said. For Daney, cinema was always an encounter with the other. An image stood in relation to the "not yet," to the "unknown." But today, cinema can no longer counter the power of television and advertisement. Daney can exactly pinpoint the moment when films were created that are no longer an expression of cinema, but instead of new channels of distribution that let cinema disappear from films. Taking the example of *JAWS* (1975), he shows how Steven Spielberg introduced an *impossible gaze*, a new and *informal* image to

cinema, by taking the shark's perspective. It is a gaze that can do anything, is authorized to do anything. Nothing is impossible for this gaze; it made a monstrous impact on me by placing me in a position I neither could nor wanted to adopt. The great white shark, however, is only a remnant of the old cinema – a piece of forgotten nature that has returned. The situation is very different in *JURASSIC PARK* (1993), a film about an amusement park in which genetically reproduced dinosaurs escape their cages and wreak havoc. The fascination of this film lies in the creation of a reality that is technically possible, a reality that is feasible. Animation in the place of duration. The film becomes a translation of images that were there before it. It's not about a reality being discovered, but a reality being created by our gaze; it is essentially a generative reality. With *THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN* (2011), Spielberg ultimately even transformed a comic book into "realistic" 3D. In *JURASSIC PARK*, the dinosaurs' first appearance is witnessed by a small group of park visitors who are in turn watched by us. The fascination with what is possible is part of the *mise-en-scène*. The simulation technology in the film is also the film's simulation technology. The logo of the amusement park and that of the film are identical. The film embodies the viewer's gaze, which can do anything, from the privatizing of experience to the

appropriation of time through what is visible. It doesn't matter whether this reality is digitally generated or not (cinema has built illusions from the very beginning). The "discovery" of the dinosaurs is all about the fact that they can be shown, that it is "possible" to make them look so alive and "real". It doesn't matter that they appear new or hidden to the gaze, on the contrary: the dinosaurs only exist for the consumers, who already know which products they are being sold.

The film touches upon a relation between image or appearance and reality, or illusion and reality – technically virtual relations, in other words. In particular, however, the film focuses on the relation between what is visible and what is invisible, as the dinosaurs were already an image and a product before they were made the subject of and animated for the film. It therefore both demonstrates and enforces in itself film's historical change, the new order of the gaze and its mode of perception. This is the moment when animation begins to supersede documentary film: the image loses its reference to reality, not in the sense of being a depiction of it, but in the sense of having a relation to the gaze; not in relation to duration, but to time; not in relation to aesthetics, but to social conditions. These dinosaurs can never vanish – could never have vanished – as they are not made of time. You can create and

touch these dinosaurs. The performance of their authenticity is decisive for the introduction of the informal image. The children pet the dinosaurs in the film to show that they are “real,” while the adults are busy being worried by their antiquated neuroses and ideals (therefore basically representing the older audience in the movie theater). The children are presented as little experts who are neither aware of nor care about the difference between film and game, between cinema and television, or between virtual image and reality. They have never known the mode of perception that only cinema could propose; they have overcome cinema. Even in childhood, they already possess the necessary subjective skills to cope with this altered reality. Kids know how to handle a joystick, while the adults seem naïve and childish. This is about a gaze for which nothing is impossible.

Daney established a link between this new form of informal image and tourism as a mode of perceiving reality: easy access to reality for everyone. Our gaze slides through a reality especially created for it, a reality that is socially permeated, just like a travel brochure. Cinema’s fascination used to lie in the fact that we had to perceive a yet unseen reality by being *compelled* to assume *another* gaze. In this film, however, something is *shown* before it even becomes visible – an image before an image. Society

begins to look at itself in the film. You look at what you already know, a world of commodities, an unframed or unframable image, so to speak, because it is porous. The images evoked by Daney's critique are "digital" not in a technical sense, but in a social one. Suddenly there were films starring actors we already knew not from films, but from advertising, such as Andie MacDowell in Steven Soderbergh's *SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE* (1989) or Milla Jovovich later in the 1990s. Film is now the amusement park in which reality is accessible on request (even though it might spin out of control). The product range available in the park's gift shop reflects the fact that such a film capitalizes on and refines itself only through its merchandise. The product is no longer just the film itself, but everything that is shown in it. There is no longer a distinction between product and advertising, or between film and society. It all comes together in one continuous value chain. The film provides the imagery for what is sold outside the cinema: CDs and DVDs, toys, books, etc. Welf Kienast used the example of *POKÉMON: THE MOVIE* (2000). This film is basically only an advertisement for something beyond it, it is part of a corporate identity. In his film, Spielberg represents what Daney termed the "auto-consumption of society" with regard to Jean-Jacques Annaud's film *L'OURS* (1988). The image

becomes a product, an advertisement for itself. This is the “short circuit” broached in *STRANGE DAYS*. It is not the aesthetic of the film that changes in *JURASSIC PARK* – the first appearance of the dinosaurs is modeled on the presentation of King Kong – but the unique form of visibility that film owed to cinema (and to which *KING KONG* [1933] still belonged). This was also about the time when films in theaters suddenly yielded less revenue than other distribution channels: advertising time (outside North America) and popcorn at the theater, as well as toys, television broadcasting and home entertainment. The decline of cinema cannot, strictly speaking, be understood on an aesthetic level, but only socially and economically. The state of emergency has already arrived within the continuance of cinema. In the midst of images, cinema is perishing.

In its history, cinema has time and again reflected how it shows reality and how it presents the conditions under which reality becomes visible to those who watch it. This was done not as a matter of form, and not even in a specific kind of form, but in terms of staging the gaze (as Heide Schlüppmann already demonstrated with regard to early film). For the viewer, cinema had to indicate how it wanted to be seen and understood. Cinema had to refer back to itself in order to communicate its

change and to show the socio-historical relation between image and reality as well as between film and audience. Cinema hid clues in its images that pointed to an altered reality and to access to reality in general. The movie theater used to be inscribed into the films as the space for perception; in its forms, it reflected its relation to the viewer.

In *JURASSIC PARK* Spielberg also uses the impossible gaze from *JAWS*, from the perspective of the dinosaur. In his very next film *SCHINDLER'S LIST* (1993), however, he went even one step further. Thus far, critical engagement with the Shoah in film had always been characterized by the notion that the inconceivable cannot be represented, that the historical record is not the truth nor does it disclose the past, but that it is merely a trace or a script of the past. This is what Alain Resnais demonstrated with *NUIT ET BROUILLARD* (1955). Spielberg, on the other hand, turns records into conclusive images of the past. He “animates” these records. The process, however, differs fundamentally from, for example, Art Spiegelman’s book *Maus*, which sparked a debate about whether the Shoah can be rendered into comic book form. But Spiegelman never interfered with any records. *SCHINDLER'S LIST*’s incredible transgression does not consist in showing something that has never been shown before, but in staging the inconceivable

as a record and thereby introducing an *impossible gaze*. Spielberg has repeatedly invoked the authenticity of his depiction, also based on his use of a handheld camera that mimics on-site presence. Everything was historically documented, everything “authentic.” He even reconstructed archival photographs. Coincidentally, nothing remained of what was not documentable about the Shoah. This was Spielberg’s decisive shift: suddenly what is documentable is true, instead of that which really occurred, and which therefore can no longer be documentable. The records were once merely the authentic trace of the inconceivable. If only what is documentable is true, then film loses its genuine connection to the relation between the visible and the invisible; that is, to thinking. Claude Lanzmann’s critique of the film published in *Le Monde* – that the representation of the Shoah is per se impossible – does not go far enough. Godard says that Spielberg “reconstructed” Auschwitz. Spielberg not only produced a possible “informal” image, he introduced a new order of the gaze.

In the film’s pivotal scene, he adopts the strategy of the *impossible gaze*: all of a sudden, you find yourself in the gas chamber, waiting for certain death in the dark. You hear cries of fear, you see women weeping (analogous to the woman in *JAWS* getting devoured by the shark at the beginning of the film).

But ultimately he only opens a water tap. Spielberg doesn't need to go to the extreme of releasing the gas, as he has already introduced the possibility. He is inside the gas chamber, showing us the gaze. But he is forced to turn on the water tap to make us feel the incomprehensible power of a gaze that can kill. As a result, this process becomes even more effective and cynical: the gaze inside the gas chamber, the shark's gaze, the dinosaur's gaze. He could have entered the gas chamber to claim no one was gassed there – it would have amounted to the same thing. The problem isn't that Spielberg shows too much or reenacts history as a fictitious feature film. This has been done before and was already criticized when the HOLOCAUST TV series was broadcast (1979). Neither, and this too has already been criticized in reference to Liliana Cavani's *THE NIGHT PORTER* (1974), is the problem that National Socialism was once again depicted as the tyranny of a demonic perpetrator against helpless (and particularly sexualized female) victims instead of as a structural principle (with, of course, the brilliant exception of a few individual heroes). In one scene in the film, Spielberg shows the desire of SS-Lagerführer Amon Göth for the only scantily dressed Jewish worker, Helene Hirsch. What counts is the power of the gaze: it signifies the victimization of the female body (similar to the one in the

“gas chamber” watching the naked female bodies). The camera had already raped the woman before Göth did it. Spielberg used the same strategy in his first feature *DUEL* (1971), in which he adopts the perpetrator’s gaze (the truck driver acting as killing machine) without letting him be seen. Spielberg himself also stands out of sight on a platform selecting who will be eaten by sharks and dinosaurs. It’s usually the people who are morally questionable and need to be punished (the woman who gets eaten by the shark at the beginning of *JAWS* is portrayed as a promiscuous hippie, and he uses a similar approach in *JURASSIC PARK*). Dario Argento follows a completely different strategy by consistently showing us death as something that would never agree with our sense of moral righteousness. In his films, the viewer is twice condemned to inaction: they can neither influence what is happening (which violates their moral standards), nor can they return to the world outside the film or the movie theater, where these moral values originate. Just like Spielberg, Argento expects us to adopt the killer’s gaze. But at the same time, he shows us the gaze of the one condemned to inaction, who – tied up, eyelids fixed – must watch the murderer perpetrate his crime. *OPERA* (1987) is probably the most impressive rendition of this gaze. There is no use in shaking in disgust – you won’t be able to shut your

eyes. The desire to see is dangerous because it is passive. Cinema itself then becomes the true horror, because I have to see through the gaze of another. I'm at someone else's mercy in a double sense: with *my gaze* and through *their gaze*.

The completely novel experience introduced by SCHINDLER'S LIST lies in its reduction of thinking to what is possible, and of the past to what is documented. Upon the liberation of the camps in 1945, British documentarians tried to make the situation as undeniable as possible by stating the place and time of their recording in front of the camera. They knew that the images were insufficient to record what had really happened, that the records would remain silent. Slavoj Žižek declared SCHINDLER'S LIST to be a "remake" of JURASSIC PARK: while Spielberg revived dinosaurs for one film, he revived records for the other, at the price of creating informal images, images outside of time. Therein lies the ambivalence of "liberating" the ban on images from its taboo: only what can be shown has really existed. The past is replaced by the possible. The so-called end of history acknowledges its arrival through the disappearance of time. This is reflected in the moment when the neo-Nazi in Winfried Bonengel's BERUF NEONAZI (1993) denies the reality of the gas chambers while standing inside a gas chamber.

Cinema, unlike opera or theater, was never staged or make believe, because it never called upon my imagination, it was never an illusion. I have to disagree with Malcolm Le Grice that cinema is neither a “symbolic space” nor a “mystical past.” The movie theater really was this other life I disappeared into, which turned me into an uneducated being. At the movies, in contrast to in museums, I can’t and don’t want to educate myself. On the contrary, I want to position myself outside of society at the movie theater. This is what neither art nor science have ever understood about cinema: cinema has never been fiction (illusion) or depiction (documentation). If films are reduced simply to moving images I can individually manipulate anytime, which are therefore at my service, then they enter into a new economy of consumerism that they have as yet evaded in the movie theater, by compelling me to expose myself to a strange, impenetrable and forbidden form of perception. This also justifies Daney’s reservation with respect to animated film (largely restricted to the narrow field of hand-drawn film), which he articulated in 1992 in one of his last texts for the fourth edition of his film magazine *Trafic*. He writes that he has never watched the films of Walt Disney. Because he was captured by cinema, he never saw the allure of animation. For Daney, the hand-drawn film has always been

something other than cinema, maybe even its enemy. Mickey Mouse was the precursor to Spielberg's dinosaur, cinema's first immortal being: invulnerable and all-powerful because it stands outside time; unlike cinema, which has a genuine relation to death through its connection to time. By and large, this is also Siegfried Kracauer's contention against Disney's animated films in his *Theory of Film*. It is not known whether Daney knew about Kracauer's book. But just like him, he wants to "redeem physical reality," meaning the relation between the visible and the invisible in film. In short, that which referred to another time and to thinking; to reality, not to subjectivity.

If there was a reason for talking about film, then it was to express outrage or fascination about this transformation into a pre-linguistic life, to an essentially *ethical* and by no means *aesthetic* attitude towards the world. If a theater production is bad, you can simply go home. If the way a film is shown at the cinema is bad, you can still look at things that are in the moment. In this respect, "bad" films are sometimes even better than "good" ones, because they don't distract you from perceiving the world that, to a certain degree, is stored within them. Ludwig Wittgenstein, who loved to go to the movies and went frequently, said that the "non-participation of the mind" is what distinguishes cinema

from the arts. The movie theater is the only space where I can transform another's perception into my own memory by perceiving the world as a memory ("My memory becomes a wilderness of elsewheres," said artist Robert Smithson in *A Cinematic Atopia*). It affects the issue of how I want to live, how I can live and wanted to live. It compels me to take a stance, it affects my faith (this has been demonstrated by Bergman, Bresson and Dreyer, among others). Cinema, says filmmaker Pedro Costa, is about being in the world. Watching a film by William Wyler, Roland Barthes realizes that the grief over his mother's death extends into the film: "Je suis là." This other, alternative life offered by the film is only revealed inside the cinema, which leaves you no choice. The movie theater completes the film by its desire to resemble time.

Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema* books essentially only deal with this one great thought that films correspond to ways of thinking, individual brains and philosophical concepts. The fundamental idea of the Nouvelle Vague consisted of taxonomy of perception, the ethics of authors. The Nouvelle Vague was an expression of the need to talk about film, because a strange perception was nonetheless common to us all; it addressed *us* and concerned us all because we were *alone* in the movie theater, but a collective outside of it; in the world but still on a far

away planet. You left the cinema and had to talk in order to change the world; not through education, not through form, but armed with a new perception. Once you had seen and experienced the world differently, it could no longer stay the way it once was. This was achieved by the highly distinctive and socializing power of film, made visible for some time by cinephiles and film critics. In the past we looked at the world through cinema, today we can do it faster and more comprehensively through the internet at any time.

Film has long since become a leisure activity among many. Film reviews, reports on film festivals or texts written by film scholars, now only serve to communicate within a small group of people and can hardly hope for any kind of social response. The importance of film criticism, which is affected by the same kind of general helplessness with regard to the inefficiency of social criticism, is fading at the same rate as the movie theater as a space for watching films. The meaning of film criticism is lost when film reception becomes private, because criticism demands a space where that which I myself saw was perceived by others under similar conditions around the same time. Criticism demands a general consensus on the need to talk about an external reality based on a shared approach to reality. However, as soon as subjectivity comes into play,

which is no longer required to conceptually and factually disclose its approach and effect on reality, criticism has lost its foundation. Cinema meant access to a different reality. Because it reminded us of thinking, you could discuss cinema – not because you liked this or that; cinema has never been a question of taste, not like with art. Almost unnoticeably, films lost the need to be discussed; they lost the reason why someone like Jacques Rivette, as a critic for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, could and wanted to discern the right setting for an attitude towards the world within a tracking shot. Film criticism loses its social significance at that moment when films assimilate the leisure industry's mode of perception, in which everything is individually accessible at any time. Cinephilia comprised what could be expressed about cinema; its critical distinction, its sociogenesis. This is what kept it from being a source of nostalgia for a long time – in cinephilia, cinema became consciousness.

Never has this been described more accurately or beautifully than in the mid-sixties, in Georges Perec's *Les Choses* (*Things: A Story of the Sixties*), where he says "cinema was not so much an art as simply a given fact. [...] Sometimes it seemed as if they had grown up with it, and that they understood it better than anyone before them had ever been able to understand it." The cinephiles' illusion, however,

was that the world could be understood through cinema (even though for a while it was about *changing* the world through cinema). Cinephilia used to be the most progressive attitude you could take toward cinema. Today this attitude risks being chauvinistic if it cannot conceive of *film after cinema*. And, except for Serge Daney, cinephiles have largely failed in this endeavor. For Daney it is the “author” who can save us from society and consumer culture (which also keeps his notion of “the author” from the authors’ canonization), because it is the author who, as it were, can always show us something *for the very first time*. The “author,” for Daney, is therefore not a certain style or a “signature,” but an individual, unique, and liminal view of the world and of an access to reality. Seen in this way, the gaze of cinema is always the gaze or the attitude of the individual (which is exactly why the viewer is condemned *to be alone* in the movie theater). Toward the end of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze asserts the primacy of aesthetics and author against economics and technology, but at the same time he detects the rise of an informal image, an image as “table of information” (“table d’information”). He believes that this will not seriously endanger cinema, but he nonetheless thinks it possible: “The electronic image, that is the television and video image, the digital image coming into being, had either to transform cinema

or to replace it, to mark its death.”

To understand the historically different approaches to cinema as a mode of perception, you can refer to two films that reflect on the figure of the star in completely different ways. William Wyler's *ROMAN HOLIDAY* (1953) shows Audrey Hepburn as being part of cinema; she cannot join real life outside of it (no matter how much she might want to, which is also the film's topic). The princess leaves behind her social status in exchange for a different, dissident life for one day and one night in Rome, for the duration of the film. The star, however, never becomes part of a living reality. She remains other-worldly, never to be part of a real life. The film draws attention to the irresolvable contradiction between the world of cinema and the world of consumer culture: the nature of cinema (royalism against the backdrop of Rome's antique scenery) and business (in the form of an upcoming media industry represented by Gregory Peck as a tabloid journalist). At the end of the film, this contradiction is not covered up, it remains visible within the melodrama. In melodramas, the inadequacies of reality that cinema shows us remain unresolved. Unlike in theater, where melodrama is presented as a tragic conflict of relationships between people, in cinema it is defined by the viewer's position at the mercy of the technological

apparatus. It is a conflict between my ethical stance and the reality of cinema, between what I see and that which is looking at me. The couple is only united for the duration of the film, for the duration of this *other time*. In contrast, forty years later in NOTTING HILL (1999) the contradiction remains only between rich and poor. The film's star (Julia Roberts) has already become part of consumer culture. The only thing that essentially differentiates her from the audience (Hugh Grant) is class. What in ROMAN HOLIDAY was an irresolvable contradiction between film and reality, between cinema and life, simply becomes insurmountably social in NOTTING HILL. This film already demonstrates the historical change pertaining to its medium's economic status: it became pure fiction the moment it stopped being shown in cinemas, where film always was irreconcilable with the reality we found outside of it. This used to be the monstrous space between perception and action, the pain across the distance between emotion and mind. Fiction in film has never disguised this conflict. On the contrary, the beings of cinema have never found themselves to be part of reality. It was the cinema that introduced me to an inaccessible new world in the dark. The possibility of an alternative reality accounted for this bit of anarchism within a world of capitalism; it was cinema's unbelievable affront

to the consumer culture it belonged to. Created by the cultural industry, cinema was an Arcadian place to which I retreated – speechless, invisible, immersed, lodged in a pocket of time.

Film Festivals as Temporary Museums

Evidence suggests that film festivals, alongside television and the internet, are developing into the most important public platform for films. These three platforms, which are more commonly reserved for the public – just like VHS and DVD once were – will take over the traditional function of the cinema. Film festivals were once a marketplace for films; they created the necessary conditions for the commercial distribution of films in the first place, while at the same time reaching only a small public audience. Today, they contribute to making films available to a wide audience – often, they provide the only public a film will ever have. It is currently estimated that there are several thousand film festivals worldwide, 120 in Germany alone. Author and producer Stephen Fellows once took the trouble to count them all: “When I last studied the topic three years ago, I found 9706 film

festivals which had run at least once between 1998 and 2013, of which 2954 had run in the previous two years.” Film festivals such as Berlin, Rotterdam and Toronto reach an audience of hundreds of thousands over the course of a few days.

We should harbor no misconceptions, however: hardly any films find distributors on the few relevant film markets worldwide. The following example demonstrates how drastic the situation has already become: As the director of the Venice festival, Marco Müller suggested establishing a foundation to foster sales for Cannes, Berlin and Venice in 2008, as not even these festivals managed to get their films into movie theaters. In a 2014 article about the Sundance Film Festival, *The New York Times* came to the conclusion that not only do ever fewer of the festival’s films move on to commercial distribution, but also that a mere two percent of the 4,000 submitted films manage to regain their investment in the festival’s aftermath. The number of award-winning films from those festivals with a theatrical release was increasingly diminishing too, almost dropping to zero. In the past, you could at least count on seeing prize winners from US festivals in theaters at some point.

In his 2014 blog post, American film producer Ted Hope proposed that cinemas shouldn’t wait to screen award-winning films until they have

distributors, because that results in a long delay. Instead, they should be shown immediately after the film festival, which is exactly when people want to see them. The digital distribution of films has made this possible. Urs Spörri put forward a similar idea in 2017: “Film festivals need to be recognized as commercial platforms with their own distribution channels. After the festivals, the options of *day-and-date release* (online at the end of the festival) and of specific events at independent venues would make much more sense than enforcing a theatrical release, which benefits the distributors and the cinemas much more than the films themselves.” Films that have the potential for the theatrical market – usually films that can amortize their production costs on the (often US) domestic market – no longer need festivals. It’s not because of festivals that they get a theatrical release, and if they are screened at festivals, then they are shown in theaters immediately afterwards or have already been released abroad. These kinds of films don’t need to be discovered. In these cases, festivals only function as additional advertising right before the film’s release date. The prestige that used to accompany a film being selected or winning a prize – at least at important festivals – seems to have lost its significance. This means that the concept of “the market” itself is in crisis. Business is now being done

elsewhere, mostly on the internet. Meanwhile, cinemas survive as an affirmation of a different form of social utility. The less socially relevant they become, the more they celebrate themselves, for example on major festivals' red carpets, at premieres or at important award ceremonies.

As products, films no longer need festivals, and maybe not even cinemas. Film festivals are in the process of becoming a classic cultural offering. We must seize this historic opportunity to finally show better films at festivals. But just as film festivals are creating a new audience for films with no or few commercial opportunities, the "audience" as we once knew it is disappearing. Looking at the numbers, movie theaters have no great future of commercial viability. If commercial film distribution is turning away from theatrical release (and there is nothing to indicate that this development can be halted), then where will we be able to see films that cannot be made profitable? Will they even continue to be produced? It is very likely that the whole traditional chain of distribution for film will eventually fall apart. This, too, raises questions of whether subsidies for the cinema industry can still be justified in future. The decline of cinemas, however, will also have serious consequences for festivals: where, on what grounds, and under which circumstances can they still take place? How and

why should they still receive (new) films that cannot, or only to a very limited extent, be distributed? Some film festivals are already encountering problems in finding movie theaters with the appropriate screening technology, because many analog film projectors have been disposed of and suitable digital screening copies of older films aren't always available. It remains entirely unclear as to where and how film festivals, which have the potential to inherit cinemas, could themselves take place in the future.

Film festivals now find themselves in the unexpected position of becoming the cultural distribution platform for films that have no or only very limited commercial prospects. They continue to foster the focused transmission of content, and in this respect they provide an overview of the complex structure of offerings. However, festivals hardly accomplish their original task – functioning as a marketplace by procuring content for other uses – anymore. This is due to the rapid proliferation of film festivals and the simultaneous loss of importance of target markets such as television and cinemas. Today they assume the role that, at least in Germany, used to be taken by repertory cinemas and the film departments of television stations: to supply a wide audience with film culture. Without film festivals (and a few film museums), film history

would hardly be publicly accessible (even though today's corresponding outreach is usually highly canonical and canonizing).

Film festivals are gradually becoming social installations; the genuine experience of cinema within the security of the collective. A 2015 study dedicated to so-called "special forms of cinema" conducted by the German Federal Film Board (FFA) registered a substantial increase in audience attendance, number of screenings and revenue for film festivals in contrast to classical cinema distribution. The rise in the number of film festivals corresponds to a significant increase in the number of films. More and more films (and with them more and more filmmakers spat out by more and more media factories) are competing for ever fewer potential distribution platforms. Withoutabox, a submission and preview platform for film festivals, allegedly represented 125,000 filmmakers for 2,000 film festivals as early as 2008. In the face of such numbers, Internet Movie Database (IMDb) bought the portal for an unconfirmed three million US dollars. Film festivals are increasingly a symptom of the contradiction between managing the mass of films resulting from new technologies, forced media education and an increase in film funding on the one hand, and the challenge of earning money with them on the other. On a structural level, this

results in a loss of legitimacy for the festivals. Today, film festivals can offer filmmakers little more than passing on their films to other festivals.

The new power of the internet or of the individual use of moving images has apparently not or only barely slowed down the festival boom, apart from the fact that many new online film festivals are appearing on the web. However, you can hardly define these as “film festivals,” as interaction and communication are usually only carried out electronically, most commonly in the form of voting: public opinion at the push of a button. If they happen at all, encounters or discussions with filmmakers generally only play a marginal role online. The various origins and material “texture” of these works and screening formats are also transferred to a uniform digital (and usually compressed) standard. All this may well explain why although individual downloads or streaming, whether legal or illegal, are meeting with increased acceptance on the internet, the social pact of meeting at a certain time and place isn’t. The social act of gathering together is a fundamental characteristic of a film festival, but it is rather foreign to the nature of the internet, which targets individual use, even though we constantly speak of its networking components. The internet’s potential lies in providing the individual user with access to works that have already

been broadcast on television or shown at film festivals here and there. In this way, novel parallel structures are being established regarding the simultaneity of commercial and non-commercial forms of film distribution, whether on the internet or through conventional channels. Furthermore, the internet has made a significant contribution to the speed at which films can circulate, and film festivals participate in this development by using digital submission and online viewing platforms. Film festivals considerably accelerate the digital circulation of these works based on the fact that digital images, whether they are moving or not, are simultaneously available to an almost unlimited extent through links. Films can circulate via these decentralized digital sources without ever being moved. It is safe to assume that every new film will be submitted to a film festival at some point.

Even though the benefits offered by the internet with regard to the individual use of images is evident, the social need for “real” communication has obviously not been diminished. On the contrary, what was until recently a highly improbable expectation is today reasonably possible: that analog and digital film distribution will continue to coexist for quite a while with film dissemination at festivals and on the internet, similar to the case of the music industry. Of course, because the majority of film

festivals, even the largest ones, are dependent on public subsidies, this form of distribution doesn't have equally sustainable social or economic perspectives. Film festivals are tied to the market even if there hasn't been a market for them to refinance their offerings for a long time now. The commercial future of film lies in individual use, independent of time and place.

As a general rule, whatever film festivals no longer show won't be shown at all, or at least not through commercial distribution. Even though political decision-makers and ministerial bureaucrats often still cling to the guiding principle of supporting film festivals as "flagship projects" or for their "unique selling points," in reality we are already facing other challenges. Under current circumstances, "unique selling points" are difficult to achieve or even as pointless as the fight for premieres or awards, which are supposed to validate distinction and relevance. Concurrently, digital evolution offers industry visitors viewing and communication options that, given the shrinking budgets for travel and film acquisition in television and other places, render visits to festivals less and less attractive. If film festivals are no longer a marketplace, but instead have turned into a forum, if they are no longer a place to do business, but instead to exchange ideas, and if they no longer

offer outreach, but instead just provide screenings, then how will filmmakers and producers make money? Should film festivals start paying to screen films? And since the current financial resources of film festivals can't cover that, then who will provide the funding?

Originally, the establishment of film festivals was essentially controlled by the clear interests of the political elite. While the festivals in (in the order of their foundation) Venice, Cannes, and Berlin were very discernably part of a geopolitical and partly nationalist agenda (with regard to national representation, political supremacy, the promotion of tourism, etc.), later on the notion of bringing film culture to a wide and local audience in remote areas also became a decisive factor in establishing film festivals. This can explain the sometimes slightly odd festival locations. Often the driving forces behind establishing a festival were or are individuals – film lovers who essentially build a forum for themselves, admittedly also to cultivate their own image, who in doing so offer non-institutional and non-governmental access to culture. This obviously does not require a great deal of skill or knowledge, as Reinhard W. Wolf already ascertained resignedly when he went looking for benchmarks and binding standards for film festivals for the online magazine *shortfilm.de*: “Most do not

deserve this name, many work with obscure regulations, and some even make do without any rules or terms & conditions at all.” It is doubtful that financial motives have often played a significant role in establishing (and sustaining) film festivals. At any rate, most festivals founded on the basis of strategic intentions such as location marketing or other unmistakably economic reasons have not lasted for long. Even the emergence of so-called film markets is considered marginal and only a handful of these are really relevant. This can easily be explained by the fact that European films are now almost exclusively produced with money provided by public funding and government-owned television broadcasters (with all the problems that go along with that system). They are therefore essentially completely publicly subsidized (even if indirectly). The financing structure for US productions – or generally for mainstream feature films that have to refinance themselves on a global scale – has always been embedded within an autonomous market logic. We therefore have to distinguish between the social, cultural and economic conditions under which films are produced, distributed and perceived.

As a result, it is becoming increasingly accepted that film festivals first and foremost contribute to the rise of symbolic capital. Often the

non-commercial circulation of films on the festival circuit generates value that the films couldn't build up within a commercial setting. This creates an artificial distribution scenario. For the film scholar Marijke de Valck, who along with Dina Iordanova founded the branch of film studies they called "Film Festival Studies," film festivals mainly serve the "cultural recognition of artifacts and artists that acquire cultural value in the process." This can without question indirectly have a commercial impact on training, image building, marketing, etc. through formal access to funding schemes, but also on the continued existence of communicating about "film culture," as part of which the social discourses and ideals – all the way to canonization – manifest and preserve themselves. Art in film, it seems, is hibernating at film festivals. In the early 1960s, a critical public socialized through cinema developed the new concept of the "auteur," which gradually turned film into a part of the classical cultural offering. New aesthetic forms and artistic strategies enforced the reformatting of presentation spaces. For example, in 1968 the festivals in both Cannes and Oberhausen were cut short or almost canceled, while new festival formats and forms of organization emerged concurrently (in Hamburg and London) that were better equipped to deal with the new requirements of the time.

National representation, the influence of (semi-) governmental lobby groups, of production studios and distributors was reduced and the purpose of competitions in assessing artistic concerns was questioned. Already in 1967, autonomous formats and presentations of Expanded Cinema, performance and other activities developed alongside the competition as the core piece of the experimental film festival in Knokke. Auteur cinema socially dignified a new type of artist (based on cinephilia, publications and magazines, funding programs, culture awards, etc.), while at the same time, technical (television and the internet) and social developments (in particular the deregulation of working hours and changes in leisure habits) unsettled the economic foundation of cinema culture. Due to the proliferation of presentation spaces for films and the resulting pressure to distinguish themselves, film festivals were able or forced to develop from a market into a trademark.

Most film festivals work with scarce resources, usually at the cost of both staff and filmmakers, and their reality consists of the often quite dismal presentation and projection of films. In itself, this must be read as a symptom of the decline of cinema. At the same time, large festivals with their new branding power create the tremendous illusion of a supposedly commercial “film industry” by means

of new training formats such as in-house funding programs, pitching sessions and talent promotion. This development is sometimes marked by neo-imperialist traits, as Simon Rothöhler criticized in 2011 in the magazine *Filmbulletin*: “If nothing else, the attendant market politics are obeying the general rules of the new event culture. Selection and branding go smoothly hand in hand [...]. It’s no small problem that this is happening with public funding and accompanied by paternalistic rhetoric about fostering and enabling artists without any critical awareness of the postcolonial structures in place today [...]. The festival politics of these festival stakeholders first and foremost engage in self-serving ‘development aid’, which isn’t an investment in the establishment of a largely autonomous local film industry, but a centralist form of subsidy for films with strong ‘authorship’ whose real addressees are Western festival visitors.” Continuous expansion is the impetus for festivals as trademarks: ever larger, ever more expensive, ever more important. Film critic Neil Young diagnosed a kind of implosion of large festivals using Rotterdam as an example in a 2014 *Indiewire* article: “How many bad movies does it take to ruin a film festival?” Based on this, author and curator Mark Peranson determines that “[f]estivals here are seen as political actors, and by this I mean they are

subjected to pressures from interest groups and that festivals exist in relation to each other, and, one could even argue, are in a constant struggle of power. In the course of this struggle, relationships of exploitation have come into place.” In this way, cinephilia turns into a depraved expression of the power of knowledge and pretentious opinion. These festivals pretend to present new discoveries even though they primarily strive for geopolitical dominance, sometimes extortionately so. The decline of cinephilia can be demonstrated by the current practices of many festivals. “What is left for the spectator, in this perspective, is a mere second-order cinephilia, presented on a plate, ready for consumption: a commodified mass cinephilia instead of privileged revelation,” as Marijke de Valck pointed out.

The main danger lies not only in film festivals becoming the single distribution platform for a certain kind of film (already accurately called “festival films”), but in the fact that they are unobtrusively beginning to generate and enforce a particular aesthetic. An aesthetic halfway between canonizing cinephilia and cultural location marketing, an aesthetic that risks nothing and overwhelms no one, that drives away neither the audience nor the sponsors who come with ordinary, consensus-based expectations, because this kind of

aesthetic is first and foremost geared toward offering a space the audience can identify with and the sponsors can present themselves in. It therefore becomes an issue if, for example, someone were to upset the sensibilities of the political middle classes by provocatively calling himself a “Nazi,” as Lars von Trier once did in Cannes in referring to his German roots. Film festivals are currently reinventing film after cinema as a brand that is aesthetically and politically correct at all times. Culture journalists lament the quality of films (often on the occasion of a jury’s decision); they complain that in Berlin, the films financed by the local funding agency are disproportionately represented more often in competition, and they criticize that the sponsors’ interests obviously take precedence over the audience’s in Rotterdam or Toronto. For all intents and purposes, however, these journalists are quite content with a system that offers sufficient extravaganza to somewhat justify coverage in an increasingly precarious media market. The Zurich Film Festival, a more recent brainchild of location marketing, is now owned by the NZZ Medien-gruppe, an integrated media conglomerate that creates the content and character of its news (therefore positioning itself in competition with other film festivals). Even for the culture section of newspapers, attending stars and paying visitors serve as

sufficient criteria for assessing quality within an environment of declining critical public discourse about the quality of films. This development is establishing a false alliance between critique and festival, because instead of aesthetic radicalism, sustaining one's own image and survival becomes the benchmark. As long as attendance figures are high enough, stars come to town and the political mainstream is catered for. The "film industry" thinks everything is hunky-dory, as Olaf Möller lamented in his summary of the 2015 edition of the Berlin International Film Festival in *Film Comment*. Everyone seems pleased with the social democratization of culture, with "Berlin Republic event-movie neoliberal realism," he stated. Many film festivals dedicate programs to film funding agencies, broadcasters and "film industry" associations, just as they do for other sponsors. Often, these parties are themselves direct or indirect patrons of the festival, which is in turn eager to pander to the various interests demanding attention. In this way, film festivals are no longer just a "filter" viewers can use for independent qualitative orientation, as a guide to cope with the mass of films, instead they are becoming an institutionalized ordering principle that establishes mediocrity as the aesthetic standard.

But the task of film festivals could be to preserve cinema as a cultural practice, with its specific mode of perception, its social engagement within a liminal experience, and the particular architectural features of its spaces. Film festivals take place in movie theaters whose very existence is at stake right now. Film festivals provide the spaces where film can renew itself, where we can keep an awareness of and discuss aesthetic and social alternatives. In that sense, cultural-political demands should focus on institutionalizing and professionalizing film festivals and presenting them with a new cultural-political mission. Spaces like the cinema are required to preserve aesthetic and social alternatives to academic interpretations, as well as to the conventions of the art scene, to the education mainstream or the individualization of the internet, etc. Film festivals could lead cinema toward a regulated musealization. We have to decide right now whether the market will put an end to cinema as a cultural practice, just as has already happened to analog film, or whether we want to understand, pass on and shape the historical configuration and diversity of cinema and film formats. It doesn't necessarily follow that we need more film festivals, but the ones charged with cultural promotion must understand that they can most likely only salvage cinema with and through the work done at film

festivals. The problem with such cultural-political demands, however, is essentially the always-terrifying prospect of living with the “imposed right thing to do,” which spells the end of any form of unregulated existence within a quasi-governmental, didactic cultural zoo. Compared with the economization of cinema, however, a pact with cultural politics definitely seems to be the lesser evil and an opportunity to gain time.

A shift in the mindset of culture promoters and the art scene in particular is needed to bring about substantial change. They need to realize that the movie theater is a place with specific architectural, social and technical requirements and conditions. Among others, we have to ask the question whether we’d rather show a program with experimental films in a cinema foyer for 300 people instead of in the auditorium itself, where only 30 people are interested in watching them. In short, are we prepared to surrender that which makes these films seem something else, which lets them have a different effect? “Cultural education” – with which cultural promotion tries to play social politics at the expense of art, and art promises social function and real effect – must develop an idea of where and how to keep the enormous artistic heritage of film accessible and how to impart it to future generations. You cannot expect people to go out to the

cinema or the opera if they are not familiar with movie theaters or opera houses. Once it has lost its commercial relevance, a cultural practice not only needs to be taught and learned, it also needs to be experienced and expanded. There is no question that the term *cinema* must be historicized in order to do this, because it always refers to a different *social practice* of showing and watching film.

This development must also include a vision of a new compensation system for filmmakers. Today there is no sufficient reason why directors should enter competitions without being paid if there are no realistic expectations for commercial distribution afterwards. Of course they cannot count on high-level revenues from a single festival, but the potential for large sums are there if all festivals are taken together. The redistribution of film festival prize money is unquestionably only a makeshift avenue toward a new distribution and refinancing model. The new system could be capitalized by adjusting the model of per-screening and box office subsidies for commercial, digital distribution, for example, by establishing a culture-wide flat rate, and through a radical shift in film funding by remunerating participation at festivals to a greater extent. The entire film funding model needs to be reviewed. Film festivals, at least in Europe, could become part of the funding and refinancing circuit

for films. Germany's film promotion act already stipulates that films with a certain number of festival participations or awards gain access to subsidies. As part of this system, filmmakers are indirectly awarded some financing, but this doesn't go far enough. It would be sensible to establish a second pillar of film funding in addition to the grants awarded by committees and juries, one based on participation and awards at festivals, a performance-based automatism of funding that provides filmmakers with greater independence from broadcasters and the cinema business. From an economic point of view, it is unjustifiable to keep a commercial cinema structure artificially alive through subsidies, and all the less so from a cultural point of view, considering the quality of its programming.

"To foster cinema only because it is culturally important seems to me an insufficient explanation. This is a fundamental question of cultural politics," says urban planner Ralf Ebert. Cinema can only survive if individual movie theaters are developed into special venues that can be used by festivals and other cultural events. The movie theater has to be turned into the kind of place that is already self-evident for housing contemporary art. It has to become a museum, removed from the grip of the market. Not primarily a storage facility for the past,

but a *temporary museum* of moving images, a museum of the artistic film, of social and intellectual interaction. A plate outside the entrance of the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna explains to its visitors what to expect inside: “Our exhibitions take place on the screen.” Even as the last cent is being squeezed out of it, the cinema will only be able to survive as a museum. The temporary museum is a place where cinema can defend its alternative mode of perception and its unique social space. It therefore doesn’t define itself in contrast to the art museum, nor does it signify the transformation of the movie theater to the museum. It is the museum’s evolution in the form of a program, as a sequence of reproducible works shown under the terms of cinema. Compiling films – within the art world, where it is considered a career called curating – is not an artistic strategy; at best, it brings such a strategy to light. What cinema can learn from the museum is, among others, the intellectualizing and intimacy inherent in dealing with artworks and artists. Yet what the museum can learn from cinema is a peripheral, technical mode of perception that belongs to cinema alone.

Until now, cinemas or screening rooms in museums have often been treated as merely side stages of an exhibition or, in contrast and even worse, as separate and essentially commercial

venues for “arthouse” film. The standards with regard to curatorial care and screening quality are often accordingly disastrous. When museums are newly built or remodeled, this is where they often save money. Only very few museums have ever tried or managed to realize the idea of a cinema as a genuine and integral part of museal practice. But there are examples. Frequently film and art curators work in different museum departments, with different budgets and possibilities; they address a different kind of audience, too. The larger the museum, the sharper the distinction. If film is allowed to be part of an exhibition, then only under the conditions set forth by the focus of the show; if art is allowed to enter the cinema, then only as an illustration of the exhibition. Cinemas and museums have remained separate and their connection largely misunderstood, both aesthetically and architectonically, as well as structurally and technically. A temporary museum, however, should understand the sequence of these moving images, their screenings as durational exhibits, as well as the cinema’s and the programs’ compulsion to perceive as a component of the exhibition itself – and certainly in connection to the business of art. Viewed in this light, cinema as a social mode of perception cannot be saved through the cinema as a commercial venue. The idea of a temporary

museum is the result of both the crisis of the cinema as the place to see films and the sometimes hardly adequate presentation of films within the contemporary art world. Judged by these standards, both movie theaters and film festivals currently fail just as much as museums do. They only rarely succeed in confronting the consumerist individual – who is just as isolated and separated from entering into a potential intellectual process with others at the cinema as they are in a normal art show – with a new social engagement. It is nothing new to think about reformulating cinema (how to make cinema more attractive for the audience), as this has been happening ever since the crisis of the movie theater as a place to show films began. What’s new is reflecting on how we can save the social mode of perception brought forward by cinema without thinking about the films’ amortization.

British curator Ian White, for example, once asked, taking a consciously reductionist and polemic stance, whether the museum was failing with regard to films. “Does the museum fail?” then became the title of a panel discussion at Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen and triggered nervous reactions within the art scene, claiming that after all we had to differentiate whether the individual museum or the individual curator was failing or the entire institution, which of course

could not be the case. Needless to say, it is not *the* museum, not *the* festival, not *the* cinema that is failing. Of course there is good and bad art, there are good and bad curatorial decisions, and good and bad ways of presentation. Nevertheless, we cannot maintain that most exhibitions, galleries or museums are successful examples of showing films, just as movie theaters in their current condition are not successful examples because they only survive in Europe thanks to many subsidies. And even the majority of film festivals aren't a good example, because they have never considered, during this crisis of cinema, what a film festival could look like *after cinema*.

A temporary museum calls for a new, multifunctional space that is shaped by artistic motives alone: it is at once exhibition space, library, café or restaurant (where artistic motives usually lose importance), cinema, concert hall, artist's studio and much more – an essentially *transitory* space, and a space that evolves according to the circumstances and the people who use it. A few museums, cinémathèques and film museums are already trying this, although at considerable cost and negotiation efforts. They are constantly facing the risk of being too dependent on the government, or of reducing a cultural practice to indirect cultural profitability in middle-class, intellectual, multipurpose halls that nostalgically glorify the cinema.

Every cultural practice undergoing the process of musealization, and this is true both for the cinema and the opera, is of course highly threatened by cultural stagnation. The musealization of its spaces endangers the social significance of an art form. However, neither the performing arts, which currently claim roughly half of public cultural subsidies even though they have already lost large numbers of their middle-class audience, nor the cinema, which is probably affected by even heavier losses in audience numbers, need necessarily lose their social relevance as a result of musealization. They lost their economic relevance long ago anyway, and musealization primarily means only that the commercial costs incurred for society clearly exceed the existing demand. The temporary museum is a space that makes an alternative perception of reality historically possible, asserting its position against the need for the films it showed to be economically efficient. It's a place where you can save yourself from the obligation to purchase something, a clandestine space for a duration of time that can sometimes seem endless and also a bit bizarre. This process requires the cinema. The movie theater claims an interruption of the current social context. In this sense, the decline of cinema as part of the industrial exploitation of film isn't the actual threat, because artistic, good and bad

films will continue to be produced and will find their audiences elsewhere. The threat lies in the potential loss of a mode of perception that only the movie theater can offer, and which could reinvent itself at film festivals.

But will a demand for film festivals even exist in the future? With the progressing convergence of television, telecommunication and the internet, films will probably be predominantly available and watched through electronic means. The DVD and its extensions are already disappearing from the market. Does that mean film festivals themselves are already an anachronism? In September 2011, the German daily paper *die tageszeitung* published a survey on the popularity of film festivals and the media coverage on them. Only 11 percent of all respondents said film festivals were interesting and that their coverage was worth reading. The rest thought both to be superficial and unnecessary. This result demonstrates a social development in which film and the cinema, in addition to other arts and cultural spaces, have significantly lost social importance. Film and the cinema now have a less discursive, distinctive and socializing effect than prior to the internet's advent. Technology is conditioning our leisure society toward new economies. The justification for the existence of film festivals today are therefore different from those before the

internet: film festivals keep aesthetic and social alternatives alive within communal spaces and they contribute to the differentiation between aesthetic criteria. They help relate artistic, scientific and generally societal concerns to each other. Festivals counteract the individualization of reception. And they defend cinema as an alternative mode of perception against television, which has been corrupted by the pressure of ratings, against pedantic universities, and against *cinema itself as a convention*, in its current, depressing state. Presumably, there will continue to be a need for essential film festival offerings, at least for a certain crowd. A need to discover films, for correctly projected images, a collective mode of perception, quality of selection, thematic profiles, interaction and discussion. One thing you can be sure of: if film festivals don't succeed in plausibly formulating some kind of social added value, they will become expendable. A good film festival is like one of those bookstores where you end up buying something you weren't even looking for. You enter with certain expectations and leave with experiences; you get something you didn't expect. Jacques Ledoux, the long-term director of the Cinémathèque royale de Belgique in Brussels and of the legendary film programs at EXPRMNTL in Knokke-Le Zoute, once explained his concept for film festivals as follows: 1.

film programs, 2. programs without films, and 3. the unpredictable result of 1. and 2.



The Compulsion to Perceive

The decline of the auteur film in cinemas and the absorption of auteurs by the art world happened almost simultaneously. On the one hand, because artists couldn't survive economically within a system regulated by television and the logic of film funding, and on the other because we neglected to talk about the future of film and film funding right after cinema's loss of importance. We therefore missed the opportunity to develop and foster alternative forms of distribution for artistic films. The directive for film funding still stipulates it be destined for theatrical release (and judged on whether it can achieve distribution in cinemas, no matter the costs or how absurd that may be). Considering the actual social and commercial circumstances, this is a naïve point of view which, at least for the time being, is maintained on behalf of the (commercial) interests of the movie theater industry and not at all on behalf of the cultural

practice of cinemas. Whenever we have to use and justify subsidies for the film and television industry – in Germany alone we spent around 250 million euros in 2015 – we like to use the term “cinematic art.” The modest artistic (and commercial) success of European films when compared to international productions is the penalty for film funding policies that back a powerful lobby and are interested in leveling extremes. Given the original motivations and background leading to the formation of film funding, current funding practices are clearly the result of a failed development. In 1960s Europe, we fought hard to establish film funding as a remedy against stale post-war cinema. It was supposed to especially foster films that, due to their artistic interests, would never achieve any kind of commercial success. Meanwhile, players who once had to – or should have had to – prove themselves on the market because they pursued commercial interests by making mainstream films, are now commanding access to subsidies from those productions the funding originally targeted. For the sake of simplicity, mainstream films today have their productions subsidized risk-free by national film funding. Therefore, the European “film industry” is not only essentially dependent on subsidies, it also first and foremost makes its money from subsidies. However, the purpose of film funding was

never to replace the market, but rather to maintain artistic quality despite the market. Television is currently greatly influencing a product it only finances to a small extent. Highly sophisticated content, which cannot hope for money from television networks because it has no chance of getting broadcast on television, therefore has hardly any prospect of support. Such a system, which is more interested in the secured advantage of a few than in competition for the best quality among all, is prone to establishing a dictatorship of the mediocre. It is constantly reassuring its own structures and ideals, it immunizes itself against all risks – against the unpredictable as well as against calculated provocation. Such a system is impeding the development of new paths of production and distribution, of addressing new audiences and, most of all, of generating new cinematic forms. This system is sealing an alliance based on the lowest common denominator in the interests of broadcasters, funders, a few producers, distributors and theater chains. It aims at preserving its own existence, not at fostering better films. It's part of "film industry" jargon to say that culture and business are "two sides of the same coin." There is certainly not much left of either one now. Clarity on the parameters of success or the definition of criteria for commercial or artistic accomplishments are not in anyone's

interest, because they maintain a system that has to relentlessly produce while never legitimizing itself. Any interest in culture is only as great as it serves as a justification for interests that, measured by the results, can hardly even be called “cultural.” Film funding is therefore growing a systemic problem, not only because it is abolishing a market that should regulate who is successful and who is not, but even worse, it eliminates the production and distribution of artistic works that cannot successfully compete on the market. It prevents the development and renewal of artistic films. Film critic Peter W. Jansen wrote about how the young Wim Wenders once received funding at a meeting of the committee of the “Kuratorium junger deutscher Film” simply based on the novel *The Goalkeeper’s Fear of the Penalty* by Peter Handke, which he had submitted to them. In the early years of film funding, these committees apparently still took risks without demanding fully developed scripts, well-known names or other securities.

In today’s Europe, film funding not only contradicts its historic mission, it also engenders an artificial environment without allowing for artistic impulses for the continued existence of the cinema, which presently doesn’t offer any commercial prospects at all. There is no longer a market for (European) films that allows them to refinance

themselves in the movie theater (through ticket sales). Cinemas have become a commercial shadow play, a “state cinema,” as German director Klaus Lemke calls it. Meanwhile, television networks have a substantial portion of their offerings financed through film funding. Lemke has drawn a radical conclusion from these circumstances: he finances his own films with scant resources and no film funding (without the influence of broadcasters, distributors, etc.), retaining complete control of the result. In doing so, he is paving the way towards a return to a structure based on supply and demand, which is the only way to guarantee artistic quality. Like Christo, Lemke believes that only one’s own money can absolutely guarantee artistic autonomy.

Art in film has been taking place outside the cinema for a long time. While appreciation for film as an art form must continue to be seen as having failed – at least with regard to television and movie theaters – the art world has rendered a significant number of films marketable since the mid-1990s thanks to the promise of “liberation from the formatting of cinema” (Jan Verwoert). And this despite the partially deplorable artistic make-up of the programs shown on television, in movie theaters or at festivals, and the dismal conditions under which they are screened there. The art world promises filmmakers new attention and exclusivity,

and is keeping its promises in part. Every short film in a large-scale exhibition today reaches a greater number of spectators and receives greater recognition there than it could ever attain in cinemas. This increase in value is a genuine element of the logic of value creation within the system we call “art.” While the majority of artists play a marginal role with their films in the art world, there are a few people receiving international recognition and making a considerable livelihood as a result. Filmmakers able to live off prize money and rental fees alone have always been the exception. Most finance their films through teaching positions and have little financial stability. Only once artists such as Nam June Paik, who experimented with video, began working in a more sculptural mode did their market value flourish in the art world. Few artists working in film met with success in this business. Kurt Kren, for example, survived in the US for years by working as a museum guard, in the end subsisting on benefits from the Austrian government until his death. A variety of artistic films achieve considerable success at film festivals, therefore finding a specific audience within this context and, in contrast to screenings at cinemas, occasionally reaching quite a sizeable audience. At the same time, their presentation at film festivals isn’t connected to a funding system determined by lobby

interests and geared toward a distribution in movie theaters and on television that in itself isn't commercial, but conducts itself commercially. This phenomenon is therefore rare, a thing reserved for star artists such as Matthew Barney (*DRAWING RESTRAINT 9*, 2005) and Steve McQueen (*HUNGER*, 2008), who successfully showed features made thanks to film funding and proper budgets at film festivals as well as in cinemas. In the German-speaking region, visual artists such as Rebecca Horn (*BUSTER'S BEDROOM*, 1990) and Pipilotti Rist (*PEPPERMINTA*, 2009) were not able to emulate their success.

Still, some filmmakers who have been artists for decades are suddenly miraculously "discovered" by a quite heterogeneous and sometimes even inconsistent art scene. Numerous filmmakers who are effectively more or less "experimental" in their approach, with an already extensive filmography to show for themselves, were discovered by the art market at a very late stage – among them Chantal Akerman, James Benning, Robert Breer, Harun Farocki, Isaac Julien, and Ulrike Ottinger. Others – for example Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Matthew Barney, and Pipilotti Rist – found acceptance early on (if not from the very beginning), because the conditions were right at a specific moment in time. The price for the assimilation of the "experimental film" into

the art world was de-historizing these works. Many a filmmaker “discovered” by the art world is subjected to a founding myth, given that it is not least because of their “originality” that they gain “value”. Originality, in this case, is meant with respect to the history of art, not the history of film. All of a sudden, even an artist’s older works made for screening in cinemas are shown at exhibitions, regardless of how they were originally received outside the movie theater. Films that have only earned moderate revenue or are considered mere shelf warmers in the catalogues of experimental film distributors are now being bought by museums or even withdrawn from distribution. Sometimes these works just move from one museum department to another, from film to contemporary art, which of course have completely different budgets and prices. Some museums only started buying these artists’ works once they were represented by galleries and therefore became part of the symbolic system and value chain we call “art.” The art market also requires reassurances. No one wants to be wrong. Apart from a few really bold curators, it was the galleries that stimulated this development, not the museums. Everything is supposed to have its origin and destiny in art history, or better yet: in the art market. The reformatting of film through the art world can sometimes have an almost exorcizing

effect on film history and the cultural practice of cinema, which is denied its standing as a fundamental technique and genuine mode of perception of film. An obituary about filmmaker Harun Farocki in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* not only omitted mention Farocki's films and his work as an editor (listing him only as author) of the magazine *Filmkritik*, but also insinuated Farocki found his salvation as an artist within the art world, where he allegedly encountered "the focused spectator he had wished for. And he was successful, exhibiting in all major museums." What is certainly satisfying on a commercial level for every individual artist is, however, nowhere near sufficient justification for their art. It seems like we're not talking about the same thing: the incomprehension now inherent in the clashes of discourse between film and art has rarely been this great and this hopeless, not only regarding the valuation of aesthetics, but even of craftsmanship. Embarrassing silence or evasion are the usual responses on both sides when you challenge the work of a renowned artist because it involves image and sound material that has already been used in other films, which they should have looked at critically. The suppression of film history within art discourse is a requirement for a certain type of logic on added value and its inherent origin myth with reference

to both artist and work. Given the art world's new sovereignty over the interpretation of which films – and, most of all, which names – even have market value, the issue of experimental film and its potential film historical standards has apparently been settled.

Whoever says film, cannot mean art; there are still too many reservations on this point. Nevertheless, the term “film art” implies something that certainly doesn't match up with the current state of artistic production. It usually refers to a canon of “masterpieces.” While film festivals dedicated to experimental film have largely disappeared or taken up new, zeitgeisty names, the designations “experimental film” and “video art” have gradually been absorbed into the term “media art.” But even “media art” has never really been able to access the art market, even though the classification itself contains a claim to artistic accomplishment. Media art contains the promise of artistic integrity in the age of its technological reproducibility. As a sponsor of culture, you cannot go wrong with media art. Film is elevated to the level of art, and the aspects that have always been dubious – screenings at the movie theater, the stigma of the popular or even the proletarian, the smell of popcorn, the noise of children – are left out. The label “media art” itself, however, does not guarantee access to the art

market, which functions according to the idiosyncratic, often obscure but ultimately astonishingly simple logic of relationships and names, in short: of networks. It is therefore not surprising that the art world's appropriation of filmmakers in the last few years has meant success to people who have never defined themselves as "media artists." To prosper, the artists' "positions," as the art scene so aptly calls them, first had to be "discovered," especially those pertaining to animated and documentary films.

This has contributed to a late – for many too late, i.e. posthumous – appreciation of a whole series of artists. In any case, earnestly opposing the art scene's sovereignty over the interpretation of film as art was no longer possible anyway. The elevation of film to an art form on the condition of its scarcity (limiting the number of copies and screenings) was gratefully accepted by many filmmakers, because this offered them the recognition, sometimes also financially, that the cinema had refused them so far. Filmmakers such as Robert Breer and others managed to unexpectedly sell their graphic works in this way as well. In this respect the movie theater has clearly failed as a distribution venue for artists' films. We therefore shouldn't be surprised if they migrate from cinemas to galleries in large numbers. Those who deplore

the state of film festivals are also right, because there is too little attention paid to and too little due diligence done for the individual artist and their work within a mass operation dealing with hundreds of films. Exclusivity in the art scene, meanwhile, is a privilege awarded only to the happy few.

Furthermore, reasons for migrating into the art world are also technological in nature. Only the emergence of digital processes and affordable professional software, especially the opportunity represented by increasingly satisfying video projection, made it possible to elevate this medium in the first place. This laid the foundation for the transition of film to video technology. Video installations were then able to be shown not only on small monitors, but on large screens too, without the technical complexity and noise of film projection. Film could effortlessly be transferred to video. HD technology opened up a new dimension in which film and video technology were able to converge. Erika Balsom demonstrated that the tremendous success of the moving image in the art world coincided with the introduction of the LCD projector, which emerged in the early 1990s. In 1992, *documenta 9* presented numerous video positions, marking the turning point for “media art” and the inception of the assimilation of film and video into

the art world. Today, these works can easily be shown as installations on several screens (in a space mobile viewers can enter and leave), or in the form of a traditional projection. Eija-Liisa Ahtila, for instance, has always seen herself both as a filmmaker and a visual artist, therefore showing her work as installations (multichannel) at exhibitions and as films (single channel) at festivals (in this case without any commercial prospects, of course).

The rapid development in film and video production coincided with a significant crisis within the art market during the early 1990s. The (perhaps already waning) success of technological media on the art market may therefore on the one hand be explained by momentary fatigue with regard to established techniques for visual art (and the necessity to open up new ones), and on the other by the possibility of presenting immense, convincing technical images that can be preserved as durably as large panel paintings. This was first demonstrated by the large-scale photographs of Jeff Wall and the Becher-School, as well as works by artists like Andreas Gursky, Axel Hütte, and Thomas Ruff. Even the market value of small-scale photographic works such as those by William Eggleston benefited, because their durability level is generally as high as for canvases. Only a few years ago, it would have been unthinkable for filmmakers

to sell their copies strictly in limited editions (if we ignore the works of Bruce Conner or Gregory Markopoulos for this observation). That filmmakers like Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, who are now both part of the art world themselves, accompanied the copies of their films into the projection room, refusing to let them out of their sight, can confidently be dismissed as a whim that had nothing to do with market value.

Everything that once only received a modest response at festivals like Biarritz, Hyères or Knokke is now confronted with completely different standards for assessment in the art world. To maintain or establish any innovative kind of imagery there, you have to prove yourself, because all other distribution networks have largely disappeared (revenues from distributing artistic films are marginal and predominantly declining, it is said) and were never very significant, for that matter. This has caused an essential change in the mode of production for each individual artist, who no longer has to deal with the customs of (experimental or media art) festivals and the niche market for distributors. Instead, they must meet completely different requirements and adapt to the logic of added value supported by museums and collectors, as well as the galleries addressing them.

Today, the art world decides what is artistic about film. It alone can promise the general commercial conditions for aesthetic standards, even though the artistic expression of film used to be a matter for the avant-garde. However, avant-garde film has always had a distinctly anti-institutional and anti-economic dimension. Almost no one earned any money with it; avant-garde meant leisure time. A filmmaker such as Lutz Mommartz worked as an administrative employee. “Experimental” films that cannot be distributed and validated in the system of the art world today appear as marginal forms of amateur filmmaking; the avant-garde itself has long become inherent to the system. As long as the art scene didn’t function as a distribution platform for artistic films, festivals like Knokke were the place where very different artistic projects with no commercial prospects came together, although they didn’t always coexist without conflict. Experimental and narrative strategies weren’t separate from the beginning, but for a time formed a wide space dedicated to artistic invention. Martin Scorsese’s *THE BIG SHAVE* (1967), for example, was shown first at Knokke and Oberhausen before he was considered a director of feature films. The end of avant-garde film arrived the moment when film became interesting for the art scene; when film could be integrated into art

exhibitions in a satisfying manner and handled as a “multiple,” as part of a limited edition. Experimental and narrative techniques separated into “feature film” and “artist’s film.” At the same time, and not least due to the rise of video and digital procedures, the experimental form has become tremendously more complex.

Avant-garde film never managed to establish a commercially relevant distribution system for its presentation and monetization. In this case too, the market determines what film – or rather what art – is. Value can only be generated by inclusion or exclusion on a communicative level. The term “experimental film” was essentially always too vague to attain commercial relevance. In important theoretical works on avant-garde film, for example Birgit Hein’s *Film im Underground*, Peter Gidal’s *Materialist Film* and P. Adams Sitney’s *Visionary Film*, this term is of absolutely no importance. Even today, filmmakers like Mike Hoolboom prefer to speak of “fringe film.” Hans Scheufl and Ernst Schmidt Jr. already deemed the avant-garde to be obsolete in their *Sub-History of Film* in the 1970s. What remains is the desire to find a conceptual term for the special status of the artistic film at the cinema as opposed to within the art market. This, however, has contributed to a highly reductive view of film history. The history of American avant-garde

film between the 1940s and the 1970s – following P. Adams Sitney’s formula – has long been viewed as the paradigm of any reasonably serious engagement with experimental film, even though almost the entirety of non-Western works in avant-garde cinema were completely ignored. Until today, festivals and program series such as the “Experimenta Weekend” (London Film Festival), the ICA Artists’ Film Biennial (London), the Plastik Festival of Artists’ Moving Image (Dublin), the “Views from the Avant-Garde” (New York Film Festival), “Wavelengths” (Toronto International Film Festival) and the Flaherty Film Seminar in New York continue in this tradition to a great extent. These programs almost exclusively feature British or American (sometimes also Canadian) works under the not very specific label “artist’s film.” Sitney’s reductionism is an expression of the fact that these filmmakers were only familiar with the films in their own environment and didn’t appraise experimental films with an eye toward the *entire cinema*. The artistic part of film is limited to your own range of experience and learned conventions – and film festivals, as well as a few film distributors and universities, are contributing to this. A small community meets at a few festivals and events to ritually discuss a phenomenon that today has become as seriously marginalized as never before:

the avant-garde film, meaning the film that elevates its own materiality to an aesthetic object (Malcolm Le Grice speaks of “the material instead of an illusionistic presentation”). What this community essentially does is mutually corroborate the constant expectations of the genre “artist’s film,” which is actually defined by the art world, whereas divergent aesthetic and cultural practices tend to be completely overlooked. In this way, the “avant-garde” turned into a dominance of Western culture. Whatever remained of social progress is supposed to be converted into aesthetic progress, but a canonized form remains that predefines the social framework of thinking, not taking into account its authoritarian character. Gregory Markopoulos created a symbol and precedent for these circumstances by holding screenings exclusively reserved for his films in Temenos, far from civilization on a remote mountain in Greece. In trying to radically remove cinema from the market and therefore the cultural industry, he created a pastoral version of a cinema before its fall from grace, a scenario in which nature and audience were to form a symbiotic relationship without distraction, wholly dedicated to the service of art. The audience had to go to considerable lengths in order to reach this place; they had to consciously renounce social presence. Art wanting to withdraw from the art world in this

way always threatens to turn into aesthetic fundamentalism.

The arrival of film in the art world in the beginning of the 1990s also engendered an impressive number of “curated” film programs; in the past, they would have been merely “compiled.” A program therefore must be “curated” at the very least, and a filmmaker needs to be a “position.” No exhibition on the present state of contemporary art can do without film. Film, however, is detached from its film-historical and aesthetical references and therefore also from critical engagement. Film history and film aesthetics are by no means the only valid measure for assessing a film, but considering how “positions” of classical avant-garde film, for example Kenneth Anger, Robert Breer, or Bruce Conner, are presented in the art scene, numerous shifts regarding mostly the aesthetic and historical evaluation of these artists can be detected, especially regarding the standards of presentation. The curator is considered the new hero of deregulated working conditions within a neoliberal reality of life that listens to this nicely named “creative class.” For some, these circumstances and their own role within them may appear to be a proper profession. The more unsettling contemporary art is, the more urgent the apparent need for explanation and orientation through discourse mechanisms. Steven Rosenbaum

talks of a “curation nation” in which everything is curated and everyone is a “curator,” giving in to the illusion of self-determined work. The curator embodies what remains of the idea of non-hierarchical life equaling an individual success story. They regularly present themselves as a form of opposition. The only people who are really successful, however, are those who are and remain mainstream. The curator’s blind spot is their relation to power. Their success cannot be judged along the lines of artistic standards, but rather upon the influence they can exert. The star curator no longer needs to establish artists and they don’t even need to “curate”; they simply need to orchestrate something highly spectacular and create name artists.

Even though filmmakers finding success on the art market today, albeit sometimes only post mortem, is very welcome, what is incomprehensible is that their works are presented as if they had nothing to do with the practice of screening films in cinemas or with film history; as if this was an aspect you could simply forget. The art world is developing a mostly affirmative discourse about film as an art object, which de-historizes film and decontextualizes it. This is American artist Andrea Fraser’s general critique: “Despite the radical political rhetoric that abounds in the art world, censorship and self-censorship reign when it comes to

confronting its economic conditions.” Critical analysis in the art world usually ends at the point when you have to address your own participation in the underlying economic system. “Criticality” usually doesn’t refer to the art world’s institutional logic and even less so to its handling of film. We therefore need a critique of the formatting that determines how we perceive and discuss film, cinema and art. Because how we watch a film isn’t irrelevant – just as how and where you listen to music isn’t irrelevant (much of what is written about film also applies to music anyway). It doesn’t necessarily follow that the standards of the movie theater need to be implemented for every presentation of a film in the art world. All of us are already too used to being content with completely inadequate forms of film screening. When did you last see a film that was projected under the best possible (and necessary) conditions? The problem with showing films is, among other things, that screenings are only ever an *approximation*. It makes a difference whether you stroll through an exhibition, entering and leaving a black box at will (seeing various exhibits simultaneously) or whether you are *compelled to a different mode of perception* for a certain time within a collective.

What art has never understood about cinema is the *compulsion to perceive*, irrespective of the audience

– each member of which has their own individual education, inclinations and intentions – watching the film. Film imposes the perception of *something different* and a reference to time through its *setting, which has its own duration*. Duration is cinema’s “imposition,” Juliane Rebentisch writes. For Jean-Louis Schefer, cinema represents a completely innovative “experimental” experience of time and memory. This is what has always gotten in the way of film in the art world. For the duration of a film, I wasn’t part of a world I could imagine and look at; instead the world was *looking at me*. In *L’Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, Schefer says thinking is inherent to film, it doesn’t take place outside of it. This was cinema’s greatest, most powerful invention, so radical in comparison with all other arts also because it didn’t call on your education. On the contrary: the cinema essentially turns me into a (“normal”) being with no education, because it is film itself that is thinking (which doesn’t mean that the film isn’t intelligible and cannot – or even must not – become an object of critique). As part of the art world, film gives us art as added value, but at the same time it loses the independent mode of perception it owes solely to the movie theater. You encounter film as visual art, as an object of aesthetic. Only during the course of the decline of cinema has film finally been confirmed as art. But at the same

time, its significance and innovation within the history of media remains misunderstood. Cinema – to adapt one of Slavoj Žižek’s ideas about Brecht’s morality plays – counters the essentially ideological freedom of “self-determination” with the compulsion to perceive something specific for a certain duration of time. Self-determination consists of the possibility to come and go at will, irrespective of what is imperative for appreciating a film, and of the illusory subjective (or liberal) freedom that is nonetheless based on a fundamental submission to the ideological imperative of conventions (for example the rules of the art scene) on the one side, and physical stasis, the fixed gaze, *the submission to time*, on the other. Cinema offers an alternative to the seemingly limitless freedom that amounts to the prospect of evading this other, different, challenging perception at any given time in order to persist in your own perceptual and behavioral patterns. The choice I actually have versus the choice I only seem to have comes down to leaving or staying in order to *be compelled to perceive differently*; to relinquish subjectivity in exchange for a passive experience of objectivity.

The assumption that only film that is installative and can therefore be experienced as an object (or even “interactively”) serves the “anti-illusionist” (and therefore *aesthetic*) experience (Juliane

Rebentisch) and introduces an analytical “freedom” (Boris Groys) – what Malcolm Le Grice calls the “critical arena of the present” – overlooks exactly that which differentiates film from the arts. This assumption may be based on a fundamental media-historical misconception of the bourgeois concept of subject and culture, which cements the art world’s current particular mode of “individuality as a technique of power” (Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack). 1970s film theorists (influenced by feminist, Marxist, psycho-analytical thought such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Louis Comolli, Stephen Heath, Teresa de Lauretis, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey) fell prey to this misconception when they followed the tenets of “apparatus theory,” thereby primarily targeting their critique of an “illusionist” (i.e. manipulative) film at narrative cinema as the matrix. Several of these theorists, among them the filmmaker and theorist Peter Gidal, believed that based on this they could deduce a genuine justification for experimental film, a sort of anti-cinema aimed at putting an end to the convoluted, illusionist games of cinema. If experimental film was thought of and produced as a general “critique” of the cinema, then it was always in jeopardy of prematurely becoming an “anti-illusionist” project that would counter the cinema’s specific mode of perception as a comparatively

harmless “critical” aesthetic. The desire for a *different* kind of movie theater condemned *all* cinemas in the name of anti-capitalist critique. Every aesthetic of truth always includes authoritarian and totalitarian, and therefore also spiritless, features.

Apparatus theory has rightly diagnosed and protested cinema’s exercising of a mode of reception in favor of the industrial distribution of film. You can easily corroborate how the cinema was industrially perfected and how it established a certain “dispositif” and thereby a certain social practice. *The cinema* undoubtedly encompasses various historical and social practices of presentation (authors like Noël Burch, Tom Gunning and Heide Schlüpmann have tirelessly reminded us of this fact). It nevertheless overlooked how cinema, to the same extent as it became the perfect illusion machine, also created a unique media-historical mode of perception that didn’t merely turn audiences into consumers and victims of an efficient capitalist process. Cinema shaped us into beings who perceive differently than how society, ruled by the principle of capitalist processes, would dictate. Images may be ideologically charged, but the apparatus itself that produces these images is not, even if it works as an expression of certain economic interests. Apparatus theory has misjudged at least

two factors in its endeavor to overcome cinema with anti-illusionism, so to speak: on the one hand you cannot evade the apparative *image*. Looking always rubs off. As much as I try to evade the image if it seems suspicious to me with respect to my own thinking and to the world, it will always catch up with me. Without the image, there is no connection at all, neither to thinking nor to the world. Gilles Deleuze's essential realization was that cinema is analogous to thinking because it *is* an image; cinema is not similar to philosophical concepts because it can illustrate them, but rather because it is capable of *perceiving* the world analogous to philosophical concepts in sound and images. Meanwhile, it is thanks to the apparative image that we can perceive *differently*. Apparatus theory has ignored the media-historical reality on the one hand and the profoundly new effect of the cinematographic image on the other. The idea or expectation that a viewer should or could encounter an artwork "freely" is a truly persistent teaching of critical art theory. However, Jean-Louis Schefer, in his book on Correggio (*La lumière et la proie*), showed how an artwork's individual structure and texture subdues our gaze, how the artwork "looks at us." The claim of a "free" gaze also stands in contrast to an art world that imposes its own orders of gaze on each viewer and fosters the illusion of us being

“free” individuals who only make conscious choices, at least for the duration of the exhibition or simply in the moment of contemplation. A museum visitor has just as little freedom as a viewer in a cinema or a user on the internet. The compulsion to perceive is always suspicious. At least our gaze should be independent, even if the social circumstances aren't.

The observation that the movie theater doesn't offer or represent intellectual, critical, or self-reflexive engagement with its mode of perception (which it may enable only in terms of reasoning in retrospect, i.e. a posteriori), that it is “thinking me,” even though I myself would like to think, makes it per se suspected of being an “apparatus,” an “illusion machine,” and an “instrument of power.” Any project of “anti-illusionist” film overlooks (notwithstanding numerous excellent “anti-illusionist” films) the part which so radically differentiated the cinema from the more or less “critical” mode of perception of the bourgeois viewing of art. It threatens to fall for an illusion itself. Only within the past few years have cultural studies developed a new understanding of how the cinema doesn't represent an ideological form of illusion, but instead a “highly intelligent symbolization” (Gertrud Koch) and social reality. Theodor Adorno's use of the term “semblance” in

his later publications might lead us to the heart of the matter. Cinema is not based on an illusionist deception. Nothing about cinema is an illusion in the sense of a falsifying (“ideological,” “mythical,” etc.) reality. Some have misread Ilja Ehrenburg’s *The Dream Factory*, because in it he described the social reality of the nascent film industry in 1931, not the reality of technical images.

The cinema was a mode of perception that revealed itself as an aesthetic reality only to the immobilized (“passive”) viewer through the suspension of everyday life and subjectivity, not intellectually, but rather in “distracted” and “tactile” form, as Walter Benjamin stated. It is the only aesthetic mode of perception that, for a certain time, not only compelled me to see and think differently, but to *be something different*. For Benjamin, the “freedom” in the compulsion to perceive consisted in overcoming the limitations of the subjective gaze. “Pure cinema,” Fernand Léger wrote in 1925, “is the image of the object that is wholly unknown to our eyes.” For Benjamin, cinema is one of the forms of profane enlightenment he had previously only experienced subjectively by taking drugs, and it has since become a collective form of experience through the apparatus. With the designation “optical unconscious,” Benjamin established a proximity to Freud’s

studies. Shortly after the publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, Gustav Mahler set to music German poet Friedrich Rückert's "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" / "I am lost to the world." It would therefore be worth studying in-depth why apparatus theory has only understood the cinema completely non-dialectically under the aegis of illusion, thereby ideologizing the technical mode of perception and the media-historical radicalism of cinema under that of the criticism of ideology. Fundamentally, apparatus theory as an anti-capitalist theory of cinema was an exceedingly romantic method of defense against both apparatus and media, ultimately causing a significant amount of harm that reached all the way to critical art theory.



A New Kind of Epic Film

Oddly enough it was Andy Warhol who, while providing key testimony to many “anti-illusionist” critics and theorists, showed that film was not illusion, but rather an autonomous mode of perception connected to cinema and only possible in the movie theater. Warhol uses the cinema to critique film. For a long time, the idiosyncrasies of films such as *EMPIRE* (1964) were expressed by the very fact of their existence, and not through their visibility. Warhol’s *EMPIRE* became the most famous unknown film. Few people have ever seen it or experienced what happens when you see it in the cinema. This film embodies the menacing scale of a single concept and of a completely inactive working day: an eight-hour shot of a building. Normally, the movie theater audience is exploited by not being able to see the work the film requires of them. Warhol transforms this very aspect; the action takes place inside the theater, where the soundtrack of

this silent film is created. Warhol calls it a “‘sound’ movie *without* sound.” The film’s silence provokes disobedience inside the theater similar to children misbehaving at school. At first, the appearance of Warhol’s superstar, the Empire State Building, suggests to the audience that this will be a serious, “aesthetic” event for which they are expected to sit still and be quiet. The continuing absence of redemptive speech or liberating motion, however, elicits movement, gestures, and noises from ordinarily regimented bodies. The viewer’s individuality in art reception collapses. In this case, art cheats society out of added value.

The titles of Warhol’s films contain no secrets; they don’t offer more than what’s promised. They are summaries comparable to the labels on cans of Campbell’s Soup. People eat in *EAT*, they kiss in *KISS*, and they sleep in *SLEEP* (all produced in 1963). The skyscraper’s absurd persistence isn’t about things and symbols or about (abstract) time, but about the redemption of the symbolic, of chronology and history through a process happening within the collective audience. This film overcomes the framing of art created to perform a symbolic demarcation from daily life, from lived time. The film begins with the duration of its projection, because its content is duration itself. It consists of watching and murmuring, of inertia and tension;

its subject is the amount of time it takes for boredom to set in. In this way, each audience member loses their fear of falling silent as part of a collective, and of the childish dread of the dark. Warhol's film criticism discovers the cinema as a potential space in which the collective can leap into a time beyond work, individualization and art. Watching Warhol's films on DVD at home or on the internet would be just as meaningless as bringing them to museums as installations. Their artistic aspects only unfold in the movie theater, only thanks to the specific "materiality" of film, only because of its duration in the dark within the collective. None of this would remain on an exhibition screen.

Warhol's film anticipates installations with film durations that exceed anyone's individual patience and stamina; installations that just have a "middle" and have been clogging the art world's exhibitions since the 1990s. He therefore consciously anticipates the possibility of not being able to endure the conventions of the movie theater, by people becoming vocal or leaving the room, and basically dissolving the social contract. He nevertheless insists on cinema's mode of perception, and not just because potential activity and mobility are a genuine part of his artistic idea, or because it is impossible for the audience to miss a part of an

overarching meaningful context or an important detail (as would be the case in the exhibition of films with a “plot” or documentaries lasting several hours). He insists on this mode of perception because the specific experience of time connected to this film only results from the original dialectic between the submission to time and the possibility of individually or collectively shaping time.

Warhol’s works stand in contradiction to the merely conceptual freedom of all filmic installations which, due to their duration, either turn the audience into desperate consumers or hopeless participatory dilettantes. The audience is neither overwhelmed by not being able to (or supposed to) appreciate a work in its entirety, which is the case for many contemporary exhibitions, nor are they incited into some kind of idiotic interactivity (whose freedom always remains trapped inside the tightly limited structural logic of the given work or the institutional logic of the art world). Because each individual activity always refers to an intimate perception of time itself, which is the opposite of education, namely difference. This is what makes Warhol’s films so radical. They touch the limits of cinema, the passivity that is part of the compulsion to perceive, because they make it possible to subjectively experience much more than the merely deceptively “interactive” exposure to one’s own

freedom – which is mainly also creative, and results directly, necessarily and objectively from perceiving this other world that only cinema can offer. Warhol doesn't disavow or stylize (in the sense of a dubiously “anti-illusionist” or “critical” attitude); he separates the visible from things and movement from the story, because both things and movement in the cinema at some point lost their visibility in favor of meaning and the story. At that point they were nothing but the agents of the stories. With the Empire State Building, Warhol films a fallen diva whose aura had already been threatened by the construction of taller rivals. It is no coincidence that Warhol returns to the scene of the crime within the high-rise metropolitan jungle where King Kong once lost his main asset, namely his monstrosity. Warhol prevents the demonstration of the unimaginable or the monstrous by showing the visible in its unmitigated massiveness. There is nothing invisible hiding behind the visible that could suddenly appear, that could be discovered and then need to be carefully revealed like the secret, uncharted island in KING KONG. No more monsters are there to be forced to just show themselves at the end. The visible becomes immediately proximate, it moves to the sensory surface of what *can be* visible. Silent film worked with head-on sets that were meant to present just part of the whole.

Warhol no longer treats the visible as just a view through the keyhole; the visible alone is what fills the frame. He doesn't look for what's decorative, but rather for the moment in which experience becomes the image. His films are not a description of something that has come before, even though they are always essentially about the same thing: a dazzling procession of visibility. The image never becomes *informal* – it is frontality without background, an image in which nothing is happening, that doesn't refer to anything, doesn't hide anything; there is nothing but time and the image's own freedom.

This cinema breaks the invisible thread that leads offstage, which is an effect of the image itself, both in its visible weight and non-optical “emptying”: “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel,” Warhol says. In its infinite slowness, *EMPIRE* absorbs all forms and refuses, in an act of dramaturgically exact “emptying,” a happy ending for all things. The completely open aperture and the highly sensitive film stock take away the image's depth and horizon. The impression of watching a silent film, brought on by the slowed projection speed, means the building is already immersed in a radiant, flickering brightness at twilight at the very beginning

of the film. The gradual onset of artificial lighting roughly an hour later creates a completely flat image composed of an arrangement of light and dark: a surface with secret messages and signals, an enigmatic map of the visible. A distant building's illuminated clock no longer displays chronological time, instead blinking an unintelligible language in Morse code. The architecture of light creates a glamorous being born of the cinema that remains in view, ever unattainable. You constantly look past the "content" because this strange, obscure soundlessness reaches deep into your own silent existence in the movie theater. The duration of the immobile displaces the image's focus. And, with the dimming of the building's lights toward the end, the last figure disappears from the image into a chimerical materiality.

Questioning conservational or philological aspects of the "original" film (which looks like it needs restoring) misses the point with regard to the unique optical quality of this stained, spotted, scratched and quivering work. Callie Angell, the curator of Warhol's films, pointed out that these "defects" come from the chemical developing process of the film negative and therefore aren't abrasion marks on the prints. As it pulls things down with it into the abyss of meaning, the film gains even more texture while approaching its

inexorable disappearance. By celebrating its visibility, the film risks its very existence as it burns up. Nevertheless, where and how the film is shown is not immaterial. The better the projection quality, the stronger its impact. In this case, cinema contemplates its own existence outside the cinema.

Warhol's *POOR LITTLE RICH GIRL* (1965) acts as a counterpart to *EMPIRE*: both films show how a "star" is born. The title of this film is a tribute to the eponymous film starring Shirley Temple, who was Warhol's idol. At first, Warhol wanted to film twenty-four hours in the life of Edie Sedgwick, but he only shot an hour of her waking up in the morning and getting ready for the day. Warhol's "superstars" are special because they can become that without presenting stories or embodying characters. Warhol says that his stars don't require a script, that glamour is enough. The first part of the film remains almost completely out of focus. Warhol also kept this technical defect, joining it together with a second part that was in focus. This blurriness has a distancing effect similar to that already seen in *EMPIRE*. The eye fails to capture the full meaning; it submerges into materializing movement. As Sedgwick dresses in front of the mirror in the second part of the film, this equally displaces the meteoric apparition; each attempt at coming closer results in the distancing of the focal point and the

coveted object. These films define the construction of an impossible encounter, of absolute inaccessibility. They are not about physical desire, but rather about the attempt to think of the vanishing, of the incomprehensible itself within the return of time. They are about the wish to resemble time.

The theory of “anti-illusionist” film, which comes from within the narrow field of film theories based on ideology critique and experimental film, has largely been integrated into the art world’s discourse. It defines and endorses film by neglecting or even negating the cinema as a screening practice and mode of perception. Most curators educated in the art world – including those who show films – understand film outside of its historical screening practice in theaters and its context within the history of film. At least two things have been accomplished by the art world. It has created a new form of attention and a new source of income for artist’s films; a positive development for every filmmaker who is able to benefit. It has also abolished the critical, historical engagement with experimental practices of filmmaking and the standards of film presentation. The price film has paid for being acknowledged by the art world has come in the form of the dubious transfer of a bourgeois concept of art onto film as an art form. It was both right and important to save film as an art form,

no matter how. But in the process we lost a mode of perception that had been until then unique – more than just an art form – which it owed to the cinema, a space that now belongs to the history of technical media. Moreover, film as part of the art world outside the cinema is beginning to conform to new conventions, to address a different audience and thereby to also change its character.

For a few artists, the absorption of “experimental film” by the art market, which involved a drastic selection procedure, resulted in greater public recognition and a significant financial upgrade of their work. Before that, films by artists such as Robert Breer, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and even Andy Warhol were restricted to the underground (fetching accordingly low prices), even though their more traditionally produced artworks already had a certain commercial success on the market. This also illustrates the different ways in which the film and art markets operate. Value for film lies in multiplication, whereas in the art world it consists in scarcity: films must be shown as often as possible under any circumstances in the film world to refinance themselves, while a film on the art market should be exhibited as little as possible under very specific conditions. The film’s print has purely material value, not sentimental value. The art market, however, which still clings to

the idea of the original, considers only a limited edition – exclusivity, a certain inaccessibility, sometimes almost culminating in invisibility – as guaranteeing the value of a certain work. If film and art don't get along, it is mainly because of their distinctly organized systems. The question asked by the art magazine *Texte zur Kunst* (*Texts on Art*): “What does art want from film?” can therefore be grasped only by understanding the diversity of the respective logic of added value involved. However, this question insinuates that *art* is scrutinizing *film*, placing it outside of art and therefore not making it part of a heterogeneous artistic field. We must therefore understand the question as follows: Why is the art world interested in film? Consequently, the film magazine *kolik.film* later turned the question around: “What does film want from art?”

As a result, it is not just well-known paintings that sometimes disappear from the public view after auctions, but films too – for instance those of British artist Gillian Wearing, which are now rarely exhibited. It is nearly impossible to show them at a festival or at the cinema, as this would clearly not add value to the films. You have to have exhausting debates with gallery owners, who fear for the market value of the work they represent, about the pros, cons and modalities of a potential screening at a movie theater or film festival. As per the

instructions of their representing galleries, films of other well-known artists must now be shown exclusively within the context of the art world and in some cases even only in solo shows. Art dealers and private collectors sometimes buy the complete oeuvre of a deceased artist, thereby establishing great financial and formal hurdles for screenings at cinemas, as in the case of Jack Smith's films. Everything is a matter of market power and the logic of added value. The danger of this kind of "reauratization" of works lies in losing an audience and the increased privatization of art, as it prioritizes the market value of a limited-edition object. In case of doubt, it is the collector (or the gallery presumably acting in the interest of its client) who decides when, where and how you can see something. Limited editions of films are in this case secured in high-quality packaging outside of the public gaze. It is said that data carriers and master tapes are sold in expensive velvet cases, like perfume, and certified on high-quality paper to anoint technically reproducible images as originals. The rights and letters of indemnity included with them are very comprehensive. The peaceful coexistence of films existing both as limited editions and distribution copies is unlikely in structural terms, even though the rental distribution of some artistic films is often tolerated because, commercially

speaking, it is completely irrelevant. You can admittedly not blame collectors for not wanting their works shown everywhere, nor can you blame filmmakers for increasingly turning their back on the rental system as a form of distribution, because it does not offer any relevant turnover or significant public recognition.

The art world once again offers film an aura that used to be extended only to the unique object, to singular and non-reproducible works. The reauratization of artworks is inherent to the system, it is part of the value chain, not merely with regard to their value on the market itself, but also to their underlying idealization, i.e. the manner of their presentation. The art world has to create its own origin myth for each artist and work. A lobby of gallery owners, curators and collectors appoints names and standards. Now and then a star curator may even write a triumphant article about a little-known media artist who is part of the collection of an institution on whose advisory board the curator sits. Names are creating names.

In the art world, film-aesthetic, film-historical, or even just plain technical standards for assessing how an artwork should be made and presented have almost never been relevant. You can only wonder at the extent of how technically questionable the showing of a film sometimes is. The

difference between a preview copy and a proper release is sometimes completely dismissed. The standards of film production and presentation within the art world are often atrocious. Hito Steyerl, a filmmaker who is highly successful in the art world, has meanwhile become the captain of a new image paradigm and an advocate of the art world: a “poor image” should overcome its “fetish value” so that an “alternative economy of images, an imperfect cinema” may develop. Here again there is an almost Calvinist mistrust of conceptual art in particular, of the allegedly “illusionist” image; there is a fear of the beautiful semblance; the primacy of “free” contemplation (as opposed to immersion). That there is something rotten about this, but that it still neatly fits into the logic of the art world has also struck others, such as Susanne von Falkenhausen, who wrote for *frieze.com*: “In this light, the video format is something like an intermediate step on the way to a literal flattening of art on tablet screens: gallery-compatible, yet still not especially saleable due to a lack of haptic object quality, while still more or less resembling an artwork.”

This new image paradigm has led to a series of curatorially disastrous decisions, for example the projection of Lotte Reiniger’s films as video copies. Her films are based on the aesthetic principle of

back and white, even though it is well known that video projectors cannot display true black. Films get projected onto walls through pocket-sized video projectors, in rooms that aren't properly darkened (or may not be dark in order to prevent accidents, they say). Films are projected in the wrong aspect ratio, because people lack film format knowledge. The same artist, for example, who no longer wants to show her work in movie theaters will present it at a gallery, projected incorrectly in a 1:1 square. And at exhibitions you regularly hear the sound from the next installation, which you haven't even seen yet. Art critic Julia Voss reported on the 2015 Venice Biennial, completely exasperated: "The sound of various films roars, hammers and clamors from the other rooms. You can only hear the narrator's voice if you stand very close to the screen. But then you block everyone else's view." The art world has never really established adequate professional standards on how to show films, particularly because a work's actual "performance" is secondary to its discursive categorization and market value. Curatorial solutions get stuck within the conventions of the art world, which promises self-determined, limitless access to aesthetic experience, and in doing so rigorously challenges precisely this experience. "In short, the error consists in thinking you can move film history from cinemas into white

cubes and black boxes without taking into consideration the essential conditions inherent to the material. Put another way: They believe it possible to have the films without the film history.” (Volker Pantenburg). Traditional distribution platforms for artistic films are rapidly losing importance, accompanied by the rash application of the art world’s conventions for film as an art form. This is apparent in the erosion of not only meaningful professional standards of presentation (tried and tested in the cinema), but also of a certain state of theory formation and of a concept of film and cinema. It is therefore gratifying that some artists won’t give up on the cinema without a fight when it comes to screening their films. At documenta 11 for example, Steve McQueen stipulated that his film *WESTERN DEEP* (2002) could only be shown at specific times and that no one would be admitted late.

The standards we know and treasure for projection in movie theaters that strongly shaped the cinephile understanding of film – vivid and focused projection, a bright screen, the black box, a beginning and an end – was badly shaken up in part by insufficiently darkened, acoustically permeable rooms and in part by the introduction of the loop. Peter Kubelka has always insisted that his “invisible cinema” (implemented for the first time in 1970 in

New York), in which the theater's complete architecture retreats into the background (becomes "invisible"), was by no means a radical venture, but simply "normal" cinema (therefore the original in some sense, when compared to screening practices within other spaces). When it comes to the loud, cramped art fair booths in broad daylight, the limitations are obvious. But even at exhibitions, we often have to be content with less than the minimum standard of a cinema. Exhibition films are rarely shown in accordance with technical requirements and possibilities. Nothing invites you to linger or concentrate when you look at something. Being in the know is enough. The main thing is believing you saw it all. Preview becomes the standard of aesthetic experience. There are either no seats or just some that don't really offer much of a view – or none at all. It is usually the discursive framework of the catalogue that later explains how you should understand something you didn't see or only partially saw. The astonishingly high-level, privileged standards that "Unlimited" at Art Basel is setting with its screening rooms for other art fairs remains the exception. The misunderstanding between the cinema and the art world goes back a long way. Julie Reiss tells the story of how the well-known Swedish curator Pontus Hultén, who was not a bad filmmaker himself, tried to convince

Charlie Chaplin to let him use a clip from *MODERN TIMES* (1939), transferred to video, for an exhibition at MoMa in New York in 1968. Chaplin apparently denied his request in disgust. In an essay about the legendary exhibition “Prospekt 71: Projection”, which took place a few years later at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle – perhaps the very first exhibition of media art – Maxa Zoller writes about how some artists and filmmakers opposed the poor presentation and the exhibition’s openly commercial orientation. Filmmaker Lutz Mommartz consciously contrasted the exhibition’s “spatial experience” as part of the counter-event “Film – Kritisch” (“Film – Critical”), in which he reinstated the film inside the cinema.

An artist like Matthew Barney, who knew how to defeat cinema with its own arguments by funding his films with money from the art market instead of from the audience, irritated the art world (and the collectors who spent a lot of money on his films) for the long term when he sold his work in unlimited editions on DVD after they greatly increased in value on the market. This meant the auratization and scarcity of his films, the condition of their market value that regulated their public access, was at stake. The boundary between film and art is mostly controlled by the market and not necessarily based on the individual’s artistic claims

or their self-image. The art industry is not actually a market, it is more a symbolic system continually assessing the value of objects based on inclusion and exclusion. Whoever isn't part of this system has little chance of success. "The arcane social customs surrounding this – the stuff of social comedy – divert attention from the business of assigning material value to that which has none," says art critic Brian O'Doherty.

An excellent example of this development is Douglas Gordon's and Philippe Parreno's *Zidane, A 21ST CENTURY PORTRAIT* (2006), which was successful not just thanks to their names, but primarily due to the exhibition of its production values. The renowned cameraman Darius Khondji, already well-known for his work for David Fincher, placed 17 HD cameras around legendary football player Zinedine Zidane to film him during a single game. The production budget amounted to more than five million euros, the largest part of which went to the football club Real Madrid and its players, it is said. The film's premiere took place during Art Basel in a stadium designed by Herzog & de Meuron, where the only thing left of the soundtrack by Mogwai was a loud droning. The hype surrounding this unknown work by well-known names was enough to make it art. The artwork exhibits its worth. The work's character

as a commodity becomes apparent in its elements of spectacle. The film's production values become a fetish – always bigger, more expensive, more sensational: culinary cinema. For *DEANIMATED* (2002), Martin Arnold had a team of four employees digitally retouch an old Hollywood movie over 13 months, for a budget that usually suffices for small features. He then elaborately presented the result as a museum installation. It allegedly took three years and nine “research assistants” for Christian Marclay to compile and assemble footage from old films for the 24-hour *THE CLOCK* (2010). Mathias Poledna, who used to be an excellent graphic designer, showed his *IMITATION OF LIFE* (2013) – a roughly three-minute animated film in the style of 1930s Disney cartoons – at the Austrian pavilion in Venice. With a supposed budget of 1.1 million euros, more than 5,000 individual drawings were produced by an enormous team, which included staff from Hollywood studios, in order to piece together a short film that looked deceptively similar to the original it was modeled after. The soundtrack was recorded by a 52-piece orchestra on a historical stage on the Warner Bros. studio lot. In the accompanying text, Jasper Sharp, the curator responsible for this work, postulates the exaggerated thesis that this is a commentary on the pavilion's history, even on the history of Austrian artists

living in exile. IMITATION OF LIFE, however, mostly offers sad proof that only the art world is capable of replicating a technique once invented by cinema. The press release lists the “quantitative effort” as the “film’s special feature.” The art world triumphs over the movie theater; the imitation of a cinematic role model becomes a demonstration of how much power the art world has: it can offer huge budgets for short films that can’t be raised for feature films anymore. Walking through Venice towards the Giardini, the host of the Biennale’s exhibitions, you pass the abandoned carcasses of movie theaters lining the streets. The cinema is dead before you even reach the art.

ZIDANE offers advanced industrial society a contemporary version of the equestrian statue; this is its ideological dimension. Artistically, a critique of the production conditions under which this film was made would have been more appropriate. Of course, very few of the roughly 2,000 spectators in Basel would have known that the film is merely a rip-off of another avant-garde film, namely Hellmuth Costard’s FUSSBALL WIE NOCH NIE (FOOTBALL AS NEVER BEFORE) (1970), which doesn’t even get a mention in the credits. With six 16mm cameras, Costard filmed Manchester United footballer George Best. This fascinating deviation from the conventions of television broadcasting consisted,

in Costard's case, in asserting the micro narrative of a single player against the major narrative of the whole game. All Gordon and Parreno do is highlight a star who, on the playing field, is a mere reflection of his own market value outside of the arena. This offers up some reliable information on the nature of the art world, which is not only able to ignore film history without being challenged, it even manages to demonstrate its power to adapt cinema, to forget and to define. ZIDANE clearly marks the moment when the art world triumphed over film history, the moment in which it universally assumed sovereignty of definition over film as an art form. Whether the film made money in cinemas after the screening in Basel probably never played a role in its value chain, because it had already been fully financed from the outset, and its distribution on CD and DVD was already in full swing.

The art world's sovereignty of definition is now visible in many works created within and for the art market. Nothing about Cyprien Gaillard's NIGHT-LIFE (2015), for instance, could inherently justify what the texts issued by galleries and exhibitions so verbosely read into the work. In the case of this film too, the technical effort invested not only into the production but primarily into the work's presentation requiring advanced digital 3D technology

continues to be the main focus of the discourse surrounding this work. The discourse completes the assertion within both the work itself and its aesthetic internal structure. Technically the film is merely a succession of elements of spectacle thrown together for visual appeal (including a flying drone and fireworks), but of course it is all exquisitely presented. We might well see a general contextual connection between “racist Nazi ideology,” Berlin’s Olympiastadion, and a tree planted by Jesse Owens in Cleveland, but you cannot deduce this from the work itself. The “interpretations,” offered on guided tours through exhibitions or in lectures, in the press release, the catalogue essay or the reviews, all resemble the talks given at galleries or art fairs, which are intended to provide deeper insight into the work. But they all refuse to answer the much more urgent question concerning the artistic quality of the work itself.

The film might be “critical” in its intentions (though not in its form): it deals with identity, migration, racism, etc. The more critical, the better. Every act of criticism falls into the trap of intention when it dispenses with thorough analysis of the work and doesn’t constantly demand radical opposition and contradiction of the official discourse. Everything is referential, referencing concepts and values beyond the work itself, which then becomes

filmed theory, an expression of a common sense that confirms itself with mantra-like repetition in what it sees. The less aesthetically consistent a work is, the more receptive it becomes to discourse that can continue the narrative and ascribe value to it. Work and discourse are no longer separate spheres, instead entering into an albeit unstable but inseparable unity. The work is no longer a silent riddle to be solved or explored time and again. It is by contrast the discourse, having become part of the work itself, that continually deciphers what I perceive, because the work is no longer set against it; the work surrenders to said discourse. The discourse prompts me with an inaudible, but firm voice; it controls everything in line with the system within which the work was created and continually has to assert its value. “What is qualitatively good art, what is bad art, in light of inflationary concept art that can claim and make use of everything without ever producing any art or having to demonstrate its ability through tangible works of art?” German art critic Eduard Beaucamp asks with obvious impatience in an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. “Today, general ideas and concepts, high-spirited intentions and more or less accurate messages suffice.” Comprehensive texts at exhibitions, sophisticated catalogues, and elaborate art education on all levels (offline and online)

that can hardly be avoided nowadays ensure that no one will ever misunderstand anything or prematurely fall for the idea that – just maybe – this could actually be pretty bad art after all.

Put bluntly, the interpretation dictated to me is the only interpretation the work still allows. Interpretation is no longer personal, speculative and *contingent* on the individual, but rather an affirmative, tautological reproduction of the discourse preceding the work. Essentially, the work is meant to enable an infinite discourse of similar interpretations that don't contradict each other, a fantastical machine producing meaning and value. No matter how "critical" its "message" might be, a work becomes an expression of ideology whenever the class struggle between what is visible and what can be expressed ends, whenever the work stops opposing its interpretation. The work should never find peace; it should never be forgotten, it must speak up, as if impelled by an invisible trainer. No matter what I say about the work, I see what the enterprise is dictating, how it wants me to judge the world. The work can no longer be interpreted and, most of all, it has no effect beyond the discourse foreshadowing it. Criticism of the work cannot take any risks, as the range of potential interpretations has already been defined, examined and sealed off. Any discourse about this kind of work only confirms

the market's sovereignty over its definition. The market takes no risk because the work represents its own discourse, and "criticality" is what it's advertising.

It's understandable why older positions in media art are out of fashion; for example, Bill Viola, whose work is fully devoted to an aesthetic (if not to say "aestheticized") intention and is not at all referential. Only a work nurtured by highly-topical discourse can expect attention and recognition. Markus Metz and Georg Seesslen point out how the art market is partially eliminating art history, thereby abolishing interpretations that are deviant, speculative and critical by enforcing its own "narrative." It is therefore no surprise that NIGHTLIFE was presented in Düsseldorf thanks to cooperation between a museum, a private collection and a "fashion and lifestyle company." The museum adds to the work's cultural upvaluation and the private collector can patronizingly exhibit his possession in a public space, admittedly under the complete control of the art market. The problem in adapting film for the art market is of course not so much the reckless economization of relationships, but the implementation of a new perceptual dispositif.

A new form of epic film is being developed within the art world: "The epic film *Nightlife* resides between high-tech and history." (exhibition press

kit). “Artist Rosa Barba builds an epic sculpture in SCHIRN’s rotunda.” (*magazine of Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*). “The museum Villa Stuck is presenting an epic 13-channel film installation in cooperation with Sammlung Goetz. (Sammlung Goetz press kit). “*The Clock* is the largest monument to remix and mash-up culture to date.” (*Die Zeit*). On the one hand, these films are produced and exhibited in ever more elaborate ways, on the other hand they sometimes even feature movie stars to attract a wider audience. In LOVE STORY (2016), Candice Breitz had Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore recite the stories of Syrian and Somali refugees (instead of letting them speak for themselves), and in MANIFESTO (2015), Julian Rosefeldt had Cate Blanchett perform artists’ manifestos. With a clever strategy that expertly uses celebrities as elements of spectacle, films can generate a new temporalization and “eventization” (Metz and Seesslen call it “cinematographization”) of the artwork. Art is hyped into overpowering aesthetics (which at times hardly even acknowledge the refugees’ messages or the intentions of the artists’ manifestos). The presentations of these works, only made possible by the extensive cooperation between public and private sponsors, as well as aggressive exhibition and location marketing, claim for themselves a singular kind of visibility that hardly permits, or even

outright disqualifies, the possibility of featuring the films in a curated group show. Rosefeldt's work, for example, has to be shown on 13 massive parallel screens, leaving an impression on the audience that is probably comparable to what a medieval visitor would have experienced upon entering a cathedral. It is precisely these kinds of technical images that are again turning exhibition rooms into adoration spaces. Cinema is returning as a cult to the art world, which promises the consistent reconciliation of contradictions.

Film Becomes Sculptural

The long history of the art world's "pre-critical" adaptation of film history has its beginning in Douglas Gordon's 24 HOUR PSYCHO (1993), among others. Gordon's stunt consisted in expanding Hitchcock's film to 24 hours in length and presenting it inside a black box, making it part of the art industry. Nicolas Bourriaud characterizes this kind of practice positively as the "postproduction" of images by means of digital technology in contemporary art. But you can see the difference from Warhol at first glance: by doing away with the cinema's compulsion to perceive – because neither the work's aesthetics nor its presentation deposits the audience into a *different* time – the work becomes decorative and at best entices the audience to participate in empty interactivity. With the genre of found footage, that is with the manipulation of surviving and sometimes very well-known material (for example from feature films), avant-garde film

started practicing a kind of psychoanalysis of cinema early on, raising awareness of itself (first through the works of Joseph Cornell, then mainly Bruce Conner, later through Matthias Müller and others). The reappropriation of found footage within the art world, however, is the appropriation of cinema's elements of spectacle, with whose production means and methods the individual artist can hardly compete.

It has become increasingly harder to draw a distinction between, in legal terms, the "fair use" of material in the creation of "transformative" works of art, and mere exploitation by claiming something as art. In some cases, this has become the object of legal suits for alleged copyright infringement. It is amusing to see artists who have processed film material claiming fair use without permission (or paying for it), who then turn around and warily safeguard their own copyright of the result. Meanwhile, the use of found footage has become a perfectly unchallenged, everyday occurrence in the art industry as part of the sometimes rather decorative, sometimes rather discursive cannibalization of film history and of cinema (or of private images taken from amateur films). The mere juxtaposition of unedited scenes of (famous) actors in feature films within the sculptural form of an installation is often already enough to be celebrated as a critical

achievement, for example in the cases of Candice Breitz's *SOLILOQUY TRILOGY* (2000) and *HIM + HER* (2008), and various other, lesser known works. Whereas found material was also once used to critique cinema itself, in the art world it has increasingly been used for the nostalgic affirmation and fetishization of cinema. The archives of film history are meticulously combed through in search of motifs or personas that can be arranged in series or condensed into a miniature. These works regularly outperform each other in the fastidiousness inherent in the amount of material collected. The finder's reward, however, is rarely insight.

Simon Reynolds' findings on the current pop culture's obsession with "retromania" applies particularly to found footage as an artistic process using cinematic images, especially considering the new digital archives on DVD and the internet, which have created a veritable inflation of found images and a new kind of arbitrariness in how they are used. This artistic process is problematic because the diligent and technically often impeccable, at times fascinating, recycling of the continuing recollection of cinematic imagery doesn't bring forth any new images, instead it is threatening to completely solidify itself into a structural principle. Christian Marclay's *TELEPHONES* (1995) is an early influential example of how you can

successfully establish yourself as an artist on the art market with this form of reduction. Marclay combines film clips of actors on the phone as if they were calling each other, resulting in a sort of dialogue between fictitious people. In that way, experiencing film is reduced to a serial accumulation, to recognizing motifs that were once only the smallest pieces of cinema, pieces that were part of a considerably more complex narrative (and ideological) logic and, above all, of an alternative perception of time and reality.

Found footage has become a symptom of the crisis of the filmic image's erosion which, as Serge Daney said, has become an *informal image*. This is what makes found footage attractive for advertising as well. Lana Del Rey's music video VIDEO GAMES (2011) was a great popular success not least because of how it evoked the past using the decorative, retro look of worn-out moving images we previously knew only from experimental films. In her video for LOVE (2017), the future only seems possible in the past: science fiction arrives successfully in our memories; pop culture becomes a utopia thought backwards. "Final reconciliation," which Theodor Adorno already found fault with in his essay about Franz Schubert, negates the idea of any kind of progress in its endless refinement of what has already been. "Retromania" is time stood still in an

archive you can't escape from. Today, found footage is availing itself of practices that were invented decades ago by Conner, Müller and others. Few were as original as Bjørn Melhus, who likes to use old film soundtracks, populating and embodying them with his own interpretations and a variety of characters (e.g. *AUTO CENTER DRIVE* (2002)). Melhus doesn't misappropriate filmic material to fake aesthetic proximity. On the contrary: he uses it as the starting point for his own artistic process. Melhus never succumbs to the temptation of categorizing the images of cinema and being satisfied by their primary iconography, because his "sound footage" is always a valid interpretation of a new reality in the form of film and, most importantly, it is an independent artistic process. Cinema, in this case, functions more like a resonance chamber – far, far away.

As media artist Jesse McLean points out in a conversation with Christian Höller: "One of the biggest challenges when working with already existing material is asking how the material and the method you use bear any relevance to the present. [...] I think that you shouldn't simply be enchanted by the material you use. In asking after the potential of no matter what artifact, you should always be aware of why exactly you are using it here today." McLean's work distinguishes itself in the

new way it uses found footage or, more precisely, in the new awareness it has in using the images we know from television or the internet that have had an impact on us. You can call it “post-internet art” or “post-digital art,” but that would not be very illuminating. McLean primarily harvests her material from amateur YouTube videos or television genres such as televangelism, quiz and game shows, telenovelas, etc. At first glance, McLean deals with pop cultural phenomena in her films: how people listen to music and watch television. What makes her work so radically different and unsettling, however, is the confrontation with human projections as an expression of the asymmetry between emotions and technology in advanced industrial societies. McLean traces emotions such as adoration or fear, which result from seeing images taken from elsewhere.

MAGIC FOR BEGINNERS (2010) contains the Andy Warhol quote: “People sometimes say that the way things happen in the movies is unreal, but actually it’s the way things happen to you in life that’s unreal.” In the notes on his 1841 doctoral thesis, Karl Marx expressed it like this: “Real thalers exist just as much as imaginary gods do.” I consider what I myself can imagine to be true imagination. We contract debts based on our imagination. That means all gods have really existed. In other words,

McLean doesn't ask what is real about faith, but what kind of reality faith creates. Human beings are inherent in things. What we are can only be evaluated based on the objects we surround ourselves with. We understand ourselves through objects, we communicate through them. And what will remain of us once we no longer exist? McLean's *THE INVISIBLE WORLD* (2012) says: "Unlike nature, science and technology are not static, they are restlessly on the move; and, at each further move that they make, they produce disturbing and bewildering changes in the alien environment that they have imposed on us."

It turns out it is increasingly irrelevant whether the material is found or self-created. What counts is the image's reference. McLean never uses images in a purely atmospheric or decorative way – the image must never be merely beautiful – nor in an additive or serial way, so that the images only make sense because they are strung together based on similarity. The poor technical quality of the material, usually taken from the internet, is sometimes almost repelling and gives the images a rough, unfinished and unbalanced look. McLean's images are at times alarmingly artless. She prefers to work with crude, messy material with absolutely no aesthetic claims in its production, like those taken from televangelist or quiz shows. She rejects the

additive as well as the decorative. McLean has obviously been more socialized by television than cinema, more heavily by shows instead of films. This has a particular impact on how she uses the material. McLean is interested in the relation to the viewer, who looks and desires. She counters the danger of a fascinating image by showing the people who are fascinated by it. All the images have always already been looked at; they are never “original”, they are never seen for the first time. In a conversation with Kent Lambert, McLean says: “I mostly use stuff that’s widely available on purpose because the very fact that it’s already swimming in the public sphere is part of my interest in using it.”

The images have already been seen and used, they are worn; they stand in relation to both those who have made them and those who have seen them – to us. The aesthetic, technical quality that found footage usually has when using material from mainstream cinema is lacking. The images are chosen based solely on their unconventional image quality (instead of their content), regardless of their provenance. McLean isn’t interested in discovering analogies; she wants to reposition the images’ status and their iconographic effect. She doesn’t care about analyzing a sequence of motifs within more or less identical images of a similar origin (mainly from Hollywood cinema), she is interested

in the new, extended impact of a pre-existing image. McLean looks for found images that will seem new within the context they are placed: not an original, authentic image or an image whose origin isn't relevant, but an image that mirrors to us the gaze directed at it, that reflects its social use; a socially impregnated image. This signified the defining break from found footage: presenting a used image as if for the first time, letting a specific, shocking effect unfold, even though the image itself is not usually an artifact. The uncanny effect these images have is that they look back at us. McLean finds no similarities in her discoveries, unlike what found footage films have done so far in analyzing the collective unconscious of cinema. She discovers images that tell us something about our own fears and desires.

McLean avoids a general danger inherent in using found cinematic images: that of either being content with the image's effect or reducing the images to motifs which more or less always show the same thing, in a series, as a visual pun, just like in Marclay's *TELEPHONES*. Found footage has always been vulnerable on two sides: the threat of solidifying either into an object of fascination or a mere motif. Imitators of Conner and Müller are themselves imitated a thousandfold on YouTube. The internet has turned into a huge archive

everyone normally has access to. This debases the value of a process that initially seemed suitable for eliciting “sub-stories” from narrative film, and thereby from our childhood. Exploiting motifs from old and now ubiquitously available films became inflationary, increasingly preventing discussions on what may come after or accompany found footage in art, on whether it is even possible to create new images, or whether everything has already been said, shown and thought. The fact that the reused material had already been subject to changing social tradition wasn’t visible; it wasn’t even discussed. The engagement with found footage since the advent of the internet, of digital editing systems and of the beginning of YouTube in 2005, in short since the “indistinguishableness of art from the hobby video” (Vera Tollmann), was essentially determined by the fact that although found scenes became increasingly peculiar and the pace of the editing increasingly masterful, with the genre basically exploding, the debate over social changes and advances in media technology became extremely rare. Everything carried on cheerfully, just more elegantly so. Differences were leveled out, the temporally remote was effortlessly synchronized, and subjectivity was deployed as a stringent understanding of reality. While in the beginning the process was still about exploring

analytical and historical relations to distant images of film history's past, today it increasingly reflects a meta-historical narrative and a certain type of traditional artist who considers material based on purely formal aspects. The benchmark for accessing images is no longer historical or determined according to criteria of succession and disruption, or development and distinction, but by simultaneity and accessibility. The internet's unrestricted access simulates a simultaneity of film history. The material's accessibility makes you believe in a similarity of images, regardless of their historicity. Using material taken from old films has lost critical relevance since television and, subsequently, the internet became identifiable as socializing forces. And at some point it became clear that the cinema and thereby also the films made for the cinema lost their social relevance. At some point people stopped not only watching old films, but watching films at the movie theater or on television. The cinema's images have become a freak show.

Content-wise, McLean has only expanded the field of provenance away from feature film, instead including television shows and amateur YouTube videos. On a formal level, however, she goes much further, changing the analytics of montage by turning away from the serial juxtaposition of motifs, from linking similar images from feature

films. This practice doesn't simulate a false simultaneity of essentially historical images, instead it historicizes the simultaneous access to these images. McLean looks at the fact that we are beginning to see (or "read") and use images differently on the internet. This begs the question of how and what we even still see. McLean makes this changed access to reality, to images of the world, apparent: the images are available anytime and everywhere, and this is exactly what changes our relation to these images. The discovery of similarity among motifs, the serial approach toward accumulating material, was an invention of the avant-garde, which began working with the cinema's debris and reorganizing it, because they didn't have the means to create new images. It was a lack of images that helped narrative cinema find a new language, a new self-awareness. This practice revealed tremendous insights as the images became detached from the logic of the narrative and were newly rearranged. However, it also regularly failed mid-way, because it remained restricted to the production of mere analogies, the juxtaposition or confrontation of images which, considering the images generated by the internet every day, now seems naïve. The status of the single image was hardly ever challenged, as these early artists all essentially believed in linking images and making them collide, and quite

generally in the critical power of montage. This remained true even when the internet's algorithms began to assemble what we see and how we see it – which has disconnected us from any emotional connection to the cinema (as a cognitive space). The trap set by found footage was always the pure effect of motif-based work, the false similarity, the fascination of the (already arranged) image, the admirable effort of compiling these images. Filmmakers were always in jeopardy of falling for the images' tricks. They went along with the formally masterful and sometimes entertaining bricolage of cinema's images, which they eventually perfected. They eviscerated the cinema, even while having nothing but its own fading splendor to counter their work with in the long run. The avant-garde's analytical gesture turned into experimental fretwork that could be critically rubber-stamped. Found footage became cinema's endgame, a fact rarely more impressively or more painfully depicted than in Oliver Pietsch's work, for example in *MAYBE NOT* (2005), *DOMIN, LIBRA NOS* (2006) and *BLOOD* (2011). These films compose an orgiastic excess of violence, blood, and death from the images of cinema, as if cinema, leaving behind its images on the internet for all eternity, wanted to show us its own mortality in the moments of its demise as a collective spiritual exercise.

McLean demonstrates how television turns the private public, thereby abolishing it. Her resources are duration and repetition, sometimes until it almost becomes painful. Rather than falling into the trap of showing a fascinating image, she denies the images their meaning, such as in *REMOTE* (2011), where she consistently cuts the image before anything is able to happen that might make sense. The story, all the characters, every visual motif is struck from the film, to let appear at the margins of the images that which has always been repressed by the narrative: the pre-lingual as horror. For example, what McLean always extracts from television shows are moments of waiting, the disruption of the social narrative, those almost eerie moments when we cannot be certain whether silence will turn into violence, destruction, submission or redemption. The image is brought to a point where it no longer says or represents anything, but instead suddenly transforms, as if preparing to take a leap. This is not a quality inherent in the image, but in the duration that McLean assigns it, sometimes very obtrusively. For example when we are forced to reverently endure a religious concert together with the audience in *THE ETERNAL QUARTER INCH* (2008). The images must be brought to a point where they are removed from the social structure they belong to, where social and media

conditioning is transformed: the collapse of the real into the symbolic, as in the case of the earthquake in *SOMEWHERE ONLY WE KNOW* (2009). Our imagination is interrupted as we think “now this could happen” or “now this should happen” at the moment when the social and media conditioning of our emotions is suspended, and we are able to confront our own expectations. McLean lets us experience the blind spot of fascination, imageless in the midst of images.

The criticism targeted at found footage occurs simultaneously to the success of this process in the art world. Film is stripped of the mode of perception it owes to the cinema and reduced to its iconography, indeed to a continuous middle part or climax. Its artistic process is therefore usually no longer analytical, instead it is mainly additive and decorative. In the case of Christian Marclay’s *THE CLOCK* (the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* called it “the most popular artwork of our time”), the discussion (encouraged by the sophisticated media strategy of a leading gallery) centered primarily on the massive effort needed to sort the material, and not on the aesthetic quality of a work that no one had seen (and probably didn’t need to see) in its entirety. This work submits scenes found in thousands of feature films from a different time to daily routine and chronology. It displays the

actual time of day outside the film. The film itself therefore functions like a clock: it lasts for exactly 24 hours and, in sync with the actual time, always shows a scene featuring a clock displaying the exact time or people referring to the exact time. Narration time and narrated time are identical. Film time becomes real time. Apart from artistry, there is nothing to see in this film; there is nothing new to discover. It is nothing but the art world showcasing how it has not only gained sovereignty of definition over the status of film as art, but also its experience of time. It is fitting then that Marclay stipulated his film could only be shown in museums and must never be secretly copied (the film exists only in the form of a computer program). Allegedly, the film's six multiples have been sold to the world's major museums (among them the Centre Pompidou, MoMA and the Tate Modern) for hundreds of thousands of US dollars; other interested parties (museums and collectors) came away empty-handed. This kind of work vertically piles on the elements of spectacle it stole from cinema – for a rushed audience that doesn't have time for the cinema anymore. Essentially, it cynically shows viewers a world in which subjective experience is replaced by objective power over reality. The vanishing point of this structural principle lies in the suspension of expansion through simultaneity,

a glamorous farewell to the cold beauty of time: “time transfixed in space,” as Adorno has said about Wagner and his tendency for reification. Such films are usually short enough to be watched even at large exhibitions with a full program. Or they can be shown as loops, in which case it doesn’t matter when they begin or end, or how long they are. Only a middle part exists. Cinema is taken out of time and becomes pure spectacle. But what these artists have wrenched from cinema was once a necessary component of a specific mode of perception and a historical reality that only the movie theater, with the specific duration and compulsion to perceive it stipulates, could make visible. Despite their length, you cannot call Marclay’s (or Douglas Gordon’s) works “epic.” They neither tell a story nor show anything. They are fundamentally panel paintings with a duration. The process of found footage currently risks decoratively cannibalizing cinema and nicely preparing it for the art world without producing new images – thereby becoming the symptom of a crisis in which all that remains of cinema are the used images of others, old images.

The art world’s “discovery” of filmmakers led not only to an increase in the commercial value of their work, but also to a change in the methods of artists who work with film. The art world’s prerequisites became part of both the presentation of the

works, which suddenly had to be shown in a loop, and of their inherent aesthetic design; form became customized, so to speak. The loop is a technique that guarantees the audience continuous, effortless access to the artwork as they, often both cluelessly and aimlessly, enter a room inside an exhibition that is crammed with countless artworks at any given time, without even the patience to watch a “whole” piece from beginning to end. The exhibition – not the artwork – is the event. The loop addresses the implicit viewer of the art exhibition, whose institutional logic becomes the artwork’s structural principle. In principle, it’s the gaze of the collector, the one wanting to possess the work, the bourgeois artwork.

Films are still looped even when it hardly makes sense for aesthetic reasons; the loop’s impact seems almost inevitable, as it affects the work deep into its microtexture. These works make duration, or the fact that something can make a claim on time through aesthetics, or can genuinely represent time, disappear. This is the basis for the success of films by Mark Lewis, Shirin Neshat, Fiona Tan and many others who work with strategies of deceleration and reduction (and through overwhelming aesthetics). Music often becomes the only sound design; an off-screen voice narrates a story that doesn’t develop, but is instead synchronized with

the image, which it often comments on. While it was once the artistic strategy of avant-garde film (Marguerite Duras, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and others) to point our gaze to the invisible and time itself, the off-screen voice in the art world is progressively becoming a means to return our gaze to the surface of the image, thereby also bringing the cognitive process back to critical awareness. The off-screen voice therefore increasingly serves to guide the audience through exhibitions with numerous individual pieces and looped artworks that have neither beginning nor end. Everything must be instantly comprehensible. The off-screen voice becomes a built-in audio guide. Everything is geared toward verticality, instant gratification.

The loop incorporates the viewer, who is guided by the art industry, into an aesthetic process. The work turns into a visual substance in which the social conventions of the art world are expressed as a default setting of our gaze and our access to moving images. A work must be understandable ad hoc. A film's duration is an inconvenience. As Malcolm Le Grice and Volker Pantenburg have demonstrated, in the art world, works that are quickly comprehensible and whose "economy of attention" fits best with its institutional logic are the ones that prevail. A whole series of artists have quickly learned how to create their work according

to the requirements of the art world. Some of the resulting work is good, some less so. But those that have neither beginning nor end, that only recognize the middle part of an implicit gaze, structurally only make sense within the conventions of museums or exhibitions addressing the incidental gaze. Against this logic, the viewing time of an artwork seldom watched from beginning to end, no matter if its length is 24 hours or 24 minutes, becomes irrelevant. This changes its dramaturgy, which is now directed by the motifs of the art world, by the viewer's "blink of an eye," instead of by time compelling you to perceive. This is the reason why many films are suddenly emerging that are always too long and aren't meant to be seen in their entirety. They continue playing, but never elapse. The loop has made the length of an artwork meaningless. It could essentially run on forever. In many countries that have been cut off from their own film history by political circumstances, films are being created in artistic environments by people who haven't been socialized through cinema, by a post-cinematic generation working with different artistic processes whose films aren't intended for release in cinemas (and for that matter aren't suited for it). Many works produced for and within the art world can hardly be shown in movie theaters anymore because they lack dramaturgy. Whereas

cinema compels the gaze to objectively perceive the film's duration, in the art world film is reified into an object of the subjective gaze that relishes images. This is the opposite of cinema.

Many gallery owners, curators and collectors aren't used to watching a film program at the cinema that consists of a series of different works and develops its complexity through exactly this diversity. A film's artistic dimension stems from the objective duration of the work; within its sequences, not in the subjective duration the viewer grants it. There is tremendous interest in commercialization. They run through exhibitions and subsequently can, or must, offer a serious judgment. The art world finds duration to be the suspicious aspect of film, and the art market deems duration to be difficult to exploit. Everything therefore aims toward taking duration away from film – or more specifically: that which only duration can generate – by making duration *sculptural* within an installation or a loop, and thereby also exploitable for the art world. A film that demands being presented under specific conditions only, such as controlled admission, a completely darkened room with tiered seats or a 35mm projector, is a problem for this system, because all that extra effort hardly makes it profitable. Which collector would be interested in this; which museum could fulfill the logistic,

architectural, personnel and technical requirements, and be able to finance them?

Brian O'Doherty has demonstrated that what artists like Duane Hanson bring into museums is not essentially illusionist sculpture, but critical collage, "something taken indoors and ratified by the gallery." They make perceptible a symbolic system that regulates what is inside and what is peripheral. For the films it has adopted, the art market has developed conventions and considerable restrictions that are now discernible within the formal principles of films aimed at the art market. At this moment, the cinema is returning in the "specialized" form of the sculpture and attaining a "fetish-like significance" (Dietmar Schwärzler). Works by Rosa Barba, Rebecca Baron & Dorit Margreiter and Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller elaborately recreate the cinema as a physical space or object, as a walk-in, sensory, even noisy and haptic event – the same cinema that was once an established mode of perception that referred to a reality beyond the film. Exhibiting the projector, the film reel or the movie theater against the backdrop of a predominantly affirmative attitude toward the art world and an inadequate understanding of cinema often results in an "anti-illusionist" illusion. Art showcases cinema as a trophy. Tacita Dean projected her 11-minute *FILM* (2011)

onto a 13-meter tall monolith outside the Tate Modern, as if it were a ritual object that, probably not quite coincidentally, bore a certain resemblance to Stanley Kubrick's own prehistoric monolith in *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY* (1968). Even the title *FILM* suggests we are in final negotiations. The object is the spectacle, not the film. The film is only showing itself as an object, not as a medium. The film's object-like status is intensified because it is silent and because its perforations – the nails on which the filmic image is mounted – are also projected. Film appears under the sign of its disappearance as a mode of perception of a different reality.

Meanwhile, the art world is considering films as objects for exhibition that were made at the time as critical commentaries on the conventions of cinema, the commodity aspect of artworks and institutional formatting – e.g. works by Jack Goldstein, Anthony McCall, Lis Rhodes, Andy Warhol and many more. Alexander Horwath has criticized this development on the basis of the art world's rediscovery of so-called Expanded Cinema, which turns the critical erosion of cinema into an extension of the museum (and the art market), imposing its own conventions and logic of exploitation onto film. Expanded Cinema, just like any kind of performative artistic practice temporarily geared toward the unpredictable always aims at

challenging both center and periphery, the artistic and the non-artistic, everyday life and artistic space. This process sometimes transcends symbolic, social and institutional boundaries. It is artistically speaking always in danger of either diffusing into daily routine, thereby becoming not only invisible on a social level, but above all also ineffective, or of simply falling into the trap of the art market again. Expanded Cinema was the artistic observation of cinema; performance was the artistic observation of the museum. In the form of the installation, however, the museum today is re-enclosing the boundaries of the cinema that Expanded Cinema once dissolved. The observation and critique of the movie theater turn into the affirmation and expansion of the museum. The performative, the live event and the “eventization” of artworks are now exceedingly popular at exhibitions and museums. On the one hand, collecting and providing continued access to artworks with a precarious and ephemeral status that can hardly be archived, that are difficult to perform, and even more difficult to document (hence performative art in the broadest sense) is certainly legitimate and clearly reasonable from a curatorial standpoint. On the other, we must be allowed to ask whether and how the gestural meaning of such interventions is altered through this process – given that they have usually only

consisted in the form of a few vague instructions or relied on the audience's participation, and have articulated themselves within their contemporary setting or presented in their self-conception a consciously anti-institutional and anti-economic message. Success proves the institution to be right, however: the first evening of Anne Imhof's performance "Angst" ("Fear") at the Nationalgalerie Berlin in the fall of 2016 attracted 2,000 visitors. A critic from the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* limited his impressions to "a fashionable look and the right keywords."

Without doubt there are numerous film works that are – even though rare enough – better placed in a white cube than in the cinema, for example when the sound of the projector is part of the work (such as films by T.J. Wilcox), when the projector must be seen, or when the work needs to be projected onto multiple screens. But it was extremely irritating when, for example, Stan VanDerBeek's *MOVIE MURAL* (1968) was transferred from film to video and turned into not much more than moving wallpaper as an installation at the 2013 Venice Biennale. Avant-garde films didn't question cinema simply to newly legitimize the museum and supply the art market with new works. Presenting hours-long documentaries by Chantal Akerman and Ulrike Ottinger at an art

exhibition, as was done during documenta 11 for an audience of 5,000 people, demonstrates the problem quite plainly: while it may be true that art exhibitions sometimes show better and more films (also reaching a wider audience) than cinemas can these days, at best all the viewer does is gain an impression from short excerpts. The exhibition's maze design doesn't allow for any other mode of perception. A large-scale exhibition must insist on quickly channeling as many people as possible through as many exhibits as possible, and numbers are important parameters for recording its success. Walter Grasskamp has rightly criticized Boris Groys' assertion that this kind of presentation shouldn't be misunderstood as curatorial incompetence, that it is calculated artistic intention. Gottfried Knapp's description of this problem in an article published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with regard to a work by Amar Kanwar is exemplary: "The result is that only a few of the already exhausted visitors wandering in will even sit down to watch a few minutes of one of the 19 simultaneously screened and thematically coordinated films. Most people are content to read the note in the catalogue describing Amar Kanwar's set of films as dealing with Myanmar's history of military dictatorship, including general observations about literature and politics through the example of a bookseller from Myanmar who spent

three years in prison because he tore out political advertising pages from the books he was selling.” Knapp came to the conclusion that films don’t belong in art exhibitions. This is a justifiable claim, in particular with regard to James Benning’s films, which are usually exhaustingly long with expansive dramaturgy that a hurried visitor would necessarily miss; the only thing this kind of person would see and understand is that nothing is happening, there is only beautiful emptiness. The art world’s declaration that it contributes to more focused reception and more thorough understanding of art cannot entirely be accepted for film. Whether you can do justice to a work you have only seen in parts may reasonably be doubted. Conversely, you also don’t need to dogmatically adhere to the principle of sitting through every work in its entirety. Steve McQueen’s rule that his black box may not be entered at random already provides a possible answer to one of the worst developments of the art scene: that people come and go at will, causing considerable disturbance. There are rumors that it wasn’t due to artistic considerations that documenta 11 included all filmic works in the white cube, but because the filmmakers feared they wouldn’t be taken as seriously as the other artists featured in the exhibition if they were shown at the cinema located next door. They were certainly right about that.

The black box is in the offside zone, it is the *panic room*. However, even the audience of an ambitious film program such as “Art Film” at Art Basel hardly consists of gallery owners, curators and collectors. While everyone who can and wants to seriously buy and sell art may gather in an illustrious circle at industry dinners, the film programs themselves tend to address a local audience. No one who makes money with art has time for the cinema. And the “positions” are already clear anyway. This is why cinema holds so little appeal for the art world. The decision made by the curators of documenta 12 – Roger M. Buergel, Ruth Noack and Alexander Horwath – to show films not in the entirely unsuitable white cube, but instead to include a screening theater as an integral part of the event, was probably the only possible solution within the context of such a large-scale exhibition. So that cinema could be defended and historicized as the genuine space for films and the mode of perception they require – no matter what the art world thought of their resolution at the time. Concurrently, with his program “Kinomuseum” at Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen in 2007, Ian White made an exemplary attempt to return art to the cinema, to turn the movie theater into an exhibition in itself, to build a temporary museum – a museum with a (limited) duration that also consists of film’s mode

of perception and cinema's form of potentiality, i.e. time: "*Kinomuseum* is a project that occurs at the intersection of [...] the museum's seemingly unlimited ability to reproduce itself and the threat that reproduction poses to the art museum's primary function as the keeper of unique objects. Ultimately, *Kinomuseum* is a proposal for considering a particular kind of cinema as a unique kind of museum: one where 'originality, authenticity and presence' are not undermined by reproduction, but where reproduction either turns these qualities into a new set of questions for the museum, almost physically disrupting it, or, perversely, where film and video as potentially infinitely reproducible objects make these same terms manifest in moving images considered as works of art."



The Music Video Adapts Cinema

To the extent that avant-garde film and media art have been soaked up by the art world (which now defines the status of “artist’s film”), narrative cinema has also been able to adopt its innovations and practices with less inhibition and risk. Today, narrative forms sometimes seem “more experimental” than they used to. It was primarily the music video that borrowed numerous tools from avant-garde film, considerably contributing to different, new stories at the cinema and, at the same time, a mode of perception beyond the cinema. Since then it has become normal to watch visual strategies taking place in movie theaters, music videos or commercials that would hardly be conceivable without the innovations made by “experimental” filmmakers such as Peter Kubelka, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Jan Švankmajer, and many others. This is similar to the fact that in the art scene, it has been mostly the films that comply with

its institutional logic and “attention economy” that have succeeded (because they are short enough and can be grasped at one glance). The music video has also historically addressed a different viewer from that of the cinema, *whose gaze was lost in time*. Since roughly the mid-1990s, the film industry has released soundtracks featuring retro pop music that are much more intense, which has enabled the exploitation of secondary film markets on CD and DVD. While these markets already existed, they never did so in conjunction with music that was fundamental to the film, that alone gave the film its cohesion, and never with a soundtrack that mostly used preexisting music from catalogues of the 1960s and 70s.

Pop culture’s new presence at the cinema opened up unexpected platforms for music in film and for its capitalization beyond it. Many major film distributors and record companies are managed by the same corporations today, which means that the rights for both music and films are gathered under one roof, facilitating this development even further. Narrative cinema was discovered as a means to promote the multiple capitalization of music. The new significance of the soundtrack, however, wasn’t due to especially clever marketing. Movie theater audiences nowadays seem to accept reasonably “experimental” narrative structures (or at least

those considered, or reminiscent of, experimental structures) much more easily than they used to. The reason being that the music we already know (or even own) and are encouraged to buy (again) is meant to bring everything together, even if the story is going nowhere and would surely fall apart without the soundtrack. An audience socialized by pop culture has learned, thanks to the music video and its superordinate coherence, to understand rather complex, disorderly and sometimes illogical sequences and image compositions. The use of music has introduced a new, disciplinary order of the gaze, both in narrative cinema and in the art world (there mostly in the form of sound design). This is an order of the gaze that addresses a hurried, unfocused viewer, a consumer who only considers images *incidentally*, who doesn't have time and isn't given any time, neither at home nor in public spaces, stores nor exhibitions. Experimental forms suddenly become a natural component of narrative strategies, but only as long as they remain purely ornamental.

Without a doubt, narrative cinema today is much less linear and much less formalized than it was just a few years ago. The (new) audience has been conditioned by commercials, music videos and interactive video games to adopt a *vertical gaze* that can “grasp” many things at once. David Fincher

was one of the first directors to adapt techniques of assemblage for mainstream cinema for the opening credits of *SE7EN* (1995). Paul Thomas Anderson's *MAGNOLIA* (1999), with its elliptical structure and relatively minimal dialogue, essentially only becomes halfway plausible through its soundtrack and the music specifically composed for the film. In this case, the music makes the picture. New narrative styles emerge that we tend to call "experimental" a little prematurely, only because nothing in these films would work without the music. In Germany, the production company X-File Creative Pool implemented this strategy for Tom Tykwer's films, for example. And movies such as Sofia Coppola's *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES* (1999), Lars von Trier's *DANCER IN THE DARK* (2000), Wes Anderson's *THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS* (2001) and Cameron Crowe's *ALMOST FAMOUS* (2005) also offered new perspectives in capitalization for their soundtracks. It was at this point that music video directors, whom up until then no one would have trusted to produce more than five minutes of a comprehensible story, suddenly became interesting for the making of narrative cinema. Almost everyone who had significantly set the tone internationally for the aesthetics of the music video since the mid-1990s, and who helped promote the genre to a new artistic level, began making (or at least planned to

make) feature films at roughly the same time. Directors such as Jonas Åkerlund, Roman Coppola, Anton Corbijn, Chris Cunningham, Jonathan Glazer, Michel Gondry, Garth Jennings, Spike Jonze, Mike Mills, Hype Williams and, in the case of Germany, Philipp Stölzl; some of these filmmakers made the most exceptional features of their time. You might almost be tempted to say it was the music video and popular culture that saved mainstream culture from absolute stagnation for some time. Experimental processes entered the mainstream as a homeopathic therapy. While many contemporary avant-garde films hardly look different than they did 40 years ago, some of the latest narrative features make an avant-garde film look like a music video.

But by no means does contemporary cinema look like the most recent mainstream music television. Traditional German film critics who use the term "*Clip-Ästhetik*", i.e. music video aesthetics, think they have understood something about the "acceleration" of images in a negative sense. But many music videos do not share this aesthetic so narrowly. Daft Punk's video for FRESH (1999) consists of one long take along a beach. And nothing really happens in Jonathan Glazer's video for A SONG FOR THE LOVERS (2000), in which Richard Ashcroft sits in an almost entirely dark room. The

music retreats into the background and you wait, confused, for something indefinite to finally begin. Some of the most extraordinary music videos became the accompanying music for a film scene. Strategies from the golden years of narrative cinema are also imitated and referenced: the excessive gaze, the idea of having the large screening space instead of the small screen at your disposal. Chris Cunningham, making music videos for Aphex Twin in *COME TO DADDY* (1997) and *WINDOWLICKER* (1999), as well as Jonas Åkerlund for Prodigy's *SMACK MY BITCH UP* (1997), further developed well-known fright effects of the horror genre. Spike Jonze refined the documentary forms of Direct Cinema for Fatboy Slim's *PRAISE YOU* (1998) and techniques of Chinese martial arts films for *WEAPON OF CHOICE* (2000). "Music video aesthetics" were copied from experimental cinematic practices, not the other way around.

The acceleration and decomposition of images was invented by the avant-garde, not by the music video industry. Exceptional music videos often consciously follow the tradition of the avant-garde. It is certainly no coincidence that some of the most important early music videos were made by avant-garde filmmakers, for example Jem Cohen, Bruce Conner, Robert Frank, James Herbert, Derek Jarman, John Maybury, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Jan

Švankmayer, and Cordelia Swann. Initially, everyone was consciously inspired by avant-garde films, also due to the lack of other aesthetic models. Think, for instance, of Bob Dylan's and D.A. Pennebaker's genre-defining proto music video *SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES* (1965), in which Dylan displays the song's lyrics written on cardboard. The awareness of another film, of film that doesn't want to tell a story and only uses the image itself as a subject, is preserved within the many genres and forms of the music video. The music video has made it possible for us to see film differently today – less critically, but also more eclectically; less immersed, but in a more complex fashion. You pay more attention to the effects than to the story; you watch films vertically. The development of the music video has had considerable influence on the films and art made since the 1980s, since the foundation of MTV. This is well documented. In trying to be contemporary, the music video has doubtlessly interpreted and adapted the visual strategies of narrative and avant-garde film, at the same time inventing a new way of watching these strategies. This is not only due to television's format – the screen that was always too small and never really watched closely – but primarily because the music video as a cinematic form per se isn't narrative. It is essentially about illustrating or, via image

transfer, embellishing the already finished piece of music; the video's only coherence comes from the music. Today we see and understand film differently because of the images we have learned to observe in music videos.

As a result of the music industry's crisis since the turn of the century, which was basically caused by the internet, music videos became less innovative and especially less expensive. The demise of opportunities to distribute music videos on television, which usually broadcast a song according to its sales figures, became immediately noticeable. Innovative music videos hardly ever made it on television. The better ones were frequently made in the context of film or art schools, or by artists. Many people thought this was too highbrow, so they declared the music video dead. By the time YouTube arrived, the growing disparity between music video and music television became conspicuous. The time of great artistic achievement in music television, which had been made possible by a thriving music industry that could advance the necessary production resources, was over. Maybe it really isn't worth wasting words on music videos anymore, now that we've begun to canonize and musealize its authors. Musicians and bands such as Björk and Underworld, and filmmakers like Cunningham, Gondry, and Jonze have long been successfully releasing

their videos on DVD, thereby gaining public attention much more effectively than nighttime rotation on music television, where high quality videos were once an insider tip for the very patient, ever did.

As soon as music television's formal requirements disappeared, new options were set free. But most of all, videos had to be produced more cheaply than before, so music video makers began adapting the filmic processes of the avant-garde and the underground, in particular assemblage, found footage and stop tricks. When Leos Carax was invited to shoot New Order's video for *CRYSTAL* (2001), he simply sent a pixelated, blurred clip he already had on his computer of a cat and a dog fooling around. Jem Cohen's ten-minute music video *MAXINE* (2001) for Sparklehorse, shot on Super 8, is a free association on the band's singer Mark Linkous' studio and its surrounding landscape, as if the song were an expression of the musician's habitat. Ever since music television's formatting (institutional logic that had turned into aesthetic principle) was dropped, videos have become longer and freer in their form, occasionally more political, and sometimes highly complex artifacts and analyses of the present. Think of works by Tony Cokes, Coldcut, Die Goldenen Zitronen, Arnaud Fleurent-Didier, Jens Pecho, and Mario Pfeifer. Music videos were also created

without shooting any scenes, instead they were done on a computer at home, as were videos without visible performers, in which the music wasn't paramount but instead hardly audible, or even interrupted. In Michael Robinson's video of the Thompson Twins' HOLD ME NOW (2008), a classic American TV series becomes the cue for a karaoke session and the audience is invited to sing along.

The issue of the future of the music video remains, now that the medium for which it was once intended – music television – has declined. On the one hand, interesting videos with large budgets disappeared almost entirely. Musicians with high sales figures and high visual standards began producing their works using relatively simple means. While this led to the impoverishment of production resources, music videos were created with seemingly no ambition to be shown on music television or to follow old production standards or regulations. On the contrary, these videos were conceived within an independent artistic field, and its makers accepted the fact that these works could only gain visibility on the internet, in *long tail* distribution, so to speak. Filmmakers or musicians who previously worked with enormous budgets were now able to present astonishing results and offer expressions of a genuine audiovisual world using low-tech artistic processes.

On top of the music video's image value, the act of visualizing music received unprecedented creative leeway with the fading of performers and analog instruments in the heyday of electronic music in the 1990s. Why even show people only playing with buttons instead of guitars, whose beats don't encourage anyone to dance? A new kind of attraction between music and digital visualization emerged. The most innovative videos often don't show people making music at all, or they stage them within a fictitious space, for example in Svenja Rossa's *DER MOND* (1999) for Rocko Schamoni and in Walter Stern's *THURSDAY'S CHILD* (1999) for David Bowie. Process in avant-garde film relates to contexts of contemporary pop culture, for instance assemblage and found footage techniques in *WEIL WIR EINVERSTANDEN SIND* (1998), a video by Smoczek Policzek for German punk band Die Goldenen Zitronen. Michel Klöfkorn and Oliver Husain used stop tricks in Sensorama's *STAR ESCALATOR* (1999) video, in which the garage doors of bourgeois neighborhoods beat the rhythm of an unheard world. At that time, much in music was still being invented, and music videos were still shown on television. The new reality of production is frequently reflected in the works themselves: the search for images and keywords on Google depicted in *GOOD MORNING STRANGER* (2007) by Monta and

in ROBIN WILLIAMS (2007), the video made by Vania Heymann for Cee Lo Green; in Ben Jones' DOT NET (2015) for American experimental rock band Battles; and in Metahaven's INTERFERENCE (2015) for composer Holly Herndon, in which the digital terrain made up of user interfaces, desktop aesthetics and games provides everything for the artistic process. In Daniel Swan's ALGORITHM (2016) for Emmy The Great, the text that runs across the screen was created by a music video machine obeying an algorithm that processes natural speech. In Jon Rafman's works STILL LIFE (2013) and STICKY DRAMA (2015) for music by Oneohtrix Point Never, the internet becomes a world with no exit, a digital drama of networking that can't be escaped, a realm in which subjectivity inexorably and solipsistically heads towards its own demise. The self is drained and run down in its attempt to reach self-awareness through others, a self that is constantly networked, but never objectively or socially connected. "What concerns me is the general sense of entrapment and isolation felt by many as social and political life becomes increasingly abstracted and experience dematerialized," Rafman says.

RUBBER JOHNNY (2005), the latest collaboration between Cunningham and Aphex Twin, created an epitaph for a past epoch and, simultaneously,

announced the new self-image of music video artists. The filmmakers who had, up until the advent of YouTube, conceived the most relevant visual interpretations of the music of famous artists were suddenly few and far between, because some turned to making feature films, and others like Cunningham temporarily found their way to the art world. On the other hand, creative personalities who were able to move effortlessly between various artistic areas emerged. Musicians began to direct their own videos and visual artists made music, not simply because there was a lack of money, but because music's visuality became the object of artistic investigation and identity. For example: the artist duo Luigi Archetti and Bo Wiget created a series of performative works that have repositioned the music video as an artistic form of expression; Detlef Weinrich produced a set of found footage films for each piece of music on the album *Eve Future* (2002) by Kreidler; and Terre Thaemlitz overcame old dogmas with the one-hour music video for LOVEBOMB (2003).

Miranda July's and Mike Mill's performance music video TOP RANKING (2007) is another example of the range of artistic intervention that shows off a new posed setting in each shot. Another legendary example is OK Go's own video for HERE IT GOES AGAIN (2006), which made them instantly

famous online. In some cases, for example in *FOURTYTHOUSAND3HUNDRED20MEMORIES* (2005) by Sue Costabile and AGF, whether the images illustrate the music or vice versa is not distinguishable; rather, these are autonomous artistic works of continuous music somewhere beyond the music video. This holds especially true for the unique works of artist Carsten Nicolai (Alva Noto), who is equally appreciated and successful both in the art and music industries. In 2009, the Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen Jury, consisting of Elke Buhr, Diedrich Diederichsen and Herbert Fritsch, in selecting the “best German music video” began their jury statement by recognizing the crisis: “The jury observes that in Germany at least, the genre of the pop music video we used to know has apparently become extinct. Instead, we are dealing with a new form, nurtured less in culture-industrial sweatshops than at art schools, and this cannot always be concealed. In the context of the traditional music video, the question of status and aspiration was answered by the work’s integration into the broad genre of pop music. In this new situation, however, the jury must ask itself what kind of artistic objects it is dealing with. It is conspicuous, for example, that producers trained as visual artists frequently create objects with an artistic ambition of their own. In other cases, such as the winning video, the

image design was adopted as an overall artistic extension by the musicians themselves. The jury therefore had to align its criteria in a quasi-experimental manner.”

The twenty-four hour music video HAPPY (2014) by the filmmaker’s collective We Are From L.A. for a loop of Pharrell Williams’ earworm, set new standards. Hidden cuts give the impression of an almost infinitely long take; at the same time, you can jump to any given time of day on the video’s online timeline. HAPPY is one of the first music videos that only makes sense on the internet, it is essentially interactive. From an artistic standpoint, however, the whole venture was a little underwhelming, as nothing spectacular happens, neither musically nor visually. Many newer videos are interactive now, targeting audiences in front of their screens (computers instead of televisions) – viewers who don’t want to just watch, but instead want to participate and connect. HAPPY is basically a continuous loop that looks and sounds more or less the same at any position. It never ends, but it also never begins: it’s time that never passes; the realization of a social stand-still with the sedating effect of happiness. In the meantime, interactive aesthetics have reached into music itself through the internet. Brian Eno, for instance, offered an app for his ambient album *Reflection* (2017) that basically allows for musical

variation ad infinitum. Ambient music has always aimed at establishing new relationships between everyday life and music, it has always moved along the borders of life and art. The material is taken from daily life and music is given back in order to make everyday life more tolerable; sometimes this has tended to be soothing, sometimes it has been more aggressive. In an extension of the escapes of the early 1970s, ambient music drafted a scenario for a successful, if only temporary, balance between the individual's libidinal desires and the claims society directs at them. In ambient music, these are transformed into a permanent state of blissful consent.

Art "after" the internet is characterized less by mapping virtual reality as a "second" reality of contemporary society, instead it sheds light on the way we subjectively perceive and use this reality online as a binding feature of how we deal with the real world. The filmic image's frame equaled the "right setting" for the world, it always referred to a relation to the invisible, therefore offering the flashing of a different, inaccessible reality that only the technical reality of film could ever produce. This frame is now being replaced by an image that can never be framed, which already mirrors a subjective reality. The visual world of tourism that Serge Daney criticized constantly creates

immersive, “spatialized,” interactive imaging techniques that pretend to anticipate experiences and “real” visits to places. The journey only objectively reenacts the image of a reality that we have already subjectively established, and therefore we move within a socially dictated framework at any given moment. This world’s promise of freedom consists in unlimited individual access to reality. The variations of virtual reality, however, not only replace reality, they also identify the restrictions of the short-circuited self’s subjective reality, as shown in Kathryn Bigelow’s *STRANGE DAYS*.

Lawrence Grossberg says that technology is replacing pop culture, meaning that communication is replaced by reference. Put bluntly, technology, the infinite deterritorialization of the senses, abolishes the artistic work in the classical sense, a work with a beginning and an end. It overturns front and rear, the completed or even the physical work and thereby its viewer, a viewer who could look at these works “in their entirety.” “Post-Internet Art,” which refers to a hybrid field of completely different strategies, is beginning to conceive of a new viewer for moving images, just as mainstream cinema is beginning to create films – which are being reduced to retelling the story told in the trailer – according to their trailers’ aesthetics. While Thaemlitz produced a highly artificial

artistic concept with LOVEBOMB, the kind of pop cultural hypertext that usually drives whole masses of overwhelmed people out of the cinema, there is no reason to even watch HAPPY in a cinema, because this music video doesn't actually want to be seen, it just wants to be "used" and "connected." Its viewing time is basically irrelevant for its status as a "work," similar to the artworks by Gordon and Marclay you pass by in exhibitions. These artworks aesthetically mirror the mode of their social use. The affective relation to the work no longer consists in contemplation and surrender, but in manipulation and connection, in subjectivity gone wild. The triumph of the self over the artwork achieved through technology is simultaneously also a showdown of cognition, of the notion that the only possible access to reality exists in absolutely solid, factual subjectivity rather than in a checkmated self, so to speak, that is objectively forced to pursue cognition.

Having sprung from music television, the music video has emancipated itself from its origin and will continue to exist in the future as an artistic process, most likely on the internet. It keeps reinventing itself beyond music television, and both art exhibitions and film festivals have contributed to this development. The music industry's crisis was not least caused by the insufficient regeneration of

innovative forms and ignorance toward a minority of audiences interested in more experimental music and videos. It is astonishing that with the music video, the music television industry created a new, autonomous genre of film (apart from well-known precursors of short musical films), but failed to claim this independent artistic form for itself or use it to bolster its own credibility. Music television began to lose its unique position and its sovereignty of definition over music videos with the emergence of YouTube and other platforms, with the attention of film festivals such as Rotterdam and Oberhausen, and with the discovery and prominent exhibition of artists such as Doug Aitken, Chris Cunningham, and Jonathan Horowitz within the art world (Cunningham, for instance, through Harald Szeemann at the 2001 Venice Biennale). New platforms and audiences also accelerated the de-formatting of music videos, enabling a new artistic self-confidence in understanding the music video as an art form independent of the realm of music television.

The art within the music video migrated to film festivals and into the art world, the rest of it went to the internet. Music television itself retained the mainstream. Even in the mid-1990s, it would have been unimaginable to encounter music videos at film festivals or art exhibitions. This new development was an expression of the crisis of legitimacy

that film festivals and the art world were going through, as they tried to reclaim audiences and attract a new, younger, intellectual public socialized by pop culture. On the other hand, the music video only really became apparent as an artistic process at the beginning of the music industry's crisis, during the transition from music television to regular broadcast television and the internet's long-term archive, in the moment of its industrial demise at the approach of dusk, so to speak. Jens Balzer described the music video as a type of revenant of the cinema: "Becoming, passing and eternal recurrence: these are leitmotifs in contemporary music video culture. It doesn't mirror the current condition of pop music as a review of retro fashion, but rather the historical condition of the music video itself: it's the condition of reincarnation. The music video has died and risen again; it has experienced the death of music television and was reborn on the internet. It is now beginning to understand what it means to live a second life: you must overcome your own death; remember, repeat, work through it." This is clear in Oursler's *WHERE ARE WE NOW?* (2013) for David Bowie, which is thought-provoking not only with regard to the changes in pop culture, but also regarding Bowie himself, who died three years later. Unlike in the videos made (and still being produced) for Björk

that have increasingly created aesthetics for the performer that are somewhat corporate, pop culture in Oursler's video reflects its own historical condition and analyzes the present. Olaf Karnik says: "In such a way, pop music once used to function as a classification system, one that distinguished between what's right and what's wrong (music, attitude, style, etc.) in a way that formed an identity." Oliver Pietsch's work illustrates this in an unsettling manner. Pietsch, who probably doesn't even consider his works to be music videos, helps himself to elements of both cinema and music to compose his "nocturnes of internet society," which celebrate death as a fantastic spectacle of an obscene world that cannot die, in which everything will always and forever be present.

This development marked the onset of the common, maybe even inevitable forms of canonization and standardization of the art world and of film festivals: illustrated perhaps for the first time in 1997 by the exhibition "PopVideo" at Kölnischer Kunstverein, but certainly at the latest by the much more elaborate exhibition "Video – 25 Jahre Videoästhetik" at the NRW-Forum for Culture and Economy in Düsseldorf (2014) and subsequently by "The Art of Pop Video" at the Museum für angewandte Kunst Köln (2011). Masses of videos on monitors were cramped into rooms that were

sometimes much too small and too bright; the videos were arranged relatively conservatively according to motifs – they were hung thematically, so to speak. In 2015, the megalomaniacal grand narrative “Björk” at MoMA in New York followed (“something like a cross between a fashion show and a theme-park ride,” Ben Davies wrote on *artnet.com*). Less worrying than the canonization of names and works, which was certainly right and important at a certain point in time, even though such measures establish a rather traditional artistic body of works, was the fact that these works’ artistic processes and their respective individual aesthetic quality, through the form of their presentation, were not at all or only in a very limited sense visible anymore. The order of the gaze that was enforced on music videos within the spaces of the art world was therefore not as problematic as their musealization. Works were often densely stacked screen-to-screen, image-to-image, so that the next video was always already in view. With this type of exhibition, even headphones would be of little help. As always, you could hardly cope with the sheer quantity of works on display, which results more in oversight than insight. If you have ever seen a well-projected music video by Chris Cunningham in a movie theater, you will have detected a wholly different aesthetical materiality and texture, as well as

completely different genealogy and cross-references than those who have only seen it on television or at exhibitions. Music videos can only be properly experienced sensorially once they are taken out of the random context of music television and shown in the cinema on a big screen, or if they are viewed within a program as part of a succession of works. The special aesthetic (political, social, etc.) qualities and characteristics of an individual work can only be objectively brought forth through its presentation in a particular, by no means random, sensory context: through the cinema, in other words. The cinema allows us to take a step beyond the random succession resulting from channel surfing and the often chronological cataloguing and evaluation of the music video as a phenomenon.

This is all not without critical contradiction. Justin Hoffmann, for example, assumes that the art world's and film festivals' appropriation of music videos has a positive tendency toward "culturalizing" economic strategies; they casually and universally want to absolve music videos from commercial interests in order to idealize and free them as artifacts. However, understanding music videos as artifacts with independent intellectuality does not mean they are considered autonomous artworks according to a traditional concept of art.

There is no question that music videos are conceived as advertisements and that they remain as such even when shown at an exhibition or festival. Nevertheless, this particular form of product advertisement fosters the development of new forms that may become partly autonomous from the pieces of music they illustrate and promote, articulating moments of aesthetic and social deviation. In particular, the fact that music videos contribute to shaping the visual awareness of music (how you hear a song once you've seen the video) already gives them a certain autonomy. Some music is now hardly imaginable without its corresponding video. The music video is therefore a piece of advertisement that should be subtracted from the (ideal) aesthetic experience to make it "authentic." Perfectly commercial, even industrial music productions (think of classical Hollywood cinema) sometimes result in – thanks also to technological opportunities – completely new artistic forms that may also have an inventive effect. Music videos are neither autonomous (i.e. "free of ideology") artworks nor are they pure product advertising.

"A music video (like the short film in general)," Christian Höller wrote in 2015, "can be *anything* these days. A piece of moving image with, admittedly, a beginning and an end, with more or less music [...], that recognizably references particular

genres or actively avoids them. Apart from that, a compelling connection between musical template and visual implementation hasn't existed for a long time now. After decades of struggling to step away from existing as a mere functional form and finally being accepted as an art form, the music video perfectly fits within the framework of a conventional diagnosis of our time. Consequently, pop music as the original motive for the music video format has entered a phase of sheer endless 'presentness'; a condition in which there is no beginning and no end. No before or after is foreseeable for pop music, and therefore also no noteworthy historical development that some other accompanying format (for example the music video) could foster or counteract. This doesn't mean that the music video has become random [...]. All possible forms of implementation are *equally* valid, no one approach can claim conceptual primacy in this matter." Pop culture isn't a clearly defined field of forms and genres, but rather an adaptive, generative force affecting various areas of culture and economy. Beyond its superficial display in musicals, pop culture in film is only really effective when, in the wake of cinema's decline, the traditional paradigms of film's avant-garde lose their power to define aesthetic guiding principles. The question, therefore, is no longer whether experimental films

still exist or whether music videos can be an art form. It is about dealing with forms and signs rooted in the traditions of the “old” avant-garde, but which substantially differ from it with regard to contexts of production and reception. Pop culture’s effects on film are therefore not always recognizable through music videos that are becoming ever more “filmic” or films that are turning more and more into music videos, but by the pop cultural familiarity between film, art, and music and the hybrid expressions of the experimental itself. In pop culture, the avant-garde has unexpectedly been integrated into “innovation,” or so it seems.

Far from the Twisted Reach of Crazy Sorrow (Epilogue)

We are currently experiencing a technological rupture: many things discussed in this book will soon probably be outdated. Nevertheless, the question remains: how can we defend the specific mode of perception of film engendered by cinema independently of the cinema, and does it even make sense to do so? This depends on our perspective on cinema, but also on concrete sites and spaces for film, as well as on how film is handled. It is quite possible, Alexander Horwath wrote to me, that now that film has stepped out of a commercial context of capitalization, we can potentially, gradually perceive *cinema in its entirety*: pristine, a line-up of all films, regardless of their production, exhibition, distribution or interpretation, in full ambivalence of being both products *and* art. I like the idea of watching films in this kind of complex panorama

again and again, no matter whether they are currently defined as art or masterpiece, or who does so, no matter the genre or context. We can re-appropriate film *in the offside of cinema*, lost in time, watching patiently and maybe even casually, getting new insight every time. We can now gaze upon cinema as if onto a landscape. We see the details, the weather, the seasons and the ruins of time; an almost allegorical scenery. Already in 1968, Werner Kliess thought the simultaneity of cinema and the individual viewing of film to be perfectly desirable. In his article “Kino und Drogen” (“Cinema and Drugs”) in the magazine *Film* he wrote: “The film of the future will be shown outside of the cinema, at home, in apartments. Everyone will be able to choose what they want to watch, free from distributors and censorship. We will buy films like we buy records, books or pictures. This freedom of choice will engender a new authority against mainstream cinema. [...] We will watch it with affection, like we do the circus: a traditional thing with its own sorrows and perils, standing magnificently outside reality, perhaps the best alternative to drugs.”

You have to accept that something is over and won't be coming back in order to see film in a new light – be it in a niche inside a museum, or by chance in very few, remote places. In any case, we

must submit to the fact that we will be increasingly alone at the cinema, because the cinema isn't seeing many of us there. Cinema is highly unsuitable for a "defense of culture based on the notion of collecting art" (Dietmar Dath). We may even have to live with knowing that the movie theater will, at the end of its history, only survive under the conditions of a musealized culture of subvention, just as the visual arts do. If we are not careful, not even this will remain of cinema. For a long time, the cinema was the place where we perceived a different world we could discuss. It wasn't just a niche where I could be by myself, like in my room with my music. The cinema raised a stop sign to the world; it used to be an alternative plan to the present, an objection to the status quo, because it suggested an alternative perception of the world to me. Access to reality wasn't made absolute, there was no subjective reality, instead it compelled the self to think. After the cinema the films remain, old ones and new ones, some better and some worse; this is true. But they remain without that which made them *different* for us, made them be more than the stories they told or the art they offered. What remains of cinema are the stories and the art. That is good, but not good enough. We have long accepted that cinema no longer has any great thoughts and that films are sometimes original, sometimes

decorative entertainment or art – which is usually unquestioningly seconded by cinephilia and the cultural sections of newspapers, as if the end of cinema had left films untouched. Of course we will continue to watch films, on television, on DVD, increasingly on the internet, occasionally even at a cinema, but the invisible and unique connection to time, the reason why we used to go to the cinema to let ourselves be looked at by a different life, now only occurs rarely and in fewer places. These places will still exist, places where such an experience can survive not just temporarily, where it may plausibly articulate itself anew, perhaps even for those who come after us. As long as society offers alternative spaces, and as long as the perception of film finds a refuge somewhere in time, where we will be spared the influence of education and economics, from a cinephilia reduced to nerdy know-how, from cinema management and cultural politics, a refuge in which cultural economics and the curators' criticality will simply forget about us. The niche, Diedrich Diederichsen writes on the last pages of his book about pop music, not only guarantees an existence out of the reaches of the state and authority, but also ensures the potential to create alternative visions and cultural developments. These undisturbed niches are without doubt the place for something that used to be, but also for

something to be rediscovered by those who come after us, because we weren't able to make more out of it. Maybe only the loss of cultural relevance will allow for the emergence of spaces that haven't yet been discovered by artistic milieus or curatorial originality, that haven't been made viable by cultural economics or systematically worked through by academia. A space with no prescribed depth of experience and no promise of authenticity or identity. Spaces that are by no means subversive, but that will allow us to think when faced with an unfettered cultural industry. An act of resistance might lie in the infamy of ignoring education and relevance, and in wanting to be alone for a moment; individual cognition against total subjectivity, the helplessness of the escaped individual against the social dictate of creativity and the forced collectivization of the cultural industry.

Maybe we should show fewer films, but show them better – at least as long as we don't turn this thought into dogma. Robert Bresson dreamed of a small theater in Paris where only two films would be screened per year; an idea that is equally sad and forgiving. All the rest should be watched online for information purposes. There is nothing to be said against watching films under any circumstances, even without the cinema. But there is much to be said for not doing only that. Because we are old

enough to remember the experience offered by cinema's alternative mode of perception, but young enough to rediscover and newly shape it. For all those who go to the movie theater passionately but not sentimentally, who are lost in time and in a *different* world, the cinema won't ever become a source of nostalgia. The garden of the spacecraft in Douglas Trumbull's *SILENT RUNNING* (1972) continues to be looked after by a robot even after the last human has vanished. At the end of the film, the garden turns into a brightly illuminated dome disappearing into the vast darkness of space. It represents this cognitive space: the suspension of subjectivity by the apparatus in an "unthought" reality, the fiction of a world without us.





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Lars Henrik Gass graduated with a PhD from Freie Universität Berlin. From 1996 to 1997, he was the head of the European Institute of Documentary Film (EDI) in Mülheim an der Ruhr, where he established the book series *Texts on Documentary Cinema* at Vorwerk 8 publisher. Since 1997 he has been director of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. He has published essays, reviews, and lectures on film, photography, and cultural and film-political topics, and has taught on film and cultural management. He is co-editor of the volumes *Provokation der Wirklichkeit. Das Oberhausener Manifest und die Folgen* (2012) and *after youtube. Gespräche, Portraits, Texte zum Musikvideo nach dem Internet* (2018) and author of the books *Das ortlose Kino. Über Marguerite Duras* (2001) and *Filmgeschichte als Kinogeschichte. Eine kleine Theorie des Kinos* (2019). He is also a board member of the Federal Association of Municipal Film Work in Germany.

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