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On Interfaces as Moving Image Configurations in Space

In the era of "film as an experience",[2] a rich debate has been focussing on coming to terms with existing definitions and proposing new ones able to grapple with the moving image formations the so-called post-cinema has brought about. While the majority of the efforts have proposed a revision or a new reading of the categories that have traditionally characterised our way of thinking of film moving across the territory of ontological enquiry,[3] less frequent is the consideration of how the contemporary production and reception of moving images increasingly involves the employed *dispositifs*[4] and interfaces.

In what follows I wish to adopt the latter approach, with the aim of looking beyond medium specificity, which I find imposes constraining coordinates to the discussion. To

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1) An early and complementing version of this text has been published as *Dwelling with Moving Images* in Dominique Chateau and José Moure (eds.), *Post-cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020). I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer for having suggested a number of stimulating points on my work.

2) Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002). Comp. Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Keywords for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

3) Anne Friedberg, 'The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change', in Christine Gledhill, Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), pp. 438–452. Comp. Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 2, (1999), pp. 289–305. Comp. Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999). Comp. Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001). Comp. David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Comp. Francesco Casetti, 'Filmic Experience', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1, (2009), pp. 56–66. Comp. Francesco Casetti, 'Back to the Motherland: the film theatre in the postmedia age', *Screen*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2011), pp. 1–12. Comp. Jacques Aumont, *Que reste-t-il du cinéma?* (Paris: Vrin, 2012). Comp. André Gaudreault, Philippe Marion, *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

4) I do not translate *dispositif* as apparatus as this would be reductive and would convey the idea of a more 'stable formation', traditional and recurrent in its composition and structure. I owe a similar use of the term to Raymond Bellour, *Between-the-images* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2012).

do so, I look in particular at how the experience of moving images is articulated when it enters art spaces, observing how the setup serves as spatial interface facilitating and allowing for the unfolding of the exhibited works and their consumption.

Situating artistic moving images in relation to the spatial turn in film studies,[5] I am interested in the contamination between cinema and art with regards to spectatorship and in particular in the ways in which a more distinct horizon of operationality characterises the agency of spectators/visitors. Moving from a phenomenological perspective, the kind of moving image experience I look at is the one belonging to the subject, by which I mean a spectator/visitor living and performing an embodied experience, who is embedded in physical space. In this view, the contemporary experience of artistic moving images that I shall study does not simply raise the important issues revolving around the increasingly algorithmic creation, distribution, recycling, remix and reordering of cinema, but because it is situated it poses the question of dwelling, too. Considering space as a key element in the configuration of moving images, the observation of the location where these unfold, are exhibited, installed and consumed makes it even more apparent how they are woven into the networked texture of everyday life and practices. Differently put, the experience of moving images results from a complex set of elements where text and context contribute equally. The concept of the postdigital, in this instance, may perhaps help in coming to terms with this, as it refers precisely to the mix of content and the situation "containing" it.[6] In the frame of a postdigital world, then, moving images work as a fibre of our reality; they inhabit the same space we inhabit and allow us inhabiting it through the image.

Relationality reloaded: space, moving images and the postdigital

The increasing presence of moving images in gallery spaces is certainly not a new trend but, entering its second century, cinema is at the centre of a process of interaction, at times integration, and exchange with a system of image consumption that does not only influence its language but powerfully impacts on it as a medium.[7] Observing these dynamics from a slightly different point of view, art critic Nicolas Bourriaud coined the fortunate phrase "relational aesthetics" to describe precisely a kind of art that defines and constitutes itself in the act of opening outwards, and in particular towards the public. If in the case of the art Bourriaud has in mind, "the exchanges that take place between people […] turn out to be as likely to act as the raw matter for an artistic work",[8] cinema in the age of the postdigital also opens up, namely to a variability of modes of production, distribution, reception, subsequent elaboration and recycling, as well as to a myriad of possible formats.

5)   E.g. Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009). Comp. John David Rhodes, Elena Gorfinkel (eds.), *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

6)   Florian Cramer, 'What is post-digital?', 2013, *Post-digital-research*. Online: <http://post-digital.projects.cavi. au.dk/?p=599>, [accessed 20 April 2020]. Comp. David Berry, Michael Dieter (eds.), *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation and Design* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

7)   Elizabeth Cowie, 'On Documentary Sounds and Images in the Gallery', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 124–134.

8)   Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Press du Réel, 2010), p. 37.

This reshuffles the relationship of moving images with other media, with themselves and their histories. Engaging in a reflection on this is then a way to rethink moving images in light of a relational system based on the interconnections among processes, discourses and disciplines, which proceeds by relation. This does not imply a focus on relation *per se*; in fact, it rather employs it structurally to describe the procedure that articulates the temporary formation of moving image configurations, in the awareness that while relation — we could equally say interfaces — is the means, the ultimate result of the process are these configurations.

The elements composing the moving image configurations I study, then, are not simply associated with one another relationally or aesthetically; instead they organically come to be part of the same assemblage, as temporary as it may be: they work together as an entity, as a specific dispositif, as essential parts of that very formation, located in that very space which is informed by their presence, as I'll explain further below. Each component contributes in its own way to that configuration that "lives and breathes" thanks to the mutual positions and contributions of the others, to which they connect in a structural, organic fashion.

Already in the 1960s and 1970s, but more systematically from the 1990s, "[f]ilm or filmic effects are so pervasive in the art world they have begun to reformat all kinds of other practices".[9] With the benefit of living some 15 years after this statement was first shared, I would contend that the situation is now possibly more exacerbated: it is very rare *not* to encounter moving images in museums and art spaces, regardless of the content of the collection or the selection they exhibit. In fact, moving images do not enter art spaces only in the form of objects on display *per se*; on the contrary, they are employed according to various strategies that involve and insert them in the mechanics of galleries as *dispositifs*. We tend to forget or to take it for granted because this is by now an entirely naturalised practice, as totally naturalised and familiar as are the interfaces that make them accessible, but it is worth reminding how moving images in art spaces are not limited to the presence of artists' films or video installation projects. On a more procedural, technical, and subtler level, screens and displays are used as digital signage tools that require the public to watch them. Whilst this is certainly not comparable to the experience of watching a film or a video art work installed in the gallery, such experience demands nonetheless a specific set of actions and establishes an equally specific set of expectations from the viewer. What happens in these instances is that a "screen-sphere"[10] emerges in the art space implying a number of practices and establishing an economy of the attention that borrows from the etiquette and the mechanisms characterising cinematic experience.

Looking more closely, what happens to the space where these dynamics unfold is that the introduction of screens and moving image-based tools in the museum builds a sort of bubble that *gathers* the subjects around them and determines — albeit with a fairly wide range of possibilities — their attitudes and behaviours within the art space. Such bubble,

9)   Hal Foster, Malcolm Turvey, Chrissie Iles, George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Anthony McCall, 'The Projected Image in Contemporary Art', *October*, no. 104 (Spring 2003), p. 93.

10) Vivian Sobchack, 'From Screen-Scape to Screen-Sphere: A Meditation in Medias Res', in Dominique Chateau and José Moure (eds.), *Screens: From Materiality to Spectatorship — A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 157–175.

such screen-sphere, might give the idea of a process informed after a centripetal force; however, this is not simply an inward-looking event that solely acts upon the interior of the museum. On the contrary, the same screening situation eliciting and favouring a viewing experience that is typical of cinema occurs when the museum space itself is remediated into a viewing surface which displays the pieces outwards. This allows for an outward-facing distribution and consumption of the art that is otherwise only accessible once overcoming the institutional and economical barriers that generally regulate the access to it.

The examples in this instance are countless, but works such as Doug Aitken's *Sleepwalkers*, commissioned by the MoMA in 2007 for its central Manhattan venue, are a case in point. Comprised of 5 video pieces, the artwork has been installed taking advantage of the external walls of the museum building, both those facing the Sculpture Garden and those actually facing outwards. This seemed to respond to a logic of extension and opening, whereby the moving image literally "made room for itself", discarding the binary interior/exterior, and re-designing the balance between the two, as well as the relationship between the private/institutional and the public spheres. As in a sort of reverse configuration, the gallery walls become a double-sided surface for art — meaning by that Aitken's gallery film. They articulate a trajectory and provide an architecture to the public's visit at the museum if taken in their internal side. Contextually, however, the same walls work as outdoor screens too, making the artworks public[11] with no requirement to buy any tickets

Fig. 1: Doug Aitken, *Sleepwalkers* (2007). Photo moma.org

11) Due to space constraints, I cannot delve here into a close analysis of *Sleepwalkers*; further details and visuals can however be found online. Please refer to the installation website: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2007/aitken/>, [accessed 20 April 2020].

to watch the films, no indications of where to stand, sit or stop to have the best view of the screens, nor of the duration, temporal development, beginning or end point of the screening.[12] All in all, these aspects contribute to metaphorically (but also very practically) show how the spread of moving images outside the classic cinematic precincts works, what role the spatial element plays, what challenges it poses and what are the reactions of the public.

The generative possibility of place

As I have briefly mentioned, the reading of such processes that I would like to argue for is one considering first and foremost space and the position of the entities situated therein alongside the moving image. In this view, the subjects, as much as the moving image itself, have a power to practice and activate the space they are in. In the framework I am sketching, I propose to define this action on space as design. Such function is followed by a second action that puts into practice the concept offered by the overall design, whereby the space undergoes a disposition, that is, a re-articulation that functionally facilitates the design by establishing the conditions for it to move from a status of potentiality to one of reality. When applied to screen media *dispositifs* as those in our galleries, as well as the set-up and the interfaces used, work precisely in making this shift possible, that is, to link and connect, to turn the reality of a space into the generative possibility of a place. It is in fact worth specifying how these processes impact on the definition of the environment where they unfold. I have thus far used the term space to mean the spatial extension where the subject, the moving image and any other entity is located. To be more specific, however, I would suggest to differentiate the environment taken in its neutral character and the practiced, lived environment once this is informed by the entities it contains, as is it rather incontestable that when an entity enters a certain environment this is marked by its presence. In line with phenomenology and more specifically with Martin Heidegger's philosophy of space,[13] I term the neutral environment *space* and the marked environment *place*. The main difference between the two concepts is that while space is pure extension,

12) A rich literature addresses the characteristics of gallery films and their pattern of consumption. In the impossibility to provide a full overview on this, please see the key contributions in this area, such as Catherine Fowler, 'Room for experiment: gallery films and vertical time from Maya Deren to Eija Liisa Ahtila', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 324–343; Catherine Fowler, 'Remembering cinema elsewhere: introspections and circumspection in the gallery films', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 2, no. 51 (2011), pp. 26–45; Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and Moving Image: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate/Afterall, 2008); Connolly, *The Place of Artists Cinema: Space, Site and Screen*; Andrew Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014); François Bovier, Adeena Mey (eds), *Exhibiting the Moving Image: History Revisited* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2015).

13) Martin Heidegger, 'Art and Space', (or. 1969) reprinted in *Man and World*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1973), pp. 3–8. Comp. Martin Heidegger, '… Poetically Man Dwells…', in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 221–239. Comp. Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', in *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 343–363. In "Art and Space" (or. 1969, 1973) the philosopher is less preoccupied in distinguishing space and place but addresses the interplay of art and space and mentions the concept of gathering (*versammeln*) as I have alluded to earlier while discussing the introduction of screens and moving image-based tools in the museum space.

place is a space marked by the presence of an entity and its action, that is, by the design it informs around itself and the disposition it elicits. If place is the specific space of an entity, then, the space where I live is "my place"; the space where I go see art pieces is a museum, the place of art; the space where I watch a film is the place of cinema, and so forth.

However, this categorisation may be a little rigid for our postdigital, fast-paced, multitasking, hyper-flexible way of life. This is why I posit that a strictly ontological reading of the processes I am discussing is, in my view, not the most suitable: doing so exposes to the risk of employing categories and concepts that, as familiar as they may be, do not reflect the objects they are supposed to attend to. Shifting the attention from ontology to phenomenology is the option I propose to take on, in that it allows for a better consideration of the spatial element, making easier at the same time a truly interdisciplinary approach.

The framework I am borrowing from Heidegger to do so focusses on the conditions of not simply *being* but of *being-there*, that is, on a spatially-mindful horizon of existence which is articulated in direct response to space and time. Whilst this aspect is not made explicit as such in the philosopher's essays on spatiality, I suggest it would indeed be of particular relevance for the development of the debate informing current film studies. This would not only take up the challenge of the spatial turn investing them, developing it further, but it would also put film studies in relation with other areas of the humanities so as to practice the interdisciplinarity I just advocated for above. As a matter of fact, I find this would be a good way for the academic discourse to mirror reality: our contemporary moving-image forms mix up and mingle with other media configurations, consequently anticipating to grasp them adopting film studies' tools only is simply insufficient to offer an overview of how they work as they weave in our culture and organically coalesce into its forms. Being an integral part of this, interfaces appear increasingly naturalised, enveloping, and spatial, to the extent that it is more productive to think of them as thresholds and processes rather than simply as objects.[14] As such, they contribute to blur the distinction between the actual content and the format this is shaped into to be eventually experienced, in line with a framework of hybridity and fluidity. The most common narrative is to explain a similar frame in terms of "crisis", as the content, the format and the technology apt to deliver it tend to overlap questioning their status — the sign of a "medium in crisis"[15]. Regardless of whether one agrees or not with this explanation, looking beyond the classic borders of the discipline taking the risk of a non-ontological-oriented and medium-specific view becomes in my view an important move to mirror the historic moment we live in. This is an historic and cultural moment whereby "crisis" seems to be the keyword to interpret many phenomena — a quick online search of the term shows this quite clearly, as it offers no less than approx. about 929,000,000 results in 0.55 seconds.[16] In such moment, for example, "post-cinema" may easily be seen as an expression of the crisis of cinema, and the postdigital is most often (and very superficially) reduced to something occurring chronologically after the digital. Whilst situating the object of our inquiry in

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14) Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2012). Comp. Sarah Kember, Joanna Zylinska, *Life after New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012).

15) Please refer to the sources I listed in the opening of this text for a bibliography regarding postcinema and the debate around the presumed end/death — read, crisis — of cinema.

16) Google, [accessed 20 April 2020].

a broader space may not be the solution for "the crisis", perhaps it is at least a way to real-istically capture the situation. Conceptually, observing this climate and narrative of crisis is rather significant: interpreting the ways in which it influences the ways moving images work, are thought of, is to me a great opportunity to understand if and how what we study is interconnected with other entities, how it responds to this proximity, and to the gener-alised regime of ongoingness that makes contemporary media increasingly fluid.[17] If, as Galloway has argued, "the universe is no longer divided up into objects so much as nexus-es of relation, forever ebbing and flowing in and out of equilibrium",[18] then I would sug-gest that diving into this flow would well enable us to better grasp in what way moving-im-age configurations unfold in space, how they morph alongside their surroundings and articulate with them into the actual configuration which they bring into existence, con-taminating or mutually strengthening their identity.

Coming back to Heidegger's system of thought, the main shift describing the passage from space to place is that by *gathering* (*versammeln*) the pure spatial extension around the entity entering it and making it suitable for its needs, making it — so to say — its "home"; in this way the entity inhabits the environment it is contained in. In other words, once space is entered, practiced by an entity, designed and disposed around it, place is founded and dwelling is possible. When articulating his framework, Heidegger had most-ly in mind man as the entity activating space and turning it into place, but he develops the argument in reference to sculpture, too.[19] In this vein, I believe the process well suits the mechanism in a broader fashion, which is why I suggest applying it, as I already anticipat-ed, to any entity entering a certain space. In the conviction that, if anything, any entity has in itself a certain potential for action and that this is mirrored in the area around it, I am to apply this scheme to moving images. Better yet, design, disposition and dwelling are the three key processes that I argue can be applied to moving images as they enter art spaces.[20] In this view, I shall contend an experience of moving images that gives equal importance to text and context, and allows for a new sense of inhabitation of space, on the basis of a temporarily contamination and integration between image and space itself.

17) Janine Marchessault, Susan Lord (eds.), *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Comp. Laura U. Marks, 'Immersed in the Single Channel: Experimental Media from Theater to Gallery', *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 55 (2012), pp. 14–23. Comp. Jihoon Kim, *Between Film, Video, and the Digital: Hybrid Moving Images in the Post-Media Age* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Comp. Miriam De Rosa, Vinzenz Hediger, 'Post-what? Post-when? A conversation on the 'Posts-' of Post-media and Post-cinema', *Cinéma et Cie. International Film Studies Journal*, vol. XVI, no. 26/27 (2017), pp. 9–20.

18) Alexander Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 39.

19) Heidegger, 'Art and Space'.

20) This does not apply to art spaces only. In *Cinema e Postmedia: I territori del filmico nel contemporaneo* (Milan: postmedia books, 2013), I offered a wider overview of other possible real-life situations where the moving image triggers a number of mechanisms impacting on the spaces it enters so as to activate the pro-cesses I discuss here. Unlike in that early writing, as it is clear by now, this article proposes a non-ontologi-cal perspective.

The spatialisation of moving images

Let's move back to the heart of Manhattan in light of this: what occurs on 5th Avenue when Aitken's *Sleepwalkers* opened is that a street, with its own characteristics and destination of use, ceases to be only a space of transit, of motion, a way of connecting point A to point B or the back side of a major cultural institution, and it turns into a place of viewing modelled after the presence, action and experience of moving images. A viewing situation, as transitory as it may be, is created, the design of a screen-sphere is set, and the elements articulating the situation are disposed so that this very design can be created and its ultimate function activated. Albeit only for the temporary duration of the screening, the viewer can dwell within this situation where moving images become part of the texture of the environment s-/he lives in, practices and inhabits.

Fig. 2: Richard Mosse, *Incoming*, Barbican Centre, London (2017). Author's personal archive

Of course, the variability of the setting mirrors, in turn, a high degree of variability of the situation resulting from the processes of design, disposition and dwelling. Offering a taxonomy of situations exceeds the purposes of this reflection, but for the sake of exemplifying, the variability of moving-image configurations may well range from immersive, large-scale works such as Richard Mosse's *Incoming* (2017) to interactive projects such as the audio-visual performance and digital environments by Refik Anadol (2008 onwards), or, again, to the architectural quality of works that re-articulate the gallery space as in Stan Van der Beek's classic *Movie Mural* (1968) refashioned for the 55th Venice Biennale in

Fig. 3: Refik Anadol, *Bosphorus*, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul (2018). Photo refikanadol.com

2013, or maybe play with the same re-articulation of the gallery/movie theatre nexus literally bringing the black box in the white cube as, notably, in Janet Cardiff and George Bures-Miller's *Paradise Institute* (2001). In all these as well as in other cases, a re-writing of art spaces is put into action in light of/by the presence of the moving image, allowing for an experience that is different from the classic film viewing as much as it is different from the traditional museum visit. In fact, cinema and art exchange visual and aural materials, languages, codes and formats mixing and borrowing from each other to create new configurations. As Janet Harbord has observed in her study of contemporary film cultures,

> the relationship of form and content, of mimesis and abstraction, becomes reconfigured through the different contexts of exhibition. What emerges is a binary of a different order: on the one hand a desire to maintain the purity of the singular object of the film text, and on the other, the dissolution of the film into a range of ancillary products in a context of consumption. Or, more simply, film as a discrete object or film as an experience.[21]

Some 15 years after Harbord, it is enough to observe our contemporary artistic moving images to discard a binary model (the film *or* the constellation of products emerging around it; the object *or* the experience it enables) in favour of a much more complex, multifaceted, fluid one. However, well in line with the idea effectively proposed by Harbord that the moving image as a component of a temporary configuration entering a(-n art) space can be also understood in terms of experience, I shall also posit that when this happens a *spatialisation* of moving images is favoured. As a fibre of an organic whole, moving

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21) Harbord, *Film Cultures*, pp. 44–45.

images weave into the environment, becoming part of its texture, a component of that place, of that screen-sphere I have already introduced. They make room for themselves, activating an audio-visual regime which impacts onto the behaviour of the subject — not just a gallery visitor any longer but a spectator, too — onto her/his mode of navigation of the space s-/he is in, and the way s-/he will consume the art objects s-/he is going to encounter therein. As a matter of fact, by way of the design, disposition and dwelling processes I have discussed, both the configuration of the space and the creation of a place, as well as the approach of the subjects towards them, are profoundly altered. What does this mean in relation to art spaces? How do their setup, organisation, pattern of use, and functions change when they are entered by the moving image? How do they relate to the concept of spatial interface? What kind of experience do they favour? Is it an artistic experience, a filmic experience, neither or both altogether?

The disposition of the elements featured in art spaces, both structurally and in terms of setup, define the environment *formally* and *functionally*, that is to say the regime of (audio-)vision offered to the visitors/spectators and its practicability. The possibility of action, operability and practicability of space is enhanced by the coming together of moving images, (art) space and the subject.

A modulation of the light conditions, for example, which has historically determined the difference between black box and white cube undergoes a sort of short circuit as the two are contained one in the other, paired side by side within the same context, or, again, mixed, their boundaries blurred. Alongside with this, and as a consequence, the focus of the attention and the ability of the image to hook the subject's eyes are played out differently than in the movie theatre, having to open up the classic viewing scheme to a not necessarily frontal, not necessarily single-channel viewing situation conceived for a not necessarily static viewer. The distance that characterised the position between the spectator and the screen in the theatrical setting, albeit imposed, is altered as the classic apparatus is basically invested by a certain flexibility that reassembles its components in various different ways. These, in turn, imply a variable unveiling, closeness, and interaction with the *dispositif* itself. As a result, the psycho-motor stasis typical of the contemplation mode and the inquisitive attitude of the moving and interactive visitor are combined differently from time to time. A negotiation between the instances of cinema and those of art enabled by the design and disposition of the space turn the latter into a place for viewing and support the spectator/visitor in her/his experience of the space, which will be practiced according to the design that the moving image has traced for her/him therein. In so doing, the trajectories crossing this space contribute to a dwelling experience that is offered by the moving image and that, in effect, re-organises the space itself as a new, hybrid, reconfigured place bringing together cinema and art seamlessly.

Experiencing interfaces: the space-image

The configuration that results from the encounter and reciprocal action of subject + moving images + space is a spatial interface that assesses the sense of *being there* of the subject, her/his sense of inhabiting the space alongside and through the image. I term this config-

uration *space-image* to stress the mutual interconnections and exchange among the elements involved. By way of the processes of design, disposition and dwelling, moving images are woven into the networked texture of the practices regulating the space they are in, and make it practicable to the visitor/spectator. The negotiation between the elements at stake takes place in an organic fashion, in a dynamic system that, similarly to how Yuk Hui[22] defines digital objects, conditions human experience and existence: the encounter between black box and white cube does not produce a third, possibly grey, area but rather makes possible a space-image, that is, a configuration of experience which brings together space, image and subject, predicates their phenomenological co-presence, and is based on their mutual, temporary influences on each other.[23]

A good example that illustrates the mechanisms of such dynamic system and shows the intertwined nature of its components is the work by Milan-based collective Studio Azzurro. In particular, their *sensitive environments* represent a case in point when it comes to how the space-image in an artistic context looks like. The group has produced several projects based on a specific attention to space combined with an interest and exploration of interactive digital technologies, joining a large number of artists and filmmakers who have been producing works attending to the equal relevance of the textual and contextual components of their pieces. One project in particular, *Sensitive City* (SC thereon), lends itself well in this instance, as it speaks both from a structural and a thematic perspective to

Fig. 4: Studio Azzurro, *Sensitive City* (2010). Installation rendering courtesy Studio Azzurro

22) Yuk Hui, *On the existence of digital objects* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2016).

23) More details on the philosophy of space informing the space-image are detailed in Miriam De Rosa, *Cinema e postmedia: I territori del filmico nel contemporaneo* (Milan: postmedia books, 2013), where I first introduced the term. The reader will excuse me if I am citing my own work here, but in the impossibility of reconstructing the whole argumentation developed there, I refer to this text insofar as it constitutes the basis for the ideas that I try to explore in this article. Without restating too much, then, it is worth emphasising that — as the coupling of the words *space* and *image* suggests — my vocabulary is indebted to Gilles Deleuze's thought in his tomes *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Interesting to note is also the use of the same term I propose eventually offered in Antoine Gaudin, *L'espace cinématographique. Esthétique et dramaturgie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2015), albeit in a slightly different sense.

the dynamics of design, disposition and dwelling that I described. In other words, the actual exhibition space where the installation is set up on the one hand, and the narrative it develops on the other, both revolve around and favour a critical reflection on spatiality and spatialisation.

Centred on a novel interpretation of Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, SC also promotes the values of ideal communal living in space and with others. Instead of a centralised model planned by a visionary creator, however, it brings together in a unique narrative the portrait of a series of mid-size Italian cities, as they are experienced by their inhabitants. This is why the curators have defined SC as a "counter-utopian city"[24] rather than a proper utopia. Embracing the perspective of people living in Matera, Chioggia, Trieste, Siracusa, Spoleto and Lucca, allows the collective to enter into the depth of their features, histories, memories, to connect specific spots of the narrated places that are eventually filmed, photographed and mapped by the artists. The result is an exquisitely subjective geography of the places, a depiction of a number of areas precisely as *places*, in the Heideggerian sense of the term. To convey these aspects, the installation offers an urban texture that is not structured *a priori* but instead takes shape and unfolds on the basis of the inhabitants' personal knowledge of the cities, by embedding in the representation their stories, affection for the corners of the cities they talk about, their drawings or sketches of their place of the heart or childhood fond memories. Such a dense symbolical dimension speaks well to the kind of experience contemporary artistic moving images have to offer in a postdigital age, insofar as the freshness and live character of oral history, the transitory nature of mnestic processes as well as the placemaking and dwelling dynamics deriving from them well respond to the idea of space-image as a fluctuating, morphing configuration of experience. How to make this possible? How to create a storytelling-based exercise without a pre-determined script which would conversely crystallise the sense of ongoingness featuring the project?

These needs have been translated into a specific format, the sensitive environment, and thus into a specific choice in terms of the employed technology. Thanks to a system of sensors and large-scale touch screens, Studio Azzurro has redesigned the exhibition space disposing a set of complex devices which ensured a spatialisation of moving images across the space. In this way they reconstruct the cities selected for the installation and promote a connection between the experience of their inhabitants and the sense of dwelling of the visitors, both sharing and having a placemaking experience.

From the reality of space into the generative possibility of place — sensitive environments

First presented at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai, the installation was organised in three main areas that offer an increasingly interactive experience to the visitor: closer to the entrance is the photographic documentation of the cities explored in the project; next to these and moving more towards the bottom section of the pavilion are the portraits of

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24) Paolo Rosa, 'Sensitive City', in Studio Azzurro, *Sensitive City* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2010), p. 18.

the inhabitants of the cities who contributed to the project — space and subject, paired as essential ingredients of a dwelling recipe. Moving images soon join space and subject in the third section of the project, leading to the creation of a space-image. This last section is the bigger and core component of the project, and is located diagonally across the entire space. Projected on a long screen crossing the pavilion, moving images bring together the city and the people that the visitors had the opportunity to meet in the previous two areas of the installation. Not simple still faces anymore, the inhabitants of the sensitive cities are now presented in their full body presence thanks to a life-size projection.

They walk along the screen almost mingling with the visitors walking around the pavilion. Their movements and orientation are obviously limited by the shape of the screen they appear on, and yet their presence is there, in the same space shared by the visitors, awaiting random encounters among them to happen. The Italian collective has imagined everyday life encounters among the visitors and the inhabitants to take place in the gallery space: the screen works as a proper tactile interactive surface programmed with a touch-based mechanism, so that if the inhabitants are touched by the visitors, the former stop their march and start talking to them about their city, their experience of the place, their memories or stories. In the artists' words:

[the filmed subjects are] projected and triggered by interactive technological devices so that they become nodes of a reticular network and the core of our narrative structure. Each "story carrier" can be consulted, as he walks along, only if the visitor halts him or her with their hand. In which case they will turn towards them and begin their narration,

Fig. 5: Studio Azzurro, *Sensitive City* (2010). Courtesy Studio Azzurro

which will last for as long as the hand will remain in contact with the projection surface. What we are suggesting is a very common relational gesture, the same we perform when we wish to stop someone in the streets to ask for directions. A simple gesture, yet endowed with a strong communicative symbolism which in this instance, in order to be complete, must persist to ensure that our virtual exchange is not cut short.[25]

The surface of the image does not only provide a space to make a story visible and watchable, as any screen would classically do, but becomes a "sensitive interface" activating and maintaining alive the connection between the narrative and the public. The co-presence of the image and the subject in space, their *being there,* is indeed independent one from the other, but their encounter, the process of their gathering, is what constitutes the core of the project. This allows for a humanist reading: the fact that the installation is activated only when characters and public actually come together suggests that not only they are there, but they are there for each other. They exist in the ongoingness of their image, and in turn their image breathes their presence out.

> Listening to the stories couched in the sound of footsteps, in the instability of water, in the balance of wind, the surprise provided by darkness or the sudden appearance of light, means introducing one to think of a city in terms of the stories that are woven through it, the invisible shapes that permeate it, the emotional layers of which is made […] the quality of the relationships that are born out of it.[26]

SC takes its cues from a relational map able to connect heterogenous elements and focusses on the potentiality of a collective unfolding process. The result is a multi-centric city whose exterior aspect moves and evolves as those inhabiting (the interviewed people) and crossing it (the viewers) practice its space. Metaphorically corresponding to the installation space, the narrated city is constituted by the images transitorily substantiating its views, spots, streets and anecdotes throughout the exhibition space. This is why I find this installation perfectly exemplifies the concept of spatialisation I presented above. And that is not all: captured by the moving image and thus translated into a graspable, perceptible material, narrative and relationships become the fibres of the sensitive city's texture. Located in a three-dimensional space such texture spatialises the dwelling experience of the story-carriers with the aim of eliciting a similar one in the viewers. This is precisely the main feature of Studio Azzurro's video-environments: SC offers the depiction of a city that literally explodes in the pavilion and fills it. The moving image makes room for itself across the exhibition space turning it into a place for viewing and dwelling, it works in other words as an organic material facilitating an interface, interaction and appropriation of the space so as to allow a dynamic configuration to come to the surface[27].

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25) Rosa, 'Sensitive City', p. 22.
26) Ibid.
27) I use the term configuration to convey the sense of a form taking shape taken in its own becoming and alluding to the possibility of morphing into a different shape over time. Such emphasis is posed in order to distinguish the term from the conceptually close notion of constellation, which I adopt once in this text in the way Juliane Rebentisch does in her illuminating text *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), rather than in the Benjaminian sense discussed by Paula Schwebel ['Constellation and Expression in

Encounter, Touch, Interface

The concepts of encounter, touch and interface play a key role in SC. Specifically, it is thanks to the latter that an opportunity to explicate their agency is given to the visitors — an agency which is an integral part of the symbolic value imbued in the installation, as it puts forth the principle of the encounter; an agency which is also very practically planned by the artists, as the encounter it promotes is technically possible via the touch, which is written in the project as an essential solution of the design experience. Subverting the golden rule of museum/cinema going, the public is requested to touch the moving image. The interface selected by Studio Azzurro requires the public to practice and participate, and hints to the materiality of a gesture — touching the screen — that alludes to an interactive quality which relies on a potentiality eventually becoming a real experience of exchange. Through such a gesture, fiction and reality come together, and along the surface of the interface virtual and bodily qualities meet, allowing the image to find its consistency anew. If, borrowing from Bourriaud, "any artwork might […] be defined as a relational object, like the geometric place of a negotiation with countless correspondents and recipients",[28] then SC pushes this assumption further, employing the relation to facilitate a process of encounter. That's what interfaces are: medium-based methods of encounters. Offering to the public a city which is primarily a place of negotiation on both the diegetic and the extra-diegetic level, SC exemplifies and celebrates the very idea of encounter, mixing the inputs of subjects, space and image altogether.

In this view, the embedment of the subject within a texture of images dispersed throughout the space produces and enhances the sense of immersion, which represents the main formal characteristic of Studio Azzurro's sensitive environments. On a functional level, this translates in the ability of the installation of enveloping the visitors and implicate them in a visual and tactile relationship with the moving image. SC offers emotional interstices and prehensile possibilities which overcome the spatial constraints of the representation appearing on a standard frontal screen, activating instead a placemaking process which reconstructs the selected cities through the words, images, drawings and notes created by the inhabitants. These elements are the real interfaces. They work as bridges connecting memories and stories to the present experience of the visitors, their desires to know more about what they see, their curiosity for some faraway places and some foreign faces that are now "spending their time" with them to explain about their places and sharing a space that becomes common ground. Additionally, the immersion and co-presence typical of the sensitive environments such as SC favour a situation where the image does

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Leibniz and Benjamin', in Nassima Sahraoui, Caroline Sauter (eds.), *Thinking in Constellations: Walter Benjamin in the Humanities* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018), pp. 51–82] and Tom Vandeputte ['Constellation and Configuration: Language and Reading in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue"', in Sahraoui, Sauter (eds.), *Thinking in Constellations: Walter Benjamin in the Humanities*, pp. 83–103]. I have discussed this by offering a reading of configurations as something fluid whereby moving images fluctuate from a state or shape to another in a dialogue with Vinzenz Hediger published in *Cinéma et Cie.* (see De Rosa, Hediger, 'Post-what? Post-when? A conversation on the 'Posts-' of Post-media and Post-cinema'). On surface, please see at least Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

28) Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 26.

not address to the subject with a direct interpellation, rather it cannot literally be activated without her/his participation. A mutual and constant exchange, epitomised by the touch that the hand of the visitor is invited to perform, shows how the employed interface implies a synesthetic process: one has to touch in order to see. At a time of widespread touchscreens, the fingers of the public in contact with the skin of the moving image[29] create the body of the sensitive city. Differently from the classic scheme typical of the museum, for example a collection to look at, the installation allows for a radically diverse experience, where the moving images work as a relational platform, an interface designed to create a room for dialogue, exchange, encounter.

If the artistic space-image describes the shapes experience can take in a place of art, here the engagement of the subject sits precisely in her/his active role in causing or being part of the event that generates the experience itself. In SC, the key process is the activation of the system that shows the city as it is taking shape. The installation space is therefore ever-changing, an ongoing assemblage of signs and images that emerge and dissolve. In order to collect these elements and organise them, the public is expected to literally go through them and create a conjunction with them which exceeds the haptic regime and requires an explicitly tactile contact. Conceptually, then, it is only by way of a complete superimposition of the physical gallery space and the symbolic fictional space that an appropriation of the narrated place is possible. Such appropriation and inhabitation of the museum space, as if it were the city space, enables a construction of place: the visitors touch the screen and see the urban environment coming to existence; they listen to the narrative about it and are involved, invited, implicated into it. In this sense, the itineraries and the images describing the city contribute to both the representation of the real Italian cities they refer to and to construct the texture of the counter-utopic, unique, sensitive city that serves as organic material constituting the space-image. Analysing this correspondence closer, it is possible to see a process of deixis: the exploration of the cities narrated by the inhabitants is continued by the visitors in the exhibition space, a connection between represented and practiced dimensions, between fictional and physical space occurs and it is here that dwelling becomes a shared horizon of experience.

Processes like the one we encounter in SC are, as Alison Butler has efficaciously argued, the effect of a "deictic turn".[30] By way of conclusion, I shall posit this is to be considered in relation to the spatial turn in film studies which served as a methodological premise of my analysis. Exemplifying the characteristics of a hybrid, fluid, postdigital culture, in the experience elicited by SC, the text can be fragmented and vary; the context does not simply work as a container but substantially contributes to the content of the piece as much as the moving images do. The interface is not to be understood simply as an object that connects two dimensions — typically the screen seen as a window — but rather as a flowing concept, a process that contributes in its own right to the mediation, becoming a structural part of the work that does not merely coincide with a component of an appa-

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29) Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

30) Butler, Alison, 'A Deictic Turn: Space and Location in Contemporary Gallery Film and Video Installation', *Screen*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010), pp. 305–323.

ratus but that works as the organic part of a complex system evolving as a dynamic assemblage. Because the nature of such *dispositif* is variable, the configuration that moving images will take is established also subject to a substantial variability, resulting in a pattern which may include various degrees of activity and interactivity — cognitive, perceptual and intellectual alike — from the end of the public. All of this mirrors a situation where certainly the processes of design, disposition, re-disposition and, finally, the chance of dwelling all represent a complexification of previous canons, models and apparatuses but also open up the precious opportunity to be there, with the moving image, for the moving image, and to use it to re-affirm its relational potentialities and the creative, very human, power of encounters.

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SUMMARY

On Interfaces as Moving Image Configurations in Space

Miriam De Rosa

The article focusses on artistic moving images and takes its cues from Studio Azzurro's *Sensitive City* (2010) to offer a reading in light of the postdigital that revolves around the concept of space-image. To do so, the author reflect upon space and place, and interrogates the environmental dynamics triggered by screen media interfaces from a phenomenological point of view.

keywords: moving image configurations, space-image, space, place, interface.