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Digitalization of the Cinematic Experience

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Introduction

"[O]ur social and cultural experience of watching movies has been irreversibly transformed by television, video, the computer and computer networking. Has the medium of motion pictures also changed? And if so, what are the consequences for the study of film?"[1] These are questions posed by David N. Rodowick in the fifth chapter of his book *The Virtual Life of Film.* It is exactly this thought, this question, I will analyse in the course of this research. The question whether film has changed or has been obliterated alltogether and what this means for the study of film is a crucial matter which has been thoroughly overlooked in contemporary cinema and new media debates. In particular the debate on experiencing cinema a very onesided approach can be distinguished: a filmtheoretical perspective that excludes new media theories. I will outline the debate on cinematic experience in the digital era in this introduction, on which basis I will argue for the need for a new theoretical perspective in said debate in the course of this thesis. The reason these specific articles are mentioned is because the authors (Casetti and Odin most specifically) provide the first steps in the right direction concerning the understanding of the filmic experience. A question asked by both authors is whether or not film language should be disconnected and seen separately from film theory. This in turn will allow me to argue in favor of this idea, allowing film language to be understood through a new media perspective instead. Then, I will argue in this thesis, this will allow for a new and perhaps better understanding of the current situation of film experience in the contemporary digitized media landscape.

Another reason Casetti, Rodowick, Odin and Bellour form an exit point for my research is because the transition of cinema from analogous to digital sparked questions concerning "the death of cinema." One of the main questions here is whether the occurence of this digitization of cinema means the death of cinema, since we understand cinema in a certain way which exists no longer (or is slowly vanishing), or does it mean cinema simply changes?[2] In either case the answer to this question has implications for the way in which cinema is viewed,

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1 David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28.

2 Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions: Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999). Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age,* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001).

understood and experienced. Or, in the words of Rodowick: "[t]he rapid emergence of new media as an industry and perhaps an art raises a more perilous question for cinema studies. The twentieth century was unquestionably the century of cinema, but is cinema's time now over? And if so, what is to become of its barely matured field, cinema studies?"[3] I will definitely not be posing a definite answer to this question, but what I will and can do, is opt for an approach that may prove to be more insightful and helpful toward the formulation of a definite answer to said question. For I believe that trying to understand contemporary cinema in the digital era through film theory alone will turn out to be inadequate. Therefore, toward the conclusion of this paper, I will show how the experience of cinema changes due to the digitization of the medium and what this means for the manner in which we have come to understand cinema. Film theory alone will not be elaborate enough to understand this transition, hence I will argue that understanding cinema through film theory and new media theory may prove more insightful and helpful in understanding contemporary cinema, albeit alive or dead. Now, I will first go on to show what the current state of affairs is by introducing some recent works in the debate on digitization and the cinematic experience.

Theoretical backdrop and starting points of this research

As already pointed out by Jonathan Rosenbaum, cinema exists in many different ways, even in the traditional sense: a film watched in a cinema differs from one being watched on television, or one watched on DVD.[4] Following Cavell's definition, film is defined by the author's work (the onscreen images, the filmed film, the mise-en-scene, montage, sound, lighting, etcetera) rather than it is *a priori* defined by its materiality.[5] However, the different manifestations mentioned by Rosenbaum imply a difference in the manner in which a film is experienced. The *disipositif* changes, therefore the experience changes, one might state. This can be more elaborately understood in terms of the place in which a film is viewed. Considering Marc Augé's term of *places* and *non-places*, film viewing relocates from these places to the non-places. Films are viewed on airports, in buses and airplanes, in art galleries, on mobile phones, and so on.[6] In this sense, Augé defines a 'place' as a space that "can be

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3 David N. Rodowick, 2.

4 Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition*, (Chicago: The University   of Chicago Press, 2010), 3-9.

5 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 103.

defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity."[7] Whereas a place that can not be defined as such, is a non-place.[8] A cinema for example is therefore to be considered as a place: it is relational to film viewing and its identity is defined by darkness and the silence of the crowd. A parking lot or a bus is not, for it does not relate, has no apparent specific history and is not concerned with identity. Francesco Casetti defines two different modes of film experience in this sense: *attentiveness* and *performance*. The first one is more in line with a passive mode of viewing, sitting in a cinema together with other viewers, experiencing the cinema and experiencing the film's diegesis.[9] "What is important is that one exposes oneself to film, that one concentrates upon it and follows its unfolding."[10] The viewers take the role of "privileged observers."[11] 'Performance,' then, suggests a more active role of the spectator. "The spectator has ceased simply to consume a show and begins to intervene in the act of consumption: she/he is asked not only to see, but also to do."[12] Casetti states perfomative viewing increases as the act of viewing finds new places and spaces to occur. Film viewing is no longer just about taking in the film's events, but about speaking about the film and recounting certain scenes as well.[13]

In this regard Roger Odin wrote the article "Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone." In this article Odin observes what happens to the experience of a film when watched on a mobile phone.[14] The performance and interactivity or agency that the spectator receives when

6   Francesco Casetti, "Filmic Experience," *Screen* 50 (2009): 64.

7   Marc Augé, *Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* translated by John Howe, (New York: Verso, 1995), 77-78.

8   Ibidem.

9   Francesco Casetti, 60.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibidem, 61.

12 Ibidem 63.

13 Ibidem.

14 Roger Odin, "Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone," in: *Audiences*, edited by Ian Christie, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 156.

experiencing film on a mobile phone (for instance), is underlined by Odin. Odin states, like Casetti, that the filmic experience changed from 'impersonal' to a more personal method of experiencing film, in part because the device used to experience a film is a highly personal device (the mobile phone),[15] unlike a film projector used in the cinema. The most notable conclusion Odin puts forward in his article is the posing of the question whether "the theory of cinema should be distinguished from film language."[16] An interesting question, especially when taking into account Cavell's definition of cinema, where he seems to suggest film language is what defines cinema to a certain extent. The major difference in regard to experiencing cinema, however, as noted by Odin, is in line with what was unveiled by Casetti: "The key difference today is that "film language," when it is not used to make "cinema," is no longer confined to certain areas of specialized communication, but is mobilized by the space of everyday communication."[17]

Rodowick, in turn, sees no correlation between the disappearance of cinema and the digitization of cinema. Rodowick emphasizes that the disappearance of celluloid does not equate to the disappearance of cinema alltogether.[18] He answers the question posed by filmtheorists regarding whether or not their schooling is now obsolete, by stating that the visual language and the photographic image of classical cinema still persist in the digital image. He even reminds us that cinema has always been defined by its crisis with other media: "in periods of intense economic and cultural competition from other media, cinema incorporates an image of its rival the better to remake the narrative and social image of its aesthetic identity and to differentiate itself economically."[19] The fact that cinema is not dead is proven by Rodowick by stressing the ubiquity of the film language and the classical cinematic modes of representation: "[w]hile film disappears, cinema persists—at least in the narrative forms imagined by Hollywood since 1915."[20] This does not mean nothing has changed

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15 Roger Odin, 168.

16 Ibidem, 169.

17 Roger Odin, 169.

18 David N. Rodowick, 158.

19 Ibidem, 181.

20 Ibidem, vii.

according to Rodowick. The onscreen image is easily manipulated and the input in the camera may differ completely from the output on the screen.[21] Even though Rodowick emphasizes the relationship between cinema and new media and he states that cinema is definitely not dead, but 'evolving' (he adopts Cavell's definition) in the sense that "it incorporates an image of its rival," as mentioned above, he fails to provide a new media perspective. On the other side of the spectrum we find Raymond Bellour in that sense, who seeks the essence of cinema in the memory on the screen. The fact that what the spectator sees is a memory or a memory of a memory of what was recorded by the camera suggests that when, like Rodowick states, digitization allows total manipulation of that image, it will no longer be cinema, according to Bellour.[22] Bellour literally states that this 'loss' of memory would mean the death of cinema, although that may happen in the future, it is not yet the case:

> For such a loss would also assume a real death of cinema, and that still seems unlikely, seeing that today's world still produces true cinema films, and that the limited but immense community of their spectators reactivates this ritual, in ways both real and virtual, each time that the experience of a film is lived out according to its own specific reality, within that unchanging dispositif.[23]

However, in the circumstances described by Casetti and even moreso by Odin, the dispositif has changed. At least, in a certain regard. Perhaps even the medium has changed and it is thereforeno longer cinema, but something else. On the other hand, if one were to interpret cinema like Rodowick and Cavell, cinema has certainly not died, merely evolved.

The issue within this debate, however, is – as I already put forward earlier – that it is written entirely from the perspective of cinema. Like Odin, like Casetti, like Rodowick, who all acknowledge the link between cinema and new media, but fail to provide a new media perspective. Therefore, in this thesis, I will advocate the incorporation of new media theory when researching the question what it means to experience cinema in the contemporary digital landscape.

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21 David N. Rodowick, 119-120.

22 Raymond Bellour, "The Cinema Spectator: A Special Memory," in: *Audiences*, edited by: Ian Christie, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 216.

23 Ibidem.

Method of research

In short, the setup for this research will be as follows. Having introduced the backdrop to which all should be interpreted, I will introduce an analysis of concrete examples of changes that occurred by grace of the introduction of digital technologies in the field of cinema. A major reason to focus on the transition itself rather than situations 'before' and 'after,' is the concept of "remediation." In order to interpret these transitions and place them in the context of my research I will be referring to Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's idea of remediation. Remediation emphasizes how all forms of media constantly borrow from and reshape other types of media,[24] so it implies a certain process: the transition, the change, rather than a situation or definition.

In the chapter following this, I will elaborate more on what it essentially means to experience cinema. I do this because I deem it necessary to isolate the subject of my research as much as possible. Since the cinematic experience is a major theme throughout this research it needs a theoretical groundwork in order to be researched and interpreted. I will present certain notions in regard to the cinematic experience, the main question I will attempt to answer in the second chapter is: "what does it mean to experience cinema?" The quest for the answer of this question will involve the role of the spectator and the relation of the spectator to the cinematic image, which will be explained in line with the debate around embodiment and the cinematic experience. Taking the cinematic image as an exit point for experiencing cinema is crucial in this matter, for it is in line with Cavell's idea on how cinema can best be understood.[25] This was explained more thoroughly on page four.

Authors Vivian Sobchak and Christiane Voss are foremost contributors to this debate. By means of Sobchak's concept of the "cinesthetic body" I will show exactly how the spectator can experience cinema, most specifically how meaning is generated in the relationship between screen and spectator. Then I will introduce the concept of "illusion," as described by Christiane Voss (at least in relation to cinema), how this generated meaning leads to an "illusory aesthetic experience," in short, how cinema is experienced and what this experience means (or may mean) to the spectator. This provides an accessible theoretical framework in the context of my research.

24Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).

25 Stanley Cavell, 108.

Having established what transitions and/or remediations have occurred in digitalizing the cinematic landscape and what it means to experience a film, I will bring my findings together in the third chapter of this essay. Here I will describe how the experience of cinema has changed by grace of digital technologies. In this chapter I will also incorporate certain ideas put forward by new media scholars, such as – for example – Henry Jenkins and Nicholas Rombes. I will do this not only to show how the cinematic experience has changed, but mainly to show how our understanding of what it means to experience a film has changed under the influence of new media technologies and the ideas and concept that these have invoked. In short: the essence of the third chapter is to redefine the cinematic experience in regard to the digitalization of cinema. The question that I want to ultimately answer is: 'how has the digitalization of cinema changed the cinematic experience?' The most important reason this chapter will be included is because in order to be able to argue in favor of an incorporation of new media theory into the debate of filmic experience, it is absolutely vital to show how new media have seeped into the phenomenon of cinema and how new media technologies play a role as a mediator of said experience. Only when this is pointed out properly my argument will gain validity.

Firstly I will show the transitions undergone by the medium of film when transitioning from an analogous to a digital format, then I will show what the cinematic experience contains in a traditional sense, and finally I will show how digital technologies have altered these ideas of experiencing cinema. In the end, the conclusion, I will elaborate more on my standpoint as to how and why new media theory should be considered as an important factor in the contemporary debate on film experience.

1. Changing Film Viewing

As I had already mentioned in the introduction, and which is obvious to all film theorists, there are a lot of components that together construe the eventual phenomenon we call 'a film' or 'cinema.' Most, if not all of these elements can be researched on their own individual qualities and make up the various different branches of film theory. Including all of these branches of film theory in this chapter would require me to write a small film theory encyclopedia, and is therefore not a viable way of conducting this research. Because I am not trying to investigate the changes in the cinema itself, caused by digital technologies, but changes in the experience of film, I can already eliminate the investigation of production-related phenomena. In the next chapter it will become clear that I understand the film experience mainly in terms of embodiment, in which the special qualities of the spectator and the film's aesthetics form the main elements that are needed for experiencing cinema. Therefore I will emphasize especially those elements of cinema in this chapter, because it relates by far the most to the notion of the cinematic experience as will be put forward in the second chapter. Film will, thus, in this chapter be understood in terms of screen, sound and, to a lesser extent, the events onscreen (narrative, special effects, acting, etcetera). The spectator will only play a minor role in this chapter, because this chapter is specifically about technological changes in cinema and the last chapter about the implications for the spectator of the film (experience-wise).

Change implies that a situation or phenomenon exists in a specific state and exists in a different state after the change has occurred. In order to describe change, the obvious method would be to define the phenomenon before the change and do the same after the change. This way, the changes become apparent and the different states of the phenomenon have been properly interpreted. In the case of cinema, perhaps, and only perhaps, it is possible to define cinema before a digital revolution swept through the ranks of classical film technologies and created something out of it that would change the cinematic landscape forever, both for the producers and the consumers. One might be inclined to follow André Bazin, who differentiated film from other media such as painting or poetry, because it sought to represent reality as real as possible to the spectator, within the current limits of technology and the

"cinematographic narrative."[26] Or perhaps one thinks more in line with Christian Metz, who understands cinema in terms of semiotics.[27] Because I am not looking for a definition of cinema in this chapter I will be emphasizing the change itself, the digitalization of film. More so because defining cinema after the digital transition occurred is even harder, the borders of cinema have blurred and everything can be defined as cinema: *YouTube* video's, home video's, trailers and whatnot, but on the other hand all these things can arguably be classified as something else as well. To avoid using debatable definitions I will be attempting to avoid definitions altogether.

One important change that has been brought about as early as the 1970's is the possibility to fast forward or reverse the film image, a change that occurred with the introduction of VHS technologies. But as Nicholas Rombes explains in his book *Cinema and the Digital Age*, even though timeshifting appeared to threaten the linearity of the film's narrative, "the basic unit of the film remained stable. That is, despite its medium (the theater screen, the television set) a film's narrative coherence is immune – or at least shielded – from the demystification that extra knowledge can bring.[28] The demystification that extra knowledge brings, which Nicholas Rombes mentions here, is mainly a result of the changes caused by digital technologies to the film viewing experience. Not only the ability to fast forward or reverse the film's narrative and image, but also – for instance – the bonus options on a DVD that exposes most of the film's production process toward the viewer.[29] This in turn threatens the film's aura (in terms of Walter Benjamin), the mystique that a film can generate by pretending to be real, in line with André Bazin's ideas on cinema.[30] But there are more sources that contribute to the increase of knowledge a spectator can gather about a specific film before or after viewing it. Websites like *IMDB.com*, also known as the *International Movie Database*, provide quotes, trivia, goofs, summaries and discussion boards about most films ever produced. A film like David Fincher's FIGHT CLUB (1999), in which a lot of secrets have been hidden for the viewer to discover (for example single frames of Brad Pitt taking on weird poses or a spliced in frame of male genitalia) no longer have to be discovered by watching the

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[26]André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism," in: *What is Cinema?, Volume 2,* translated by Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 26.

[27]Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[28]Nicholas Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 78.

[29]Ibidem.

[30]Ibidem.

film. The internet provides the insight and the viewer will be able to generate certain knowledge about the film without having to have gained this insight while viewing the actual film. Rombes states, in line with Walter Benjamin, that this destroys the works' aura. The reproduction of a work of art (in this example it's the films' narrative and/or cinematography which is textually reproduced on the internet) jars it out of its context, but Rombes adds it also "allows for healthy skepticism."[31] This may refer to the interactivity which is typical of online activities, considering most of these goofs, trivia and other analyses and summaries have been written by the film's viewers themselves, who may or may not also debate about certain aspects of a film on the discussion forums. This indeed allows for 'healthy skepticism' as part of the film viewing experience as such. This also allows for a new form of social cohesion to exist: rather than sitting in the dark with strangers to watch the same movie – the classical scenario in the movie theaters of yore – but not talk about the film, it is now possible to watch a movie alone (whether it is dark or not is not relevant in this respect, obviously) and talk about it with strangers online, or just receive more information about the film: underlying meanings, goofs or other extra's and secrets that might be hidden in the film's narrative.

Probably the most important change in relation to experiencing cinema that digital technologies have brought about is the manner in which films are watched and the hardware used to watch films. No longer is the spectator bound to the confinements of areas with a television set or the movie theaters, films can now be watched on phones, behind computers, on a DVD-player, on television, in the movie theaters or by using portable hardware such as a portable DVD-player or *Sony*'s PLAYSTATION PORTABLE™. Interestingly enough the fact that film viewing has gone portable and the implications this has for spectatorship have barely been researched in contemporary debates in regard to spectatorship. Because it is a major transition in regard to experiencing film, which occurred only because digital technologies made it possible, makes it such a major point in regard to my research. Before films could be viewed on portable devices, only games were visually oriented technological media products that were accessible on portable devices. Of course radio's and books have a long history of being portable, especially the latter, but these had no screen. In the introduction I shortly introduced the term remediation from Bolter and Grusin, which may help explain how the concept of 'portability' is being remediated throughout the twentieth century.

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31 Nicholas Rombes, 88.

In short 'remediation' refers to the phenomenon of media constantly borrowing or taking over elements from other media forms in order to reshape or reinvent themselves. For example, Bolter and Grusin state that "[p]hotography was seen as the reform of illusionistic painting; the cinema as the reform of the theater (in the sense that early films were once called "photoplays")."[32] The remediation of all media, especially the new media, as emphasized by Bolter and Grusin, pursues two things: a desire for immediacy and a fascination for hypermediacy.[33] Immediacy in visual media can be achieved to a greater extent than before by means of digital technologies which allow for special effects in cinema and visual modes of representation as used in modernist painting. Hypermedia on the other hand, emphasize performance and process rather than a finished product,[34] for example, a videogame is usually about the act of playing the game, rather than the outcome of the plot (I am aware that this is a debatable statement, but it is just an example). Bob Cotten and Richard Oliver explain hypermedia aptly as a "combination of random access with multiple media," which is "an entirely new kind of media experience born from the marriage of TV and computer technologies. Its raw ingredients are images, sound, text, animation and video, which can be brought together in any combination. It is a medium that offers 'random access'; it has no physical beginning, middle, or end."[35] Imagine the contemporary use of the cellphone: people sitting on the bus, just killing time on their cellphone, which is being used for random access to the internet or watching short films or chatting with friends, in this sense various media come together in this device and can be randomly activated at any location, an exemplary 'hypermedium.' This example also leads back to the portability of film I was referring to earlier. Cellphones and other machines that allow a person to view a film have become portable. Portable devices that conveyed narratives in the past were books and radios, and in the nineties of the twentieth century *Nintendo* introduced the GAME BOY™, a portable device for playing tailored computer games. Eventually portable DVD-players were introduced on the market and hybrid machines like contemporary cellphones and *Sony*'s PLAYSTATION PORTABLE and PLAYSTATION VITA can play games, can browse the internet and play films and music. Remediating the portability of older media, or in the case of film, even newer media (portable gaming devices), which ultimately led to a form of hypermediacy: portable devices

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32Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Remediation," *Configurations* 4:3 (1996): 350-351.

33Ibidem, 313-314.

34William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 161.

35Bob Cotten and Richard Oliver, *Understanding Hypermedia*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1992), 8.

that allow access to multiple media, bringing together various ingredients varying from sound to text.

All phenomena described in this chapter suggest that film has integrated with, or been absorbed by 'new media,' or perhaps has become a new medium all together. Maybe film is now, like other digital media forms, a hybrid medium or a hypermedium. This however is not the question I am attempting to answer, *the* question according to Bazin, "what is cinema?" The idea of film as a hybrid, hyper, new, mixed (as Bazin puts it), or completely changed medium is always food for thought, but the main point of this chapter in regard to this research is to show that film has collided with new media and in which ways. What this ultimately means for the experience of film will be elaborated in the third chapter, for now I will be introducing the debate on experiencing cinema and embodiment, and the relation between the screen and the spectator which I will position myself in in the second chapter.

2. The Cinematic Experience

In this chapter I will shed light upon the notion of the cinematic experience. In this chapter I will present a literature study in the field of film studies in specific regard to the ongoing debate of the cinematic experience. The axis around which this debate revolves are questions (and answers) that reveal what it means to experience cinema. In the end I will be taking the debate around 'the cinematic experience' into account in order to develop a global idea of what it means to experience cinema. When taking into account the linguistics here, it is obvious there are two important words that – together – generate the meaning annex definition I am looking for: 'experience' and 'cinema.' The (classical) notion of what defines cinema will be contested later on in this paper, so for now my primary focus will be defining the first part, 'experience,' of course, in relation to cinema. By investigating what it means 'to experience' in relation to cinema, a slight idea of what defines cinema may form throughout this chapter. These notions will be exit points for the upcoming chapter(s), and the focus in this chapter will be on the notion of 'experience.'

Cinema as such has the potential to invoke a lot in its spectator, like emotions: fear, affect, nostalgia, sentimentality, sadness, anger, happiness. Beside that it "is not only a way of seeing, but also a way of hearing, feeling, thinking, and responding. It presents not just a mental universe (of perception and cognition) but a holistic experience connected to the emotions, affects, and the body."[36] In this citation of Carl Plantinga several elements of what it means 'to experience' are being exposed: the senses, emotions and embodiment are being explicitly mentioned here in relation to experiencing cinema.

These elements are also brought together by Vivian Sobchak in her 1992 book *The Adress of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. In this book one of her main arguments in regard to the cinematic experience is that we should not only think of the spectator as an embodied being, but the film itself has a body aswell. To put this more elaborately: the aesthetics of film exist in a corporeal dimension that transcends and interacts with the human, individual body of the spectator.[37] By introducing the term "cinesthetic

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36Carl R. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 49.

37Vivian Sobchak, *The Adress of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

body," which is a neologism of 'synaesthetic experience' and 'cinema,' she describes the synaesthetic and prereflexive reactions to cinema: that which is sensed and the emotions of the spectator, for example. These are the primary meaning-founding ways when dealing with the medium of film. Sobchak states that it is precisely because of these corporeal reactions to film, rather than analytical reflections on a film, that generate a heightened sense of the cinematic presentation as being experienced more 'real:'

> All the bodies in the film experience—those onscreen and offscreen
> (and possibly that of the screen itself)—are potentially subversive
> bodies. They have the capacities to function both figuratively and
> literally. . . . Yet these bodies are also materially circumscribed and
> can be specifically located, each arguably becoming the "grounding
> body" of sense and meaning since each exists in a dynamic figure-
> ground relation of reversibility with others . . . [s]o that meaning, and
> where it is made, does not have a concrete origin in either spectators'
> bodies or representation but emerges in their conjunction.[38]

The use of this term seeks to abandon the traditional, rigid distinction between the spectator and the cinematic image onscreen, or in the words of Sobchak herself, the distinction between screen event and spectator position.[39] In that sense the "cinesthetic body" incorporates both aspects and allows one to understand the dynamic relation between subject and object: the spectator and the screen.

So Sobchak elaborates how the cinematic experience can be seen as a dynamic between the subject (the spectator) and the object (the screen/cinematic image). The generation of meaning is not constituted by means of semantic-narratological hermeneutics of film, but rather by a corporeal-somatic existence and understanding of cinema. This idea of the relationship between spectator and screen constitutes the cinematic experience, according to Sobchak. How this meaning can precisely be constructed in order to let the cinematic experience manifest is elaborately explained by Christiane Voss. But in order to understand how this works, Voss' notion of illusion has to be elucidated first.

38Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 67.

39Ibidem.

Voss departs from this specific point in Sobchak's writings in the formation of her argument about the cinematic experience being an illusion-forming experience, as can be said of other aesthetic experiences.[40] She states that the dynamic relation between screen and spectator, as described by Sobchak's cinesthetic body, leads to an act of illusion formation by the spectator, whereupon the film is being experiences as 'more real.' She elaborates as brief as one can muster how this act of illusion formation manifests itself in relation to Sobchak's notion of the cinesthetic body:

> In my opinion, the two-dimensionality of screen events is the most
> important— though not the only—abstraction in film that the
> spectator has to counter by illusion formation in order for film to seem
> "alive" and "real." My thesis is that it is only the spectator's body, in
> its mental and sensorial-affective resonance with the events onscreen,
> which (as I described earlier) "loans" a three-dimensional body to the
> screen and thus flips the second dimension of the film event over into
> the third dimension of the sensing body. The spectator thus becomes a
> temporary "surrogate body" for the screen, and this body is, for its
> part, a constituent feature of the filmic architecture.[41]

Voss' notion of illusion, or the film as an illusory body, is in line with notions similar to immersion and absorption, but takes a vastly different approach in regard to how it manifests and what it means to be immersed or absorbed. She also shows how it can help us understand how meaning is generated in this embodied cinematic experience in line with the corporeal-somatic understanding of cinema. First, Voss explains what she understands to be "tacit knowledge."[42] This notion has been presented by theorist of science Michael Polanyi. It can best be explained as a sort of 'automated knowledge,' things we – all humans – know, without having to know how or why we know this. We can always recognize what a face is, in the same way a person who learned to ride a bike actually goes through the act of riding the bike: a person does not constantly think about moving the legs in order to move the bike forward, the legs just move 'automatically.' In that same sense a master musician can nearly

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40Christiane Voss, "Film Experience and the Formation of Illusion: The Spectator as 'Surrogate Body' for the Cinema," translated by Inga Pollmann, *Cinema Journal* 50 (2011): 146-150.

41Christiane Voss, 145.

42Ibidem, 146-149.

automatically play his instrument, without having to think about his fingers moving across the keys of a piano, he just does it. This knowledge cannot be expressed explicitly, but a person can be very aware of having this knowledge. Voss then goes on to explain how Polanyi denotes two different "terms" that define tacit knowledge. The first term is called the "proximal term" and the second term is called the "distal term." The alert reader might notice the English words 'proximity' and 'distance' here: "[a]mong the proximal terms are, for example, our neuronal, organic, and senso-motorical movements, of which we become aware in light of distal terms such as the position, shape, form, and movement of an object to which we attend in a given situation."[43] The example of the bicycle can help elaborate in more detail. When riding a bike, which is a form of tacit knowledge, Polanyi would distinguish the two terms. The proximal term is the brain sending messages to the arms and legs to do the bike-riding and the actual movements that follow as a result of this. The distal term is the idea of riding the bike. We only become aware of the actual act of riding it (in a proximal sense) in light of the distal term: riding a bike.

In the end Voss illustrates how Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge can help understand the formation of meaning and illusion in the embodied cinematic experience as has been described by both Sobchak and herself. She states that the spectators' body plays the role of the proximal term, close to the stem, "which, as such, is given tacitly through its somatic excitations and vibrations."[44] We become aware of the cinematic movements on the screen in light of the predictable narrative context and the edited film event, which – together – functions as the distal term, further away from the stem. "This meaningful explication of ourselves in terms of the film event is simply a different formulation of the fact, noted above, that, as surrogate body, the spectator, by means of his or her involvement in the film event, experiences a narrative temporalization from the film in turn."[45]

So in regard to cinema, meaning is generated by means of tacit knowledge, the cinematic experience manifests itself in terms of embodiment and corporeality and finally the spectator creates an illusory three-dimensional surrogate body for the film image to be experienced by the senses. This surrogate body is, according to Voss, in fact an illusion. It

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43Christiane Voss, 148.

44Ibidem.

45Ibidem.

looks real, but it is not, in fact, real. The manner in which the spectator interprets and understands a film is a form of tacit knowledge: temporal jumps by means of editing in a film, for example, are interpreted correctly, even though these events would not appear to the spectator in real life in the same fashion.

3. The Experience Changes

The notion of illusion generated during the cinematic experience put forward in the previous chapter suggests a certain form of absorption or immersion. The classical outlook of Voss her ideas in regard to spectatorship become explicitly apparent in her description of the setting in which a film is viewed:

> [B]ecause of the darkened room and the relatively limited mobility allowed by the movie seat, the vital valence *[lebendige Wertigkeit]* of the film spectator's immediate surroundings is reduced for his or her consciousness. Thus, attention can be absorbed by sound and image sequences, so that in their visible and audible movement these become overvalued by the consciousness of the spectator.[46]

I had dubbed this scenario of film viewing one that a spectator might find 'in the movie theaters of yore,' but perhaps in contemporary movie theaters as well. But as I had explained in the first chapter, this manner of film viewing is not the dominant way of watching a film per se. Films have become portable and available through a variety of channels: they can be watched on portable devices, on a television set with a *Blu-Ray™* or DVD-player, they can be streamed from the internet and so on. In this chapter I will be analyzing these digital audiovisual manifestations and these 'modern' modes of spectatorship to the background of the theoretical framework introduced in chapter two. In the first chapter I mentioned three major transitions in regard to film viewing that have occurred since digital technologies have been introduced in the cinematic landscape: portability of film, social cohesion that manifests mainly online (forums *YouTube*) and the delinearization of narrative by means of the ability to fast forward or reverse a film. In this chapter I will argue why and how these notions are connected in regard to a modern approach of cinematic experience and how this approach to experiencing cinema is fundamentally different from the theory put forward in the second chapter.

46Christiane Voss, 143.

While it is still perfectly possible to view a film in a darkened movie theater, more ways to experience a film have ushered into western society. Neglecting to pay attention to these modes of viewing would be negligence when analyzing contemporary cinematic experience in a general sense. Beside that the world of amateur filmmakers has been given a stage on the internet, aspiring filmmakers can upload their homegrown short films on a variety of websites such as *Vimeo* and *YouTube*. Perhaps this is what defines contemporary media most: media are everywhere, mostly because they are portable.[47] Feature length film viewing on portable devices is not the norm, but short films and *YouTube*-video's dominate cellphone and *iPad* screens, yet feature films can also be viewed on numerous portable devices. So in line with all new media, cinema too has become ubiquitous in a sense.[48] Films are no longer restricted to television screens and theaters, and this has certain consequences for viewing films and the cinematic experience in particular.

The biggest difference is most likely the demystification of the film image. In contrast to what Voss and Sobchak state, the fact that the film is perceived as real, is completely annulled by the small portable screens of cellphones and other small, portable bearers of the filmic image: "[t]he shrinking of movies down to little screens erases any lingering hints of mystification: there are no mysteries to movies today. (…) Small, portable screens cannot help but reveal the contours of their making: unlike the theater screen there is no dark surrounding the hand-held video screen."[49] This provides a cinematic experience completely opposed to the illusion-forming mode of viewing described by Voss. A legitimate question could therefore be why films are being watched in this way. The answer can be traced back to hypermedia as introduced in chapter one. I paraphrased William J. Mitchell, stating "hypermedia emphasize performance and process rather than a finished product." [50] As Bob Cotten and Richard Oliver stated, hypermedia are a "combination of random access with multiple media," a medium that offers 'random access,' "there is no physical beginning, middle or end."[51] This suggests that if we interpret the portable film viewing devices as hypermedia in this sense, providing random

47Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 16.

48 Roger Odin, 156-158.

49Nicholas Rombes, 137.

50William J. Mitchell, 161.

51Bob Cotten and Richard Oliver, 8.

access to audiovisual (or other digital) material, the act of watching a film is more important than being immersed in the film when watching on a portable device. In this sense the spectator does not provide the surrogate body to the film image so the spectator gets eluded that the film image looks real, as stated by Rombes, but watches a (short)film just for the sake of watching it. The act of watching the film becomes more important than being immersed in this film's diegesis or associate oneself with the characters in the film. This opposes most traditional ideas of spectatorship where illusion, absorption or immersion are considered important elements of the cinematic experience, as is exemplified by Voss her theory on experiencing cinema. This method of watching is backed by Casetti when he distinguishes performance and attentiveness of the viewer. Performative viewing refers to a more active mode of viewing, like on a mobile device, where the viewer has more agency in regard to the screen and is not necessarily trying to be immersed, while attentive viewing refers to a viewer who's attention is completely focused on being immersed in a film's diegesis.[52]

Another manner in which this hypermediacy manifests in regard to cinema can be traced to *YouTube*. A great many things can be said in regard to *YouTube*, but I will limit myself to the relation between feature films and *YouTube* video's. I want to specifically flesh out the fact that people upload and view their favorite film scenes on *YouTube*. These scenes are fleshed out of their narrative and are presented as individual short films with a clear beginning, middle and end. A phenomenon Roger Odin refers to in his article "Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone." He states film experience becomes more personalized. On the one side because the mobile phone used to experience a film is a highly personal device. On the other side because the agency of the user in relation to the film itself allows the user to tailor his or her experience completely to the situation, location and needs the he or she requires at that specific time and place.[53] For instance the (in)famous 'magic pencil trick' scene from THE DARK KNIGHT (2008) in which Batman's nemesis, The Joker, performs a rather macabre 'magic' pencil trick involving the disappearance of the pencil in question and (or in this case, in) the eye sockets of a criminal's bodyguard. Or the beautiful dialogue between a serial killer and a store clerk in the Coen brothers' NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN (2007); in this scene the serial killer flips a coin stating the store clerk "stands to lose everything," but forces him to call heads or tails. In the end the store clerk wins the coin toss and gets to keep the coin,

52 Francesco Casetti, 60-61.

53 Roger Odin, 168-169.

which, according to the serial killer, "is now his lucky coin." The scenes portray short moments from these films but not in relation to the rest of the film's narrative. These scenes vary in popularity, but they do attract a big online audience, the 'magic pencil trick' scene has over ten million views[54] for instance. This is the tailored experience Odin refers to.

Michael Strangelove refers in his book *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (2010) to an IBM survey of Australia, India, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States that 32 per cent of *YouTube* visitors view the videos from portable devices, such as cellular phones.[55] Random film scenes become randomly accessible small independent narratives on their own particularly suitable for portable viewing. I can't measure something like an average length of these scenes, but they vary from two to five minutes in length, whereas a feature length film takes up to 90 to 120 minutes of an individual's time, usually. This way people can enjoy their favorite film's or film scenes from their portable devices in line with the ideas put forward on hypermediacy, watching videos for the sake of watching rather than to be immersed or keep track of a feature film's narrative. This is a definite shift in the way film is experienced which has occurred by grace of the possibilities digitalization has brought about. Needless to say, the existence of these modes of viewing, however, does not necessarily exclude the existence of other ways of watching films, for instance, in a darkened, silent room or cinema. The variety of ways in which cinema can be and is experienced simply expands.

The internet also provides, beside the film clips, feature length films, short films and other audiovisual material, a range of background information and forums about cinema or specific films, directors, actors and other related phenomena. *IMDB.com*, short for *International Movie Database*, provides trivia, goofs, basic information and message boards all related to films, for instance. Viewers can obtain information, reviews and the rating of the audience from practically any film in existence at any point in time via the internet. The extra information can provide insight in a film's complex narrative, give clues about hidden secrets in films (such as the FIGHT CLUB (1999) example in chapter one) or provide a platform for discussion. Especially the latter phenomenon can be linked directly to the experience a film

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54YouTube search query: "magic pencil trick scene joker," *YouTube.com*, http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=magic%20pencil%20trick%20scene%20joker&sm=3, consulted at 21-01-2014.

55Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), 11.

can offer. In her article "Ravenous Cinephiles" Melis Behlil explores the role of online film communities in regard to cinephilia. She, too, acknowledges the various websites that provide information and message boards, she calls it "a space for cinephiles to get together and exchange ideas, and fuel the need to discuss the films they have seen."[56] These websites, or online communities as Behlil refers to the 'online cinephiles,'[57] are, too, randomly accessible through various media, both portable and static: cellular phones, desktop computers, laptops, tablets, etcetera. Melis Behlil makes an interesting comparison between the online communities and ciné clubs. They are fairly identical, she states: "online communities are to home viewing, what ciné clubs were to the movie-going experience."[58] With the major difference that the online communities are available and accessible for any person who can connect to the internet through a range of devices at any time desired. Ciné clubs were relatively private and had to be reached physically, increasing the metaphorical threshold one had to overcome in order to take part in ciné clubs. Another vital point in regard to the online film communities is the fact that individual tastes get grouped together within certain forums, as pointed out by Phil Hall, these groups, or tribes as Hall calls them, transcend nationality, language and culture, they are just about film: "true virtual communities that would not have existed without the benefit of the forums."[59] The online communities thus add to the cinematic experience in the same sense as the ciné clubs did in the past, except that they can transcend certain boundaries and are randomly and easily accessible, unlike the ciné clubs.

As an added bonus the users of these forums can link audiovisual footage from specific films they wish to discuss in their posts, allowing for a dynamic between the actual footage and the popular debate on said footage. This specific social dynamic is unique to the online world, because a viewer can interact and debate with fellow cinephiles without having to leave the confines of his or her own home. In addition, the classical setting for watching a film, at home or at the cinema, has gained a new one: behind the computer, albeit just to be able to join in on a discussion about a specific scene or whatnot. So beside the possibility of watching films on portable devices, watching a film from behind a desktop computer (or portable computer, like a tablet or laptop) is another way in which digital technologies allow for new forms of

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56Melis Behlil, "Ravenous Cinephiles," in: *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, edited by: Marijke de Valck en Malte Hagener, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 113.

57Ibidem.

58Ibidem.

59Phil Hall, *Independent Film Distribution: How to Make a Successful End Run Around the Big Guys*, (Michael Wiese Productions, Studio City, 2006), 102.

cinematic experience. A new social dynamic rises from within the film audience and allows for international popular debate and flows of information in regard to the complete experience a film offers.

On the other hand, as pointed out in the first chapter, this textual or in another sense abstract, digital reproduction of a film's contents destroys the works' aura. [60] Rombes understands the term aura in this sense as the mystique that a film can generate by pretending to be real.[61] This is in line with Sobchak's ideas on whether or not a film is experienced as 'real,' who stated that it is the prereflexive, corporeal reactions to a film that allow this experience to manifest and not the analytical reflections on a film, [62] as is the case on internet forums for example. This leads us to how the film experience has changed in terms as we have come to understand it in the second chapter: in terms of embodiment and illusion. In the last chapter I have presented my findings in regard to concrete shifts in the cinematic experience by grace of digital technologies, in the next chapter, this paper's conclusion, I will point out how these shifts relate themselves to Sobchak's and Voss' theory and the implications these changes have for the de facto cinematic experience, which is, as pointed out before, the ultimate goal of this paper.

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60 Nicholas Rombes, 88.

61 Ibidem, 78.

62 Vivian Sobchak, 2004, 67.

Conclusion

Back to the beginning. I mentioned questions posed by Rodowick. Rodowick asked whether the medium of cinema had changed and what this meant for film study as a whole. Below I will reflect upon all of the above and I will suggest a new approach which is more suitable in the constantly changing landscape of digitized cinematic experiences.

At the start I set out to explore changes in the experience a film provides that occurred since the introduction of digital technologies in the field of cinema. The changes that I have considered in this paper are all directly linked to the idea of what it means to experience a film: the setting, the screen, the audience, the technology, the medium. Judging by the findings in the third chapter certain alterations certainly have manifested in the course of time but they have not replaced the older traditions of watching films: in cinema's or in a darkened room at home behind the television set. This reminds of the theory of remediation introduced in the first chapter, put forward by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Portability, for instance, has been a defining characteristic for certain media, for example audio and print, but the moving image had yet to become portable. The coming of the portable DVD-player was the first example of portable film, but with the internet and portable devices that could connect to the internet film had become part of a form of hypermediacy which is nowadays rather ubiquitous in contemporary western urban life. Being randomly accessible and ubiquitous, film has integrated with other new media forms, therefore one may ask the question whether the in this paper considered examples of portable modes of viewing and the internet forums mentioned in the previous chapter are actually to be defined as 'film.' Perhaps it is indeed a new hypermedium that remediated cinema, print, audio and other media into one all-embracing medium: the smartphone, perhaps. This in turn leads to trends such as watching films just for the sake of watching them, rather than to be immersed. However, nothing in this paper falsifies anything put forward by Sobchak and Voss.

The mode of viewing described by Sobchak and Voss suggests a viewer is to be absorbed by the film. The mode of viewing that is dominant in hypermedia forms suggests nothing along those lines, as mentioned above, it suggests people view films just for the sake of watching it. As to 'why' is a question I cannot answer, but will make a possible question for further research. This in turn might give insight into the habits of people in regard to audiovisual material on digital devices. Another example given was the use of online forums such as the

IMDB message boards or those provided by *RottenTomatoes.com* . A new form of popular debate in regard to cinema can manifest online, transcending boundaries and broadening the experience a film may provide. Insight into small goofs, hidden secrets or entire underlying allegories of films are easily exposed to the viewer, who can also share his or her own experiences on said message boards. This extends the cinematic experience but once again the same question can be asked: is this still the experience of a 'film' or something completely different? When we relate to Voss and Sobchak, they have provided a suitable framework for analyzing the cinematic experience. Just because the digital manifestations of cinema I have described in this paper do not live up to their theory, does not mean their theory is invalidated, neither does it mean my research failed. It does prove, however, that there is a rather big possibility we should not consider these digital phenomena as 'cinema,' but rather as something else, something that remediates film but is not the same thing.

It seems new media have remediated several elements of cinema into a new, more encompassing sort of hypermedium, which is consumed and experienced in completely different ways than cinema (or radio, or books for that matter). Having stated that, Sobchak and Voss still have a good point in their aesthetic approach to cinema, which has an audience that wants to be under the illusion that the film is 'real,' which has been the ultimate goal of film according to many a theorist, such as André Bazin, who stated the 'the myth of total cinema' was the idea of creating a perfect illusion of reality.[63] Perhaps, in line with Sobchak and Voss, this is still true, but have we come to experience the rise of a new sort of film, the digital, ubiquitous, randomly accessible kind, which provides for a completely new and different experience. Odin and Casetti already posed questions in this regard whether the theory of film language should be disconnected from the theory of film experience.[64] One reason for this was the fact that digital media remediated film (language) as such and therefore should be understood differently than the viewing point of film studies alone was able to offer. Basically they state that the dispositif has changed, therefore the experience has changed. But what has emerged is another dispositif, that of the mobile phone and the computer screen. No longer do we watch films in darkened rooms, but we experience films, sometimes just a scene or even only a quote from a film, everywhere. This new dispositif calls for a new understanding of this experience of film. The obvious way to do this is to

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63André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in: *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, translated and edited by Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17-22.

64 Roger Odin, 168-169. Francesco Casetti, 63.

incorporate new media theorists such as Jenkins, Cotten and Oliver in the debate on film experience. This will provide new insights into the contemporary modes of viewing cinema provided by new media technologies such as the mobile phone. Perhaps this 'cross-over debate' will help theorists develop a better understanding of the experience film provides. The idea put forward by Casetti and Odin to see film language separately makes this more interesting, because it allows for film language to be understood in terms of new media and in new media environments. Their idea is a good start in this respect. The next step should be to incorporate these concepts and ideas from new media theorists in the debate on film, for a more complete understanding of how cinema relates to the current digitized media landscape and how it is experienced.

It will be interesting to further the research on this topic in the future, especially because it is new and therefore relatively unknown. What can this kind of film provide for a consumer audience, being everywhere at all times? Why does it still appeal, despite the small screens and the lack of immersion? For what means can this kind of film be deployed? And beside these questions we cannot be blind to the platform it provides for amateur filmmakers. A platform for discussion and publication that transcends boundaries and language. One thing is certain, though, it will provide for an interesting future, film-wise, and just because of that it's worth looking into.

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