FilmForum, XXV International Film Studies Conference
Exposing the Moving Image: The Cinematic Medium across World Fairs, Art Museums, and Cultural Exhibition

Organisers: Diego Cavallotti, Simone Dotto, Andrea Mariani, Leonardo Quaresima, Simone Venturini
Gorizia/Udine/Pordenone (February 28th – March 7th 2018)

The Film Forum, organized by the University of Udine-Gorizia since 1996, made well known effort to find new horizons to rethink the approaches to moving images, within the three-year research project *A History of Cinema without Names*. As Leonardo Quaresima has argued, the original aim is to dealing with the unbalanced relations between the current *mediascape* and those theoretical perspectives that have grown increasingly over the years.[1] Therefore, the last three editions correspond to three different phases of work, from a sort of *pars destruens*, guided by an aim to overcome traditional notions such as 'authorship' and 'genre', to a comparison of various proposals about methods, subjects and interdisciplinary tools, and finally to achieve a collective theoretical model. On this basis, it is natural that the 2018 Film Forum, devoted to the cinematic medium across World Fairs, Art Museums and Cultural Exhibitions, picked a 'specific' subject, albeit many-sided, just to evaluate the practical applications of the resources provided by the previous editions. The conference's large amount of themes and issues has been deployed following broadly these research lines: a) carrying out a media archaeological study — from the beginning of the Universal Exposition experience to contemporary examples — which seeks to interrogate the turning point, discontinuity, prefiguration and resurgence throughout history of moving images apparatuses, screens and displays; b) pinpointing the intermedial exchanges within certain contexts — such as architectural space, cultural dimensions, social institution and 'atmospheres' — that are intersected by audio-visual flow; c) illuminating the role played by 'exposed moving images' in visual culture and how they work. Overall, interweaving the operative analysis of a given case with theoretical-methodological self-reflection seemed to be the prevailing tendency. In this review, we are going to trace a partial overview of the Film Forum program, touching some of the numerous topics tackled.

Mauro Carbone opened his lecture with a proposal for an anthropology of screens, in the wake of Hans Belting's anthropology of images, in order to link the

---

[1] Leonardo Quaresima, 'Names and Forms', in *A History of Cinema Without Names/2,* ed. by Diego Cavallotti, Simone Dotto, Leonardo Quaresima (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2017), pp. 261-273.

past and present of screen life without any restrictions to contemporary age and teleological leanings. This provides an essential perspective, in Carbone's view, that can avoid the risks encountered by screenology,[2] as well as screen genealogy.[3] The first step for this task could be the adoption of the key-concept of *arché-screen* described in his essay *Philosophie-écran:*[4] a heuristic tool through which one can investigate, over the course of history, the various transmutations of human experiences of screens. These surfaces must be considered as 'objects' that show and conceal simultaneously — a setting that seems to recall the Heideggerian formulation of *alètheia* — and this ontological ambiguity (the coexistence of negative and positive screens) entails that if the shadow gains a status of proto-image, consequently the body can be seen as a proto-screen. Papers devoted to 'Skin and Exposition of Moving Images' moved in the same area, providing analysis of specific cases. Barbara Grespi illustrated the conceptual and cultural relationship between the tattoo and moving images, starting from demonstration of the way the skin of a living body turns into a motion surface for a picture, thanks to muscular activity. Assuming the tattoo as a display, she outlined the modern idea of the merging of image and screen, as well as the process of signification with which the body's visibility is underlined through these kinds of 'skin writings'. Sara Damiani adopted Jean-Luc Nancy's effective notion of *expeausition*[5] to explore visual and scientific imaginary about skins, from ancient ritual of flaying to contemporary transplant surgery, from anthropological to cinematographic examples. Approaching Alejandro Iñárritu's virtual reality installation *Carne Y Arena* (2017), Simona Pezzano focused the body perception inside an immersive experience that turns on a dialectic between haptic and optical stimulation and puts the 'visitor' (spect-actor?) in a sort of plenitude witness condition in respect of the political theme about immigrants and refugees.

The role played by cinematic forms in botany and at the natural history museum was at the centre of Teresa Castro's talk, which shed light on a paradigm that seems to emerge from a series of scientific films — categorized as a Cinematic Herbaria — that aimed to reveal the imperceptible life of plants, especially through time-lapses and close-ups. Film such as F. Percy Smith's *The Birth of Flower* (1923) and Jean Comandon's *La Croissance des végétaux* (1929) have given different view of the 'taxidermic model' of early ethnographical cinema, as they used cinema to restore the movement of non-human lives, and, consequently, to show the medium's capacity to re-light so-called 'primitive' thought. Indeed, Cinematic Herbaria seems to undermine the dualism subject/object, a feature on which is based the taxidermic paradigm.

[2] Erkki Huhtamo, 'Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archaeology of the Screen', in *ICONICS: International Studies of the Modern Image*, 7 (Tokyo: The Japan Society of Image Arts and Sciences, 2004), pp. 31-82.
[3] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 99.
[4] See Mauro Carbone, *Philosophie-écran. Du cinéma à la révolution numérique* (Paris: Vrin, 2016).
[5] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2000), pp. 31-34.

In the context of Multimedia Environment, Antonio Somaini offered a rich analysis of the unrealized project of László Moholy-Nagy *Raum der Gegenwart* (Room of Present), commissioned by Alexander Dorner in 1930 and set up only recently in two different exhibitions. It would have been 'the first multimedia museum space of the XX century', as well as the first occasion on which a 'permanent museum would have exhibited film excerpts and other technological media in combination with history of art'. Somaini demonstrated the intersections between several features of Moholy-Nagy's theoretical framework and Dorner's approach to museum displays, which flowed into *Raum der Gegenwart*. The former studied 'new vision', which emerged within 1920s 'optical culture', which was enable by technological innovations and worked on the concept of light as a medium; the latter developed an idea of 'atmosphere room', namely a way to create a different experience of space, which aims to sum up the tone, the emotional perception of a given epoch. Thus, argued Somaini, this unrealized project was based on the belief that the *Stimmung*, the atmosphere of present, was a dimension in which art forms were turning to the configuration of light, producing new types of dematerialization of concrete objects. Light dynamism had a relevant role also in Eline Grignard's presentation, on the modern sensibility expressed by electric shows, the coloured light plays of Loie Fuller's dance and early cinema at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition. Drawing on the field of Media Atmospheres, Riccardo Venturi discussed 'steam' as a medium, lingering on Joan Brigham's and Stan VanDerBeek's installation performance *Steam Screens* (1979). He described how the medium of steam overturns the traditional audience approaches and the notion of art-as-object, adding, at the end of the talk, a brief genealogical overview on steam screens from figurative appearances on impressionist paintings to contemporary artist installation.

In the panel devoted to exhibiting cinema in museum complex *et similia*, Dominique Païni explained the planning and the ambitions of his latest exhibition, *Picasso-Godard-Collage(s)*, tacking again the main issues raised in his essay *Le temps exposé: Le Cinéma de la salle au musée* (2002). For him, the wide spectrum of applications offered by the Foucaultian notion of *analogie*[6] was essential to thinking through the juxtaposition of Godard and Picasso's works and, above all, advancing the hypothesis of the possibility to understand the latter through the former and vice versa. At the same time, Païni also followed the idea of collage, which he considers the most evident feature shared by the filmmaker and the artist, in order to enlighten not only their search for unusual relations and interest in multilayered images, but also to 'emulate' their practical creative processes.

The Magic of Images: Hammershøi / Dreyer and its considerably different arrangements, respectively at Ordrupgaard (Copenaghen) and CCCB (Barcelona) museums, was central to the presentation by Casper Tybjerg, who co-

---

[6] Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1966), pp. 36-38.

curated the exhibition. After having explained the influences of Hammershoi's paintings on some of Dreyer's films, he stressed the David Summers' concept of *facture* as a way to rethink some aspects of art and film history, as well as its strategies of exposition. With this view, he placed priority on the examination and reconstruction of concrete forms of 'making' rather than interpretation, in order to emphasize artistic and cultural production in a specific period. Hence, considering a film in terms of *facture* means seeing it as 'a record of its own having been made', namely to scrutinize the network of technology, industry, commerce and the artist will and agency.

The topics chosen for the 2018 Film Forum turned out to be decisive dimensions through which to grasp the work of moving images on various levels — such as its interplay with epistemological, cultural and political contexts. They also helped to devise a visual culture map (embracing modernity and postmodernity) that sheds light on many recurrences of early cinematic forms in the current mediascape, and consequently rethink the 'origin'. This recalls some aspects of Benjamin's idea of origin:

> Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. […] Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development.[7]

[Diego Baratto, Università Iulm, Milano]

---

[7] Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, trans. by John Osborne (New York: Verso Books, 1998), pp. 45-46.