

# LEA

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STEFAN MÜLLER ARISONA EDITOR ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

Live visuals have become a pervasive component of our contemporary lives; either as visible interfaces that re-connect citizens and buildings overlaying new contextual meaning or as invisible ubiquitous narratives that are discovered through interactive actions and mediating screens. The contemporary re-design of the environment we live in is in terms of visuals and visualizations, software interfaces and new modes of engagement and consumption. This LEA volume presents a series of seminal papers in the field, offering the reader a new perspective on the future role of Live Visuals.



# LIVE VISUALS

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# Live Visuals

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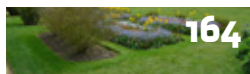
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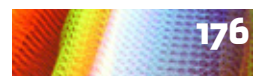


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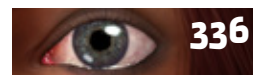
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# When Moving Images Become Alive!

“Look! It's moving. It's alive. It's alive... It's alive, it's moving, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, IT'S ALIVE!”

*Frankenstein* (1931)

**Those who still see – and there are many in this camp – visuals as simple ‘decorations’ are living in a late 19th century understanding of media,** with no realization that an immense cultural shift has happened in the late 20th century when big data, sensors, algorithms and visuals merged in order to create 21st century constantly mediated social-visual culture.

Although the visuals are not actually alive, one cannot fail to grasp the fascination or evolution that visuals and visual data have embarked upon. It is no longer possible to see the relationship of the visual as limited to the space of the traditional screens in the film theater or at home in the living room with the TV. The mobility of contemporary visuals and contemporary screens has pushed boundaries – so much so that ‘embeddedness’ of visuals onto and into things is a daily practice. The viewers have acquired expectations that it is possible, or that it should be possible, to recall the image of an object and to be able to have that same object appear at home at will. The process of downloading should not be limited to ‘immaterial’ digital data, but should be transferred to 3D physical objects. <sup>1</sup>

Images are projected onto buildings – not as the traditional trompe l'oeil placed to disguise and trick the eye – but as an architectural element of the building itself; so much so that there are arguments, including mine, that we should substitute walls with projected information data, which should also have and be perceived as having material properties (see in this

volume “Architectural Projections” by Lukas Treyer, Stefan Müller Arisona & Gerhard Schmitt).

Images appear over the architecture of the buildings as another structural layer, one made of information data that relays more to the viewer either directly or through screens able to read augmented reality information. But live visuals relay more than images, they are also linked to sound and the analysis of this linkage provides us with the opportunity “to think about the different ways in which linkages between vision and audition can be established, and how audio-visual objects can be composed from the specific attributes of auditory and visual perception” (see “Back to the Cross-modal Object” by Atau Tanaka).

iPads and iPhones – followed by a generation of smarter and smarter devices – have brought a radical change in the way reality is experienced, captured, uploaded and shared. These processes allow reality to be experienced with multiple added layers, allowing viewers to re-capture, re-upload and re-share, creating yet further layers over the previous layers that were already placed upon the ‘original.’ This layering process, this thickening of meanings, adding of interpretations, references and even errors, may be considered as the physical process that leads to the manifestation of the ‘aura’ as a metaphysical concept. The materiality of the virtual, layered upon the ‘real,’ becomes an indication of the compositing of the aura, in Walter Benjamin's terms, as a metaphysical experience of the object/image but nevertheless an

experience that digital and live visuals are rendering increasingly visible.

“Everything I said on the subject [the nature of aura] was directed polemically against the theosophists, whose inexperience and ignorance I find highly repugnant. . . . First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine.” <sup>2</sup>

The importance of digital media is undeniably evident. Within this media context of multiple screens and surfaces the digitized image, in a culture profoundly visual, has extended its dominion through ‘disruptive forms’ of sharing and ‘illegal’ consumption. The reproducibility of the image (or the live visuals) – pushed to its very limit – has an anarchistic and revolutionary element when considered from the neocapitalistic perspective imbued in corporative and hierarchical forms of the construction of values. On the contrary, the reproducibility of the image when analyzed from a Marxist point of view possesses a community and social component for egalitarian participation within the richness of contemporary and historical cultural forms.

The digital live visuals – with their continuous potential of integration within the blurring boundaries of public and private environments – will continue to be the conflicting territory of divergent interests and cultural assumptions that will shape the future of societal engagements. Reproducibility will increasingly become the territory of control generating conflicts between *original* and *copy*, and between the layering of *copy* and *copies*, in the attempt to contain ideal participatory models of democracy. The elitist interpretation of the aura will continue to be juxtaposed with models of Marxist participation and appropriation. <sup>3</sup>

Live visuals projected on public buildings and private areas do not escape this conflict, but present interpretations and forms of engagements that are reflections

of social ideals. The conflict is, therefore, not solely in the elitist or participatory forms of consumption but also in the ideologies that surround the cultural behaviors of visual consumption.

Object in themselves, not just buildings, can and may soon carry live visuals. There is the expectation that one no longer has to read a label – but the object can and should project the label and its textured images to the viewer. People increasingly expect the object to engage with their needs by providing the necessary information that would convince them to look into it, play with it, engage with it, talk to it, like it and ultimately buy it.


Ultimately there will be no need to engage in this process but the environment will have objects that, by reading previous experiences of likes and dislikes, present a personalized visual texture of reality.

Live visuals will provide an environment within which purchasing does not mean to solely acquire an object but rather to ‘buy’ into an idea, a history, an ideology or a socio-political lifestyle. It is a process of increased visualization of large data (Big Data) that defines and re-defines one's experience of the real based on previously expressed likes and dislikes.

In this context of multiple object and environmental experiences it is also possible to forge multiple individualized experiences of the real; as much as there are multiple personalized experiences of the internet and social media through multiple avatar identities (see “Avatar Actors” by Elif Ayter). The ‘real’ will become a visual timeline of what the algorithm has decided should be offered based on individualized settings of likes and dislikes. This approach raises an infinite set of possibilities but of problems as well.

The life of our representation and of our visuals is our 'real' life – disjointed and increasingly distant from what we continue to perceive as the 'real real,' delusively hanging on to outdated but comfortable modes of perception.

The cinematic visions of live visuals from the 19th century have become true and have re-designed society unexpectedly, altering dramatically the social structures and speeding up the pace of our physical existence that constantly tries to catch up and play up to the visual virtual realities that we spend time constructing.

If we still hold to this dualistic and dichotomist approach of real versus virtual (although the virtual has been real for some time and has become one of the multiple facets of the 'real' experience), then the real is increasingly slowing down while the virtual representation of visuals is accelerating the creation of a world of instantaneous connectivity, desires and aspirations. A visuality of hyper-mediated images that, as pollution, pervades and conditions our vision without giving the option of switching off increasingly 'alive' live visuals. 

The lack of 'real' in Jean Baudrillard's understanding is speeding up the disappearance of the 'real' self in favor of multiple personal existential narratives that are embedded in a series of multiple possible worlds. It is not just the map that is disappearing in the precession of simulacra – but the body as well – as the body is conceived in terms of visual representation: as a map. These multiple worlds of representations contribute to create reality as the 'fantasy' we really wish to experience, reshaping in turn the 'real' identity that continuously attempts to live up to its 'virtual and fantastic' expectations. Stephen Gibson presents the reader with a description of one of these worlds with live audio-visual simulations that create a synesthetic

experience (see "Simulating Synesthesia in Spatially-Based Real-time Audio-Visual Performance" by Stephen Gibson).

If this fantasy of the images of society is considered an illusion – or the reality of the simulacrum, which is a textual oxymoron at prima facie – it will be determined through the experience of the *live visuals becoming alive*.

Nevertheless, stating that people have illusory perceptions of themselves in relation to a 'real' self and to the 'real' perception of them that others have only reinforces the idea that Live Visuals will allow people to manifest their multiple perceptions, as simulated and/or real will no longer matter. These multiple perceptions will create multiple ever-changing personae that will be further layered through the engagements with the multiple visual environments and the people/avatars that populate those environments, both real and virtual.

In the end, these fantasies of identities and of worlds, manifested through illusory identities and worlds within virtual contexts, are part of the reality with which people engage. Although fantastic and illusory, these worlds are a reflection of a partial reality of the identity of the creators and users. It is impossible for these worlds and identities to exist outside of the 'real.' This concept of real is made of negotiated and negotiable frameworks of engagement that are in a constant process of evolution and change.

The end of post-modernity and relativism may lead to the virtuality of truism: the representation of ourselves in as many multiple versions – already we have multiple and concurrent digital lives – within the world/s – ideological or corporate – that we will decide or be forced to 'buy into.'

It is this control of the environment around us and us within that environment that will increasingly define the role that live visuals will play in negotiating real and virtual experiences. The conflict will arise from the blurred lines of the definition of self and other; whether the 'other' will be another individual or a corporation.

The potential problems of this state of the live visuals within a real/virtual conflict will be discovered as time moves on. In the end this is a giant behavioral experiment, where media and their influences are not analyzed for their social impact *ex ante facto*; this is something that happens *ex post facto*.

Nevertheless, in this *ex post facto* society there are some scholars that try to understand and eviscerate the problems related to the process of visuals becoming alive. This issue collects the analyses of some of these scholars and embeds them in a larger societal debate, hinting at future developments and problems that society and images will have to face as the live visuals become more and more alive.

The contemporary concerns and practices of live visuals are crystallized in this volume, providing an insight into current developments and practices in the field of live visuals.

This issue features a new logo on its cover, that of New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

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Özden Şahin has, as always, continued to provide valuable editorial support to ensure that LEA could achieve another landmark.

**Lanfranco Aceti**

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*  
Director, *Kasa Gallery*



1. 3D printing the new phenomenon will soon collide with a new extreme perception of consumer culture where the object seen can be bought and automatically printed at home or in the office. Matt Ratto and Robert Ree, "Materializing Information: 3D Printing and Social Change," *First Monday* 17, no. 7 (July 2, 2012), <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3968/3273> (accessed October 20, 2013).
2. Walter Benjamin, "Protocols of Drug Experiments," in On Hashish, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58.
3. "The point here is not to issue a verdict in the debate between Adorno and Benjamin, but rather to understand the debate between them as representing two sides of an ongoing dialectical contradiction." Ryan Moore, "Digital Reproducibility and the Culture Industry: Popular Music and the Adorno-Benjamin Debate," *Fast Capitalism* 9, no. 1 (2012), [http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/9\\_1/mooreg\\_1.html](http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/9_1/mooreg_1.html) (accessed October 30, 2013).
4. Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997), 97.



First production of *Immersive Cinema*:  
 "Why Stop Painting?" Brian Herczog,  
 2012, multi-screen film. London  
 Ambika P3 Gallery, June 7, 2012.  
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# REVISITING CINEMA

*Exploring the Exhibitive Merits of Cinema  
 from Nickelodeon Theatre to Immersive  
 Arenas of Tomorrow*

by

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## INTRODUCTION

**Around the turn of 21st century technology, a collection of VJs, video artists, and film enthusiasts have opened a variety of new possibilities for cinematic exhibition.** Mirroring the origin of mainstream cinema, a large emphasis has shifted to the exhibitive aspect of motion pictures. We have furthered our techniques not only of what to show but how to show it, discovering entirely new forms of cinematic experience. Today some highly advanced methods of multi-screen immersion and interactivity have pushed us to the brink of a new exhibitive paradigm in which audience members more become visitors of a cinematic environment than mere spectators of a fourth-wall screening. The biggest question we face

*For nearly a century, the public has enjoyed motion pictures through a singular mode of experience – staring at light through the dark, viewing intently but sitting idly, bringing them together but leaving them isolated. Not until the last decade have we begun to witness a monumental explosion in visual performance and exhibition – a myriad of new practices which may very well come to replace, or become closely adjunct to popular cinema venues. With so many new performances in circulation across video blogs, we can begin to venture guesses as to how and why our popular format should change in years to come.*

*This essay traces the emergence of cinema expansion through previous efforts of the 1960s and 70s to the very birth of filmmaking, when projection was as much a spectacle as the film projected. A number of exhibitive techniques have rose to fleeting fruition, including multi-screen, panoramic, and theatre-integrated displays. But today they have risen back in full force, aided by a flurry of technological innovation. They are assembled by collectives of filmmakers, video-artists, animators, VJs, sound designers, and programmers, all fully willing to provide what is lacking in classical cinemas: social cohesion, interactivity, and the freedom to roam and make choices. Much like Nickelodeon theatre and the community carnivals of days past, cinematic display becomes a space of social engagement where participants earn more than mere entertainment.*

as contributors to this movement is what characteristics will develop more rigidly as these novel exhibition techniques are standardized to a wider audience. Not unlike the emergence of Nickelodeon theatre at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can at least envisage the cinema of tomorrow to provide a uniquely engaging social atmosphere that would trump the experience of a private, home-accessible medium.

Three prominent moments in the historical experimentation of cinema will allow us a clearer anticipation of our future exhibitive practice. First we may draw a parallel to the film as festival amusement and the widespread installation of Nickelodeon theatre in the early 1900s, when the allure of cinema consisted as much in the medium as the product itself. Second, we discover a resurgence of experimental techniques through the 1960s that altered the very nature of a movie-going experience. Several of these practices culminated in the elaborate displays of *Expo 1967*, the

world's fair in Montreal. Here audiences witnessed some novel installations of multi-screen theatre, dome projection, interactive story, and film as performance. And third, the rise of live cinema in the last decade has proven to revitalize the urge for experimental exhibition, demonstrating how VJs and audio/visual artists are utilizing the digital format toward novel modes of presentation. Analysing this trio of major movements will uncover some crucial reasons for why cinema has for so long retained a paradigm mode of screening, and for why (and in what ways) we should expect it to radically evolve in upcoming years. **1**

## EARLY FORMS OF CINEMA

Film historian Ina Rae Hark consolidates our past venues of cinematic exhibition into three successive categories: the "cinemas of attractions" such as those included in fairs or amusement parks, the "nickelodeons"

that widely disseminated new media to the public, and the construction of “movie palaces” that centralize and foster movie-going as a major source of entertainment.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the former, we notice that film was not immediately localized to particular areas of exhibition. It began as an itinerant performance like theatre, dance, and other acts of festival amusement. Often a projection was shown among other forms of public spectacle, such as after a can-can show or in place of the bearded woman.<sup>2</sup> In a fascinating article entitled “The Contrary of the Movie Theater,” Gabriel Menotti traces evidence from these early displays that would compare them to modern spaces of VJ performance. He notes, for example, that cinematographic experience was “not only contaminated, but completely defined by the organization of the place where the projection was done and by the traditional behaviour of its patrons,” citing the following account from John Fell:

*Movies were watched in different ways, and had a wide degree of meanings, depending on the localization and status of the theatre; on the ethnical and racial qualities of its habitual audience; on the mix of genders and ages; on the ambitions and abilities of the exhibitor and the acting crew.*<sup>3</sup>

Film was seldom dissociated from the context of its exhibition. The screening was conceived more as a performance spectacle than as the witnessing of a movie – not yet a product of autonomous existence. Audiences were as much allured by the exhibiting apparatus as to the content displayed before them. Even the Lumière brothers attempted to monopolize the use of the equipment and technicians, as it was equally important to the exhibition as the creation of the film itself.<sup>4</sup> In many cases we can also see that exhibitors were allowed a greater level of control over the wider film experience – whether by projection technique, musical accompaniment, or live narration.

Charles Musser concurs that throughout the 1890s the exhibitor “had a creative control over a variety of elements that we would now call post-production.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, early film was economically supported as a live performance rather than a distributed product, until around 1905 when producers began renting their copies to exhibitors. Thus began the widespread appearance of nickelodeon theatres, the five-cent cinemas of numerous short features. For nearly a decade, these pop-up venues of public halls and converted storefronts were popularly attended by the working class of the Second Industrial Revolution. But even as film quickly became commercialized to a global audience, the public continued to infuse a level of social exuberance at their display. As Gregory Waller describes,

*The front row is invariably filled with children kicking their heels, giggling and talking for the pictures. The audience as a whole indulges in fervent hand-clapping at frequent intervals. The boys love to whistle accompaniments to the music, regardless of either tune or time.*<sup>6</sup>

Menotti includes primary source evidence for the social merits of these events, such as this 1909 newspaper article reported by Jane Addams:

*(The movie theatre) is also fast becoming the general social center and club house in many crowded neighborhoods. [...] The room which contains the [...] stage is small and cozy, and less formal than the regular theater, and there is much more gossip and social life as if the foyer and pit were mingled.*<sup>7</sup>

In this early age, cinema fulfilled a unique role as a social epicentre, where friends and families from different walks of life would collide under a common source of entertainment. However, exhibitors soon found it easier and more profitable to feature longer films

instead of editing together a variety of shorts. With fewer intervals between performances and a greater attention focused to the film itself as a product of an industry, nickelodeons were soon transformed into our third category of exhibition, the “movie palace.” By this mode of display, film exhibition soon became deprived of its earlier social merits. Menotti states precisely why nickelodeon exhibition would fully transition to mainstream cinema by around 1915:

*The exhibitors never intended to offer a democratic entertainment – they were after a profitable business. It was out of necessity, not by choice, that they welcomed workers, immigrants and the unemployed. As soon as it became possible, they tried to control the behaviour of the spectators and raise the status of the audience.*<sup>8</sup>

Miriam Hansen notes that even the term “spectator” only became common in 1910 when the first bonafide movie theatres were built in an effort to commercialize cinema.<sup>9</sup>

Within the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, film was still such a novel medium of performance that the public could happily explore numerous methods of its exhibition. In some ways they were just as involved in the movie-going experience as the producers themselves, making every show a new and exciting adventure – even when reels were repeated. Several enthusiasts around the world were experimenting with different modes of exhibition. Abel Gance, a French filmmaker of 1926 innovated one of the world's first multi-screen features, *Napoléon* in an attempt to widely immerse his audience in moving picture performance.<sup>10</sup> Many other diverse vanguards of the 20s introduced multi-perspective poetic visuals not unlike the work of modern VJs. Artist László Moholy-Nagy overcame the fourth wall in Italian theatre by projecting at multiple angles throughout the viewing

arena.<sup>11</sup> But unfortunately many of these attempts to diversify the cinematic experience remained hidden in the background of mainstream exhibition due to economic constraints of the following World Wars. Film developers were forced to succumb to a singular paradigm approach that everyone could follow to their economic advantage. Each reel was designed as a linear sequence of a rectangular moving picture, specifically for projection in a confined space that does everything to preserve its original integrity. The job of the exhibitor thus became a negative one, as he or she is designated the task of *preventing* a malfunction, never to accentuate the pre-made media. For this the modern cinema is often described as a transparent structure, denying its own existence in an attempt to relay a mediated cultural message.<sup>12</sup>

## REVIVAL OF EXPERIMENTAL EXHIBITION

Much to the tune of so many other artistic, cultural, and political booms of the 1960s, a variety of new film exhibition practices exploded onto the scene, mostly in the form of museum installations, but also in the realm of public entertainment. Andy Warhol's 1966 road show, “*Exploding. Plastic. Inevitable.*” featured a dual film projection over a live band performance.<sup>13</sup> Others experimented with projection onto various surfaces such as dancing people, forests and fields, curved domes, plastic balls – even animals and moving vehicles.<sup>14</sup> But by far the most seminal spectacle of these innovations was the 1967 *Expo* in Montreal, which featured over three thousand films among its festival. Many of these were projected in dazzling proportions, created specifically to expand the boundaries of film exhibition to entirely new frontiers. A great deal of this work inspired the assembly of Gene Youngblood's most seminal publication, *Expanded Cinema* in 1970. Here Youngblood discusses a number of exciting developments in experimental cinema, many of which could still foretell a future of



audio-visual performance. This decade of unbridled artistic expression pushed forward a new age of syn-aesthetic cinema, juxtaposing sight and sound with profound tactics. Expansions of cinema also included several forms of 'intermedial' practice, the merging of screen and architecture.<sup>15</sup> And most importantly for the discussion of our essay, film artists of the 1960s unleashed a variety of multi-screen exhibitions to allow the audience a wealth of new visual perspectives. Peter Weibel emphatically describes:

*From the outset, the extension of the single screen to many screens, from the single projection to multiple projections, represented not only an expansion of visual horizons and an overwhelming intensification of visual experience. It was always engaged in the service of a new approach to narration. For the first time, the subjective response to the world was not pressed into a constructed, falsely objective style but instead formally presented in the same diffuse and fragmentary way in which it was experienced.*<sup>16</sup>

By these designs, the most basic idea of cinematic narrative is dissected and grown into multi-linear perspectives, introducing an array of creative opportunities for both artist and audience. Youngblood believes that in real-time multiple-projection, cinema becomes a performing art, thus retrieving its status at the origin of its practice in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He profoundly asserts its potential as an entirely new paradigm of audio-visual experience that expresses more than just singular messages; rather it formulates a collective group consciousness.<sup>17</sup> Among his most favoured examples of these performances is the Vortex Concerts of Jacobs and Belson in 1960, which featured a sixty-foot dome surrounded by thirty-six speakers, several kaleidoscope and rotational sky projectors, and four specialized dome projectors for moving images all along the interior surface.

Later projection artists of the 1960s, particularly those featured in *Expo 67* began to integrate an additional technique in multi-screen film design, the intermedial function of multi-chamber architecture. Janine Marchessault, editor of *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* devotes an entire chapter to the glory of *The Labyrinth Project* organized by a team of architects, urban planners, and the National Film Board of Canada. The building in which *Labyrinth* was displayed took the form of a labyrinth itself, complete with a maze of mirrors that reflected and connected the projections of two main chambers. Audiences were free to wander along multiple paths as they pleased, engaging in content that depicts 'life' in its current existence on the planet. Engaging as these multi-projection displays proved for the barrage of participants, Marchessault astutely comments, "it was the space between the images of the theatre, the arrangement of the screens and mirrors, their multiplicity, and the extensive range of documentary information that created an open space for audience participation."<sup>18</sup>

The opening of the 70s marked the dawn of interactive video installations, beginning with developments of video artists like David Hall, Tamara Krikorian and David Critchley.<sup>19</sup> Later innovators such as Chris Hales and Luc Courchesne sought to construct multi-linear narratives through the platform of digitised 'live action' video clips. Here they saw possibilities for a new paradigm of cinematic experience in which viewers can freely control and assemble their own narrative through a decision-making process.<sup>20</sup> A great number of such efforts, significant in their own right, moved forward in parallel but with little influence upon cinematic exhibition. Instead the projection innovations realized through the late 60s continued to lay dormant for a number of years thereafter. In fact the only *Expo* invention to remain prominent in the context of exhibition was the worldwide installation of 70 mm IMAX film projection.<sup>21</sup> In *Expanded*



*Any form of concrete media is easily distributed by the click of a button, which obviates the need for experiencing it in an outward public atmosphere.*



*Cinema*, Youngblood directly approaches the question of why new techniques of cinematic exhibition take so long to come of age. He explains they are rivalled by the proliferation of simpler technologies, namely our expansive network of television. Television, he writes, renders cinema obsolete as communicator of an objective human condition.<sup>22</sup> With the world at our fingertips, we become less motivated to venture out and engage with social issues socially. In recent years the vast expansion of Internet media has made entertainment more of a reclusive activity than ever before.

#### MODERN DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE CINEMA

Much as expected, the accessibility of entertainment media in recent decades has grown in parallel with the accessibility of global information. Today music and films have become so readily available through satellite television access, analogue dispatch as CDs or DVDs, as well as through online purchase and piracy to the extent that many are enjoyed within minutes

after their release. Any form of concrete media is easily distributed by the click of a button, which obviates the need for experiencing it in an outward public atmosphere. That is unless of course this atmosphere is specifically designed to make use of its *being* a public space, thus commodifying itself as a location away from the private home. While cinemas have made this attempt through surround sound systems, towering high-definition screens and plush seating, musical concerts have undergone a more thorough reinvention of audio-visual design. Artists such as Deadmau5, Skrillex, and Pretty Lights have employed large scale LED sculptures to accompany their music with programmed visuals. And a vast number of musicians now employ animators and VJs to incorporate complex projection mappings that shift video across three dimensional surfaces, as seen in Amon Tobin's *ISAM*. It would appear that today we are on the brink of a new age in live performance, as the technologies of music and projection display have ascended to profound heights.

Apart from the world of music performance, contemporary VJs are responsible for a concomitant development in cinema exhibition, the recent emergence of 'Live Cinema.' Here is one definition of the concept most recently appearing on a Facebook fan page:

*Live Cinema today stands for the simultaneous creation of sound and image in real time by sonic and visual artists who collaborate on equal terms and with elaborate concepts. The traditional parameters of narrative cinema are expanded by a much broader conception of cinematographic space, the focus of which is no longer the photographic construction of reality as seen by the camera's eye, or linear forms of narration. The term "Cinema" is now to be understood as embracing all forms of configuring moving images.*<sup>23</sup>

Through a variety of Live Cinema productions today we see they explore, and even redefine the notion of a cinematic narrative with entirely new approaches. Most performances maintain a level of improvisation as digital clips are triggered instantaneously by the exhibitor. At least part of the inspiration for this novel medium stems from the "Soft Cinema" project of Lev Manovich at the turn of the century, described as "a digital editor that provides an interface between human editors and a database of footage to 'perform' different edits of the footage."<sup>24</sup> In performance, Manovich has sought to develop more poetic ways of combining film, far beyond the scope of traditional narrative. Several of his students today are practicing VJs, excited to promulgate the beginning of Live Cinema.<sup>25</sup>

A number of qualified VJs across the globe have introduced live cinematic performances in various forms. A few prominent examples are Farmers Manual of Austria, Mia Makela of Finland, DJ Spooky of the US, and Chris Allen of the UK. While most of these per-

formances engage their audience via the traditional performer-spectator relationship, some newer modes of exhibition have begun to incorporate the interactive aspect born from computer installations in the 70s and 80s. VJ and Live Cinema enthusiast Toby Harris is particularly adamant about this development, stating that as VJs, "we are all about the real-time, but not about making the perfect music video. It's about creating an environment that people can contribute in."<sup>26</sup> With so many interactive techniques now included in public projection installations, Live Cinema is sure to incorporate them in only a matter of time.

Also emerging today are a number of immersive productions, reminiscent of the efforts made in Montreal's *Expo 1967*. In 2010, London film artist and director Isaac Julien produced a nine-screen feature film shot on location in China.<sup>27</sup> The different screens are used to capture various elements of its colourful setting, surrounding viewers in an array of captivating imagery. Another group of London dedicated to the immersive potential of live cinema is *Future Cinema*, a live events company specializing in the intermedial fusion of film, improvised performance, detailed set design and interactive multimedia. Within the last few years, the collective has successfully executed a series called "secret cinema," recently hailed for "bringing a sense of spectacle back in an age of multiplexes."<sup>28</sup> Production assistant Carolina Castro-Freire once informed me of her specific intention to create an immersive theatrical experience. While so many schemes of high-resolution screening and "4-D experiences" freely toss around the term 'immersive' to describe their performance, Carolina insists that any immersive involvement of an audience must include three crucial aspects: *site-specificity*, *interactivity*, and *promenade exploration* – features that may very well become hallmarks of future cinematic exhibition.

## PROJECTING CINEMA OF THE FUTURE

Almost as quickly as it began, the movie-going experience lost its flavour as an experimental performance and grew to new heights as a standardized form of entertainment. Whether by economic constraints or competition with alternate media, its exhibitivite technique remained static for over a century, even despite its profound expansion in the 1960s. Still it confines the viewer to a dark, inactive space relinquished from worldly affairs. It has retained almost none of the social merits accompanying its early presence, aside from the audience's occasional trip to a savoury refreshment counter.

Today, however, a variety of reasons crop up for why we may soon witness a monumental shift in its paradigm format. In his 2002 publication on *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud offers a trenchant critique of modern cinema exhibition, stating: "(theatre and cinema) bring small groups together before specific, unmistakable images. Actually, there is no live comment made about what is seen (the discussion time is put off until after the show)."<sup>29</sup> This form of exhibition he contrasts with the postmodern relational installation, which "(takes) as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space."<sup>30</sup> By its current device, cinema occupies a role mostly fulfilled by the accessibility of internet media and home theatre systems. They allow the viewer to escape to an alternate reality through heightened qualities of sight and sound, which even at their richest format would still provide a passive experience to members of audience, as they are not physically engaged with their surroundings. Today as public education and healthcare are in equal struggle, our entertainment industry now starves for a medium that demands a more active engagement in mind and body. And as Bourriaud describes of our changes in contemporary art, mainstream media culture reaches everyday toward the repair of *social interstice* – we

create more platforms of interpersonal exchange to overcome the reclusive comforts of home technology.

A number of visual artists have stated predictions for the future development of cinematic exhibition. Luc Courchesne, a pioneer of computer-based interactive video installation states that media artists today are at the forefront of a new medium, a medium "whose impact in the future will be comparable to that of cinema in the not so distant past."<sup>31</sup> Like many, he anticipates a significant shift in the paradigm of mainstream cinema, but the most significant question in this day and age is what specific features will remain constituent of our future standardized approach to exhibition. Or further, we could ask: will there even become a standardized approach, or could major industries partition themselves to a variety of exhibitivite techniques? Courchesne offers at least three basic features which should prevail in future media: interactivity by computer technology, the moving image, and the immersivity of panoramic display.<sup>32</sup> In a recent essay on multiple projection displays, artist Peter Weibel discusses the unique forms of multi-linear narrative that can follow therefrom, stating, "The observer will be the narrator in multiple-media installations of the future."<sup>33</sup> Courchesne most certainly seems to concur in a final statement of his essay, which should suit to conclude our own:

*A formula that perfectly integrates medium, content and participants has still to be invented and developed. Once it is found we will have the basis of an industry of new media turning the spectator into a visitor and the storyteller into an author of worlds in which the visitor is invited to behave and bears the consequence of his or her actions.*<sup>34</sup>

The term 'spectator,' having been popularized in 1910 to describe the viewers of commercial media, now faces deconstruction in the rise of a more immersive

cinema. Years of technological progress have now granted us the opportunity to create large-scale audio/visual environments that can accommodate a host of participants, stimulating them in mind and encouraging their physical movement throughout. Members of audience will again become *visitors* of the cinematic arena, sharing and contributing to the experience of others involved, partaking in an event that occurs all around them. But most importantly, these elaborate designs can fulfil the role that Bourriaud originally proposes for artworks: they can, instead of portraying an imaginary and utopian reality, *actually become* a small slice of that reality in microcosmic form, demonstrating ways of living and models of action within the existing real. <sup>35</sup> They can both exhibit and instantiate the possibility of a new environment where disparate cultures can peacefully convene and social spheres can freely intersect in ways scarcely achieved by conventional pubs, clubs, and online networks. ■

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