Mapping moving media: film and video
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(Dis)embodiment

Introduction

"People!" The voice of a Polish young man echoes through a large, dilapidated stadium. "People!" he screams again, this time even louder. No one responds, for apart from some kids on the field, there is no one in the Decennial Stadium in Warsaw. Counter-shots to the close-ups of the young man's face show that he is talking to rows of empty benches, overgrown with weeds. So who is this speaker calling? Who is he addressing? The orator features in Yael Bartana's short film *Mary Koszmary* (2007). Together with two other short films, *Mur i wieża* (2009) and *Zamach* (2011), it forms an installation entitled *…and Europe will be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy*, which tells the (fictional) story of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP) that pleas for the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland. This is precisely what the young founder of the movement calls for in his political speech. The people he is addressing are *his* people: Polish Jews, who have fled the country due to strong anti-Semitism. As a consequence, the addressees of the speech are not present in the Polish stadium where Slawomir Sierakowski is speaking.

The audience who *do* listen to the plea for a new Jewish Movement are located elsewhere. Not in Warsaw's old stadium, but in museum galeries or other art spaces where Bartana's film is screened. Seated at museum benches, or standing in the room, the museum visitor can behold the man's filmed image as he talks. Glances into the camera, moreover, suggest that Sierakowski is looking back at the viewer. Although the old-fashioned glasses of the man suggest he belongs to the past, his glances into the camera tie him to the present. The present of the museum visitor, that is.

Although *Mary Koszmary* ("Nightmare") is called a film by the artist, the way in which it relates to its spectator is uncinematic in several respects. Not only is the abovementioned "breach" of the fourth wall unconventional in traditional narrative cinema – which usually strictly separates the space of the viewer from the film world – Bartana's film does not tell a story with a beginning or an end either. The message of

Sierakowski's address can be grasped within minutes at any time during the film projection. In addition, the short film is presented in looped form. This means that the visitor can come in and leave the room whenever she wants, as the movie itself does not set limits to the film show. Besides entering and leaving, the viewer has to make another physical decision: to look at the moving images while standing still, walking around, or sitting down on one of the few museum benches. By explicitly addressing the spectator, and offering the possibility to make bodily choices while (and on the process of) watching, *Mary Kozmary* makes the viewer aware of the position of her own body in time and space.

Such an embodied mode of looking is usually associated more strongly with video than with film. Many video artworks tend to engulf, surround or address their viewers in a physical way. Because of that, they incite a mode of looking which involves not merely the eyes, but the whole body. The dominance of embodying effects in the field of video art have led art historians and media theorists to investigate the physically affective, tactile, or so-called haptic qualities of the medium in general. Laura Marks (1998) and Margaret Morse (1990), among others, have for instance pointed out that – in comparison to media such as film, photography, painting, and traditional sculpture – video in particular has a propensity for appealing explicitly to the spectator's whole body.

The theoretical and artistic attention to the embodying qualities of the video medium stand in contrast to the way in which the medium of film has traditionally been theorized. Instead of giving rise to an embodied viewer, film is generally regarded as a medium which produces a disembodied spectator. Film theory dealing with cinematic spectator-ship has been highly influenced by Christian Metz' psychoanalytic model of film viewing, which posits the film viewer as a detached, immobile voyeur. This voyeur is a disembodied entity who experiences the film on view with his eyes and ears only. The rest of the viewer's body is left idle and ignored, for conventional film screenings do not make us more aware of our bodies (as video installations tend to do) but instead aspire to the loss of self-consciousness, which is necessary for the viewer to "lose herself" in the fictional narrative film word on screen. For this reason, Richard Rushton considers the bold claim that "the act of watching a film does not require one to have a body" (112). Stephen Heath, to give one more example here, asserts that the ideal of classical cinema remains that of photographic vision, in the sense of a detached eye free of the body (32).

Although these embodied and disembodied modes of looking have been theorized as fairly distinct medium-specific modes of spectatorship, many contemporary artistic film and video practices disobey this distinction. Conventional cinematic modes of disembodied spectatorship are mixed with video-like features that give rise to embodied spectatorship. This also goes for Bartana's *The Polish Trilogy*. The first film in the video installation, *Mary Kozmary,* stimulates an embodied way of looking. However, when the viewer of this first film moves her body to the next room of the exhibition space, she will become a disembodied voyeur by the installation's second film, *Mur i wieża* ("Wall and Tower"). As this film does have narrative plot development, and moreover has a longer duration than *Mary Kozmary*, it prompts the viewer to sit down and follow the story from

beginning to end. The movie shows how a large group of people comes to the Polish capital. At the former site of the Warsaw ghetto, they built a kibbutz, separated from the surrounding community by a high wall. In contrast to the narrator in *Mary Kozmary*, the characters in *Mur i wieża* do not look into the lens. They only look at each other during their hard work. The viewer is invited to identify with them, but is not directly addressed by them. The spectator's position in the space in front of the screen is therefore not signaled by the film. Hence, the screen world is a closed-off space, just like the kibbutz the walls of which start to fill the image frame. The viewer can only enter the narrative film space by leaving her embodied self momentarily behind and "becoming" through identification one of the depicted Jews.

The alternation between embodied and disembodied viewing positions which is subtly created by Bartana's piece highly influences the meaning of the installation, as well as its political effect. First, the viewer of the piece is hailed by Sierakowski to join the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. The set-up of the installation forces the embodied spectator to answer his call, or at least mimic the journey to Warsaw's former ghetto which Sierakowski so forcefully proposes. For, by walking from one museum room to the next, the installation's visitor moves to another moment and another place in the story of *The Polish Trilogy*. Like the Jews who are supposed to come to Warsaw after the young intellectual's speech, the wandering viewing subject of the piece travels forward in the fabula's time, to another place.

This other place is the next museum room, but also another narrative place. These two spaces seem to merge when the beholder is positioned facing an image which shows how one person after the next enters the large square in Warsaw, while one museum visitor after another trickles into the second exhibition space. However, the story world also rapidly closes itself off at this point, as the moving images appear to follow the dominant conventions of classical narrative cinema, and the visitor is prompted by the set-up of the room to sit down for a while. The spectator, who by now is a disembodied entity, has to make a decision at this point. For although she has physically mimicked the journey to Warsaw, she can now only gain access to the story world in the kibbutz through identification with the Jewish characters who live there. Because of the switch from embodied to disembodied spectatorship, this process of identification is not an automatic, unconscious process. When the film space overtly closes itself off from the exhibition space, from the space of the viewer, the spectator is faced with a choice. This is what *The Jewish Trilogy* then asks: Are you with us? Or against us? Are you in? Or out? Can you identify with these returning settlers? Or will you be stunned, and remain on the other side of the kibbutz' walls, with the other shocked Europeans? [32]

Although most theorists who study the spectatorship of moving images mention the

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[32] These rather discomforting questions were all the more loaded when they were asked at the 54th Biennale of Venice (2011), where Bartana's installation was exhibited in the Polish national pavilion.

fact that most films and videos entail some sort of combination of several (dis)embodied modes of seeing — some of which are more specific to film, some of which are more typical of video — subsequent analyses usually focus on only one mode of looking. This leaves important questions into the effect of the combination itself untouched. The viewer of intermedial pieces like Bartana's is positioned somewhere in between different media forms as well as between several modes of embodied and disembodied looking. As my analyses of *The Polish Trilogy* shows, it is important to ask how that "in-betweenness" shapes the viewing experience. (How) does the combination of medium-specific cinematic and "videomatic" forms of (dis)embodied looking produce meaning in relation to the images on view? In addition, the combination of viewing positions gives rise to questions on medium specificity. How do modes of looking affect the way in which a viewer determines the medium of moving images? At what point can the viewer read them as cinematic, and when are they understood as video footage? Can we still recognize video and film as different media in the intermedial pieces in question at all, or does the specificity of the two media dissolve in the mix of several modes of looking?

In this chapter I will look into these questions by studying several intermedial video installations and films which, like Bartana's piece, combine different viewing positions. However, unlike *The Polish Trilogy,* the intermedial films and videos by Douglas Gordon and David Claerbout that will be analyzed in this chapter do not combine (dis)embodied viewing positions in subtle, almost imperceptible ways. Instead, the works by Gordon and Claerbout function as analytical reflections on the difference between cinematic and videomatic ways of looking, as they mix and juxtapose (dis)embodied viewing set-ups in overt, self-reflexive ways. In addition, the pieces in question offer the possibility to look at practically the same moving images from both embodied and disembodied viewing positions.

For instance, Gordon has created two versions of *k.364* out of the same video footage. One of the versions is screened in cinemas as a narrative documentary film, and is dominated by cinematic modes of (dis)embodiment. The other version is exhibited as a double-screen video installation in galleries and museums and mostly gives rise to an embodied mode of looking through its video-specific form. Claerbout's video installation *Bordeaux Piece* (2004) is set up in such a way that the visitor can choose between looking at a narrative film in a predominantly disembodied way, or becoming part of a video installation with the whole body. Although the images on screen will be perceived differently from the two viewing positions, the actual projected images remain virtually the same — as they do in Gordon's double piece. Precisely because the image material remains the same in the abovementioned objects, Gordon's and Claerbout's pieces are able to expose which medium-related conditions are decisive in the production of (dis)embodied modes of viewing.

Yet, in order to see how (and if) these conditions are indeed medium-related, it is necessary to further unravel and outline the different ways in which video and film can be — and have been — related to the spectator's body. How specific are embodied and disembodied viewing positions to video and film? My starting point will be the film-

theoretical concept of the *dispositif*. Not only does this concept, which was coined by Jean-Louis Baudry in 1978, lie at the basis of the most influential film theoretical ideas on cinematic spectatorship, it is also extremely relevant with regard to the first question this investigation into the interaction between medium specificity and modes of looking must address: how can the viewing situation be related to the concept of the medium?

2.1 *Dispositif*: Another Layered Structure

In Chapter One I discussed how film and video can have an effect on the viewer. In this chapter, the relationship between the two media and their respective spectators is taken one step further. Instead of exploring how film and video can have an effect *on* the viewing subject, this chapter explores the idea that the viewing subject can be understood as an effect *of* the two media. That is, film and video each produce subjective positions for their respective spectators in medium-specific ways. Through medium-related characteristics, film and video presuppose certain modes of looking at the film or video images on view; modes of looking which define the spectator in question as either an embodied or disembodied subject. As I will argue below, (dis)embodied viewing positions can be understood as an integral part of a medium's specificity.

The question is, which medium-related characteristics influence the production of such specific types of embodied or disembodied viewing subjects? In answering this question, the film theoretical concept of *dispositif* can be of help. This concept arose in the 1970s, when it was used by aforementioned French film scholars such a Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz as a way of defining how the film spectator is situated in relation to filmic representation. Metz and Baudry were of the opinion that films bring the film viewer in a state which is close to dreaming and hallucination. According to Baudry, this dreamlike state of the film viewer is not so much the result of the discursive organization or "film language" of the moving images projected on screen, but rather of cinema's *dispositif,* which involves aspects of the projection as such. Put briefly, Baudry defined cinema's *dispositif* as a particular set of film technologies (the camera, moviola, projector, theatre), as well as specific conditions of the projection (such as a darkened room, hidden projector and immobile spectator). [33]

It is important to distinguish the concept of *dispositif* from the term "apparatus," the latter generally applied as the English equivalent of the French term. As scholars such as Judith Mayne (1993) and Frank Kessler (2006) have noted, this usual English translation of *dispositif* is rather unfortunate. First of all, the word "apparatus" does not render the idea of a specific arrangement or tendency (*disposition*), which the French term implies (Kessler 2006: 60). Secondly, the single term "apparatus" has been used to

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[33] See Parente and de Carvahlo (2008) for a more extensive discussion of Baudy's definintion of *dispositif*, which I summarize here.

translate two distinct concepts in Baudry's writings, namely "*appareil de base*" as well as "*dispositif.*" In an essay titled "Le dispositif" (1975), Baudry explains that "*appareil*" refers to all the components necessary to both the production and the projection of a film, whereas "*dispositif*" is more limited, referring solely to "projection and which includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed" (Baudry in Mayne 1993).[34, 35]

Although the concept of the *dispositif* refers to a limited part of cinema's *appareil,* the most important merits of the concept lie precisely in what it adds to a mechanical understanding of the medium – that is, to the medium of film as well as to the concept of "medium" in general. Without ignoring the technological aspects of a medium, the concept enables us to consider how aspects which do not belong to a medium's technological base are nevertheless part of what a medium is and does. Factors such as the architecture of the viewing room or the presence of seats for the spectator are not a part of the material support or *appareil de base* of film. Yet, such seemingly external, non-technological factors influence the specific ways in which a medium produces a viewing position. The concept of *dispositif* suggests that these factors, as well as the specific viewing position they create, are included in the medium.

Comparing Concepts

Baudry's notion of the *dispositif* is not entirely incongruous with Krauss' definition of medium specificity as a structure which consists of a technological base plus a layer of conventions. The conventional, non-technological layer of the *dispositif* was particularly emphasized by film theorist Jean-Louis Comolli who – unlike Baudry – explicitly stated that cinema is "not essentially the camera, the film, the projector" and "not merely a combination of instruments, apparatuses, techniques" (1980: 122). Nevertheless, many of the factors which Baudry assigned as components of cinema's *dispositif* operate on the verge of material prerequisites to a film screening on the one hand, and cultural conventions which further shape the viewer's position in relation the movie on the other.

Take, for instance, the hidden projector which Baudry pointed out as being a part of cinema's *dispositif*. The projector itself is a vital technological part of a film projection. The fact that it is usually hidden during a film screening, though, is not a matter of technological necessity. It is rather through convention that the camera is kept out of sight. This cultural convention, then, is just a much a part of cinema's *dispositif* as the machine beaming film's moving images onto the white screen, as it shapes how the film

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[34] I am quoting Judith Mayne's English reproduction of Baudry's text here, as she has expounded the latter's theory with attention to the differences between the French terms and their English translations (see Mayne 1996: 47). In the original French article, Baudry states as follows: "D'une façon générale, nous distinguons *l'appareil de base*, qui concerne l'ensemble de l'appareillage et des opérations nécessaires à la production d'un film et à sa projection, du *dispositif*, qui concerne uniquement la projection et dans lequel le sujet à qui s'adresse la projection est inclus" (1978: 317).

[35] For an excellent overview of Baudry's writings on the *dispositif*, as well as the wide array of reprints and translations of the essays in question, see Kessler's "The Cinema of Attractions as Dispositif" (2006: 59-60).

spectator relates to the film on view.

Another example is the seated, immobile position of the film spectator. On the one hand, this position can be understood as a material necessity to the visibility of a movie. If spectators were to stand upright or walk around, they might cast shadows onto the screen, and block the sight or divert the attention of other viewers, which would disturb the film show. On the other hand, walking around and casting shadows onto the screen *is* completely acceptable and even an important part of watching video installation artworks, which are hardly ever presented in rooms lined with seats. This points out that the seated, immobile position which the film spectator is supposed to take up is, first and foremost, a conventional part of cinema's *dispositif*.

The conventions of mobile or immobile spectatorship are not only part of the *dispositif*, but also of the broader cultural, institutional places in which the respective *dispositifs* operate. The "viewing rules" of the museum, for instance, prescribe a quiet, meandering, yet attentive mode of viewing, while the cinema is related to the convention of the immobile, silently seated viewer. The cultural place of the living room, to give one other example, does permit distracted and fragmented ways of looking (at the TV or PC).

The influence of the cultural and social conventions which are attached to specific places on a medium's *dispositif* are well illustrated by comparing a TV monitor in a living room with a TV monitor in a museum. A TV in a living room is watched in a different way, and placed differently in the room than a TV monitor in a museum. Unlike the set-up in a living room situation, televisions are frequently placed in the middle of a museum room, where they will in all probability be watched contemplatively by strolling visitors. The fact that cultural and institutional fields in which media operate inscribe their conventions onto a medium's *dispositif(s)* shows that the viewing room is not merely part of the *dispositif* in the sense of a geometrical, material space. It should also be understood as an institutional, cultural place. In sum, like so many other components of the *dispositif*, the viewing room in which an object is shown forms a combination of physical features and cultural conventions.

Although Baudry's *dispositif* and Krauss' idea of the medium as a layered structure have the combination of technological and conventional aspects in common, the two notions differ in one important respect. Baudry excludes the formal features of the projected films themselves from cinema's *dispositif*. He does not consider the characteristics of the film on screen to be part of the projection situation, because the cuts and compositions we see in a film are the result of operations carried out during the *production* of the movie.[36] Krauss, on the other hand, focuses particularly on the

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[36] Baudry does, however, discuss how these formal features of classical narrative films very much sustain the effect of cinema's *dispositif* (which will be further discussed in section 2.4). He does not ignore the narrative and stylistic characteristics of films. Yet, these aspects are not the focus of his attention, as they are not considered to be part of the *dispositif*. For Baudry, the point of the concept is precisely to divert attention away from the "content" of screened films, as he holds that the most dominant meanings and effects of cinema are produced by related aspects of the screening situation (i.e. the *dispositif*).

conventionality of discursive patterns within (groups of) media objects. Although she is not oblivious to the interrelation between media objects and the contexts in which they are exhibited and viewed, her definition of a medium's conventional layer in terms of "expressive possibilities," "traditional forms," and "grammar" diverts attention to the aesthetic and formal properties of the media objects themselves.

When Krauss applies her own concept of the medium, the viewing context and the position of the beholder in that context are part of her analysis, but not of the medium she analyzes. In an article on James Coleman ("Reinventing The Medium," 1999), for instance, she mentions how the dark rooms in which the Irish artist exhibits luminous slide projections set up a relationship with cinema. Yet, Krauss does not regard this room, nor the viewing situating which the room creates, as part of the structure of Coleman's (reinvented) medium. This structure is rather located in the material support of a slide sequence, together with the compositional grammar (derived from the photo novel) which is applied in the projected images. Through the reiteration of these particular compositional conventions, Coleman is able to derive his own specific medium from the material conditions of the slideshow's technical support. In doing so, Coleman succeeds in reinventing the idea of the specific medium as such without returning to traditional artistic media such as painting or sculpture.

In the case of Krauss' analysis of Coleman's work, an exclusion of the projection space and the spectator's position from the structure of the medium under discussion has some notable disadvantages. Most importantly, it obscures the complex, heterogeneous intermedial character of Coleman's invented medium. Moreover, it implicitly promotes a return to the idea of medium specificity as an autonomous material unity – an idea which Krauss fiercely refutes in *A Voyage of the North Sea* (2000).

At first sight, however, Krauss seems to acknowledge the intermedial and conventional structure of Coleman's newly invented medium of slide projection. Not only does she mention how the projection situation of a darkened room resembles cinema, she also construes the composition of Coleman's images in relation to classical narrative films. As the groups of depicted characters in the projected images face neither each other nor the viewer, but instead stare at undefined points outside of the frame which are never rendered visible, Krauss considers Coleman's still compositions a refusal and subversion of cinematic suture (300,301). Whereas point-of-view editing in narrative films causes the viewer to become visually and psychologically woven – or sutured – into the fabric of the film, Coleman's slide projections produce a completely externalized viewer. This viewer cannot lose herself imaginatively in the depth of the depicted world. She remains firmly grounded in front of an impenetrable flat image plane.

Krauss' analysis of the viewer's positioning does not mean that she is discussing the medium's *dispositif,* though. For, in Krauss' argument, the externalization of the viewing subject is not part of Coleman's medium: it is precisely through the externalization of the viewing subject that Coleman's slide projections establish themselves as a medium; that is, as a material, physical medium. For, in the eyes of Krauss, the refusal to suture

allows Coleman to confront and underscore the planarity of his medium. It forms a reflexive acknowledgement of the flatness of the image plane; of the impossibility of the visual field to deliver its promise of either realism or authenticity (Krauss 1999: 301).

It appears that, in "Reinventing the Medium," the (re)invention of the medium not only depends on the inscription of a material base with conventions, but also on quite the opposite move: a return to modernist exposure of the support's materiality. Krauss' attention to the intermedial references of Coleman's installations does not obviate this subtle return to a Greenbergian understanding of the medium. For although slide projections in dark spaces refer to film and resemble the cinematic projection situation in important respects, Krauss emphasizes how they ultimately subvert and reject the cinematic medium. Slide projections are a-cinematic, they are *not* film. Film is excluded from Coleman's allegedly pure new medium.

The concept of *dispositif* could have precluded Krauss' implicit retrogression to thinking of the medium in terms of autonomy, unity or purity, because Baudry's notion adds aspects to the structure of the medium which are – in Krauss' and other media theories – excluded from it in order to posit the specific medium as an autonomous material entity. Coleman's compositional grammar, for instance, does indeed confront the viewer with the flatness of the image plane, and with the impenetrability of the screen. It produces an embodied mode of looking, for instead of allowing the beholder to forget her body and plunge into the depth of the image with the eyes, she is reminded of her body being in front of the screen. The concept of *dispositif* shows that such a visual exclusion of the viewer from the depicted image world doesn't automatically imply that the medium is a closed material entity, though. For the idea of the *dispositif* allows us to think of a specific viewing position as a part of the medium.

When it comes to Coleman's work, the French film-theoretical concept can also be helpful in underlining the intermedial character of the slide projections. The darkened projection rooms in which images are shown highlight a relationship with cinema. In addition to the fact that the rooms are necessarily darkened, they also resemble cinema halls because they often have soft, carpeted floors, and sometimes contain comfortable chairs.[37] Moreover, the slides are generally projected on the scale of a small cinema screen. If these components are regarded as features of a medium's *dispositif*, it is possible to argue that the *dispositif* of Coleman's medium contains some of the most typical features of (classical) cinema's *dispositif* (which I will outline more extensively later on). Therefore, Coleman's medium can be regarded as a hybrid and heterogeneous one. Its *dispositif* is produced out of components which are characteristic of film, while

[37] In the past decade, this form of exhibition has become less typical for the artist. One of his most famous slide installations, *Slide Piece* (1973), was, however, commonly exhibited in rooms with comfortable chairs, for instance in gallery Marconi, Milan (1975), and The Renaissance Society, Chicago (1985). The comfortable, soft carpeted quality of Coleman's exhibition spaces is also pointed out as a distinctive treat of his installations by, for instance, art historian and curator Lynn Cooke (1995), as well as by his representing gallery Micheline Swayzer, Antwerp. For more elaborate discussions as well as images of Coleman's *dispositifs,* see James Coleman, *Projected Images 1972-1994*, Cooke, Buchloh and Fisher, 1995.

its material base as well as its aesthetic conventions are to a large degree photographic.

Yet, the aesthetic conventions of Coleman's medium are quite dissimilar to cinematic ones. As Krauss pointed out , they are derived from the photo novel as well as the theater, and clearly refuse the strategy of cinematic suture. This makes Coleman's invented medium not only a hybrid, but also an internally contradictory one – it is filmic in some respects, and blatantly a-cinematic in others. For Krauss – who does not include aspects of the *dispositif* into the medium's structure – it is mainly the refusal of cinema that counts. In her essay, the relationship between Coleman's medium and other media principally serves to outline the pure specificity of the new medium, which is *not* film, *not* photography, *not* theater, etc. I would, on the other hand, argue that Coleman's medium is not film, not photography and not theater in some respects, but that it simultaneously *is* film, photography, and theater in many others. And, it is exactly this complicated, contradictory mixture of media which establishes Coleman's medium as unique and specific.

Mixing, Expanding, Multiplying

The unwanted propensity towards essentialism in Krauss' analysis of Coleman's projections demonstrate that her definition of the medium as a layered structure can benefit from adding components of the *dispositif* to this structure. At the same time, Baudry's definition of *dispositif* can be complemented by the aesthetic conventions which play a dominant part in Krauss' layered structure of a medium's specificity. Although Krauss does not include the spectator's position in her definition of the medium, her discussion of Coleman's compositions show very well how formal and aesthetic image features (co-)produce a certain viewing position.

This has also been noted within the disciplinary field from which the concept of *dispositif* originated. Film philosopher Noel Carroll, for instance, critically remarks that Baudry is not particularly interested in "the content of the images or the stories of particular films or even particular kinds of films," but only in "a network which includes the screen, the spectator, and the projector […] the projection situation itself, irrespective of what is being screened" (2004: 224-225). The importance of what is being screened to the positioning of the viewer within the network of the projection situation has been demonstrated by film theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Raymond Bellour, who have extensively analyzed the way in which narrative film forms, styles, and narrative structures produce a specific type of viewing subject. When these formal aspects are also taken into account as part of the *dispositif*, the interrelated components of a medium's *dispositif* can be summarized as follows:

- The material technological components of a medium which are applied at the moment of exhibiting, showing, or projecting a medium object (screen, canvas, projector, monitor, etc.)
- The architectural and interior design of the exhibition space (including lighting, furni- ture, the hiddenness or exposure of the abovementioned technological parts, the

position of objects in space, etc.)
- The cultural and institutional meanings and conventions of the place of exhibition
- Formal, aesthetic, stylistic, narrative, and discursive features of the shown objects or images
- A certain viewing position, stimulated by the above conditions

In this chapter I will work with this outline of the *dispositif* to study the intermedial relationship between film and video in objects which mix embodied and disembodied viewing positions, by combining medium-specific components of film's and video's *dispositif*.[38] Before outlining the respective *dispositifs* of film and video, though, some further defining remarks have to be made on the methodological concept in question.

First of all, the concept of *dispositif* is not always suitable for investigating inter-mediality or medium specificity. Although the notion is usually helpful in illuminating how a work of art or medium object relates to its spatial surroundings as well as its audience, not every medium can be said to have a specific *dispositif*. Or, to put it differently: the specificity of media is not always related to a single *dispositif*. This is mainly a matter of historically, culturally and socially relative dominance. The field of some media is, at some points in history, in certain societies, dominated by a specific *dispositif*. In such case one particular configuration of technology, space, form, and viewing position becomes so widespread and well-known that it will eventually be regarded as wholly specific to and characteristic of the medium in question. Other possible *dispositifs* of the medium become so marginal that they are, so to speak, pushed towards or even over the boundaries of a medium's field. When one particular *dispositif* dominates a medium's field, deviations from the dominant *dispositif* will appear to put the specificity of the medium into question.

Film is one of the best examples in this regard, as it has a very specific, dominant *dispositif* (which is why it is not surprising that the concept was first coined by *film* theorists). Film projections which differ in one or more respects from cinema's dominant *dispositif* often bring into question their status as film. When film cannot be viewed from a seated position, for instance, it promptly becomes questionable whether the shown object still *is* a film. In Anthony McCall's solid light films, for example, the spectator can walk through and around differently shaped light beams emanating from film projectors. Moreover, these (visible) projectors project celluloid tapes which determine the size and shape of the light beams. Technically speaking, the medium of McCall's works is film. Yet, the way in which they can be viewed is so unlike film's dominant *dispositif* that

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[38] My somewhat simplified list of the *dispositif*'s components resembles outlines of the concept by Kessler (2006, 2007) as well as Parente and Carvalho (2008), and Joost Raessens (2009). However, Kessler does not include the architectural and interior design of the exhibition space. Parente and Carvahlo, on the other hand, leave the position of the spectator unmentioned in their definition. Raessens is the only author in this group who mentions the cultural and institutional character of the viewing context as a component of the *dispositif*.

they can hardly be understood as film. This different viewing position makes manifest a characteristic of film which is invisible from a seated position facing the screen, that is, the alleged solidity of film's light beam. Through this, film seems to turn into another medium; sculpture. Although I would say that these deviations from cinema's dominant *dispositif* should still be regarded as parts of film's heterogeneous field of possibilities – in fact, they bear that out – it is telling that McCall's installations are usually labeled with terms such as expanded cinema and paracinema, or are discussed under the heading of "Film beyond its Limits" (Baker 2006).[39],[40]

On the other hand, the field of some media is not dominated by one single *dispositif* at all. Then, the plurality of *dispositifs* which is latent in each medium is not overruled by one specific configuration. In the case of photography, for instance, it is difficult to point out one typical medium-specific *dispositif*. Photographs can be looked at while standing in front of them, or while holding them, they can be glued to a lamppost or be printed in a newspaper, placed in spacious light museum room or within the dark inside of a personal locker, and in all these cases, they will still be photographs. Because none of these variations alter the "photographness" of the images in question, it is possible to conclude that photography does not have a *dispositif* which is so characteristic to the medium that deviations from it would affect the medium's specificity, expand photography's field or push it beyond its limits.

Besides to the plurality of a medium's *dispositif,* the plurality of the viewers should be pointed out. An important point of critique on the concept in question has been that real spectators play no part in the *dispositif*. The position of the subject of a medium's *dispositif* is a construction, an effect of the interrelation between technological and conventional medium-specific forms of address. The fact that, in Baudry's opinion, cinema's *dispositif* produces a viewing subject as an active center and origin of meaning,

[39] McCall's solid light films deviate from cinema's dominant *dispositif* in a very overt way. However, film theorists such as Mary Ann Doane (2003) and Philip Rosen (1986) have pointed out that relatively inconspicuous formal and narrative features of classical fiction films can form subtle deconstructions of the disembodied viewing subject in cinema's traditional *dispositif*.

[40] The idea of the heterogeneous field is not only relevant with regard to the notion of the medium, it should also be borne in mind when specific *dispositifs* are analyzed. A medium's *dispositif* is a specific network of several components which becomes a dominant convention through iteration. Objects or works of art can deviate from the norm. Also, the norm can be contradictory in itself. In most cases, the components of a *dispositif* are in concordance with each other; they all contribute to a single effect. When it comes to film, all parts of the dominant *dispositif*, for instance, work together in creating a viewer who forgets that she is watching a representation. However, some *dispositifs* combine discrepant elements. The *dispositif* of many contemporary computer games, for instance, on the one hand aims at immersion by offering the viewer full visual access to the world on view. Not only are the images of the game world smooth and detailed, the spectator can often choose from an endless array of viewpoints by operating a joystick or controller. On the other hand, however, this option to choose (viewpoints as well as many other things) frequently produces an effect which is quite the opposite of immersion. For the interactivity which is offered by the gaming *dispositif* tends to remind the player of her own physical presence. Because of that, she cannot forget herself and feel entirely immersed in the represented world. For a further discussion of this paradox and how it tends to be resolved by other, newer *dispositifs*, I refer to Marie-Laure Ryan's "Immersion vs Interactivity" (1999).

doesn't mean the actual, real spectators have any agency vis-à-vis this powerful (and highly ideological) structure. Members of the film audience can only be presumed to be subjected to the transcendental viewing position theatrical films create for them.

Although this chapter in the first place discusses the implied spectator which is created by the two media of film and video, the real viewer is taken into account as well in the analyses that follow. In spite of the fact that the way a real spectator can behold a piece is affected and delimited by (physical) properties of the *dispositif*, I hold that this real viewer does have considerable agency. She can make choices in the way she beholds and interprets the (visual) text, and can either work with or against the viewing position or mode of looking an object assigns to her.[41] When texts and images are read or viewed, an ongoing interactive process takes place between what the text programs as/for the reader and how the real reader or viewer responds to this. I hold that the performative effect of an object, as well as its meaning, are the result of this interactive process, and are thus not fixed by the object or the viewer. However, in order to avoid confusion between the (nevertheless related) implied and real viewer I will mostly refer to the constructed spectator in the *dispositif* in terms of a "viewing position" or "mode of looking," whereas the words "spectator" and "viewer" will be reserved for the general real viewer. [42]

2.2 (Dis)embodying *Dispositifs*

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned how cinema is often said to produce a disembodied spectator. This disembodied spectator is mainly the result of cinema's dominant *dispositif*. Yet, in order to explain why the viewer of cinema's dominant *dispositif* is usually thought of as disembodied (and, subsequently, how video's most prominent *dispositif* generally results in embodied looking), it is first necessary to discuss the difference between embodied and disembodied modes looking. But what does looking with one's body entail exactly? What does it mean to look in a disembodied way? Which aspects of a medium's *dispositif* can be said to stimulate an embodied or disembodied mode of looking? Some of these questions have been answered in theories

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[41] This negation of an absolute division between the implied and real spectator/reader can be traced back to some of the ideas by reader-response critic Walker Gibson (1950) as well as literary theorist Ernst van Alphen (1988), and is based on pragmatic approaches to the relation between text and spectator as theorized by film scholars such as Francesco Casetti (1983) and Nick Browne (1986). All of these scholars emphasize a connection between the "inside" reader/spectator as constructed by a (film) text and the actual "outside" of a representation. According to Casetti, both work together in what he calls a game, in which the inside and the outside of a text constantly interact, influencing each other. Through an analysis of John Ford's film *Stagecoach*, Browne has effectively demonstrated that this game is not always a harmonious one. Considerable disjunctions can arise between what a (film) text programs and what the spectator sees, does, or comprehends.

[42] Since the film and video works I will address are contemporary Western European productions, their general spectator is, at this point, sufficiently specified as being a contemporary, Western European one.

which do not discuss the dominant *dispositifs* of film or video in particular, yet provide insight in the (dis)embodying qualities of the two media all the same.

The Eye, and the Eye in the Body

Put briefly, a disembodied spectator looks in a way which involves mainly sight, while an embodied spectator participates with his or her whole body in the process of looking. This difference between embodied and disembodied looking is a subtle one, though, and at the outer ends of the sliding scale, pure forms of embodied or disembodied looking do not exist. It is impossible to ever look completely without the body. As Vivian Sobchack stated: "Our vision is always already "fleshed out"" (2004: 60). Not only are our eyes physically attached to rest of our bodies; also, our visual perception influences other bodily sensations and vice versa.

At the same time, the idea of beholding an object with the whole body is something of a chimera. Although recent theories on embodied spectatorship (e.g. Williams 1991, Barker 2009) have convincingly argued that our skin, musculature, glands, and viscera can play a part in the act of perception, we usually do not use all our bodily parts and functions in equal measure when we behold an object. Depending on the circumstances and the object on view, some senses and body parts are more involved in the act of perception than others.

This is also how the difference between embodied and disembodied looking is best understood: disembodied looking relies most heavily on the eyes, whereas embodied looking involves other parts of the body as well. In addition, the difference between embodied and disembodied looking often has more to do with a psychological state of awareness than with actual physical participation or bodily processes. As will become clear below, the phrase "embodied looking" is frequently used to indicate a viewer who is thoroughly conscious of her own presence as a spectator at a certain time and place, and moreover, of the fact that her own act of looking takes up time and space. Disembodied looking, on the other hand, usually describes an act of perception during which the viewer forgets herself, including her body and its physical position in time and space.[43]

The distinction between embodied and disembodied modes of looking can be further explained by some concepts with which the notions of disembodied and embodied looking correspond. Art historian Norman Bryson introduced the notions of the gaze and the glance as two modes of looking at a painting. However, the two notions can be considered apart from painting. The gaze and the glance are relevant concepts in making a distinction between two ways of viewing in general, the former term indicating a disembodied, the latter an embodied look. The gaze, Bryson argues, reduces the body of the spectator to one single point, one eye. It is a disengaged mode of looking in which

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[43] As Richard Rushton has pointed out, the sense of bodyliness he and others ascribe to the film viewer is "actually more of a loss of self-consciousness – for example, the loss of awareness that one is sitting in a movie theatre – or a loss of 'self-theorization'" (114).

the viewer is unaware of her own position as a viewer, or of her bodily participation in the process of viewing. Viewing is not even a process in the case of the gaze. It is placed outside duration, leaving the time of the act of viewing unacknowledged. In addition, the gaze is a static mode of looking for it doesn't move or linger over the object in vision. The glance, on the other hand, is an involved mode of looking in which the viewer is aware of his own bodily engagement in the process of looking. Furthermore, the glance is a mode of looking in which, unlike the gaze, viewing is acknowledged as a practice which takes up time. Moreover, the glance is a look that moves; it scans and wanders over the image surface.

Bryson further distinguishes the gaze and the glance by the way in which they relate to what they behold. The gaze objectifies or seizes the contemplated object, it masters what it beholds. Moreover, the gaze is a mode of viewing which doesn't distinguish between model and figure in representation, between what is real and what is re-presented. The object in vision is not regarded as something which is made, and hence, the work of representation is not taken into account by the gaze. As mentioned previously, the glance is an involved look in which the viewer is aware of the participation in the process of looking. And because of this awareness, the glance doesn't deny the work of representation. As Bal explains in her discussion of Bryson's notion of the glance: "The awareness of one's own engagement in the act of looking entails the awareness that what one sees is a representation, not an objective reality, not the 'real thing' " (1991, 142).

In a discussion of modes of looking stimulated by different media, Laura Marks introduces two modes of looking which – as she indicates herself – strongly resemble Bryson's notions of the gaze and the glance; optical and haptical looking. "Optical visuality," Marks writes, "requires distance and a centre, the viewer acting like a pinhole camera" (2002: xvi). Haptical looking, on the other hand, bubbles up to the surface to interact with another surface. The centered viewpoint of optical looking resembles the single point of Bryson's gaze. Like the glance, the haptical mode of looking is aware of the representational status of the object in vision, as it interacts with it as "another surface." Moreover, as with the difference between Bryson's gaze and glance, the static optical mode of looking is not a process, while the mobile haptical look does take up time.

Yet, Marks' notions can be distinguished from Bryson's through the former's specific emphasis on surface. Because the haptical look "clings" to the surface of representations by focusing on details and by lingering over the object, Marks compares haptical looking to touch. Touch as a mode of looking indicates an involvement of the whole body of the spectator, especially the skin. Moreover, touch also implies closeness and interaction between *two* bodies or two skins, which is why haptical looking involves an embodied viewer responding to the object in vision as another body, and to its surface as another skin (Marks 2002: 4).

Optical looking, on the other hand, doesn't linger over or press against the surface,

it remains immobile, detached, and distant instead. However, as Marks argues, this "distance between beholder and object allows the beholder to imaginatively project him/herself into the object" (2002: 5). Thus, while haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object, optical looking "plunges into depth." The imaginative projection into the object of the optical-looking viewer doesn't acknowledge the boundary formed by the surface of the representation. In this respect it can be compared to the gaze taking hold of the object in vision, denying the work of representation.

Looking through the Surface

Although the (dis)embodied modes of looking which Bryson and Marks define can be adopted or rejected by the viewer, they are very much prompted by the objects on view. If we return to the concept of *dispositif* for a moment, it is possible to say that the two theorists mainly focus on one of the *dispositif's* four components, namely the formal and stylistic aspects of the viewed object. Bryson, to begin with, argues that the gaze is a mode of looking which is encouraged by realist representations, that is to say, representations which look transparent. This transparency is effected by effacing the traces of the labor of representation. In the case of painting, for instance, the labor of representation is removed when no brush strokes are visible on the painted canvas.

A similar argument is provided by Marks, who states that optical looking is stimulated by images with smooth surfaces. However, in Marks's writings, smoothness is not only understood as the result of hiding the labor of representation in the sense of manual production. Lens-based images can also be called "smooth" when they are fine-grained, or have a high resolution. This is effected by the quality of some of the technological and chemical parts of the apparatus (most notably the light sensitive emulsion, or the digital sensor), rather than by the invisibility of the producer's hands in the final image(s). Moreover, as Marks points out, smoothness not only hides the production process but also conceals the materiality of the object itself, as for instance the smoothness of high resolution film images hides the materiality of the celluloid. Yet, both Marks' notion of smoothness and Bryson's realist transparency – which are practically the same – give rise to a mode of looking that denies that the object in vision is indeed a material representation, which consequently entails a sense of visual access to that object. The disembodied eye of the spectator is then seemingly able to plunge into the depth of the image, taking hold of what it sees.

Since both the gaze and the optical look are modes of viewing which entail a sense of access to the depth of the image, it is obvious that those modes of disembodied looking are also stimulated by pictures which depict illusionistic space. For such illusionistic space seems to actually have depth for the gaze to enter into. Moreover, according to both Marks and Bryson, a disembodied mode of looking is especially produced by images in which the principles of linear perspective are used. Not only does space depicted according to the rules of linear perspective look very real in the eyes of many viewers, linear perspective also produces a static and single viewpoint

outside of the image through its vanishing point inside the image. Any spectator adopting this viewpoint becomes a disembodied viewer; immobile, distant, reduced to a single eye. Moreover, as the illusionistic space is fully available to view from the stable single viewpoint which linear perspective creates, the disembodied spectator of perspectival images has a sense of visual mastery over the space in vision.

An embodied mode of looking is stimulated by images which are in many respects quite the opposite of the ones discussed above. Instead of smooth surfaces, objects which give rise to the glance or the haptical look have rough, coarse, textured, blurry, scratched or granular surfaces. In this way, images which invite embodied viewing do show the work of representation and/or their materiality. Moreover, they do not instill a feeling of visual mastery in their spectator; haptic looking "depends on *limited visibility* and the viewer's lack of mastery over the image," according to Marks (5, emphasis added). This limited visibility is not only effected by the aspects of the image surface I mentioned; it can also be caused by close-ups which make the depicted forms or figures unrecognizable. Also, coarse surfaces and close-ups often obstruct depth of vision, which Marks points out as another characteristic of haptic images (i.e. images which give rise to haptic looking). This obstruction of depth of vision also implies that, unlike linear perspective images, haptic images lack an immobile outside point of reference. And instead of depicting illusionistic space, images which give rise to an embodied mode of looking draw attention to the two-dimensional space of the surface itself.

Here, Now/There, Then

A slightly different, yet also valuable approach to the production of disembodied and embodied modes of looking is provided by Margaret Morse in her piece on video installation art called "The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between" (1990). Instead of focusing on what images depict or what their surface looks like – as Marks and Bryson mostly do – Morse bases her ideas on a distinction between art forms. In doing so, she accentuates other aspects of the *dispositif* than Marks and Bryson. The status of the space of representation (or of exhibition, projection) is of central importance to Morse, who analyzes this space of representation in relation to represented space as well as time.

Another difference between Morse's theory and the previous approaches I discussed is that the actual physical position and (im)mobility of the viewer are involved in Morse's conceptualization of spectatorship. The notions of closeness and distance, movement and static centeredness which Bryson and Marks, respectively, attach to the glance, the gaze, the haptic and the optic look, do not necessarily denote the actual physical position or mobility of the spectator. While her eyes wander over the image's surface, the haptic film viewer can, for instance, sit motionless at a fair distance from the screen.[44] In Morse's essay, on the other hand, (dis)embodied looking relies very much

[44] Likewise, disembodied spectators do not necessarily physically occupy the single static viewpoint which perspectival images produce in front of their image frame (this would cause problems in crowded museum galleries and cinema halls). They rather imagine themselves in this (or *as* this) center.

on the way in which the beholder's body moves (or doesn't move) through the space of projection or exhibition. Because of that, embodied looking does not mean "looking as-if touching," "viewing as-if wandering around" or "watching as-if being close to the contemplated object." From Morse's perspective, the "as-ifs" in the previous sentence can be replaced with "while."

According to Morse, disembodied looking is mostly produced by the so-called "proscenium arts." Embodied modes of viewing, on the other hand, are usually created by art forms which Morse has termed "presentational arts." The main reason for proscenium arts inviting a disembodied mode of looking is that they represent "things apart from us, using language as a window to another world" (156). In doing so, they form a division between what they represent and the "here" and "now" which the spectator bodily occupies. As Morse further explains:

> In the proscenium arts, the spectator is carefully divided from the field to be contemplated. The machinery that creates the vision of another world is largely hidden, allowing the immobilized spectator to sink into an impression of its reality with horror and delight but without danger from the world on view. The proscenium of the theatre, and its most ideal expression, the fourth wall, as well as the screen of film divide the here and now of the spectator from the elsewhere and elsewhen beyond with varying degrees of absoluteness. The frame of painting likewise allows a painting not to be taken literally, and to allow a not here and not now to occupy the present. (156)

Presentational arts, on the other hand, do not divide the spectator from a represented "not here" and "not now." There is no screen or frame or proscenium dividing the represented artwork from the time and space in which the spectator receives a representation. Morse explains the effect of the proscenium's absence by comparing presentational arts to theater: "It is as if the audience were free to cross the proscenium and wander about on stage, contemplating the actor's makeup and props, able to change point of view […], seeing both the process of creating another world and – more dimly than before – the represented world itself" (158). In some cases, however, presentational arts do not even represent another world. For, as the term indicates, presentational arts are not so much representations as presentations.

So, which art forms or artworks can be understood as presentational? What do presentational artworks have in common except for the absence of a proscenium? Morse indicates, for instance, that some forms of performance art and some kinds of sculpture are presentational. Moreover, interactive works, closed-circuit videos, site-specific artworks and installation art (either site-specific or not) are practically always presentational, according to Morse. A common denominator of presentational arts is that they all implicate a real time and/or a real space, rather than referring to another time or space. Or, as Morse puts it, presentational arts are characterized by their "here

and nowness." Let me further explain this with the help of some of the relevant art forms.

Performance art can be presentational because in performances, as opposed to traditional theater, the body of a performer and his or her experience in the here and now can be addressed directly to the spectator. In this way, the performance doesn't refer to another place and another time. Instead, it relates to – and exists in – the here and now in which it is viewed. Sculpture is presentational when it does not function as a monument or memorial of some world or time, and when it does not consist of an object alone. As the most poignant example of presentational sculpture, Morse mentions minimal sculpture, which implies a physical space around the object and the play of light on it (Morse 158). Closed-circuit video is grounded in real time and real space in that the technique enables images of a space to be recorded and relayed simultaneously and in the same space, exploring the fit between images of a space and the space itself in a live and ongoing fashion. Installation art not only occupies an actual space, it also *is* a real space that can be occupied by the spectator. As Morse explains, the room in which an installation is installed is "the *ground* over which a conceptual, figural, embodied and temporalized space that is the installation breaks" (154).

The important effect of the "here and nowness" of these artworks is that the spectator exists *with* them instead of apart from them. For the beholder necessarily occupies the same time and space that these artworks so explicitly do. Performances which are addressed directly and explicitly to the spectator, for instance, turn the spectator into a "you," a partner inhabiting the same world; a partner who, moreover, has the capacity to influence and respond to events. [45] In many cases of presentational art, a responding, active spectator is not only an option, but even a requirement. The most obvious example is interactive art, which acts on and reacts to the visitor, but which also requires the spectator to be physically active (moving around, pressing buttons, operating a joy stick, typing text) in order for the interactivity to arise at all.

In light of embodied spectatorship, this interactivity should be further specified as what Marie-Laure Ryan (1999) has termed "literal interactivity." As opposed to "figural interactivity," which concerns the collaboration between reader and text/image in the production of meaning and affect, literal interactivity depends on physical interaction between the viewer and object. When beholders physically affect the material structure of the object and are, in turn, themselves bodily affected by this act, Ryan defines the literal interactivity as "strong." When, on the other hand, the material structure of the object is not altered by the beholder, but offers each viewer the possibility to affect

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[45] In fact, linear perspective images also interpellate the viewer as a "you" by the viewing point they construct in front of them. Likewise, the viewer of narrative film can be regarded as its addressee; when it is assumed the film's story is told by a narrator, an addressee is implicated. However, this I-you structure is not visible in the case of linear perspective, and it is invisible or implicit in the case of film. This invisibility makes all the difference; it leaves the division between the "here and now" of the spectator and the "there and then" of the representation intact. It is only when the spectator is explicitly or directly addressed that the separation between plane of the spectator and the plane of representation (or performance) is removed. I will discuss this issue in relation to film more extensively later on.

which version of the piece she sees, the interactivity is termed "weak."

Many of the presentational art forms which Morse discusses offer this weak form of interactivity. Morse, for instance, mentions how minimal sculpture "requires a subject capable of realizing the work, responding to the changing light and positions of a here and now, so that each time a work is perceived differently" (Morse 158).[46] Likewise, the beholder of a video installation needs to do something in order to behold the piece; namely to enter it and to choose a trajectory through its spatial construction. She is indeed inside the piece as its experiential subject, not by identification, but in body. According to Morse, the visitor can actually be said to perform the installation by being in it, choosing a trajectory and experiencing it.

The viewer of closed-circuit video also figures inside the work, yet in a slightly different way. As the spectator's whereabouts in the exhibition space are video-taped and simultaneously relayed on screen, she is no longer just the one who looks, but also a figure in the work that is looked at. Although these closed-circuit video installations duplicate the viewing space as they create a represented space out of the space of representation, and create a double position for the viewer who becomes both the observing and observed, the represented world on screen cannot be considered apart from its close relation to the one in front of the screen. Unlike proscenium works of art, closed-circuit video installations do not refer to a completely other world; it is not the "there" and "then," but the "here" and "now" which is depicted. This embodies the viewer, who is forced to reflect on her physical position "here" and "now" in front of the screen, as it is simultaneously shown live *on* screen.[47]

In sum, the viewer's position in time and space is implicated by artworks which directly address the spectator, artworks that offer the viewer the possibility to act out an influence on them, artworks that require the viewer to move around and respond to them, or artworks which offer the viewer a role or position in them. By being implicated as present in time and space, the viewer is automatically implicated as an embodied spectator, for it is in her body that the beholder is present in real time and actual space. This embodiment is enhanced all the more when an artwork overtly responds to the physical presence or movement of the spectator's body, or when an artwork clearly calls for the spectator to act or participate physically. It goes without saying that the acts physically co-producing or participating in an artwork embody the viewer.

On the one hand, the concept of *dispositif* can be useful in naming the relationship

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[46] I would add to this, however, that all sculptures are slightly presentational, as well as literally interactive in the weak sense. Even if they refer to another world or time, they still call for the spectator to move around them, just for the simple reason that they cannot be fully viewed from one static viewpoint. As each spectator choses her own trajectory around the piece, and with that, physically affects how light falls on the sculpture, the viewer of sculpture has a great deal of bodily influence on her own particular viewing experience. When this viewing experience is regarded as a version of the object, each sculpture can be understood as "weakly'" interactive.

[47] The effects of closed-circuit (surveillance) video on the viewing subject will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 3.

between the characteristics which Morse points out in her essay. Her discussion of presentational art forms can be understood as a discussion of similar *dispositifs*. The *dispositifs* of presentational art forms have in common that their spectator is an indispensable embodied, mobile performer of the object, that the viewing space and time are part of the produced object, and that the (technological) processes which are involved in the act of creation are not hidden from sight.

On the other hand, these presentational art forms can shed a new light on the concept of *dispositif* itself. First of all, when it comes to presentational art forms, it is no longer possible to distinguish the contemplated object from, or within, the *dispositif*. Whereas the viewed object in Baudry's theory is but one part of the *dispositif*, the presentational piece of art cannot be seen as a distinct object, somewhere in space, with a viewer in front of it. This space, the viewer, as well as the time of viewing, are implicated by the presentational artwork to such an extent that the *dispositif* itself is the object, is the piece of art.

In addition to this conflation of the object with the *dispositif,* presentational art forms "rewrite" the concept somewhat by merging production and reception. Baudry aimed to apply the notion of *dispositif* to aspects related to the space and time of film projection only. Aspects of an object's production were not to be counted as parts of the *dispositif*. This separation is tenable in the case of classical cinema, yet does not hold when it comes to the art forms which Morse has termed presentational. For, next to the fact that presentational art forms show how represented worlds should not always be understood as another place and another time, presentational *dispositifs* also point out that the production process does not always primarily belong to a there and then. In presentational works of art, the acts of creation and production enter into the here and now of the viewer. In part, they do so through the viewer, who gets to carry out physical acts of co-production.

This inclusion of the production process in the site of presentation/reception does not render Baudry's concept insignificant. It merely points out that the act of viewing an object cannot, by definition, be separated from the creation of that object. As a consequence, the viewing situation (which is the central denotation of *dispositif*) is not necessarily a spatio-temporal vacuum which remains untouched by spatio-temporal dimensions of the production process. Moreover, as presentational art forms do not separate the viewing context from a represented world, the spatio-temporal characteristics of such a represented world (if any) cannot be seen apart from the here and now of the viewing situation either. In sum, presentational art forms point out that, instead of adverting to the production process as well as represented worlds as (or to) other "there's" and "then's," we should consider the possibility that they infuse the space and time of the arrangement we call *dispositif*.

2.3 Film's Disembodying *Dispositif*: An Effect of an Effect

> *...il est la proie de l'impression, d'une impression de réalité.*
> Jean-Louis Baudry (1978: 30)

In *L'Effet cinéma* (1978), Baudry compares cinema's *dispositif* to Plato's cave. In this dark cave, which is pictured by narrator Socrates in Plato's *Politeia,* chained prisoners are unable to see that the images they take as reality are in fact moving shadow images which are cast on the wall in front of them. Like the prisoners in Plato's well-known allegory, Baudry argues, spectators of the cinema are lured into believing that the images they are watching on screen in a darkened hall are "real." As in Plato's account, this illusion is not depicted as an innocent one by Baudry. According to him, it victimizes the film viewer, who is the "prey of an impression, of *an impression of reality*" (1978: 30-31, translated by the author).

For Baudry, this victimization of the spectator mainly concerns an ideological form of oppression. The film viewer is not presented with an "objective reality," with an "open and indeterminate horizon," but is instead forced to believe in an ideologically homogeneous image of reality where heterogeneity, difference, openness, and indetermination are eliminated. Film's *dispositif* produces an illusion of continuity from discontinuous elements. Therefore, Baudry states, "We could say that film [...] lives on the denial of difference. Difference is necessary for it to live, but it lives on its negation" (1986: 290). The victim of this illusion willingly accedes to this denial of difference, because cinema caters to a deeply rooted desire, that is, the desire to return to "a mode of relating to reality which could be defined as enveloping and in which the separation between one's body and the exterior is not well defined" (1986: 315). This leads Baudry to the conclusion that cinema, like dreams, seems to correspond to a form of regression, an (artificial) hallucinatory psychosis (1986: 315).[48]

Baudry's psychoanalytical interpretation of film's *dispositif*, as well as the ideological consequences he ascribes to it, have been widely criticized (mainly for being too "sweeping," Mayne 1993). Yet, in spite of these justified critiques, Baudry's outline of cinema's *dispositif* is of paramount importance because of its dominance. This dominance should be understood in two ways. First of all, the traditional cinematic viewing set-up which Baudry first defined as *dispositif* has for a long time dominated cinematic practices, which iterated this traditional configuration when films were projected. I am using a past tense here, though, for the classical cinematic viewing

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[48] This attention to the ideological and psychological effects of the *dispositif* remained central in later applications of the concept, both within and outside of the field of film studies. In studies by, for instance, Jean-Louis Comolli (1980) and Michel Foucault (1980), the concept came to refer to a much wider array of related elements (e.g. discourses, economic factors, laws, institutions, scientific statements). Yet, the notion of *dispositif* nevertheless remained linked to power and desire in these redefinitions of the term. However, I am leaving this association largely undiscussed in this chapter, as the power structures which are put up or sustained by the media of film and video will be investigated in Chapter 4.

configuration in a darkened cinema hall on which Baudry's concept is based has lost its monopoly due to viewing set-ups which are nowadays produced by electronic media and digital mobile screens.

However, besides a material, technological construction, the traditional *dispositif* is just as much a theoretical one. A theoretical one, moreover, which has highly influenced thinking on film. As an idea, it has determined how we view film, both in the sense of what we understand as film, and how we look at movies. When we watch moving images, the idea of the traditional *dispositif* often functions as a "horizon of expectations," as well as a framework through which we determine the medium of the projected images in question. Raymond Bellour speaks of a "more or less collective experience" and a "special memory experience" in this regard, when he poses the hypothesis that cinema's traditional *dispositif* (in short, a film projected in a cinema, in the dark, according to an unalterably precise screening procedure) remains the condition from which every other viewing situation more or less departs (Bellour 2013: 206). In all its impalpable forms – as idea, expectation, experience or memory – the traditional *dispositif* is dominant and highly influential. It has thoroughly shaped the specification and reception of film – and still does, I would argue.

In addition to the fact that Baudry's writings have been influential, they cannot be ignored here because they point to an effect of film's (dominant) *dispositif* which is most relevant to the subject of this chapter: the disembodiment of the film viewer. As mentioned before, Baudry holds that film's reality effect complies with a desire to eliminate the distinction between perception and representation, as well as between one's body and the exterior. When it comes to film, the latter can be regarded as an effect of the former: when film's reality effect makes us forget that we are watching a representation, we are prone to forget the distinction between our own body and the film (as a body, that is, as a physical object). Instead, we imagine ourselves into the reality shown on screen, and momentarily forget our own actual physical existence in front of that screen.

Therefore, in this chapter, I read Baudry's remark that the film spectator is prey to the impression of reality not in the first place as a metaphorical reference to the ideological subjugation of the viewing subject to the cinematic illusion. Instead of discussing this presumed ideological victimization of the viewer further, I focus on the disembodiment which the more literal meaning of "being prey" indicates. As will be explained below, this disembodiment can be understood as an effect of an effect: it is the (by-)product *and* a prerequisite of the reality effect which the many components of cinema's dominant *dispositif* pursue.

Blotting Out the Body: Splitting Worlds
The disembodiment of the film spectator relies on two operations of cinema's traditional *dispositif* which, at first sight, seem slightly contradictory. On the one hand, the disembodiment of the film viewer is caused by the fact that film is, as Morse also pointed

out, a proscenium art form. The film screen separates the beholder's here and now from the space and time of the story world which is depicted on that screen. On the other hand, the disembodiment of the spectator depends on the negation of this separation, of the impenetrability of the screen. Most components of film's dominant *dispositif* contribute to hiding the fact that the screen is a screen, and that the film world which appears on it is a manufactured, projected representation. This doesn't mean, however, that the worlds in front and on or "in" the screen become related or merged: the here and now of the viewer's position is rather brushed aside. It is left unacknowledged, unemphasized, and is meant to be forgotten as much as possible by the viewer in order for her to sink into the illusionistic film world.

Before turning to the disembodying effects of this negation of the distinction between the viewer's spatiotemporal position and the represented world, let me first discuss the separation itself. It is obvious that the flat screen on which films are projected forms an indisputable physical boundary between the viewer and the represented world "behind" the screen. As Richard Serra remarks on film:

> When someone uses a slow dolly with a camera, or progressively moves into a foreshortened space, it still seems to me that you are dealing with an illusion on a flat plane you can't enter into. The way it is understood denies the progressive movement of your body in time. It's from a fixed viewpoint. (Serra, in Weyergraf, 1980: 96)

However, although screens cannot be entered by the body, they do not always form a rigid boundary between the viewer's physical position in time and space on the one hand, and a world on view on the other.

First of all, the temporal distinction between the worlds "on" and "off" screen can be bridged. When the images which are projected or broadcast on a screen are live, the screen no longer provides visual access to an "elsewhen." Instead, it shows the same now as the present in which the spectator resides. Film images, however, *do* usually show an "elsewhen." This can first of all be explained by conditions of the medium's traditional support. The photographic base of analogue film ensures that film images on celluloid always refer to something "that has been." In the digital age, this temporal distance is no longer ensured by cinema's chemical-technological base. However, the signs of post-production which characterize most narrative fiction films (cutting and editing) still point out that *if* digital film images have an indexical relation to referent (as opposed to being painted out of pixels), this referent must lie in the past.

The separation of the represented space on screen and the space of representation in front of that screen is harder to bridge. Even if projected images show the projection room (the viewer's "here") itself, the illusionistic space on screen remains a physically inaccessible represented space. This boundary of physical inaccessibility can be seemingly perforated by *dispositifs* which allow the viewer to feature in the images on

view, or affect them physically through possibilities of interaction. Whereas such possibilities of small "perforations" into the screen space are common in video *dispositifs,* they are not utilized in cinema's dominant *dispositif*. Film's most common viewing set-up does not allow the film viewer to act out any influence on what happens on screen, nor is she offered the possibility to take part in the perceived. Besides this lack of influence, not much physical activity is usually required from the film viewer either. In the conventional *dispositif*, the spectator ought to sit still, the screen is to be watched from a fixed viewpoint – as Serra also notes. In sum, the viewer of film cannot physically enter or interact with what is seen on screen, and is physically immobile by convention as well. In this regard, it is not surprising that Metz has called the viewer of film "a great eye and ear" (1982: 48).

The abovementioned separation between the off and onscreen world is further enhanced by the narrative conventions of classical narrative cinema. Not all kinds of films can be understood as part of the dominant *dispositif*. The kind of film which has been theorized as the object within cinema's dominant *dispositif* is the film form which Metz (1982: 32), as mentioned in Chapter One, has designated as the positive pole of film to which the majority corresponds, and with respect to which the rest can be defined: the classical narrative fiction film.

The conventions of narrative fiction films also sustain the viewing situation which is produced by other components of the *dispositif's* set-up. One of the most important conventions in this regard is the rule that narrative films usually represent a closed diegesis. This closeness is achieved by not having the characters direct any gestures or utterances towards the outside of the film's screen. In traditional films, actors hardly ever look directly into to the camera, and because of that the film spectator is almost never directly looked at by characters on screen. Furthermore, the film viewer is hardly ever verbally addressed by characters in classical films either.

Still, a story is being told in narrative films, which implies both a (first person) narrating agency and an addressee (a second person). However, as discussed in Chapter One, the traces of enunciation – the structure of an "I" addressing a "you" – are obliterated in traditional narrative films. As a result, films not only seem to tell themselves, they do not seem to be told to anyone. The viewer is not addressed, and remains an unacknowledged entity.[49]

Another reason for which narrative films – and not necessarily just the traditional or classical ones – give rise to a disembodied mode of looking has to do with the fact that fiction films have a set duration. Because narrative films tell a story, and because stories have a beginning and an end, narrative films have a beginning and end too. The film viewer is supposed to watch it from the moment it starts to the moment the credits start

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[49] The fact that conventional narrative films do not address the spectator directly contributes to Christian Metz' idea that viewing a film somehow resembles an offense. Besides the hidden and anonymous position of the viewer in dark cinemas, he or she is never given permission by the actors on screen to watch them. This voyeuristic aspect of film viewing will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

to roll. Consequently, the spectator does not have to make a decision on how long to sit and watch. The duration of the viewing experience is dictated by the length of the projected film. A few other aspects of cinema's traditional *dispositif* enforce the rule that the film viewer watches a movie from beginning to end, though. In the traditional theatrical situation, cinema halls are entered and exited through the same doors. Unlike some projection rooms in museums or art galleries, the cinematic projection room is not a passageway to other connected rooms. In addition, the entrance/exit doors of cinema halls are generally closed during a film show, which further discourages visitors of the cinema to run in and out.

Thus, although sitting down to watch a movie and getting up to leave the room are bot physical acts, they not really active choices to be made by the spectator when it comes to viewing a narrative fiction film. Therefore, the acts in question do not draw the viewer's attention to her own body. Compare this, for instance, with viewing a looped video which goes on and on forever, and is moreover shown in a room that is connected to a string of other exhibition spaces. In such case, it is left up to the spectator to decide how long to stand and watch, and when to move on. This mode of looking requires more conscious physical performances by the viewer, and hence produces more awareness of viewing as a bodily act.

All in all, due to the ways in which film's *dispositif* produces a split between the film world and the viewing situation, the spectator in cinema's most pervasive *dispositif* remains unacknowledged and unaddressed by the film. The beholder has no bodily influence on the time and space of the cinematic representation. As a consequence, the film viewer is not made aware of her own bodily presence in front of the screen. Hence, she can be understood as being disembodied.

A couple of other conventions and material components of film's traditional *dispositif* contribute to the spectator's obliviousness to her physical position in the viewing room. The darkness of the room discourages the spectator from paying a lot of attention to her spatial surroundings. In addition, the *dispositif* suppresses the ambient sounds which an audience can produce. First of all, it prevents distracting noise through the social convention which prohibits loud conversation between members of the audience during a film show. Secondly, cinema halls are usually fitted with curtains and carpets which deaden the sounds that are inevitably produced by the audience anyway. The slightest noise from other members of the audience can draw a spectator's attention to the viewing room itself, and hence divert the viewer's attention away from the represented film world (including the film's sounds, which *are* supposed to fill the cinema hall).

The *dispositif's* suppression of the world in front of the screen stimulates the disembodied film viewer to take the fictional diegesis which is visible on screen as the (one and only) real world. In order for this reality effect to come about, the real world is not only stifled as much as possible by cinema's dominant viewing set-up, the narrative film world also has to be presented as real. This means, in the first place, that the actual representational character of this world needs to be disguised. As mentioned before,

the projector is hidden in cinema's dominant *dispositif* so as to hide the mechanical on-the-spot realization of the illuminated moving images on screen. This also goes for the audio equipment which produces the film sounds during its projection; sound players and speakers are hardly ever visible from the viewpoint of the spectator.[50]

The disguise of the representational character of projected fiction films is, however, most of all carried out through formal properties of the film images – most of which I have identified in the previous chapter on the reality effect. With regard to the disembodiment of the spectator, it is important to note that some of the most prominent reality-effect producing devices have simultaneously been pointed out as causes for disembodiment. Smoothness and linear perspective are, for instance, specific cinematic image qualities which create a reality effect, yet these two qualities have simultaneously been indicated by Bryson and Marks as image features which produce a disembodied gaze or optical look. In sum, the two theorists ascribed the production of the gaze and the optical look to images which hold their spectator at a distance *and* simultaneously offer the sense that the world on screen can be entered. Entered, that is, with the eye, not with the body, and imaginatively, not literally. While many aspects of cinema's dominant *dispositif* keep the spectator and the cinematic representation apart, transparency and linear perspective effect an illusion of visual access. The disembodied eye of the film spectator is seemingly able to plunge into the depth of the image, taking hold of what it sees, unencumbered by bodily restrictions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the film viewer's sense of stable overview and mastery over the depicted world is threatened by a film's succession of shots, as well as its camera movements. These cinematic properties are potentially disruptive to the optic gaze, as the represented space can become fragmented or ungraspable through cuts and camera turns. There are two ways in which this instability can be settled. First, Baudry, Metz, and other adherents of the so-called apparatus theory have argued that although the film spectator is not capable of taking up the exact (an often shifting) viewpoint constructed by the linear perspective images of film, the filmic apparatus does offer two singular, unified points with which the viewer can identify, namely, the camera and the projector. The camera is first of all the single "eye" that has recorded the images the spectator perceives. As the camera is absent during the projection, the projector functions as its representative. It is the single and stable point from which the film images originate when the film is shown. Through identification with these technical devices, the film spectator is able to uphold the illusion of stability and singularity which is usually created by linear perspective alone.

Secondly, a stable and homogeneous illusionistic space can be constructed with

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[50] Although the film screen is often theorized as a division between the illusionistic film space and the projection room, it is important to note that sound doesn't obey this border. In addition to the fact that diegetic film sounds do not remain isolated within the film's diegesis as they necessarily escape into the viewing room, sound is often the one thing which does penetrate the film screen: speakers are frequently positioned behind the film screen. The played film sounds then reach the audience through millions of invisible tiny holes in the film screen.

film, not in spite of camera movements and the succession of shots, but exactly *because of* them. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the three related conventional cinematic aspects of continuity editing, suture, and narrativity together relate cinema's moving images in such a way that traditional film provides its spectator with the best possible viewpoint at each moment of the action, and is in addition able to give an overview of one space in a more all-embracing way than any single, static image could ever present.

The strategy of suture is, moreover, especially important in this regard, because it offers the film viewer one more way in which the film world can be entered imaginatively. Besides the fact that the point-of-view shots which suture successive shots together construct a stable and surveyable illusionistic space over which the spectator can consequently feel in control, they also offer the spectator the possibility to enter the film as a disembodied eye. For when the look of a character seems to be depicted in a point-of-view shot, the spectator shares the view with the character. This invites the spectator to imaginatively occupy the place the character occupies within the film, and to look with the character from a position inside the film's illusionistic space. The narrative character of fiction films, moreover, contributes to, as well as directs this process of identification.

Richard Rushton has pointed out, however, that we don't necessarily have to identify with a character in order to enter the film as an other. In one of his critical reflections on Metz' film theory, he defines the disembodiment of the film viewer in terms of becoming an imaginary body. Rushton proposes that we enter the film with, or rather as, this imaginary body:

> As a spectator of the cinema, I am encouraged to forget the existence of myself in its bodily form. At the cinema, the antagonism between the "real" existence of my body and the "imaginary" existence of my mirror image recedes. My body itself becomes an imaginary entity, a body conceived in terms of an eye (and an ear) that can travel vicariously through the imaginary world of film, where it becomes an anonymous and all-seeing inhabitant. (112)

Rushton's idea of the body as an imaginary entity is especially relevant when it is related to the previously discussed ability of cinema's *dispositif* to simultaneously create and hide a strict division between the on and offscreen world. By referring to Metz' comparison of cinema and theater, Rushton explains how cinema's reality effect depends on the unreality of film; on the fact that everything in the cinema (I would say cinema's entire *dispositif*), including the spectator's body, is raised to the level of the imaginary:

> The space that my body occupies in the theatre is the same space as that is occupied by the stage and actors – the space of the theatre is "too real" to offer a strong impression of reality. Hence, at the theatre, there is a confusion

between the imaginary space of the theatrical representation that I am trying to conjure and the necessary interference my body and its materiality bring to this representation [...]. In the cinema, on the other hand, everything is raised to the level of the imaginary so that any contradiction between the space that my body occupies and that which the other world of filmic representation occupies no longer bears weight. There is no longer a situation in which a self is confused with or opposed to an other, for it is already as imaginary other that the spectator enters the imaginary representation of the film. (113)

When we follow Rushton's interpretation of Metz' reflections on narrative fiction film, we can conclude that cinema's traditional *dispositif* eliminates the space of the spectator – including her actual body within that space – because the proscenium division between the space of the audience and the narrative space of the film is so very strong in the cinema.

2.4 Other Views on Film Viewing

The traditional, dominant *dispositif* of cinema has been questioned in many ways. The critical discussions of the *dispositif* can roughly be divided into two kinds. First, the disembodiment of the film viewer in film's dominant *dispositif* has been disputed. Secondly, doubt has been thrown on the dominance of the traditional *dispositif* itself. The first line of approach basically centers around one question: does the film viewer really "lose" or forget her body during a film show? One of many answers to this question has been formulated by Richard Rushton. He argues that "while watching film, the spectator does not lose the awareness of his/her body for the *entire* duration of a film" (114). It is more likely, Rushton writes, that one has such "out of body experiences" at those rare moments when "there is a synergy between what is presented on the screen and what is amenable to the most convincing levels of the spectator's belief" (114). However, these are the moments to which the classical narrative cinema aspired, and still aspires, according to Rushton.

Whereas Rushton's argument can lead to the conclusion that, although the disembodying effect of film only comes about every so often, it is nevertheless aspired to by each part of cinema's traditional *dispositif*, other theorists have pointed out how the traditional *dispositif* is not a homogeneous, unidirectional composition. Because classical narrative fiction films, which are often theorized as the viewed object within cinema's *dispositif*, frequently contain components which work against the *dispositif's* predominant tendency to disembody its viewer. Laura Marks and Mary Ann Doane have, for instance, pointed out how the commonly applied cinematic form of the close-up draws attention to the viewer's body. Marks explains this embodying effect mostly as a result of the fact that close-ups tend to "chop up" the objects they bring into view. Such

denial of an entire object or shape can make it difficult to interpret visually. At those moments, a haptic mode of looking takes over in order to make sense of the image. What is more, close-ups discourage a disembodied, optic mode of looking because the effect of monocular perspective almost entirely disappears in shots which were taken at a close range. The vanishing point is usually hard to detect in close-ups. As a result, the images look blatantly flat; they do not invite the viewer to visually plunge into the image.

Mary Ann Doane, in addition, has pointed out that the close-up puts forth matters of detail and scale. The close-up has a double status: in the space of narrative, the depicted object is a small detail, whereas in the space of the viewer, it momentarily constitutes itself as an enormous autonomous totality, the only thing to be seen. These matters of scale and detail which the close-up puts forth necessarily draw (theoretical) attention to the spectatorial space and the viewer's body within it. For, as Doane puts it; "scale as a concept in general can only be understood through its reference to the human body" (2003: 18).

In her writings on the close-up, Doane pays particular attention to the way in which theoretical reflections on the close-up counteract the dominance of the traditional *dispositif* as a theoretical construction. According to Doane, theoretical celebrations of the close-up as an autonomous entity by film scholars such as Béla Balázs, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Epstein, should be understood as an attempt to salvage spectatorial space, to reaffirm its existence and its relevance in the face of the closed, seamless space of film, and to reassert the corporeality of the classically disembodied spectator (2003: 18).

In addition to theories which point out the embodying qualities of certain moments or formal features within traditional narrative cinema, Linda Williams has demonstrated how particular cinematic genres oppose the disembodying effect of the traditional *dispositif* because they create a strong physical reaction in the film viewer. In the so-called "body genres" of pornography, horror, and melodrama, the body is displayed in sensational ways. These genres respectively portray the sensational body spectacles of orgasm, violence and terror, and weeping. While watching these spectacles, Williams argues, the body of the viewer is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation on screen.

Williams' theory points out that the process of character identification through which the film viewer is enabled to enter the film as a disembodied eye, can have a strong embodying effect when it creates (involuntary) physical reactions.[51] I would contend that this potentially embodying effect of the viewer's identification with an on-screen

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[51] Williams rightly notes that although most body genres produce a physical reaction in their spectator, they do not always produce mimicry. She gives the example of the physical clown comedy as a body genre which doesn't lead to mimicry: the audience physical reaction of laughter doesn't coincide with the dead-pan reactions of the clown who performs gross activities such as eating shoes and slipping on banana skins (4).

character is most prominent in, but not exclusive to body genres which produce mimicry, however. It is, for instance, possible to weep or cringe because one identifies with a character who is going through a psychological ordeal that is not physically displayed.

Williams' use of the concept of mimicry has been taken up and stretched somewhat by film theorist Jennifer Barker, who applies it as a much wider model for film spectatorship. Like Doane, Barker is interested in theoretical alternatives to the strict distinction between the viewer's world and the film world which Baudry's influential delineation of cinema's *dispositif* insists on. She proposes to understand both spectator and film as bodies; bodies, moreover, which take up similar structures of perception and expression, and are therefore involved in a mimetic relationship. Many film forms and rhythms mimic the pulses and movements of human bodies, while spectators' bodily responses to film mimic film itself. When the camera for instance dives under a bridge in a chase movie, the spectator will be inclined to duck, too. However, even when we don't actually copy the movements on film with our body, we feel whip pans, long takes and tracking shots in our muscles because our bodies have made similar movements. Our responses to film's body, Barker states, are a case of kinaesthetic memory (75).

When film and viewer are envisaged as co-constituted, related, embodied entities, the border between them can no longer be described in rigid terms. In Barker's theory, the material contact between viewer and viewed is less a hard edge or a solid barrier than a liminal space:

> Watching a film, we are certainly not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* it either. We exist and move and feel in that space of contact where our surfaces mingle and our musculatures entangle. […] This sense of fleshy, muscular, visceral contact seriously undermines the rigidity of the opposition between viewer and film. (13)

One of the problematic points in Barker's argument is that, in order to distance herself from traditional film theories related to Baudry's *dispositif,* she claims that the mimetic relationship between viewer and film does not involve, as Baudry and Metz have it, the spectator's identification with parts of the cinematic apparatus. To me, the process of mimicry that she describes *does* seem to concern this form of identification. Yet, this doesn't undermine her argument; in fact, it makes her ideas all the more effective as deconstructions of the traditional understanding of film viewing as a disembodied act. It shows that when the viewer in cinema's dominant, traditional *dispositif* adopts the disembodied subject position of an all-seeing eye in the film world by identifying with the camera and/or projector, she nevertheless feels this position with her actual body which is sitting in front of the screen. Due to what Barker terms "kinaesthetic memory" and "bodily empathy," the film spectator can imagine how it would feel to physically occupy that position, or carry out those movements in space. In this regard, it is telling

that Rushton argued that the spectator enters into the film as an imaginary body, as opposed to the disembodied eye which is so often mentioned in the traditional film theories which he discusses. An imaginary body can only be imagined by someone with a body, *with* that real body. Moreover, when the monocular position of the camera/ projector is occupied by the viewer's imaginary body, this is felt with her real body in the space in front of the screen, which can hence not be forgotten or eliminated. The embodied film viewer is indeed not entirely in, or entirely outside the film, but rather resides in the liminal "space of betweenness" (Barker 12).

In addition to theories such as Barker's which provide theoretical alternatives to the idea of the dominant *dispositif*, in order to show that it isn't the only or the right model to consider cinematic spectatorship with, many scholars have questioned the dominance of the traditional *dispositif* by pointing out that it doesn't dominate or hasn't always dominated cinematic practices. Following scholars such as Tom Gunning (1990) and Antonia Lant (1995), Frank Kessler has convincingly discussed how the field of film was once dominated by an entirely different *dispositif*. In the era of early cinema, films were very much oriented towards their audience. Actors would for instance look and smirk into the camera, while carrying out physical slapstick which spurred bodily reactions in the viewers. In the words of Gunning, who has coined the term "cinema of attractions" for these film practices, this form of cinema was "willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning 1990: 57). Unlike the viewer in cinema's most dominant, well-known *dispositif,* the embodied viewer in this early *dispositif* was not bound into the space of film, but rather placed vis-à-vis a space where spectacular attractions were being displayed (Kessler 2007).

In addition to the *dispositif* of the cinema of attractions, Parante and de Carvalho point out two other cinematic *dispositifs* which differ strongly from the traditional cinematic viewing configuration. Although the *dispositifs* in question never completely overpowered the dominance of the traditional *dispositif*, they took firm root within the field of film in specific historical periods. The first alternative *dispositif* is the so-called film practice of "expanded cinema," which flourished in the 1960s. Works of expanded cinema are best described as multimedia happenings which operate on the verge of cinema, theater and performance. The works in question ask viewers to participate in an experience which has its own pre-established duration, although chance and surprise can be part of the experience (Parente and de Carvahlo 49). In *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966), for instance, Andy Warhol combined film projections with a music performance by the Velvet Underground, accompanied by a group of dancers, and the simultaneous flickering of revolving slide projectors, strobe lights and moving colored spotlights. The film images were projected onto the playing band, while the bodies of the dancing audience got caught up in overwhelming surroundings filled with light and sound.

The second *dispositif* which Parente and de Carvahlo identify is the "cinema of exhibition" or "artists' film." This term applies to films which are shown in museums and galleries, often in a multi-screen, spatial set-up. The fixed duration of both the

traditional *dispositif*, the cinema of attractions, and the *dispositif* of expanded cinema, no longer applies to the cinema of exhibition. Its conditions of reception imply an elasticity of time, allowing viewers to follow their own trajectory, to participate in an experience unique to them alone (Parente and de Carvahlo 50). The viewing position which is created by these works of art is clearly an embodied one. Artists working in this genre are Philippe Parreno, David Claerbout, Douglas Gordon, Isaac Julien, Eija-Liisa Athila, Aernout Mik, Sam-Taylor Wood, and Stan Douglas, to name only a few.

Both the *dispositif* of expanded cinema and the *dispositif* of the cinema of exhibition rely heavily on intermedial relationships, which reconfirms my claim that the dominant *dispositif* of film has become so typical and specific to it, that most deviations from the norm will necessarily operate on the boundary between film and other media. When it comes to the practices which Parente and Carvahlo describe as "cinema of exhibition," this other medium is video. Many of the characteristics by which the *dispositif* of the cinema of exhibition deviates from cinema's traditional viewing set-up are derived from video installation art. In fact, the material support of pieces termed cinema of exhibition by Parente, de Carvahlo and other film theorists, is actually video technology. The intermedial character of the installations in question is so strong that a definition which would count them within the field of video, such as "cinematic video art," would be just as adequate as "cinema of exhibition" or "artists' film."

In addition to these artistic explorations of cinema's dominant *dispositif*, the viewing configuration of the traditional narrative fiction film has also been reformed by the video medium outside of the artistic domain. First of all, video technology has moved films outside of the film theater to the inside of the living room, where movies are now watched in a (home) video *dispositif* which does not meet the parameters of immersive spectatorship that are set by cinema's conventional viewing situation. Secondly, digital video technology has subsequently transported both film and video outside of the living room, into public space. Today, movies can be watched anywhere on small mobile screens. This allows the film spectator to leave the traditional cinematic *dispositif* far behind, and instead combine and alternate the act of film viewing with, for instance, a jog around the park, a bus ride to the mall, and a conversation with friends.[52]

Not only have the *dispositif*s of contemporary cinematic *objects* been influenced and reshaped through the medium of video, the *theoretical* attention to the embodying, haptic and tactile qualities of the cinematic medium which I outlined above, can just as well be ascribed to the medium of video. The embodied spectatorship which the

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[52] In an article titled "What Do We Really Know About Film Audiences?" (2012), Ian Christie points out that empirical studies in the UK have found that only 6% of the total number of film viewings takes place in the traditional cinema. Although these numbers seem to prove that cinema's traditional viewing set-up in the movie theater is no longer dominant in a quantitative respect, I hold that it is still is dominant, or at least pervasive, as an idea. As such, it shapes many of the non-traditional *dispositifs* films are watched in today. In addition, the newer viewing set-ups which Christie discusses have often incorporated aspects of the traditional *dispositif*. For this reason, it would be a mistake to discard the traditional *dispositif* as an irrelevant, marginal viewing situation.

theorists mentioned aim to formulate with regard to film is effortlessly and overtly created by the medium of video. Unencumbered by a single dominant *dispositif* that represses embodied spectatorship, the plural *dispositifs* of video are each characterized by the fact that they create an embodied viewer. It is not far-fetched to presume that the embodying characteristics which are so prominently present in video's *dispositifs* have taught us to look at moving images – even the most conventional cinematic ones – while paying attention to our body. Laura Marks, for instance, first wrote an essay on haptic video before she addressed the haptic moments in narrative fiction films. The strong embodying qualities of the video medium seem to have enabled theorists to discover the more covert haptic characteristics of film, and to consequently rethink as well as oppose the dominance of the traditional cinematic *dispositif*. With Marks' essay on haptic video as an important guide, I will further discuss the embodying qualities of video's *dispositifs* next.

2.5 Surfaces and Screens: Video's Embodying *Dispositifs*

> I can feel my body. I am lying in a dark space. I can feel my body lying here. I am awake. I feel my breathing, in and out, quiet and regular. I can feel my breathing. I move my body. […] I imagine my body. I imagine my body in this dark space. The space is like a large black cloud of soft cotton, silent and weightless. A soft black mass slowly pressing in around my body. I can feel it slowly pressing in around my body. Pressing in around me. Everything is closing down. Closing down around my body.

The soft voice rapidly whispering these lines is barely audible. At first, the repetition of the word "body" is mainly heard. The indiscernibility of the spoken words also applies to the coarse video images which accompany the murmuring voice. These images are projected on four large screens which form a square that can be entered through four narrow openings on the installation's corners. The grainy projections show colored structures in which recognizable objects occasionally appear. However, the succession of hardly moving shots of, for instance, a glass bowl, a façade or a field of flowers do not appear to have any obvious meaningful relationship with each other. In addition, these apparently random representations of things often slowly turn dark or out of focus, which means the visibility of the depicted objects is constantly tarnished. In all cases, the images can be defined as flat and impenetrable, either because they are too dark or blurred to show depth of field, or because the close-ups or long shots of flat surfaces lack the single vanishing point of Renaissance perspective.

Because of the flatness of the images the viewer entering the piece is likely to feel physically enclosed by the installation's screens. The initial unintelligibility of the surrounding sounds and images in the black museum room heightens the spectator's

senses. What do I hear? What am I looking at? How should I turn my head in order to catch as many words of the whispered monologue as possible? How fast do I have to turn my body in order not to miss what is visible at my back when I am looking at the screen in front of me? Should I try to get further removed from the obscure images, or get even closer to them in order to discover more detail?

Then, all at once, the soft sounds turn into cringingly loud noises, and the slow images suddenly show frantic camera movements which turn the vaguely displayed objects into an even less discernible whirl of video pixels. This unexpected change from slowness and stillness to loud visual and auditory noise can only be experienced as a jolt to the body. It makes one jump, or cringe. It gives rise to the urge to cover one's ears and look for the nearest exit in order to flee from the installation's violent outburst. Then, before the square of images can actually be left by the spectator, stillness and silence return as suddenly as they were broken. Slow images of flat surfaces reappear on the four projection screens. The soft voice resumes its hasty murmuring monologue: "I can feel my body, I am lying in a dark space, I can feel my body lying here. […]"

The title of Bill Viola's video piece *The Stopping Mind* (1990) may suggest that the installation's alternation between slow and fast moving images, as well as soft and loud sounds, represents faltering thought processes. The effect of Viola's famous piece on its viewers, however, has little to do with the meaning the title attaches to the video installation. For *The Stopping Mind* first and foremost moves the body.

What is more, Viola's piece displays a self-reflexive awareness of its physical effect on the beholder. For the murmuring voice which, in part, causes the embodied mode of looking in the installation's visitor, describes the installation's effect while producing it. The monologue expresses the experience of feeling (with) the body. Which is precisely the experience to which Viola's piece gives rise. If the alternation between stillness and loud chaos isn't enough for the installation's visitor to become highly aware of her own bodily movements and sensations, the strongly reiterating word "body" in the hypnotic monologue will ultimately draw the visitor's attention to her own physical being-there, in a confined dark space between illuminated screens.

Viola's installation is a paradigmatic example of a video piece which fully employs the embodying qualities of the video medium. As such, it brings an effect to the fore which can be ascribed to a large range of video art pieces that have been produced in recent decades. During the process of production, video is not a haptic medium because – unlike analogue film stock – it cannot be manually altered.[53] Within the context of the viewing process, however, video *can* be characterized as a tactile, embodying medium. For within the viewing set-up, many videos have an embodying effect on their beholder. This relationship between video art and the spectator's body has not only been explored

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[53] For this reason, studies which focus on the production rather than the reception of medium objects tend to characterize film as a haptic medium instead of an optic one. The tactile, embodied experience of working on analogue film strip is for instance celebrated by Tactita Dean in *Film* (2011), a publication which accompanied her monumental film piece with the same title.

and exploited by artists such as Viola; it has been noted by media theorists as well.

The embodying qualities of video are not grouped in one medium-specific viewing configuration. Unlike film, the medium of video does not have a single dominant *dispositif*. Instead, it has produced several *dispositifs* which do not overshadow each other. What these *dispositifs* have in common, however, is that they stimulate embodied modes of looking – albeit in different ways. Also, two cultural places play a predominant part in video's viewing configurations, namely the museum and the family home. Videos are watched most frequently in one of these places. The cultural, social, and institutional conventions of the museum (or art gallery) and the living room instigate the embodied mode of looking which so many other components of the video medium solicit as well. For, as mentioned previously, the museum is related to the convention of wandering spectatorship, while the living room prevents the viewer from becoming a disembodied, immersed entity, as it brings (and allows) social interaction and everyday domestic distractions into the viewing situation.

Although some of video's embodying qualities originate from the early stages of its technological support, most of these qualities have become specific to the medium by convention, while other technological possibilities and properties are left unutilized or underemphasized. Like film images, video images are always linear perspective images. Moreover, like film, video can be used as a narrative medium. However, within the field of video, the possibility of telling stories is not as dominant as it is within the field of film. Hence, the conventions, narrative techniques and compositional strategies that have become so prominent in classical narrative films are not so frequently applied in videos. This also makes the strategies and techniques by which narrative films tend to construct a disembodied viewing position relatively unfamiliar to video. So, in spite of the fact that video images are perspectival, the supreme viewing position created by linear perspective is – unlike in cinema's dominant *dispositif* – not sustained by most forms of video.

Some technical and formal possibilities of video – possibilities which are not necessarily unique to the medium – have repeatedly been used by artists, with the result that some of these technical possibilities have become specific characteristic properties of the medium. The loop, for instance, has become a characteristic feature of video art. In "The Temporalities of Video," Christine Ross designates the loop as one of video's key mechanisms in addressing the viewer through time, and as one of its most important modes of presentation (98). However, the loop is not so much a unique technical possibility of video, for film fragments or sound-recordings can be looped as well. It has rather become a hallmark of video through the excessive use of loops by video artists (Ross 98).

As mentioned previously, looped videos produce an embodied mode of looking because they allow the spectator to begin or start looking at any preferred moment. As Ross explains, loops usually consist of short scenes, but the potentially endless repetition of these short fragments can lead to an extension of time, or to endless

duration. Because of this combination of relatively short fragments with endless continuing repetition, loops do not force the viewer to a halt for a fixed period of time – as narrative films do – but instead leave the spectator relatively mobile and free. Looped videos allow the spectator to come in at any time and leave at any preferred moment (Sharp 253). Therefore, it is ultimately the spectator who must decide how long to stand to watch, and when to move on. This requires conscious activity by the viewer, and makes her aware of the fact that looking is a time-consuming, bodily act.

The extended duration and repetition often created by loops can in themselves be regarded as two of video's main characteristics. Again, prolongation and repetition have chiefly become typical to video through the use of the medium, that is, by convention and not by the unique possibilities or limitations of its technical support. Although the prolongation can in part be explained by the fact that editing was next to impossible in video's early phase, it was embraced and continued when it was no longer an inevitable consequence of technological limitations. When the medium was taken up by artists in the 1970s, they regarded video as "a unique means to disrupt dominant conventionalities of time, notably acceleration and temporal linearity" (Ross 83). Hence, for technological, artistic, aesthetic and ideological reasons, videos were made in which time seemed to be extended, endless and slow instead of fast and condensed. Repetition contributed to this prolongation, and moreover disrupted linearity. In addition, acceleration was frequently countered – and extended time was often expressed – by videos depicting uneventful actions with no beginning and no end, often shown in real, unedited time. That these applications have become characteristic to video over time, is suggested by the fact that repetition and uneventful prolongation can still be perceived in many contemporary videos – for instance in those by David Claerbout which I will discuss later on.

How does this prolongation affect the spectator? According to Ross, extended time increases "the spectator's sensorial and attentional faculties, so that one might liberate oneself from the habit of viewing objects as we see them" (84). In addition, Ross notes that "expanded time became […] an aesthetic strategy that could problematize the opticality of the image" (84). This intensification of the spectator's sensorial and attentional faculties, and the problematization of the opticality of the image, relates to the ideas of Marks and Bryson, who argued that disembodied modes of looking have no duration, but are rather placed outside of time. Images that express extended time do not give rise to an optical mode of looking. For, as not much happens in them, they test the patience and attention of the viewer. Once looking becomes boring, or when no end or change is in sight, the (real, unaccelerated) time the act of looking takes up suddenly becomes noticeable. Moreover, like the loop, uneventful prolongation offers the spectator the possibility to choose her own viewing length, which compels the viewer to consider how much time should be spent looking, and hence evokes the awareness that perception takes up time. In sum, extended time is time that "weighs on the body," as Graig Uhlin (2010: 21) puts it, for exaggerated duration and uneventfulness eventually

direct the viewer's attention to the position of her own body in time. [54]

Another aspect of video's *disposifs* which produces a viewer who is aware of her own position in time is the medium's technological capability of instantaneous broadcast. Video images can be recorded, transmitted through a cable and be broadcast at the same instant, with no delay due to development or transportation. First of all, this possibility further enhances video's characteristics of endless continuation and prolongation. For if no storage is needed, the duration of video is not limited by tape length. As long as the electricity supply is uninterrupted, the broadcast of video images can go on forever.

Secondly, the technical possibility of instantaneous broadcast enables video to produce live, real-time representations of events which are absent in place. This "liveness" diminishes the temporal division of the screen world and the world of the viewer, for both come to inhabit the same "now." When again taking into consideration Morse's opinion that images which share the time and space in which they exist with their spectator produce an embodied spectator, then live video images can certainly be understood as producing such a spectator. As video artist Dan Graham puts it: "Video is a present-time medium. Its images can be simultaneous with its perception by/of an audience. The time/space it represents is continuous, unbroken and congruent with that of real time, which is the shared time of its perceivers" (62). The word "of" in Graham's phrase "its perception by/of an audience" also indicates the possibility of closed-circuit video, which stems from the medium's capability of instantaneous broadcast. Closed-circuit video as a *dispositif* contributes to the embodiment of the spectator when images of the viewer are simultaneously recorded and broadcast within one space, with the result that the spectator figures in the images she perceives.

Closely related to video's ability of instantaneous broadcast and closed-circuit transmission is the medium's aptitude for interactivity. Because a video signal is electronic, devices which can convert touch, sound, light, temperature, or movement into an electronic signal can be connected to the medium, and influence its signal. This enables video images to respond to the physical presence of the spectator. For instance, sound-sensitive sensors can detect the presence of the spectator by the sound of her footsteps, and video images can then immediately respond to the signal from the sensor. Another example is that the spectator can press buttons or touch screens in order to alter the video image. In all cases, the response of the image to spectator's body and/or actions carried out with this body result in the embodiment of the spectator. For, indeed, the reaction of the image to the spectator's body acknowledges the presence of the spectator as a body, which makes the spectator aware of this body as well.

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[54] Uhlin does not use the phrase of "time that weighs on the body" in relation to video art, but in reference to Andy Warhol's films, which are indeed characterized by the slow and extended uneventfulness which has become typical of video. This shows that the expression of the temporality in question is not unique to the video medium. Only, within in the field of film, this expressive possibility is less widely applied than in the field of video.

In relation to the electronic medium's aptitude for interactivity, Marks has pointed out that the electronic and digital manipulability of video is a source for haptic visuality, regardless of the interactive component. Video images and sounds can easily be distorted by way of magnets, electronic devices such as synthesizers, keyers, scan processors and amplifiers, or, in the digital age, computers. Marks writes:

> The tactile quality of the video image is most apparent in the work of video makers who experiment with the disappearance and transformation of the image due to digital and other effects. Electronic effects such as pixellation can render the object indistinct while drawing attention to the act of perception of textures. (30)

Viola's installation described earlier is a good example of the effects Marks describes. The whirl of pixels and noises which now and then appears so suddenly in *The Stopping Mind* is the result of electronic manipulation. Not only does this manipulation lead to embodied viewing because it renders the depicted objects invisible; it also creates a storm of rapidly moving colored squares which is physically overwhelming, even threatening.

Another aspect Marks regards as an intrinsic quality of video, and one of its most important sources of tactility, is its contrast ratio. In her essay "Video Haptics and Erotics" (1998), Marks point out that video's contrast ratio of 30:1 is approximately one tenth of 16mm or 35mm film. In addition, the resolution of analogue video is at the most one tenth of the resolution of 35mm film images. However, these "insufficiently visual" qualities – as Marks terms them – have improved tremendously since Marks wrote her essay in 1998. Today, the contrast ratio of digital video equals the contrasts between darkness and brightness that can be captured by analogue film images. Digital video images, in addition, can reach such a high definition nowadays that they are used for projection in cinemas, and go under the name of digital cinema when they represent a (fictional) narrative in the viewing setting of the movie theater. Although even the most advanced Ultra High Definition digital video format (8k UHD) is not yet able to match the resolution of analogue 70mm IMAX film, the resolution of HD video images has reached such a high level that the difference between video and film is no longer perceptible.[55]

How has this improvement in image quality affected the specific embodying quality of the medium? First of all, the fact that cinematic-looking high image quality is technically possible for video nowadays, doesn't mean that all video images automatically now have such a high quality. The most common video cameras for home

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[55] Today, some video artist even soften or tune down the sharpness and brightness of high definition video images in order to give them a more cinematic look. This cinematic look concerns a slightly old-fashioned feature; we tend to regard images more filmic when they have the warm, soft look which characterizes many movies of the 1950s.

use still do not produce images which look like film. Secondly, a low contrast ratio and low resolution are still features we recognize as typical of video today. When we see images in which a bright spot in a dark image (such as an open door at the back of a dark interior) brightens the whole image because of low contrast ratio, or when pixelation is visible on an image surface due to low resolution, we recognize these as video images. Moreover, the insufficiencies of analogue video are still deliberately applied by artists who are interested in their aesthetic and affective appeal. The low image quality of video footage has thus become a conventional, rather than a technologically inherent feature of the medium. It is reasonable to conclude that the tactile features of low resolution and low contrast have become less dominant since these characteristics are no longer technologically inevitable. In this sense, the hapticity of the video medium has waned since the quality of its images has improved.

However, while video has lost some of its automatically haptic image features, it has gained embodying abilities because of developments in other areas of its apparatus (I am using it in the sense of *appareil de base* here). Video projectors were developed in the 1980s. This added new possibilities to video's *dispositifs*. Before the advent of the video projector, video was always viewed in configurations which necessarily included one or more TV monitors. In its first decades, the video image was tied to, and limited by, the small size and bulkiness of the TV. With the advent of the video projector, video images could suddenly be much larger, and appear on any surface. In addition to the video *dispositifs* in which the viewer looks into the light source of the cathode ray tube, the medium of video was now expanded with *dispositifs* in which the viewer looks at a back-lit projection on a flat surface in front of her.

The video projector offers video the possibility of copying cinema's traditional viewing set-up. Yet, although cinema's viewing situation is frequently imitated by video projectors, one of the most prevalent applications of the video projector differs markedly from cinema's traditional *dispositif*. The video projector was taken into the museum by video artists, who had already applied the (bulky) TV monitor in sculptural ways within this context.[56] As a result, the spatial set-up of multi-screen video installations became one of video's new, specific *dispositifs*. Unlike the proscenium *dispositif* of narrative film projection, the *dispositif* of multi-screen video installation art functions as a presentational art form which addresses and envelops its embodied viewer in the "here" and "now."

[56] Although the video projector entered the museum because the TV monitor was already there, it is more suitable for the production of multi-screen pieces than the average film projector. As video projectors were initially developed with the idea that they would replace data projectors such as the overhead projector and episcope in classrooms and business meeting rooms, many video projectors are equipped with a so-called short-throw lens. This allows them to project large images while being relatively close to the projection surface. When it comes to video installation art, this short throw is not only a prerequisite for the production of large video projections in small museum rooms, it can also prevent the appearance of unwanted shadows of visitors on the projection screen. The distance between the projector and the video projection can be made so small that viewers need not stand in the projector's light beams when they behold the image. When the spectator's shadow does play a part in video installations (which it often does), this is not an inevitable flaw.

2.6 In Between: Pieces

Many contemporary art forms which make use of moving image material combine embodying and disembodying strategies; some of which can be understood as more specific to video, while others are more typical of film. Put somewhat simply, films tend to disembody their viewer, whereas video is disposed to the production of an embodied mode of looking. However, many media theorists have rightly argued that this distinction is not clear-cut: recent video images can be just as optic as film, and film is quite capable of affecting its viewer physically – both in manners which resemble and which differ from video's embodying strategies.

On the one hand, the video and film pieces I will analyze below confirm the idea that the disembodying qualities of film and the embodying characteristics of video are by no means essential and unique to the two media in question. Through intricately hybrid or double *dispositifs,* the films and video installations by Douglas Gordon and David Claerbout produce moments and spaces in which film images have haptic qualities, video produces optic looking, cinema seems to turn into a presentational art form, and the video installation momentarily functions as a proscenium medium. In sum, the most typical (dis)embodying effects of film and video appear "switched" in these works of art. As a consequence, the works by Gordon and Claerbout give rise to questions on medium specificity. Are film and video still film and video when they are shown to be able to copy each other's most characteristic (dis)embodying effects? And how should the medium of the images on view be determined or specified if the traditional *dispositifs* of film and video seem to have become disconnected from the two media?

On the other hand, the switch is never complete; the most traditional, dominant and typical *dispositifs* of film and video remain active in the works in question. In Gordon's *k.364,* the hapticity of film images is, for instance, countered by some of the most prominent disembodying aspects of cinema's traditional *dispositif.* In Claerbout's *American Car* the embodying effect of the video installation depends on the spectator's familiarity with some of the narrative film conventions that sustain cinema's dominant *dispositif. Bordeaux Piece,* in addition, shows how cinema's traditional *dispositif* can be invaded and altered by video-specific forms of time, yet simultaneously presents the presentational video *dispositif* and the proscenium film *dispositif* as fairly distinct and decisive set-ups. In sum, all three film/video pieces (partially) transgress the conventional (dis)embodying *dispositifs* of film and video. Yet they show that these transgressions cannot be understood without paying attention to the common, more traditional (ideas of) medium-specific *dispositifs* on which the transgressions themselves often depend; that is, the respectively disembodying and embodying *dispositifs* of film and video. In my view, the objects in question self-reflexively explore the double move which implicitly marks many moving image productions today – they both move away from, and back to the dominant, conventional viewing set-ups of film and video.

2.6.1 Two Journeys: *k.364*

Douglas Gordon's documentary *k.364* brings us back to the journey with which this chapter started out: a journey to Warsaw. Whereas this movement to Poland's capital was prompted by the fierce call of a fictional movement in Yael Bartana's *The Polish Trilogy*, Gordon's *k.364: A Journey by Train* portrays two Israeli musicians, both in their thirties, who travel to Warsaw in order to perform a concert. The two musicians, violist Avri Levitan and violinist Roi Shiloah, board a train in Berlin which first takes them to Poznan. In this Polish town, they rehearse Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major*, K.364 with the Amadeus chamber orchestra. After the rehearsal, Avri and Roi continue their journey by train to Warsaw, where they perform the piece with the orchestra in the city's majestic Philharmonic Concert Hall. As both musicians are from Polish Jewish families, the journey brings them to a country from which their parents had fled due to World War II. This is, unsurprisingly, one of the topics they discuss during the trip.

The way the musicians and their stories come across to the spectator, however, very much depends on the two distinct *dispositifs* of the piece. From the same high resolution video footage, Douglas has produced two versions of *k.364,* each of which has its own particular viewing configuration. One of the versions is best defined as a movie. This movie version has a narrative character, and was shown in movie theaters as a conventional documentary film with a set beginning and ending. The other version is a multi-screen installation with two large mirrors, which was exhibited in museums. In this version, the film material is projected in looped form, on two large screens placed adjacently at an angle of 90 degrees in the middle of a spacious museum room.

The double *dispositif* of *k.364* is not unique in Gordon's oeuvre. In 2006, for instance, he produced the film *Zidane* together with Philippe Parenno (who is known for his multi-screen narrative films, and was also involved in the creation of *k.364*). *Zidane* portrays soccer superstar Zinedine Zidane during one match. Instead of following the ball, the 17 cameras of Gordon and Parenno focus solely on the player for the duration of one game (Real Madrid vs. Villareal in the spring of 2005). In the resulting single screen documentary film, the footage of Zidane from 17 different angles has been edited into a linear movie, in which we see how he communicates with other players, constantly scans the pitch with his eyes, alternates between moments of activity and moments of recuperation, and is finally sent off because of a brawl. Although some of the most exciting or suspenseful moments are repeated in the film (as they usually are in TV coverage of sports games), most cuts from one shot to the next also involve a movement forward in time.

In the installation version of *Zidane* the spatial set-up with 17 TV monitors creates a different temporal organization between shots. Instead of showing one moment after another, each monitor shows the same moment within the game, yet each image was filmed from a different angle by one of the 17 cameras. So, when Zidane takes a run up for the ball, one monitor provides an establishing shot of the situation, the next one

shows the soccer player's concentrated face in close-up, the third shows the star in medium-close-up, and so on. As a spectator, you cannot watch the screens of all monitors at the same time, however, for they are scattered on the floor of a large museum gallery, each facing in a different direction – like the players on the pitch. This leads to the paradoxical situation that the spatial arrangement of the *dispositif* both limits and expands the viewer's sense of visual access to the game.

On the one hand, the spectator cannot see all of the images on the monitors at once. Although most positions in the museum room offer a view of about five screens at a time, the 17 screens cannot be watched simultaneously. Thus, in order to see the entire group of monitors, the viewer has to move around in order to look at groups of TV screens one after another. As an embodied spectator, she then creates her own unique "montage" by walking through the installation. As Ursula Frohne (2008) has put it; "perception turns into participation" when the fundamental lack of visibility caused by the impossibility of viewing a video work in its entirety becomes a challenge for the observer (Frohne 357).[57]

On the other hand, the multiplicity of screens provides several perspectives on one and the same moment. It shows something which cannot be shown by a single screen projection, nor by one pair of human eyes alone. As such, the installation simultaneously gives rise to an extraordinary sense of overview, insight and visual access to the depicted scenes. Hence, the video set-up with multiple monitors creates both an embodied presentational mode of looking which is typical of video, but also seems to form a continuation of the aspiration towards the illusion of unlimited visual access, which is attributed to cinema's traditional *dispositif*.

Like *Zidane, k.364* wavers between limited and expanded visibility. Its *dispositifs* stimulate both optic and haptic visuality, and give rise to several modes of embodied and disembodied looking. The difference between *Zidane* and *k.364* is that whereas the movie version of *Zidane* is mostly a conventional optic piece, both the installation version and the film version of *k.364* combine haptic and optic moments – albeit in distinct ways, and with different results. Therefore, a comparison of the two versions of *k.364* can provide insight into the possibilities and limitations of the cinematic and "videomatic" *dispositifs* when it comes to the production of (dis)embodied modes of looking.

One of the most striking features of *k.364*, in both its film and installation version, is

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[57] Frohne adds an important historical remark to her discussion of the participating viewer in installation art: "Just as the viewer has become a participant in the scene, the parameters of the aesthetic of reception criticized by Michael Fried have become the actual principle of impact" (Frohne 269). The author is referring to Fried's influential *Art and Objecthood* (1967) here, in which he argues against the focus on the viewer's experience which is commanded by Minimal Art. A few decades later, this focus appears to have become one of the most important hallmarks of both contemporary art practices and art theoretical writings. It is telling in this regard that, in a recent article on Douglas Gordon's *k.364* ("Another Light" 2011), Fried limits his analysis to the movie version of the piece, and only briefly mentions the installation version in a footnote.

the alternation between extremely sharp close-ups, and out-of-focus images which are either very dark or have an overexposed look. In the first half of the narrative, Roi is for instance hardly ever filmed directly. Gordon points his camera at the train window on which the musician's reflection appears against the outside darkness. The transparent, vague outline of his face almost disappears into the dark landscape which rapidly passes in the background of the traveling passenger. These painterly shots are interspersed by detailed close-ups of the musician's hands, filmed while he is playing the violin. In these well-lit images it is almost possible to discern every pore in the skin of the violinist's hands.

Needless to say, the first type of image can be understood as optic cinematic ones because of their smoothness and sharpness, whereas the second type is reminiscent of haptic blurred video images with a low contrast ratio. However, the sharp extreme close-ups are not solely optic; in spite of their high resolution, perfect depth of field, and balanced lighting, they instill a sense of limited visibility in the beholder, as they dissect the depicted subject. Moreover, as mentioned previously, close-ups give rise to questions of scale which can only be deliberated in relation to the spectator's body. In sum, both the sharp and blurred images in *k.364* tend to invite more strongly an embodied, rather than a disembodied, mode of looking.

The limited visual access is further enforced by the fact that the montage of both the movie and the video projections do not follow the rules of continuity editing. The extreme close-ups of Avri and Roi – which focus especially of their hands and faces – are, for instance, hardly ever preceded or followed by medium-close ups or establishing shots. For this reason, it remains unclear how the two protagonists are seated in the train, how they are positioned in relation to each other in the carriage they presumably share, and what the interior and exterior of the train look like. The same goes for the rehearsal of Mozart's *Sinfonia*. Having arrived in Podzan, Avri and Roi join the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra with which they will perform *k.364* in Warsaw. When they enter the rehearsal room, we see that they greet the orchestra by nodding, smiling, and shaking some hands. However, the film and video never show whom they greet: with the exception of the conductor, the members of the orchestra as well as the room in which they reside remain invisible to the spectator. The camera only pictures the two musicians.

This brings me to a second aspect of continuity editing which is lacking in *k.364*; the close-ups of the musicians' faces are never sutured to another shot. In addition to the fact that it remains visible how the musicians are positioned in the space of the train or rehearsal room, we don't get to see what they are looking at. In the first half of the film, the camera switches back and forth between close-ups of Roi and Avri. The close-ups are only occasionally undercut by rather vague images of swimming girls, the railway which recedes into a dark landscape, as well as abstract black images interspersed with yellow dots. Although the last two shots may be interpreted as views from the train by night, it remains uncertain if they represent a character's point of view, as the musicians are never shown while looking outside a train window.

The only scene in *k.364* which does provide the viewer with some sense of overview is the start of the concert in Warsaw's Concert Hall. Before the music comes in, a shot of the large seated audience, the orchestra, and a shot of Avri and Roy on stage, rapidly succeed each other. However, the sense of stability which this spatial mapping may have instilled in the viewer, is undermined in the film version. Images of the playing Roi transgress the 180 degree line; the violinist is shown alternately from the left and the right side, which is highly disorienting to the film viewer.

All in all, both the film and the video versions of *k.364* are dominated by embodying qualities. Neither the cinematic piece, nor the video installation, allows the spectator to visually "plunge" into the represented world, as visibility and overview are constantly thwarted by formal characteristics of the moving images. This observation could lead to the provisional conclusion that Gordon's piece demonstrates how film and video are both able to produce an embodied viewer, irrespective of their *dispositifs*. For even though the movie version of *k.364* was screened in a conventional way, in traditional theaters, its embodying effects hold sway. However, as I will demonstrate below, the traditional *dispositif* of the cinematic version is more prevalent than first thought.

Disembodied Listening

When *k.364* is viewed in a movie theater, the opening credits of the film form the concise onset of a story. The subtitle of *k.364* reveals that the movie will depict "A journey by train, from Berlin, to Poznan to Warsaw." In addition, the opening credits let us know who is undertaking the journey by stating that the film features: "Avri Levitan: The Violist." and "Roi Shiloah: The Violinist." The expectation of story development which is raised by the opening credits is further enhanced by the *dispositif* itself, as the traditional viewing situation in the cinema room tends to provide a view on traditional narrative movies.

When the film starts, the initial bare outlines of a story on two musicians who travel from Germany to Poland is hardly expanded into a more comprehensive narrative. The haptic, blurred images which succeed each other in Gordon's *k.364* are hard to interpret. In addition, it is hard to decide on the temporal and spatial relationship between the images as well as the characters they depict due to the absence of continuity editing techniques. However, after a while, the movie starts to conform to the expectation which its opening credits and *dispositif* have awakened. The story of two musicians in a train starts to unroll when the violinist and the violist, who have known each other since childhood, begin to tell stories themselves.

In the cinema, the stories told by Avri and Roi are comprehensible, whereas the viewer of video installation must do her best to catch snippets of their spoken sentences. This difference is first of all caused by some distinct aspects of the two different *dispositifs*, namely the acoustics as well as institutional conventions related to the halls in which the movie and installation are screened. In both the cinematic and the installation versions of *k.364,* the voices of the musicians are soft. In addition, the two men are not always intelligible because they speak English with a Hebrew accent.

However, in carpeted cinema halls with silently seated viewers, the attentive spectator can catch the remarks and anecdotes of the musicians. In spacious museum galleries, where the footsteps of visitors echo through the room together with the musicians' spoken words, the viewer of the installation fails to understand most of the stories.

In addition, the audibility of the musicians' stories is diminished all the more in the installation because its two screens are each accompanied by their own soundtrack. As a result, the spoken words are often drowned out by another soundtrack playing simultaneously. When Roi talks about his mother, for instance, the image of his face is juxtaposed with a shot of a receding railway on the other screen. His words, then, can hardly be heard over the sounds of wheels of the train which come with the image of the railway. A final reason why the stories of Avri and Roi do not come across very well in the video installation is that the video version is shorter than the cinematic one. In order to keep the wandering museum-goer's attention, the feature film length has been cut to 50 minutes in the installation. As a consequence, the video piece contains less visual and less auditory material.

In the film, one of the first spoken remarks is uttered by Avri. The violist explains that even though he doesn't have a "Holocaust complex or anything," he cannot look at the woods outside of the train window without imagining how cold it must have been out there, in wintertime, during the night. His remark points out that he must be Jewish, and that hence, the train journey to Poland is an emotionally charged one. The journey turns out to be all the more meaningful to the two musicians when it becomes clear that they are of Polish-Jewish descent. Roi explains how his mother and her family fled the country during World War II, through the cold dark woods to which Avri also referred. Thus, the two Jewish musicians are not only traveling to a country which held some of Europe's most infamous concentration camps, they are also returning to the motherland of their parents. Although they have never lived there, Roi explains how the country is somehow familiar, even though he grew up in Israel. He recognizes words and dishes when he visits Poland. Without knowing the meanings or names, he identifies them as the sounds and flavors of his childhood.

These stories place the journey by train in a grand historical narrative. In addition, they tell us more about the relation between the two protagonists of the story. The fellow musicians share a homeland, as well as their mother's homeland. As the stories proceeds, it turns out that the two musicians have known each other since they were children. They went to the same high school, and served in the Israeli army together, where they played in a string quartet. Some funny anecdotes about this period make the two friends laugh out loud.

When the narrative character of the film settles, the haptic, embodying qualities of the film's moving images diminish. Through the narrative, the images become more intelligible. The images of the dark woods outside are, for instance, invested with meaning through Avri's and Roi's accounts. Likewise, the inexplicable close-up images of girls in a pool can now be identified as girls in *Poznan's* swimming pool, which – as

Avri points out – is a remarkable place because it used to be a synagogue. Today, it still looks like a synagogue, but it "smells like a swimming pool," the violist adds. Although anecdotes like this do not abrogate the visual haziness of the many out-of-focus close-ups, they do counterbalance their embodying effect. For, as Marks explains, haptic looking often sets in when we can't make sense of images with the eyes. In the film version of *k.364,* the sense of the moving images no longer has to be looked for with the viewer's whole body when it is sufficiently provided by the narrative unfolding through the protagonists' anecdotes.

Likewise, the narrative character of the movie neutralizes the embodying effect of its absence of point-of-view shots, since the close-ups of Avri and Roi are hardly ever sutured to shots which can be interpreted as their point of view. Their spoken remarks and anecdotes to some extent solve this absence of suture, because the images which surround shots of their faces often show the things they are talking about, such as the woods or the pool. Although they are not looking at these things while they talk, the images attach themselves to their point of view because their stories prove that they have once been looking at the woods outside, or the pool in Poznan. More importantly, however, the soundtrack reveals that the musicians are looking at each other while they talk, even though the montage of the images does not confirm this. When Avri is talking, we either see a close-up of Roi's face, or we hear him respond to his friend with words or laughter. This also works the other way around – when Roi is uttering words, we know these words are heard by Avri, who is either depicted listening or whose responding voice can be heard. In sum, the two friends clearly listen and respond to each other's words.

This interaction proceeds all the more impressively when the musicians rehearse, and later on, perform Mozart's piece together. Gordon's film meticulously depicts how the violist and the violinist listen to each other while looking at each other. The previously provided narrative information on the long-standing friendship between the two men, moreover, enhances the visibility of the intimate and concentrated auditory interaction between them. Each of the isolated close-ups of one of the two male faces now appears to be sutured to the other musician, albeit in a way that is not predominantly visual. When Roi's face is shown, we don't get to see what he is looking at. Yet, we can always hear who he is listening to, or who is listening to him: Avri – who is either talking (back), laughing or playing the viola. As a viewer, you are therefore not invited to identify with these musicians in a conventional cinematic way, by being able to look through their eyes. Instead, the film prompts the spectator to identify with the musicians *as* musicians. For, through an auditory form of suture, Gordon's film allows the beholder to enter the film's diegesis as – above all – an ear.

Embodied Looked At

The video installation version of *k.364* enhances the embodying effect of the piece's haptic images in many ways. As the two large, double-sided projection screens of the installation are placed at an angle of 90 degrees in the middle of a room, the spectator

has to move through the room in order to see the installation from all sides. In addition, the viewer is made aware of her own physical presence in the viewing space by the two large mirrors which are attached to opposite walls of the exhibition space. Besides the fact that the mirrors reflect the spectator's body, they also make the proportions of the installation in relation to the viewer's body more visible. Whereas the spectator in a cinematic *dispositif* can only roughly estimate the scale of close-ups in relation to her body, the viewer of Gordon's installation can actually see how small her body is compared to the detailed close-ups of the musicians which appear on the tall screens.

What is more, the mirrors cut up, multiply, reframe and refract the projected images. In doing so, they both enhance the visibility of the installation by offering additional perspectives onto the projected images, *and* diminish its visibility as they preclude the possibility of viewing the piece at once in its entirety from one fixed viewing position. As Pepita Hesselberth (2014) has noted with regard to multi-screen exhibitions, "the out-of-the-corner-of-one's eye perception of either a detail of an image or an entire other screen pulls the visitor's perception out of the perspectival grid" (49). In Gordon's installation, this embodying loss of the single stable viewing point of lens-based images, which can be ascribed to all multi-screen installations is all the more enhanced and complicated by the addition of mirrors, which multiply the vanishing points of the two projected images in disorienting ways.

In spite of, or perhaps precisely because of the addition of mirrors, the installation version of *k.364* conforms to common outlines of video's *dispositifs,* as it confirms the idea that the *dispositifs* of the video medium tend to produce an embodied spectator. However, despite – or again: because of – all its video-specific qualities, the *dispositif* of Gordon's installation allows the piece to do something cinematic. Whereas the cinematic version of *k.364* lacks visual suture, the video installation *does* produce a cinematic form of visual "stitching," yet in a videomatic, embodying way. In the installation piece, the close-ups of the musicians' faces are juxtaposed with images on the other screen. In the film, it never becomes clear what their staring eyes are looking at. In the video installation, the looks of the musicians traverse the space between the screens formed by the angle of 90 degrees, and fall onto the other screen. In this way, Roi's eyes are looking at moving images of train tracks on the opposing screen when he talks about his Polish-Jewish mother, and Avri's look rests upon shots of the outside scenery when he is reflecting on the coldness out there. The image on the other projection screen is therefore not so much sutured to the point of view of the characters by convention, but because the protagonists are looking quite literally at the images in question during the projection.

It is important that the looks of the musicians travel through the real space of the viewer before falling upon the other projection screen. In this way, the illusionistic space of the projection space infuses the actual space of representation between the two screens. Such an extension of the illusionistic represented space within the viewer's space is in a more general sense one of the most prominent ways in which video's

installational *dispositif* has expanded cinema's traditional *dispositif*. It returns in other forms, and with diverse effects, in the installations by David Claerbout which will be addressed later on in this chapter. In Gordon's installation, the transgression of the proscenium is especially interesting because it not only transgresses the traditional cinematic division between the on-screen and offscreen "real" world, but also returns to a cinematic form, absorbing the viewer into the represented on-screen world.

Let me explain this by addressing the installation's depiction of the concert in Warsaw. While the violist and violinist are playing Mozart's *Sinfonia* with the orchestra, one of the projection screens shows Avri and Roi as they were filmed from the right side of the stage, while the other projection screen shows an opposing view of the two musicians, from the left side of the stage. These sideways camera standpoints thus do not show us the two musicians as they face the audience in the music hall; not frontally, standing next to each other, but in profile, standing behind each other. Although both musicians are visible off and on within the image frames of both projections, the right-hand camera has focused mainly on Avri, whereas the left-hand camera catches Roi's face most of the time. As a result, whereas the musicians are positioned shoulder to shoulder on stage, they seem to be facing each other in the juxtaposed projection screens of the video installation. In the museum room, their glances at the audience in the concert hall now seem to be directed at each other.

However, while playing in the concert hall, Avri and Roi often turn their eyes away from the audience, in order to look and listen at each other. However, when the two musicians turn their heads in order to face each other on stage, they no longer face each other in the spatial set up of *k.364*'s two screens. Instead, their eyes are cast outside of the screen, into the space of the viewer that has already been cast as a part of the illusionistic space.

The viewer of the installation, who was already under the impression of being simultaneously in the real museum space and the represented space of the images, is now visually addressed in turn by both musicians. When their glances break the so-called fourth wall and rest upon the spectator, however, the spectator isn't primarily addressed as herself – a museum visitor – nor as member of the concert audience. The viewer is addressed as one of the musicians; she alternately stands in for each of them. For she is addressed by the look which Avri casts at Roi, and catches the glance which Roi directs towards Avri. As in cinema's classical *dispositif*, the viewer of Gordon's installation is invited to identify with the characters on screen by being enabled to look through their eyes. Yet, in the case of *k.364,* this invitation is created through an uncinematic, embodying breach of the proscenium, by which the spectator is allowed to look through the eyes of an on-screen character by being looked at as if *being* one of the on-screen characters.

Two Bows
The double screen set-up which creates such an intricate viewing position in the

installation version, is at some point copied by the cinematic version of *k.364*. When the violist and violinist enter Warsaw's concert hall, the elongated cinema screen splits in two. That is, it shows the two images that are also projected at the installation's double screens, yet within one flat cinema screen. Although the movie is shown to partially imitate a common formal feature of video installation art, the split screen is limited by the conventional single screen of cinema's *dispositif*: the two images cannot face each other on the single flat screen of a movie theater. As a result, the two musicians never catch each other's eye, nor are they able to address the spectator as an inhabitant of the represented space. Hence, the fourth wall remains intact in the film version. The film viewer remains a physically excluded and unacknowledged entity outside of the film world.

When the concert and with that, the film, have come to an end, the two musicians take a bow. In the split screen of the cinema version, Roi and Avri blend into one large black arced figured during the film's final shots. For in the split screens, they bow towards each other until their bodies meet. They visually become one in the middle of the cinema screen, at the adjacent boundaries of the two images within the one flat film projection. The two fusing dark figures resemble the closing curtains of the theater; they signal the end of the show and close off the illusionistic space from the eyes of the spectator.

In the video installation, the same shots of bending bodies produce a different effect. First of all, the bowing musicians never meet at the edges of the two frames, as the two large projection screens of the installation are not entirely adjacent: there is a small opening in between them. In addition, the spatial set-up of the two screens turn the bows into gestures which, just like the musicians' glances, extend from the illusionistic space into the exhibition space. Therefore, in the installation *dispositif*, the violist and the violinist not only bow towards each other, they also seem to form an arch over the viewer. This enveloping gesture made by two large blown-up bodies on screen can even be physically threatening to the beholder. As a consequence, she may be inclined to slightly duck away from the large approaching figures. And by that mimicking move, she will once again become like one of the musicians.

2.6.2 Being in *American Car*

Waiting for Action
David Claerbout's video installation *American Car* (2004) consists of two large-screen video projections, exhibited in two adjacent rooms. The first projection shows two men in a parked car, the second depicts a car in a vast landscape. Whereas the two images could very well be understood as shots from a classical narrative fiction film, the overall piece is unlike film because of important deviations from cinema's dominant *dispositif*. The spatial, double-folded form of the installation, for instance, is unlike the single screen on which films are usually projected. More importantly, the way in which the two

images are positioned in space requires the spectator to walk through the rooms in order to see the entire piece. This spatial set-up of cinematic shots, which creates an embodied mode of looking, diminishes the filmic character of the images. Incorporated and taken apart in the *dispositif* of the multi-screen video installation, these film shots can just as well be specified as video images.

However, the ways in which Claerbout's piece affects the spectator, and the ways in which the spectator in turn determines the medium of *American Car,* are much more complicated than this brief outline would lead one to suspect. The video installation can never completely be distinguished from film; both the media of video and film can be perceived while looking at *American Car.* Moreover, the ways in which the viewer is positioned by the piece changes from cinematic to videomatic and back again when the installation's route through the two rooms is followed. As I will explain, this route through two rooms is a route through media. For *American Car* not only leads its spectator from film to video images, but also brings the viewer inside the space of film, through video.[58]

At first sight, only the first projection of *American Car* is visible. When entering the dark room in which it is projected, the viewer cannot see into the next room. Therefore, the spectator does not suspect the presence of the second projection of *American Car.* This influences the perception of the first one. As I have mentioned previously, the image of two men sitting in a car can easily be associated with a scene from a narrative film; two detectives patiently staking out a location. So, when walking into the first room, the first impression of the viewer is likely to be determined by this resemblance of the depicted scene to the Hollywood cliché. Although the projection is shown in a dark museum gallery instead of a cinema, and although there are no seats to sit on, the strong familiarity of the scene is enough for the spectator to assume that he or she has entered in the middle of a narrative film. Having missed the preceding story, the reason why the two detectives are sitting in the car will not be completely clear. However, by waiting patiently, as the detectives do, you might find out who or what they are waiting for. Something will happen eventually, for the stake-out is usually a prelude to dramatic action. At least, this is what you, as a spectator familiar with conventional narrative cinema, are likely to expect. And as long as this expectation persists, the video image looks like film.

The expectation doesn't persist, however, because it slowly becomes clear that nothing will happen. Except for some minimal movements preventing them from seeming to be statues, the two men remain seated in the same position, while rain keeps pouring down the windshield of their car. Suddenly, the flat impenetrability of the images becomes more apparent. As the two men remain silent and practically immobile, the viewer is likely to search for narrative clues in their background. Perhaps something is

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[58] The viewing process I will describe is based on what a general, Western contemporary viewer who is acquainted with video and film is most likely to see and do. Moreover, the spectator I describe is not a resistant spectator, but a spectator who is susceptible and open to the influence the work acts out on her.

going on outside of the car? Perhaps we could get a glimpse of action if we peer outside through the window, just like the detectives. However, the windshield can hardly be penetrated with the eyes, as it is almost constantly covered with pouring rain. The viewer's optic film look, which expects to plunge into the depths of the representation, is thus halted by the image. Not so much by the quality of the image surface – as is often the case with video – but by the opaqueness of a surface which is depicted by the smooth projection. The chances of gaining visual access to the story world do not seem entirely nil at this point, however. For the viewer can still wait for the rain to stop, or for a shot which will show the outside of the car. However, the probability of these changes diminishes as the viewing process continues. After a few minutes, the period of time after which something would certainly have happened in a narrative fiction film – if only the appearance of a different shot – has passed.

In fact, nothing will happen for hours, because the projection shows a looped fragment. Because of the invisibility of the loop, the scene has an endless duration. Moreover, the uneventfulness of the scene, which becomes apparent after having watched a while, contributes to the sense that time is extended in *American Car*. The loop, endless duration, uneventfulness, prolongation, all these aspects are – as we have seen – characteristic of video. And not only are these aspects likely to be recognized by the viewer as characteristic features of video, they also have an effect on the viewer that can be recognized as typical to video's main *dispositifs*.

As soon as it has become clear that nothing is going to happen in the first projection in *American Car*, it is also obvious to assume that nothing has happened before either. As a spectator, you haven't missed a previous piece of the story; there simply is no story with a beginning or an end. Apparently, you can come in and leave at any time without missing anything. And as I argued earlier, such a possibility gives rise to an embodied mode of looking, for it leaves the choice of the viewing duration to the spectator. This compels the spectator to consider the amount of time spent on looking, and hence evokes the awareness that perception takes up time. In addition, once it slowly dawns on the spectator that nothing will happen, waiting can suddenly turn into boredom, which again leads to the awareness that viewing is a slow and time-consuming process, and moreover that an active choice to physically leave the room has to be made.

Once this decision is made by the viewer, she will be invited by the piece to an even more embodied mode of looking. Besides the fact that walking out of the room is a physical act, the spectator is also enticed into an embodied viewing mode by the trajectory which leads to the next room. For in order to leave through the door opening in the wall on your left side, you have to approach the projection screen first, as the opening is close to the projection surface. This inevitable approach undermines the possibility of keeping the distance from the projection surface which is needed to have an overview of the whole image, an overview which sustained the sense of mastery which is so closely connected to disembodied, optic looking. [59]

So when you, as a spectator, are forced to move close the projection, the overview you might have had is lost, and more importantly, the image no longer looks smooth when viewed at a close range. The flatness and impenetrability of the windshield now become visible characteristics of the image surface itself. For, whereas the high resolution of the image provides its surface with a smooth, transparent look when it is looked at from at a distance, this same surface looks grainy and pixelated when seen from close up. As the distance between the viewer and the image surface diminishes, the materiality of the image becomes perceptible. Together, these aspects give rise to the embodied kind of visuality which was already given an initial impetus by the rainy windshield. The mode of visuality, that is, which Marks terms haptic, and Bryson indicates as the gaze; a mode of looking which acknowledges the representational status of the object on view and which therefore relates to the image as another surface.

Haptic looking is not merely stimulated, but almost enforced by *American Car*. Marks describes the haptic look as a look which presses up to the surface of an image, for instance by focusing on its details or by lingering over its surface. Thus, the pressing up to the surface doesn't have to be taken literally. Yet, in the case of *American Car,* it is something which the spectator physically needs to do in order to comply with the installation's *dispositif.* The spatial arrangement of the installation insists on the viewer's bodily movement from room to room, from screen to screen. Without following this path, the spectator cannot see the entire piece. Hence, when looking at *American Car,* closeness to the image surface isn't attained by focusing on details. Instead, focusing on details becomes inevitable by having to move close to the image surface. Therefore, in this case, haptic looking is not primarily the cause, but rather the *result* of embodied, kinaesthetic spectatorship.

The abovementioned act of focusing on details might only be brief, though, as it happens in the process of walking to the door in order to leave the room. Yet, it is important that between the moment at which the spectator of *American Car* begins to realize that the perceived image is uneventful, and the moment at which she sees the graininess of the image before leaving the first exposition room, *American Car* looks more like video than like film. For both the extended uneventfulness and the graininess of the projection – even though the latter aspect is only perceptible from close range – are more characteristic of video than of film. However, upon entering the next room, a strong association with the medium of film is reinstated.

Looking, Being Looked At, and Looking At Yourself Being Looked At

The successive film shot which so obviously didn't appear in *American Car*'s projection shown in the first room, seems to be present in the next room. There are two reasons

[59] My discussion of *American Car* is based on the way it was exhibited in the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2005. As the position of a door close to the projection surface is essential to the perception of the video installation, *American Car* can be considered as a site-dependent installation. When exposed in rooms different from the ones in the Van Abbe Museum, it changes considerably.

why the image of the car in a landscape can be understood as the shot which would succeed the one of the two men in a narrative film.[60] First of all, as mentioned previously, one of the rules applied in classical narrative fiction film is that a master shot (or establishing shot) of a space must be given when the space and the scene unfolding in it are also mapped out by medium or close-up shots from different angles. The reason for this is that, in order for the spectator to maintain a sense of overview, it needs to be clear how everything which is shown is positioned within the represented space. Thus, in a narrative film, the medium close-up shot of the two men in a car would have had preceding or succeeding establishing shots showing where and how the car of the two men is situated in space. The image of a car in a landscape can therefore be understood as such an establishing shot.

In addition to the rule that medium shots of characters are preceded or followed by an establishing shot which defines their position in space, it is of course customary in classical narrative films to suture images of characters to point-of-view shots. In particular, close-ups of characters who are explicitly looking at something are likely to be preceded, or mostly followed, by a shot which shows us what he or she is looking at. If such a shot clearly corresponds with a character's viewpoint its status as point-of-view shot is clear. Since the two men in the first image of *American Car* so insistently stare at a fixed point outside of their vehicle, the second image can also be understood as a point-of-view shot instead of an establishing shot.

Interestingly, the possibility that the men *in* the car are looking *at* a car is furthermore sustained by the way in which the two flat projections are positioned in relation to each other in the two rooms. Ignoring the space between them for now, the first projection is square to the second projection. This fact becomes relevant in relation to the depiction in the first image. The two men sitting in the car are shown from the back, yet their heads are turned to the left, which is therefore also the direction in which they are looking. Following the direction of their looks, the second flat projection surface is positioned precisely in front of them. Whereas a narrative film which is shown within a traditional viewing set-up can only suggest that a shot shows what the characters are looking at, the *dispositif* of the video installation enables a spatial arrangement in which the characters in *American Car* are actually looking at the shot which shows what they are looking at. That is, if it is assumed that the image of the car shows us their point of view.

Both possibilities for understanding *American Car*'s second image – as an establishing shot or as point-of-view shot – can be considered. And although the effect of the overall piece depends on how the second image is understood, both options have the following two effects on the spectator. First, the viewer who perceives the work is looked at by the characters. Second, the viewer seems to become part of the illusionistic space which is mapped out by the film shots.

[60] Although the second projection of *American Car* can immediately be understood as a film shot succeeding the first projection, it is, however, remarkable that the car is positioned in a deserted landscape. For this is not a usual location for detectives to stake out.

If the second image is understood as an establishing shot, and hence as showing the car in which the two men are sitting, the spectator is looked at by the men in the car in the second image. Because the left side of the car is shown in the second projection, and the men in the car were shown peering out of the left front window of the car in the first image, they must be looking straight at the viewer who is standing in the second room. If the two images of *American Car* were to succeed each other in a narrative film, the spectator would probably not have a very strong impression of being watched. As neither the men in the car nor their gazes are perceptible in the second shot, the character's looks can only be supposed to point in the direction of the viewer. Moreover, in a narrative film, it would soon become clear which event or character from inside the film's diegesis the detectives are waiting for. This doesn't become clear in *American Car* though, for as in the first image, nothing happens in the second one either. The question which was raised by *American Car*'s first projection – who or what are the two detectives observing? – can therefore only be answered with: the viewer.

If we regard the second image as a point-of-view shot, the viewer is also looked at by the two men, but this time from out of the first projection. For as we have seen, shots suggestively related by character looks create spatial continuity, since the spatial position of the looking character and the spatial position of the things he or she looks at are connected by the direction of the look itself, which appears to cross the space between them rectilinearly. The space which is crossed by such a look in narrative films is an illusionistic space within the film, a space in or behind the film screen. In *American Car*, however, the look of the two characters also seems to cross the real space of the exhibition rooms if the second image is understood as their point of view. For, as explained previously, the two men quite literally look at the image of the landscape (possibly) representing their viewpoint because of the spatial arrangement of the two projections. Therefore, if it is assumed that the second projection shows what the two men are looking at, then the viewer who is looking at the car in the landscape is standing physically in the men's field of vision, within the illusionistic film space.

Hence, as in *k.364*, the proscenium is breached by Claerbout's installation, as the real space of the exposition room seems to simultaneously be the illusionistic space between the two men in the car, and the car in the landscape. Even if the second image is not understood as a point-of-view shot, the real space between the images would stand in relation to illusionistic space that is mapped out by the camera's shift from the inside to the outside of the car. Walking from one image to the next can then be experienced as a trajectory in a direction opposite to that traversed by the camera.[61]

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[61] This trajectory is mostly an imaginary one, for narrative films are not usually recorded with only one camera. However, if a shot shows an object in close-up, and a second shot shows the same object from a distance, the spatial distance between the two viewpoints and the trajectory crossing through the space connecting the two viewpoints can be imagined by the viewer. Moreover, especially if the two viewpoints are not point-of-view shots, this trajectory can be understood as the distance the camera has traveled – albeit instantaneously.

Thus, as a whole, *American Car* occupies an actual three dimensional space, for the space between the two projections is not vacant; it is enclosed by the two related images. However, the way in which the images are related causes the illusionistic space within the images to expand into the real space of the exposition rooms. Consequently, the viewer is physically positioned within both the real space occupied by the work, *and* within the illusionistic space of the images which expands into this real space. It goes without saying that this position offered to the viewer gives rise to an embodied mode of looking. For it is in bodily form that the spectator can stand and walk through the spaces occupied and formed by *American Car*.

However, this embodying effect is not a given when it comes to video installations in which the illusionistic space "breaks over" the ground of the exhibition space, as Morse would put it. In some instances, the actual space can lose its concreteness, and the viewer can lose her awareness of being in a museum or gallery space. In other words, the presentational art form of the multi-screen video installation can produce a reality effect which is so strong that it eliminates the real space and produces a disembodied spectator. For even though she is physically present between the screens, and usually has to move her body in order to behold the surrounding screens, the viewer of a multi-screen installation can still become so engrossed in the story world that she momentarily forgets her own bodily position in the exhibition space. At such moments, the three-dimensionality of the video installation appears to come close to the potential which Bazin saw in cinema; to depict the profilmic world as real as reality. In its ultimate, most complete form, "total cinema" would be able to imitate, replicate and reproduce allegedly objective reality without the hindrance of material limitations or artificial interventions such as cuts and camera swerves – the latter being absent from *American Car,* and extremely limited in many other installations which apply this particular video *dispositif* in relation to narrative cinema.[62]

However, most of the time, multi-screen installations that produce an illusionistic space which covers the exhibition space leave some room for the actual exhibition space itself. They generally give rise to the impression of being in two places at once; within the space of representation as well as the represented space. In this sense, the multi-screen *dispositif* resembles the older video *dispositif* of the live feedback set-up, in which the viewer features in both the represented and viewing space. The difference

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[62] At first sight, 3D cinema may even seem more able to fill the viewing space with a fictional world than multi-screen video installations which reproduce an illusionistic space within an exhibition space. On the one hand, the flatness of the screen becomes invisible during a 3D viewing experience, whereas the screens of a video installation remain recognizable as flat surfaces – sometimes this flatness is even more apparent in spatial set-ups. On the other hand, 3D cinema is not as three-dimensional as a video installation, in that the images can only be viewed in 3D from a fixed viewpoint. If the film spectator of a 3D film turns her head, the illusionistic world is no longer there. In sum, video installations are able to produce the impression that the represented world enters into the viewing space in a *dispositif* which involves a (more or less) embodied, mobile viewer, whereas the illusion of 3D cinema only unfolds in a traditional cinematic *dispositif*, including an immobile disembodied spectator.

is, of course, that the viewer of multi-screen installations usually isn't split in two; she doesn't look at herself within the screen world. *American Car* forms an interesting exception to this rule, though. For in Claerbout's installation, the spectator can be said to be looking at herself. After all, sharing the point of view with a character when looking at a point-of-view shot invites the viewer to imaginatively occupy the place the character occupies within his/her diegesis.

Therefore, when looking at *American Car,* the viewer can both be standing in the room while being looked at by the two men, and simultaneously be with the men in the car in order to look at herself standing in the room while looking. The cinematic identification process by which the film spectator is supposed to enter the film as a disembodied entity, now becomes an act which leads the spectator back to her own embodied existence between the screens. She is persuaded to imagine looking at herself standing in the room while looking. Naturally, this imaginative act only contributes to the spectator's awareness of her own body, the position of this body in space, and the fact that this body is present at the time of looking.

Yet, even without this process of identification by which the viewer looks at herself looking, the fact that the spectator is looked at by the men in the car is in itself sufficient to produce an embodied mode of looking. For, when the spectator is looked at by the characters in a representation, this can be understood as visual address which turns the viewer into a "you," a partner inhabiting the same world. It acknowledges the physical presence of the spectator, and breaks through the division between the time and space of the representation and the time and space the spectator resides in.[63]

In addition, in *American Car,* the spectator's physical presence is not only acknowledged by the fact that the characters are looking at her. Because it is raining in the projection showing the two men in the car, and it has just stopped raining in the image showing the car in a *wet* landscape, some time has past between the two "shots."[64] In this respect, *American Car* differs from *Zidane* and *k.364,* in which multiple screens represent the same moment. Through a subtle and short lapse of time, Claerbout's installation seems to take into account that it takes time for the viewer to move from one room to the next. In other words, the slight change between the two images acknowledges the physical presence and action of the viewer.

Finally, the ambiguity of *American Car*'s second image can in itself be said to contribute to the embodiment of the spectator. For, when it comes to two important effects of the video work, it doesn't really matter whether this second image is

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[63] In the case of film, any contact between characters in the representation and the spectator is illusive, because the characters are not really present when they seem to look at the viewer, and the spectator was not present when the actors looked into the camera. However, the visual address of the viewer still provides the viewer with the strong impression that the division between the time and space within the film and outside of it is lifted. This *impression* of the viewer is of influence on her embodiment.

[64] In narrative fiction films, such a notable temporal difference is unusual. Although narrative time can jump forward when one shot cuts to the next, it usually doesn't do so when it comes to point-of-view or establishing shots.

understood as an establishing shot or a point-of-view shot. In both cases, the spectator is looked at and seemingly positioned in illusionistic space. However, how the second image is understood affects how the spectator is looked at, and how the viewer's movement through real space relates to the illusionistic space mapped out by the two "shots." The gazes which are directed towards the viewer can come from different directions, either from the first or the second projection. And the trajectory she takes through real space is either congruous with the direction in which the gazes of the characters cross an illusionistic space, or is opposed to the camera's course through an illusionistic space. These multiple possibilities aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, however. The viewer doesn't have to regard the second image as either an establishing shot or a point-of-view shot; she can consider both options at the same time or alternately while beholding the video work. This would imply that looks can come from every direction – perhaps even simultaneously – and that the illusionistic space between the images is constructed in two different ways. The complication caused by these double possibilities only contributes to the viewer's awareness of her own body in space, for she has to actively consider – and perhaps decide over and over again – which space she is in, and how she is looked at.

Questioning the Medium

In sum, *American Car* clearly produces an embodied spectator through aspects which are more typical of video's *dispositifs* than film's dominant viewing conditions. The uneventfulness which incites the spectator to action, and the spatial construction of two related projections in which the spectator is positioned, are both aspects which have become characteristic of video artworks because these expressive and formal possibilities enabled by the medium's support have excessively been applied – the latter mainly in video installation art. Moreover, although *American Car* refers to film, it deviates from some of the most important conventions of the dominant cinematic *dispositif*. Firstly, characters looking at the viewer – as those in *American Car* do indirectly – are an anomaly in classical narrative films. For, as explained previously, actors in such films do not look into the camera so as to keep the film's diegesis closed off from the world outside the screen. This already indicates the main reason for which *American Car* differs strongly from film: it doesn't keep the world represented on screen closed off from the one in front of it.

A connection between the diegesis on screen and the one in front of it is, however, not only caused by the characters' looks being directed at the viewer. The breach of the division between them is far more radical, because the illusionistic space represented in the images seems to extend into the real space in front of them by the spatial positioning of the projections. With this, *American Car* differs from classical narrative film and the convention belonging to this dominant application of the filmic medium of representing a contained diegesis. The ostensible extension of illusionistic space into real space differs from film in a wider sense, because film is generally regarded as a proscenium art. Even if the film spectator is addressed by characters on screen, the illusionistic space represented

by film can never be entered physically by the beholder. And although the viewer of *American Car* still cannot enter into the space *on* the flat surface of the projections, she does seem to enter into the illusionistic space which is suggested between them.

American Car, then, looks like video in important respects, and very much unlike film in others. A conclusion which can be drawn is that although the video work refers to film, its medium is overtly video. In addition, it can be argued that the effect of the work on the spectator is mostly enabled by features typical of video, which again shows that this is actually the medium of the work. Any initial doubt as to the medium of *American Car* could now be regarded as settled. This rash conclusion, however, doesn't account for the work's reference to film. Should this reference to film be regarded as superfluous? And moreover, are the work's overt differences from film irrelevant?

Both these questions can be answered in the negative. As I argue below, the medium of film cannot be excluded from the work as unimportant for three reasons. First, because the reference to film does to a large extent enable the embodied mode of looking which is produced by the overall piece. Secondly, because the strong association with film upholds doubt on whether – in spite of all the differences – the medium of the work might nevertheless be film. Finally, because *American Car* gives rise to a reflection on the specificity of film.

The association with classical narrative fiction film has an important function in the embodiment of the spectator throughout the viewing process. Earlier, I explained how the viewer is eventually invited to an embodied mode of looking by the extended uneventfulness in *American Car's* first projection. The process leading up to the spectator's awareness of the fact that viewing takes time – waiting for the action to start, doubting if it will ever start, getting impatient or bored, and then realizing that no action will ever start – depends to a large extent on the familiarity of the depicted scene. For the viewer's expectation that something is about to happen, and her willingness to wait for it in spite of the fact that the scene is uneventful from the beginning, depends on the resemblance of the scene to a recognizable situation in narrative fiction films.

What is more, the fact that both of the projections are regarded as film shots once the spectator has entered the second room affects the manner in which the two images can be related by the viewer. The fact that the viewer can have the impression of being looked at, or can have the sense of entering the illusionistic space mapped out by shots, is wholly dependent on familiarity with the way in which successive shots map out a space in narrative fiction films.[65] The spatial construction of two related screens – which

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[65] Both of these arguments illustrate my previous assumption that the spectator doesn't necessarily experience a work of art passively, but can apply conventional or intertextual modes of looking at a work. The previously discussed effects of *American Car* on the spectator depend for a large part on the spectator activating her knowledge of film's traditional *dispositif*, including narrative film conventions. She activates or applies this knowledge when beholding the work. As most contemporary viewers are familiar with narrative fiction film, and because *American Car's* reference to classical narrative fiction film is quite overt, it is unlikely that the general viewer will not activate her knowledge of classical film conventions. Yet, the effect of *American Car* on the viewer depends on this act by the viewer.

is a customary form of the medium of video – is in itself not enough to evoke the impression that the illusionistic space of the images extends into real space. This impression only arises when the two projections are related to each other *as* film shots. Therefore, the association with the conventions of narrative fiction film is needed throughout the viewing process in order for the abovementioned effects to arise.

Besides the fact that the association with film is needed for these effects, the association with film evoked by the video work is likely to be determinative of the way the spectator perceives the medium of the work. Previously, I claimed that almost every aspect of a work which produces an embodied mode of looking, as well as the production of an embodied mode of looking itself, are characteristic of video, and that the medium of *American Car* can therefore be understood as video. However, although the abovementioned aspects – including the production of an embodied mode of looking – can be taken into account as characteristic of video, they are not completely decisive in determining the medium of *American Car*. Because the work's reference to film is so prominent, the impression of walking through a space mapped out by film shots is likely to prevail in most viewers. Yet, the video installation differs from film in many respects. These differences do however not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the medium of *American Car* then must be video. They rather lead to the question of whether the medium of the work can possibly be film.

Previously, I have argued that the specificity of a medium consists of both a technical support and a set of conventions, both of which are determinative for the medium's specific field of possibilities. The conventions of which a medium consists determine which possibilities offered by a medium's technical support are used, and thereby become specific to the medium, i.e. part of the medium's field of possibilities. This counts for both video and film; many of their characteristic possibilities have become typical of them because they are repeatedly used. Similarly, many of the possibilities that the technical supports of film and video offer remain unused by convention, and are therefore not part of their field.

The most important aspects through which *American Car* produces an embodied spectator – extended uneventfulness and the spatial construction of the two screens – are conventional characteristics of the medium of video, as they have become typical through repeated usage. In a technical respect, however, these aspects are not unique to video. The same extended uneventfulness could be expressed with the use of film's technical support, and there is no reason for which two film projections could not be shown in two adjacent rooms. The problem is that those aspects are not by convention specific to film. It would be unusual for a film to show the same uneventful scene for hours on end. And in its typical form, film only exists with one projection screen. Moreover, film mostly doesn't produce an embodied spectator. Therefore, the question of whether the medium of *American Car* can be film now leads to the following question: is a film still a film if it doesn't meet the conventional limitation of the possibilities which the medium's technical support offers? When it comes to the technical support of film

alone, the medium of *American Car* could be film.

The above question is not answered by *American Car*. Rather, it is only posed. However, by just raising the question of whether the video work *could* be film in an unusual form, doing unusual things, *American Car* compels the viewer to consider the technical possibilities of film. In this way, the work might lead to the realization that, technically speaking, film is able to deviate from the form it usually takes, from what and how it normally expresses itself, and even from the mode of looking it generally produces. Moreover, *American Car* can evoke awareness of the fact that the technical support of film is able to equal the characteristic aspects of video which are used in the work. In all, the video installation not only compels the viewer to realize that film is technically able to expand beyond the limits of its conventional *dispositif*, but also that the specificity of both film and video are to a large extent based on conventions, and therefore historically relative.

Video without Attractions

Yet, in spite of the fact that *American Car* could technically be film, and can even be understood as *being* film, the actual medium of *American Car* is not film, but video. This is important especially because of the historical relativity of the two media's specificity. When seen in a historical perspective, it is significant that video is able to show largely unused technical possibilities of film's support.

As mentioned previously, in the history of film, the medium has not always been used for the production of narrative fiction films representing an enclosed diegesis, nor have its viewing conditions always been predominantly ruled by traditional cinematic *dispositifs*. When the medium was newly invented, the so-called cinema of attractions functioned within a *dispositif* that is unlike the traditional *dispositif* of narrative cinema that has become prevalent in later decades. These early films did not represent a contained story world; the characters in them seemed to acknowledge the presence of the viewer. They addressed the spectator and put on a performance in order to entertain her. In addition, the acts represented in those early films – such as pulling funny faces and physical slapstick – call for a bodily response by the spectator. After about 1906, however, the cinema of attractions had to make way for classical narrative cinema, which from then on became the dominant mode of filmmaking. There, the disembodied spectator was, as we know, strictly separated from the world on screen.

In *American Car*, the spectator is in part invited to an embodied mode of looking by a characteristic convention video had acquired through its use when it had just become accessible to artists. As mentioned previously, artists in the 1970s frequently used the medium of video to show uneventfulness and prolongation. Importantly, these characteristics of video came partly into being as a reaction to narrative fiction film. The features of uneventfulness and prolongation were meant to counter the accelerated and compressed time which had become common in many narrative fiction films. In Claerbout's video work, the uneventfulness and extended duration of the first projection

embodies the spectator by compelling her into action, into making the decision to walk from one room to the next.

American Car stimulates one to realize that the specificity of both video and film are largely conventional. Because of the work's reference to film, the video piece evokes the awareness that the technical support of film is able to function in *dispositifs* which differ in many respects from cinema's dominant viewing configuration. Moreover, in spite of all the video aspects in *American Car*, the work ultimately still looks like film with a twist because the resemblance of the first depicted scene to a conventional narrative film scene is indelible. This twist, then, is clearly provided by video. Therefore, video seems to lend one of its characteristics – uneventful prolongation – to precisely that which this aspect was meant to counter in the eyes of the first video artists; narrative fiction film. Consequently, video exposes the technical possibility of film to produce an embodied spectator. However, the way in which film is shown to be able to do this, is quite unlike the way in which the medium of film once did give rise to an embodied mode of looking. For instead of putting on a performance in order to provoke a reaction in the viewer – as the cinema of attraction films did – *American Car* provokes the viewer into physical action by removing all action from narrative fiction film.

2.6.3 *Bordeaux Piece*: Looking through Sound

Bordeaux Piece offers two viewing positions to the spectator. The first is a mobile, upright position which gives rise to an embodied mode of looking. The second is a seated and immobile position which produces a disembodied mode of looking. Both positions and modes of looking resemble the *dispositifs* which are characteristic of video and film respectively. Moreover, *Bordeaux Piece* looks either like video or film, depending on the viewing position from which it is watched. The different *dispositifs* in which the video projection can be watched not only involve different *viewing* positions; both positions also offer a different soundtrack. The soundtrack which accompanies films as well as videos is often forgotten in discussions of the *dispositif*, as the concept has been developed predominantly in theories which focus on vision and visuality. Yet, *Bordeaux Piece* emphasizes that soundtracks are of paramount importance to the ways in which images are, or can be, watched. Moreover, in *Bordeaux Piece,* the fact that the viewing positions can be discerned and recognized as two positions at all wholly depends on sound. As I will argue below, this work forms an important contribution to the discussion on the embodiment of the spectator by exposing the strong influence of sound on viewing. In my discussion of *k.364,* I already explained how narrative time often depends on the soundtrack which accompanies moving images. *Bordeaux Piece,* in addition, exposes how the soundtrack not only affects the temporality of moving images, but also produces spaces – both within and beyond the image frame.

Embodiment by Ambient Sound

When first entering the room in which the single large-scale projection is shown, the second viewing position is immediately visible. For a couple of benches are positioned in the middle of the room on which wired headphones lie ready for use. In most circumstances, such a position can easily be understood as the only position from which a video work can be completely perceived, because often, the headphones suggest that the soundtrack accompanying the image can only be heard through them. This is not the case with *Bordeaux Piece*, however. For even without putting the headphones on, sound can be heard in the exposition room. Subtle rural ambient sounds such as rustling leaves, chirping crickets, twittering birds, and humming bees fill the exposition space. They can easily be related to the projection on view. For, in the projection, medium close-up images of a villa and three characters in and around it alternate with shots that show how this villa is positioned in a vast and mountainous Mediterranean landscape.

The characters depicted by the projected representation are clearly related; they exchange looks and are involved in inaudible conversations. However, as in the video installation version of *k.364*, no coherent narrative can be descried in the images without the soundtrack of the dialogue between the characters. It is unclear what is happening between the three figures, or how they are related. In fact, not much seems to be happening at all, for no vivid gestures or dramatic facial expressions are shown. Moreover, no events or changes of situation can be detected. In addition, it remains unclear as to how the successive shots express the passage of time. Time lapses or flash-backs are undetectable, nor is it clear whether or not time progresses at all.

Thus, with no accompanying sound other than ambient sound, the images of the villa and the characters in and around it remain incoherent and hard to interpret. Moreover, the rural sounds draw the beholder's attention away from the villa and the characters, and instead direct it to the landscape in which the villa and the characters are positioned; to the swaying trees on the mountain slopes surrounding the villa, and to the bees and butterflies which sometimes pass through the air. What is more, the ambient sound seems to extend beyond the image frame. For although some of its sources are visible within the image, most of them originate far beyond the space that is visible on screen.

Because the ambient sound indicates a space much larger than the illusionistic space represented within the projection frame, this sound seems to extend the illusionistic space of the vast landscape beyond the limits of the image into the exposition room. This impression is especially evoked by the fact that ambient sound is *all* you can hear; no sounds the source of which lies visibly and solely within the image are audible. Such sounds would perhaps redirect the attention of the spectator to the contained illusionistic space on screen. However, in the absence of sounds with an exclusively on-screen source, the illusionistic space on screen seems to expand into the exposition room through the vastness of the ambient "soundscape." Therefore, like *American Car, Bordeaux Piece* provides its beholder with the sense of being

simultaneously in real space and in the illusionistic space of the representation. However, whereas *American Car* evokes this impression through a spatial construction of two related projections, *Bordeaux Piece* produces the same effect with only one flat image. It is through sound that the viewer seems to be positioned inside – as opposed to in front of – the space formed by *Bordeaux Piece*, and is thereby invited to an embodied mode of looking.

By demonstrating that ambient sound is able to relate the illusionistic space within an image to the real space in which the viewer of the image resides, *Bordeaux Piece* makes an important contribution to the discussion of the embodiment of the spectator. For although Morse has convincingly argued that the spectator becomes an embodied viewer by being in the same space which an artwork occupies or constructs, her discussion – like many discussions of *dispositifs* – remains mainly confined to the material and visual aspects of art forms. *Bordeaux Piece* proves, however, that sound can be added as an important aspect to producing an embodied spectator by artworks and their spatial viewing set-up. Yet, it is important to note that it isn't the aspect of sound in itself which produces an embodied spectator. It is its combination with images which enables sound to effect a seeming expansion of the illusionistic image space into the real space which the beholder physically occupies.[66]

Another important effect of the fact that ambient sound is all you can hear in the first *dispositif* of *Bordeaux Piece* is that no coherent narrative can be descried in the images. This is important because as soon as you, as a spectator, abandon any attempt to reconstruct the story which only *seems* to evolve on screen without ever becoming truly discernible, two important temporal aspects of the video work become more noticeable. For, once it becomes clear that time cannot be extracted from the unreconstructable narrative, it has to be looked for or measured differently by the viewer.

One way in which this can be done is by paying attention to the brightness and color of sunlight, and to the position of the sun within the sky that appears sporadically in the images. After a while, it appears that the intensity of the daylight is slowly changing, and that the position of the sun is shifting as well. The pace at which this process occurs is more or less congruous with the natural pace at which the sun rises and sets again every day. In *Bordeaux Piece* it takes thirteen hours for the sun to rise and set: the average length of a West-European summer day is the length of the video itself.

In addition, by paying attention to such a change or progression in order to measure

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[66] It is worthwhile, however, to briefly consider whether sound in itself could produce an embodied listener. For in itself, sound has the manifest capacity to envelop the listener, for it is never a limited object, but something which can – and often does – fill a space. When it does, the listener can be understood to be embodied because she shares a space with the sound. The question is, however, whether (by definition immaterial) sound alone can give rise to an embodied mode of looking by simultaneously occupying and constructing a three-dimensional space as installation art often does. On the basis of contemporary soundscape installations by artists such as Justin Bennett, I would say that this might be possible. For further thoughts on this subject, see *Site Specific Sound* (2004) by Brandon LaBelle and *Resonances: Aspects of Sound Art* (2002) by Bernd Schulz.

time, repetition becomes noticeable in *Bordeaux Piece*. Every ten minutes, the same prolonged shot of the landscape is shown. Then, suddenly, one of the characters walks into the frame. From then on, everything is repeated, the same shots succeed each other, and the characters repeat the same minimal gestures and restrained expressions all over again. Because hardly any differences can be detected between the repeated parts, it almost seems as if the video is looped. The position of the sun, however, keeps shifting slowly throughout the fragments.

Both temporal features mentioned above – real, unaccelerated time and repetition – can be recognized as characteristic of video. Importantly, although ambient sound itself is not a typical feature of video, it is mainly due to the soundtrack that these typical features of video become noticeable. For, when the soundtrack is altered in the second position from which the video work can be watched, these features become less apparent. Which is why *Bordeaux Piece* mainly looks like video from the first viewing/listening position.

 Moreover, the real, unaccelerated time which becomes noticeable in *Bordeaux Piece* contributes to the production of an embodied spectator. First of all because the real time represented in the work is congruous with the real time in which the spectator resides. Even the time which is indicated by the position of the sun in *Bordeaux Piece* can more or less coincide with the time of day at which the spectator is looking at the work, for the work is often screened for its entire duration, starting at sunrise.[67] Secondly, and more importantly, this represented time can produce an embodied spectator because, if it is assumed that the video runs in real time, it *could* be live, which would only enhance the embodiment of the spectator. It doesn't really matter if the images are truly broadcast live; the mere suggestion is enough to evoke the impression in the viewer that she physically exists at the same moment as the images.

In sum, the sound which is audible in the first viewing/listening position is not typical of video, yet it does make the work look like video. Firstly, it produces an embodied spectator by enabling the illusionistic space within the image to seemingly expand into the actual exposition room. This production of an embodied spectator can be recognized as typical of video, even if it isn't caused by a feature specific to video in this regard. Secondly, the soundtrack makes temporal features noticeable that are characteristic of video, and therefore lead to the assumption that the medium of *Bordeaux Piece* is video. Thirdly, the discernment of one of these characteristics – real, unaccelerated time – gives further rise to an embodied mode of looking.

Disembodiment by Dialogue

Whereas *Bordeaux Piece* looks like video from the first viewing/listening position, it looks like film from the second one, if only because of the viewing position itself. The silent and immobile viewing position which *Bordeaux Piece* offers alongside the more

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67 It was, for instance, shown this way in MUHKA and in Gallery Micheline Swayzer, both in Antwerp.

embodied one has become so specific to film that these aspects in themselves lead to the inclination of regarding images on view as cinematic ones. In the second *dispositif,* immobility is quite literally enforced on the spectator. Because the headphones which the viewer is invited to put on are wired, turning one's head in any other direction than the screen is hardley impossible. The well-known comparison of film's *dispositif* to the prisoners in Plato's cave applies unequivocally to the second viewing set-up. "Chained" by the wires of the headphones, the spectator of Claerbout's piece is compelled to look forwards at the projection screen. Moreover, like the prisoners in Plato's cave, she is stimulated by the set-up to accept the projected images as "real."

When viewed from this distant position, the surface of the projected images on view looks incredibly transparent. The sharpness and brightness of the images match the high quality which film images can have. Only closely approaching the screen – which *is* possible from the first mobile viewing position – would bring the materiality, as well as the actual medium, of the image to light: from up close, digital video pixelation can be perceived.[68] However, the second, immobile viewing position obliges the spectator to keep a distance from the screen, and invites her to sink into the represented world with her eyes.

This cinematic invitation into the depicted world is further affirmed when another characteristic of film becomes apparent in this second viewing/listening position, namely narrativity. As opposed to the soundtrack which jointly produced the first *dispositif,* the soundtrack which is audible through the headphones does contain dialogue. Moreover, the ambient sound which dominated the first viewing position is now substantially diminished. Because of the dialogue, the narrative, which could only be guessed at from the first position, now becomes entirely discernible. A story unfolds about the diminishing love of a woman for her husband, and her budding affair with another man. The two men, in addition, are in dispute over a film script which the woman's husband is writing, and which the other man is going to produce. In this respect, amongs many others, the story in *Bordeaux Piece* resembles Jean Luc Godard's film *Le mépris* (1963). Thus, the video work doesn't just look like a narrative film from the second viewing/listening configuration; it also refers to one.

As soon as the story of *Bordeaux Piece* becomes perceivable (through dialogue) from the second position, the viewing position itself comes to resemble the conventional cinematic *dispositif* even further. The narrative forms an enclosed fictional story. Consequently, the spectator is separated from the time and space on screen. As the rural ambient sounds are diminished, the earlier impression of the illusionistic space expanding into the real space of the spectator is no longer evoked. Instead, because a narrative unfolds through the dialogue, the on-screen foreground space is the space between the three characters. This space between them becomes more apparent for two reasons.

[68] *Bordeaux Piece* was recorded with a state-of-the-art HD digital video camera.

Firstly, because the spatial relations indicated between them through different shots can be reconstructed now that these shots are related through narrative – an effect which could also be noted in the film version of *k.364*. Secondly, because the spatial relations between the characters become invested with meaning through the story, for the emotional, romantic, or discordant relationships which the story exposes between the characters bind the characters through space. Moreover, these emotional and psychological relationships make the spatial distances between the characters – their remoteness or proximity to each other – more significant.[69] In all, in the second *dispositif* of *Bordeaux Piece,* the narrative space between the three characters is activated, while the viewer's space is left unaddressed and untouched by this other, enclosed story world.

Similarly, the time which becomes noticeable through the characters' dialogue excludes the viewer from the video work. For the narrative which emerges turns out to represent a linearly progressing, compressed form of time which is unlike the real time in which the spectator exists. In *Bordeaux Piece,* this compression of time is mainly achieved by time lapses. When one shot succeeds another, a considerable amount of story time has passed. Like the spatial relationships between shots, the temporal relationships between them can only be appreciated because they are explained by the overall narrative on the evolving relationships between the three characters.

However, from the second position, *Bordeaux Piece* only looks completely like film for a limited period. After ten minutes or so, the resemblance to conventional narrative film diminishes because an aspect characteristic of video becomes noticeable. The repetition of the fragment which was visible from the first position also becomes noticeable from the second one. Once the story has ended, it starts all over again. Thus, although the characteristics which make *Bordeaux Piece* look like film from the second viewing/listening position remain unchanged, a video aspect eventually "infiltrates." As a result, the medium of film seems to change (back) somewhat into the medium of video.

One Medium, or a Medium within a Medium

Because the medium of video eventually becomes noticeable from the second position, film can be said to be embedded in the medium of video in *Bordeaux Piece.* This conclusion is further sustained by the fact that the second viewing position, from which *Bordeaux Piece* initially looks like film, is spatially embedded in the first one, from which

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[69] In this regard, *Bordeaux Piece* confirms some arguments by Stephen Heath. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Heath argued that, on the one hand, film shots can map a space, which enables a narrative to unfold. On the other hand, the space mapped by film shots can only be reconstructed if a narrative sustains the relationships between the shots. Similarly, the looks and voices of characters can connect film shots and as such enable a narrative to unfold, but the characters themselves need to be related by or embedded in a narrative which clarifies their non-spatial relationships in order for their looks and voices to construct meaningful relationships between shots. *Bordeaux Piece* shows that within this reciprocal process, dialogue can incite such relationships.

the work looks like video. For although the two viewing/listening positions can be alternately adopted by the beholder, the first position is automatically taken up by the spectator as soon as she enters the room. Only after having walked through the exposition space while hearing the ambient sounds, can the spectator choose to sit on the bench. In addition, the work's disembodied seated viewing position, which is typical of film's dominant *dispositif,* becomes even more like the embodied viewing position of video in the respect that, as it is embedded in this mobile viewing position, it is presented as an option to the viewer. Because the spectator is required to make a conscious choice between two possible positions, both sitting down and remaining statically seated become necessarily consciously performed physical acts. Furthermore, film seems to be embedded in video because the narrativity which only becomes fully manifest from the second position, is already latently present when the work is perceived from the first position. As the work looks like video from the latter position, the more filmic aspect of narrativity seems to be latently present in the medium of video as well.

The question remains as to whether the medium of the work should be understood as video, or if film is still present in *Bordeaux Piece* as a medium within a medium. On the one hand, video seems to have absorbed the medium of film completely. However, the actual support of the video work is digital video. This can be perceived, as mentioned previously, by looking at the screen from close range. For when doing so, digital video pixelation can be detected. Thus, it is possible to say that the work demonstrates how the medium of (digital) video is able to imitate film. It can copy film's viewing position, equal its narrative capabilities, and meet the high quality of its images. By showing these capabilities, *Bordeaux Piece* exposes the relativity of film's specificity. On the other hand, the medium of *Bordeaux Piece* doesn't necessarily have to be determined on the basis of its technical support. Moreover, the medium of the work doesn't necessarily have to be singular. The medium of *Bordeaux Piece* can also be regarded as that which the spectator understands it to be, if only for a moment. A medium is also what we – its beholders – think it is. If the seated, immobile viewing position, as well as the narrative structure visible from this position, are still understood as characteristic of film, they cause the viewer to *see* film, not video. Hence, the *dispositif* decides which medium is seen, regardless of the technological base which has produced that *dispositif*. Following this thread of argument, film just *is* film in *Bordeaux Piece* for as long as the spectator recognizes the work as film from *and because of* the second viewing position. When accepting this conclusion, film exists within *Bordeaux Piece* as a medium within a medium, while both medium-typical *dispositifs* exist within the single artwork.

Both conclusions drawn above are valid, for *Bordeaux Piece* itself doesn't provide a clear-cut answer to what its medium is. It rather provokes the question as to whether and how it is decided in relation to the two *dispositifs* the installation presents. The artwork in question seems to point out that particular viewing set-ups not only influence the meaning and effect of the images on view, but also their medium. Not only is the viewer offered the possibility to choose and alternate between different *dispositifs*, it is

the viewer who potentially relates the viewing configurations to different media, who decides which features count as characteristic and specific of film and video – since what medium is seen depends on what is regarded as typical of which medium.

This chapter started out with the assumption that media affect the spectator through their medium-specific *dispositifs*. Either by their conventional characteristics or through technical possibilities, the *dispositifs* of film and video produce modes of looking or viewing positions. Following this line of argument, the viewer was theorized to be an effect of the medium. *Bordeaux Piece* shows that the assumption with which this chapter started out can be reversed. The media of film and video each produce a viewing subject, yet the two media are also an effect of the way in which the viewer beholds projected images. This reciprocal relationship of determination between medium and user will be central to the next chapter on social structures.