

# The Museum as a Cinematic Space: The Display of Moving Images in History Museums

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## *Abstract*

In the last decades moving images have become a common feature not only in art or film museums, but also in a wide range of institutions devoted to the conservation and transmission of memory. This paper focuses on the role of audio-visuals in the exhibition design of contemporary history and memory museums. Starting from a classification of the different kinds of audio-visuals used in these institutions, I will analyze not only “literal” presence of audio-visuals in exhibitions, but also the ways in which the museum dispositive can incorporate elements of the cinematic dispositive. I will show how, on the one hand, exhibitions can be structured according to cinematic principles such as montage and sequentiality and, on the other hand, how the configuration of museums space can be deeply influenced by the “classic” cinematic dispositive and its components (screen, dark room, projection, sitting spectator).

## *Cinema in the museum*

The pervasiveness of cinema and moving images in exhibition spaces is no longer a novelty. Museums and art galleries are filled with video loops, film installations and projections, and an impressive amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to the investigation of such phenomena.

Considering this complex scenario in its entirety, we can identify at least two major modes of disseminating moving images in museums. A first group includes cinema as an exhibition object, as a form of technology or art. This category comprises both cinema equipment shown in science and technology or film museums,<sup>1</sup> and film-related materials (photographs, posters, costumes or projections) displayed in exhibits of, for example, the relations between art and cinema or the work of specific film directors. The latter are now common in cinema museums as

<sup>1</sup> Such exhibits can be found at the Museo del cinema in Turin or at the Cinémathèque française in Paris, for example.

well as in art galleries.<sup>2</sup> Cinema has been displayed in these contexts since the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in 1922, for instance, the inventor Will Day lent five hundred items from his collection of cinematic apparatus to the London Science Museum.<sup>3</sup> The Museum exhibited Day's equipment until 1959, when the items were purchased by Henry Langlois, director of the Cinémathèque Française.<sup>4</sup> It was also in the 1920s that intellectuals such as Ricciotto Canudo, Léon Moussinac and Robert Mallet-Stevens organized pioneering exhibitions that aimed at legitimizing cinema as an art form, such as those that took place in Paris at the *Salon d'Automne* (1921, 1922 and 1923) and at the Musée Galliera (1924), where the exhibition *L'Art dans le cinéma français* included enlarged frames, set photographs and costumes, and was accompanied by film screenings and lectures.<sup>5</sup>

The second group of cinema-related exhibitions includes contemporary art installations involving the use of films and moving images. The foremost examples of this category are cinematic installations created by artists or filmmakers (the boundaries between which are sometimes very blurry),<sup>6</sup> which have been permeating museums and art galleries for at least twenty years. In this great number of works, cinema provides an almost unlimited source of iconographic material as well as of narrative techniques,<sup>7</sup> but it is also a means of comparison – or even a point of reference – of its modes of production and reception.<sup>8</sup> We can addi-

<sup>2</sup> One of the most well-know exhibitions is Dominique Païni, Guy Cogeval (eds.), *Hitchcock et l'Art: coïncidences fatales*, Centre Pompidou-Mazzotta, Paris-Milan 2000 (this refers to the catalogue of the exhibition, which ran 6 June-24 September 2001 at the Centre Pompidou).

<sup>3</sup> Some institutional collections of cinematic equipment were established before Will Day's donation, for example at the Prague National Technology Museum, in 1908-1911. See Alison Trope, "Le Cinéma Pour Le Cinéma: Making Museums of the Moving Image," in *The Moving Image*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 29-67. However, the museum was not the first site where cinematic machines were exhibited: several items had been displayed at International Exhibitions and commercial fairs since the 1890s. For a brief overview, see François Albera, *Exposé, le cinéma s'expose*, in Olivier Lugon (ed.), *Exposition et médias: photographie, cinéma, télévision*, L'Age de l'Homme, Lausanne 2012, pp. 182-183.

<sup>4</sup> On Will Day's collection, see 1895: *bulletin de l'Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma*, *The Will Day Historical Collection of Cinematograph & Moving Picture Equipment* (edited by Michelle Aubert, Laurent Mannoni, David Robinson), special issue, October 1997.

<sup>5</sup> On these exhibitions, see Christophe Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*, AFRHC/École des chartes, Paris 1999, pp. 72-79.

<sup>6</sup> Such as Chantal Akerman, Tacita Dean, Stan Douglas, Harun Faroki, Douglas Gordon, Pierre Huyghe, William Kentridge, Christian Marclay, Steve McQueen, Shirin Neshat, to mention only a few.

<sup>7</sup> Among the vast, related bibliography, see the three issues of *Cinema&Cie. International Film Studies Journal* devoted to "Cinema and Contemporary Visual Arts," edited by Philippe Dubois (no. 8, Fall 2006; no. 10, Spring 2008; no. 12, Spring 2009), as well as collection of essays such as Alice Autelitano (ed.), *The Cinematic Experience. Film, Contemporary Art, Museum*, Udine, Campanotto, 2010; Philippe Dubois, Frédéric Monvoisin, Elena Biserna (eds.), *Extended Cinema. Le cinéma gagne du terrain*, Udine, Campanotto, 2010; Francesco Federici, Cosetta Saba (eds.), *Cinéma: immersivité, surface, exposition*, Campanotto Editore, Udine 2013 and Id. (eds.), *Cinema and Art as Archive: Form, Medium, Memory*, Mimesis International, Milano 2014. See also Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, Tate/Afterall, London 2008.

<sup>8</sup> These issues are explored in depth in Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen*, Intellect, Chicago 2009. An investigation of the connections between cinema and mu-

tionally identify within this group a broad series of large-scale collective exhibitions, frequently curated by artists or art critics, that relate more directly to the relationship between art and cinema. They often bear historical overviews of the growing presence of moving images in museums and galleries, starting with the avant-garde film and the use of video to document artistic performances in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>9</sup> These exhibitions differ significantly in their scope and approach and adopt a specific component of the cinematic apparatus (projection, for example) as the starting point to explore the migrations of images among various media and artistic domains.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the multifaceted interactions between cinema and contemporary art also include exhibitions curated by filmmakers, such as Agnes Varda's *L'Île et elle*,<sup>11</sup> a site of fertile intersections between the director's installations and her cinematic universe, and Jean-Luc Godard's *Voyage(s) en utopie*,<sup>12</sup> which explores a complex web of issues including the question of cinema's integration in the exhibition space.

As I have suggested, scholars have investigated these connections extensively. However, the field still lacks a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the dissemination of moving images in museums, and the role of cinema in museology and exhibition design still remains neglected in academic research. In the contemporary landscape, moving images are widespread not only in film museums and art galleries, but are in fact exhibited more and more frequently in a wide range of institutions such as science, natural history or ethnographic museums, as well as in history museums, where video installations, projections and screens occupy the domain traditionally inhabited by artifacts and artworks. Within these settings, films and audio-visuals are not displayed as works of art, but rather as tools for contextualization, explanation or visitor engagement. However, their role is far from being merely instrumental, and they deeply affect the strategies of museum exhibitions and the meanings they convey.

In this article I will focus specifically on several contemporary museums of 19<sup>th</sup> century history, and I will analyze the use of film and moving images in their galleries.

seum space can also be found in Miriam De Rosa, *Cinema e postmedia. I territori del filmico nel contemporaneo*, postmedia books, Milano 2013 (particularly chapter 5, pp. 127-150). A further, recent important contribution to the field of cinema and contemporary art is found in Erika Balsom's *Exhibiting Cinema*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Matthias Michalka (ed.), *X-Screen: Film Installation and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, Walther König, Köln 2004 (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 13 December 2003 - 29 February 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See for example Christine Van Assche, Catherine David, Raymond Bellour (eds.), *Passages de l'image. Films, vidéos, images de synthèse*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1990 (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Centre Georges Pompidou, 19 September - 18 November 1990); Philippe-Alain Michaud (ed.), *Le Mouvement des images*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 2006 (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Centre Pompidou, 9 April 2006 - 29 January 2007).

<sup>11</sup> VV. AA., *Agnes Varda. L'Île et elle. Regards sur l'exposition*, Fondation Cartier, Paris, 2006 (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 18 June - 1 October 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Voyage(s) en utopie. JLG, 1946-1966. A la recherche d'un théorème perdu*, exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, 11 May - 14 August 2006.

*Moving images and exhibition design*

When considering museums, it is necessary to take into account the complexity of the levels on which they communicate their content. Visitors walk through galleries following a narrative that is articulated in objects, artworks, labels, audio-visuals, as well as by their arrangement in space. Studying the meaning of museums from a semiotic perspective, Manar Hammad has proposed the distinction between architecture, objects and installation.<sup>13</sup> According to Hammad, each aspect is constituted by a composite set of elements (including the arrangement of the rooms in the building, exhibited items, lighting solutions, multimedia and interactive devices, etc.), and is strictly related to the other levels: objects are inscribed in the exhibition, which is in turn included in the architecture,<sup>14</sup> and all of them are organized in order to communicate a unitary sense. Furthermore, as Patrizia Violi has stated, material configurations should be related to a set of practices, uses, and functions. In other words,

*[the] model visitor is generally taken to be an interpretive strategy embedded in the museum itself, according to assumption that each space also inscribes in its own form of representation a particular pathway guiding its reception by the public, as well as both explicit and implicit instructions regarding how it is to be used and interpreted by its visitors.*<sup>15</sup>

In this paper I will consider the museum as a dispositive: an aggregation of heterogeneous elements, which include material and technological components, textual modes and forms of spectatorship.<sup>16</sup> Drawing on these premises, I will propose a classification of the different kinds of audio-visuals used in history and memory museums, considering how their installation influences their meaning. I will discuss not only the types of contents of the audio-visual texts, but also their arrangement in space and their relations with other items, with museum

<sup>13</sup> See Manar Hammad, *Il museo della Centrale Montemartini a Roma. Un'analisi semiotica*, in Isabella Pezzini, Pierluigi Cervelli (eds.), *Scene del consumo: dallo shopping al museo*, Meltemi, Roma 2006. For a semiotic analysis of the museum, see also Santos Zunzunegui, *Metamorfosis de la mirada. Museo y semiótica*, Cátedra, Madrid 2003 (It. ed. *Metamorfosi dello sguardo. Musei e semiótica*, Nuova Cultura, Roma 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Manar Hammad, *Il museo della Centrale Montemartini*, cit., pp. 270-275.

<sup>15</sup> Patrizia Violi, "Spectacularizing Trauma: The Experientialist Visitor of Memory Museums," in *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici*, no. 119, July-December 2014, p. 52. Violi further develops these issues in *Paesaggi della memoria. Il trauma, lo spazio, la storia*, Bompiani, Milano 2014.

<sup>16</sup> See François Albera, Maria Tortajada (eds.), *Cinema Beyond Film: Media Epistemology in the Modern Era*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 25-44. In recent years, the notion of "dispositive" has gained a renewed centrality in film and media studies; though it is impossible to provide an exhaustive bibliography here, cf. in particular André Gaudreault, Catherine Russell, Pierre Véronneau (eds.), *The Cinema, A New Technology for the 20th Century*, Payot Lausanne, Lausanne 2004; François Albera, Maria Tortajada (eds.), *Ciné-Dispositifs, L'Age de l'Homme*, Lausanne 2011 (Eng. ed. *Cine-dispositives: Essays in Epistemology Across Media*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2015).

architecture and with visitors. The case studies I discuss in this section are selected from European and US museums, in order to illustrate the main categories of moving images in exhibitions. Moreover, they are representative of a pervasive contemporary museological trend, which we can define as the “delivering of experiences.”<sup>17</sup> To quote again Patrizia Violi, it is possible to identify

*an action performed by the museum in order to affect visitors, evoking a strong emotional involvement on their part, by focusing on their pathemic experience. Memory museums thus appear to foresee and construct an experientialist visitor, i.e. a visitor that will, first and foremost, “have an experience” during his visit, rather than being informed, by acquiring more knowledge of past events, which was the principal underlying idea behind traditional museums.*<sup>18</sup>

In the following analysis, I will show how contemporary history and memory museums<sup>19</sup> extensively draw upon films and audio-visuals to fabricate such “experientially oriented encounters”<sup>20</sup> with their visitors.

### *Archival footage*

*Archival footage* is one of the most common kinds of filmic material used in history museums. Insofar as it is strictly related to the role of cinema in the documentation of historical events,<sup>21</sup> this use of film performs a similar function to that of museums in general – the conservation and transmission of memory<sup>22</sup> – and more specifically to history museums, which “display historical artifacts, or even reproductions or representations of artifacts, in the formal effort to teach about the past”<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See Hilde Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C. 2000; Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Patrizia Violi, “Spectacularizing Trauma,” cit., p. 53. See also Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums and the Objectification of Suffering*, in Janet C. Marstine (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics*, Routledge, London-New York 2011, pp. 222-223.

<sup>19</sup> In this paper I use the definition “memory museums” to refer to a wide range of museums that present past events through the paradigm of memory. See Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2013, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> This function has been attributed to cinema since 1898, since the Polish pioneer cinematographer Boleslas Matuszewski claimed that “animated photography” was “a new source of history,” which “will give a direct view of the past”. Boleslas Matuszewski, *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire (Création d'un dépôt de cinématographie historique)*, Paris 1989 (Eng. trans. “A New Source of History,” in *Film History*, vol. 7, no. 3, Autumn 1995, pp. 322, 323).

<sup>22</sup> ICOM's definition of museum states: “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”. ICOM, “Museum Definition” (2007), <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>, last visit 6 April 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Warren Leon, Roy Rosenzweig, *Introduction*, in Id. (eds.), *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1989, p. xiv.

The display of archival film footage can introduce a great degree of ambiguity between the (supposed) transparency of images and a high level of mediation in the construction of the museum discourse. A particularly representative case in this regard is the Churchill Museum in London, which uses a large amount of audio-visual footage and interactive devices.<sup>24</sup> In this museum, films, photographs, text, graphics, and audio recordings have the same value as objects in the transmission of historical knowledge, and are combined to create a coherent narrative about Churchill's life. The exhibition is largely based on 4:3-ratio, black-and-white silent film footage, which has been digitized and is projected on screens and monitors of different sizes. As noted by John Pickford, one of the exhibition's designers, this footage has undergone processes such as re-shaping, colorization and cropping. What is at stake here is thus not limited to the possible changes constitutively imposed by digitization; designers moreover deliberately edited film footage to give it a new appearance and a new meaning. Furthermore, throughout the whole exhibition,

*a visual language was developed that is recognisably mid-20th century in character, consciously evoking the period in which Churchill was alive. [...] all screens were coordinated to have a mid-20th century, paper-heavy feel; a virtual analogue recalling a pre-digital age dominated by paperwork, filing cabinets, folders, maps, telephones and busy working desks – the stuff of Churchill's life. Content on the screen was treated as real; papers, photos held the attributes of the real thing.*<sup>25</sup>

The “visual style” applied to the whole display contributes to the distancing of the archival images from our time to underline the fact that they were filmed in the past. The exhibition exploits a vast range of digital and up-to-date technologies, but at the same time its visual style is arranged to seem as dated as possible, to fulfil visitors' expectations about the atmosphere of Churchill's age.

The recreation of the tone and style of a historical period (revisited to make it more comprehensible to present visitors) proves to be as important as the information provided itself. To make this point is not to question the accuracy, richness and completeness of the historical sources used by the museum; rather, I am claiming that the emphasis here is more on an overall “experience” of the atmosphere of Churchill's era, as well as on the emotions engendered by objects and videos. A case in point is the evaluative report about Churchill museum's visitors in which the MHM agency emphatically states: “Visitors come to the Churchill Museum hoping to learn. They are not disappointed. But something more extraordinary happens. Eighty percent report profoundly emotional and spiritual experiences.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The museum has nearly eighty AV installations, including slide shows and projections of film footage, interactive videos, pictograms and animated maps.

<sup>25</sup> John Pickford, “Making the Churchill Museum,” <http://www.cassonmann.co.uk/publications/making-the-churchill-museum>, last visit 7 March 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Morris Hargreaves McIntyre Ltd (MHM), *Summative Evaluation of the Churchill Museum*, London 2005, p. 3.

*Filmed testimonies*

The second kinds of audio-visual materials that we find in history museums are *filmed testimonies*, which include interviews with witnesses of historical events, wars or atrocities. Witnesses represents not only, as Shoshana Felman has argued, “a crucial mode of our relation to events of our time,”<sup>27</sup> but are also key figures in museums devoted to history and memory, which tend to privilege the stories of common people over authoritative and (presumed) objective historical narratives. Indeed, museums increasingly incorporate testimonial accounts in their communication strategies and exhibition policies so as to foster the development of a deeply emotional relation between the visitors and the institutions.

One of the most common cinematic figures of the filmed testimony is the so-called “talking head”: a seated individual that speaks looking at an off-camera listener, positioned slightly to the left and below the lens. A noteworthy example of a video testimonies’ display is the Museum of Resistance in Turin, in Italy, where close-ups of eye-witnesses of fascist occupation are shown on glass screens, where visitors are reflected, in a sort of face-to-face conversation with them. Yet, as Alice Cati has stated, the “reciprocity of gaze” between the two subjects remains unattainable: following Derrida’s theory about the cinematic technique of the eye-line, she compares the gaze of the testimony to the gaze of a ghost “that not only monitors us, but also watches over us.”<sup>28</sup> However, the use of glass in the display produces an overlap between the faces of the witnesses and the visitors, reinforcing viewer engagement and emphatic response.

*Documentary films*

In history museums we also find actual *documentary films*, which are more structured and often combine archival footage with filmed testimonies. They have different lengths and can be located at the end of museums’ exhibitions or embedded in displays, alongside objects and artifacts. Sometimes the films are shown in purpose-built projections rooms, such as the cinema at the *Historial Charles De Gaulle* in Paris, where the five-screen documentary *Charles De Gaulle* (Olivier L. Brunet, 2005-2008) is projected. The 20-minute film gives a somewhat bombastic portrait of the statesman, through a montage of archival film and photographs. The museum’s cinema hall, which has the elliptical shape of a reversed dome, is placed at the very core of the building, and hosts up to 250 spectators, whom are almost surrounded by the giant screens. The architectural

<sup>27</sup> Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Routledge, New York 1992, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Cati, *Displaying Memories. Studio Azzurro and the Turn to Audiovisual Museum*, in Philippe Dubois, Frédéric Monvoisin, Elena Biserna (eds.), *Extended Cinema. Le cinéma gagne du terrain*, Campanotto, Udine 2010, p. 79. Cati further explores these issues in *Immagini della memoria. Teorie e pratiche del ricordo tra testimonianza, genealogia, documentari*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2013. Patrizia Violi also discusses similar issues drawing on Derrida: see *Paesaggi della memoria*, cit., p. 139.

magniloquence of the projection space thus accentuates the rhetorical tone of the movie, emphasizing the celebratory character of the discourse.

### *Video reconstructions*

The final category is that of *video reconstructions* of historical events, characters or periods: actors recount or act out scenes relating to museum themes and collections. These means of narrating history can be associated, on the one hand, to the conventions of documentary films, and on the other, to practices such as museum theatre, as well as to forms of display such as mannequins, life groups and dioramas.

The In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres (Belgium) makes extensive use of fictional testimonial videos. Actors play the parts of witnesses who lived through World War I and were involved in the armed conflict in different capacities: soldiers, a priest, a doctor and a nurse. Their testimonies, although written by curators, are based on verified historical sources: visitors are not asked to believe that they are watching authentic footage, but rather to trust in the exactness of the narrated facts, granted by the museum's authority. The images of the characters are projected on glass screens, which make them similar to ghosts that return from the past. Moreover, reflections of the Gothic windows of the building on the vitrines emphasize the transparency and immateriality of the figures. This solution accentuates the "tension between the authenticity signalled by the 'genre' of the video testimony and the fact that these are only simulations of testimony."<sup>29</sup> Further, it engenders in visitors an involvement that is first of all emotional and empathetic.

### *The exhibition as a cinematic space*

In the previous sections, I have outlined the "literal" presence of audio-visuals in museums. Here, I will focus on a different (albeit related) aspect, discussing how the museum dispositive can incorporate elements of the cinematic dispositive. In other words, I will show how, on the one hand, exhibitions can be structured according to cinematic principles such as montage and sequentiality and, on the other hand, the configuration of museum architecture and/or exhibition design can be deeply influenced by the "classic" cinematic dispositive and its components (the screen, the dark room, projection, seated spectators).

### *A walk through (moving) images: the Trento tunnels*

To investigate the link between the museum and the cinematic dispositive, we should consider the broader question of the relationship between cinema

<sup>29</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, cit., p. 101.



and architecture. It was during the 1920s and 1930s that a strong connection between film and architectonic space came into place, both in theory and practice. Sergei Eisenstein's well-known essay *Montage and Architecture* constitutes a pivotal attempt to ground theoretically the intersections between cinema and architecture. Starting from Auguste Choisy's description of the positioning of buildings on the Acropolis of Athens, as related to the variable point of view of a walking observer, Eisenstein postulates a link between montage and the composition of an architectural ensemble, from the perspective of a moving spectator.<sup>30</sup> Eisenstein considered sequentiality and montage as the two essential conditions of film as a medium and used them as a grid for the appreciation of other arts.<sup>31</sup> His notion of "cinematism," a series of structural proprieties that are independent from any medium,<sup>32</sup> allowed him to underline the temporal dimension inscribed in architecture as well as in painting.

Moreover, during the 1920s, as Olivier Lugon has explained, exponents of the avant-garde also established a strong link between cinematic dispositive and the exhibition.<sup>33</sup> Experimenting with innovative ways of arranging objects, they conceived a series of displays that were deeply influenced by the dynamism and mobility of cinema. As Lugon writes,

*What designers envied most about film was the possibility of controlling a sequence of images, of imposing on the visitor a planned progression of pictures, impressions and information. Hence the following challenge: how to extend this principle of unfolding to a three-dimensional space [...]?*<sup>34</sup>

Drawing on these approaches,<sup>35</sup> we can understand how contemporary museums play with the temporal and dynamic dimension of perception in a way that closely recalls filmic language.

One of the most remarkable examples of this process are the so called "Trento tunnels", in the city of Trento, in north-east Italy. These are two former highway tunnels that have been reconverted into a history museum. They are painted in different colours and have different functions: one with walls that are entirely black, which hosts large and evocative installations; the other white, which provides facilities for meetings, temporary exhibitions, and educational activities.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Sergei M. Eisenstein, *El Greco y el cine*, quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, "Introduction to Montage and Architecture," in *Assemblage*, no. 10, December 1989, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, p. 112.

<sup>32</sup> François Albera, *Introduction*, in Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Cinématisme: peinture et cinéma* (1980), Editions Complexe, Bruxelles 2009, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Olivier Lugon, *Dynamic Paths of Thought: Exhibition Design, Photography and Circulation in the Work of Herbert Bayer*, in François Albera, Maria Tortajada (eds.), *Cinema Beyond Film*, cit., pp. 117-144.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> On the relationships between cinema, architecture and exhibition, see also Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, Verso, New York 2002.

<sup>36</sup> See Studio Terragni et al., *Tunnel REvision: Le Gallerie di Piedicastello = The Trento Tunnels*,

Here I will focus on the black tunnel and on a temporary exhibition on the First World War held in 2008, *Trentins and the Great War, 1914-1918* (19 August – 21 December 2008). Fifty video projections were displayed on the whole exhibition surface: on the curved walls of the tunnel, as well as on the floor (fig. 1). The images included documents from a local archive, slide-shows of period photographs, and clips from Luca Comerio's documentary films shot during the war. The images were distorted to adapt to the curved walls of the tunnel, creating an immersive and emotional atmosphere which was enhanced by a soundtrack composed of recorded voices that read period letters and diaries. Loudspeakers were installed on the ceiling, each of which diffused different voices: in this way, the soundtrack changed as visitors advanced.

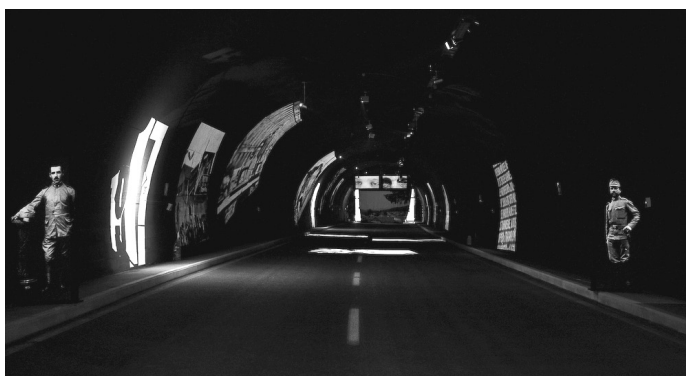


Fig. 1 – Trento Tunnels: the “black tunnel” (2008) (Photo by Pier Luigi Faggion).

By walking through this dark space, visitors encountered war scenes, landscapes, letters, figures of soldiers and family groups. Projected images remained fixed in a specific portion of space, and it was the visitor who recomposed them in a unique narrative by walking past them. In a kind of “film in reverse,”<sup>37</sup> the visitors' displacement created a montage between the images: as they progressed through the tunnel, the projections on the walls produced effects that could be considered equivalent to figures of cinematic language. The spectators' movements had the same effects as camera movements: they produced changes in perspective or even zoom-ins – from long shots to close-ups.<sup>38</sup> The cinematic nature

Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, Trento 2010.

<sup>37</sup> In 1942, the architect and exhibition designer Herbert Bayer conceived his *Road to Victory* exhibition as a “film in reverse”: “To tell the story dramatically, I wanted to reverse the procedure of looking at the film where the public is static and the film moves. Therefore, in this case, I had the public move through the exhibition”. Quoted in Olivier Lugon, *Dynamic Paths of Thought*, cit., pp. 134-135.

<sup>38</sup> Irina O. Rajewsky's includes this phenomenon in her definition of “systemic intermedial references”, where “the media product uses its own media-specific means [...] to refer to [...] another medium qua system”. Irina O. Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality,” in *Intermedialités*, no. 6, Autumn 2005, pp. 52-53. For a

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of the space was evident in the dynamism of the transitions from one image to another, which stressed the key role of the montage. The cinematic dimension also emphasized the temporal and spatial progression of the visit: the spectators' movement through the tunnel was characterized by changing rhythms and paces. It was therefore the displacement of the visitors' bodies that "set in motion" the museum narrative. Moreover, spectators were literally and metaphorically immersed in a darkness where only the lights of the projections were visible. Thus, in the black tunnel, perception did not (or not primarily) have an intellectual nature, but was predominantly embodied and affective.

*"A bit like a large cinema": The Big Picture Show at the IWM North*

Let us now consider the Imperial War Museum North, in Manchester, designed by the architect Daniel Libeskind, who gave it the shape of a globe broken in pieces by the destructive action of war.<sup>39</sup> Since its opening, in 2002, the IWM North has been featuring the so called "Big Picture Show," an audio-visual show that takes place in the main exhibition space of the museum at regular times during the day. There are currently seven shows, and one of them is projected hourly. Each draws from the Imperial War Museum's film and audio collections, and lasts for a few minutes. When the Big Picture Show starts, the lights go out and still and moving images are projected onto the whole exhibition space, including the walls, the floor, the ceiling and the bodies of the spectators. The projections, which can be as tall as twelve meters, produce a sort of kaleidoscopic space, with ever-changing and impressive visual effects (fig. 2). Additionally, every programme has a powerful soundtrack, which mixes war sounds and voices.



Fig. 2 – The Big Picture Show at the IWM North (Courtesy of IWM).

similar attempt to describe the exhibition narrative strategies through a comparison with cinematic language, see Mieke Bal, *Exhibition as Film*, in Sharon Macdonald, Paul Basu (eds.), *Exhibition Experiments*, Blackwell Publishing, London 2007, pp. 71-93.

<sup>39</sup> See <http://daniel-libeskind.com/projects/imperial-war-museum-north>, last visit 6 April 2015.

The museum's leaflet claims that "When the Big Picture Show is on, the Main Exhibition Space is a bit like a large cinema." The "classic" cinematic dispositif with its components (the screen, the dark room, projection, seated spectators) actually constitutes a model for the display. The whole exhibition space becomes a screen (or better, a system of screens in different shapes and dimensions) on which multi-projection documentary films are displayed. Each programme starts at a precise time and is identified by a title (such as *Remembrance* or *Weapons of War*), following a temporal organization that is closer to that of cinematographic screenings – or even of a tv schedule – than to an ordinary museum visit, during which the visitor is free to choose how much time to spend in front of each exhibit. Conversely, at the IWM it is the duration of the show that dictates the time of viewing. Incidentally, this spectatorial situation is also different from those of film installations: in that case, spectators are asked to negotiate between the temporal duration of the projection and the freedom to leave before it ends.

During the Big Picture Show, cinema is *relocated* to the exhibition space, which changes according to the protocols of film spectatorship. The term "relocation" was proposed by Francesco Casetti to refer to "the process in which a media experience is reactivated and re-purposed elsewhere in respect to the place it was formed, with alternate devices and in new environments."<sup>40</sup> According to Casetti, in this process, cinema "colonizes" a new portion of the world, rewrites its boundaries and its configuration, and, at the same time, the "classic" cinematic dispositif is reshaped by the new context.

One of the most noteworthy implications of the notion of relocation is the pragmatic one. The presence of a screen entails a series of behavioural guidance: visitors adopt a certain physical posture, a certain mindset and ideological position, and perform a certain set of actions.<sup>41</sup> During the Big Picture Show the spectatorial response is very different from the interactive participation required in the "ordinary" exhibition at the Imperial War Museum North. When the projections are over, the visitor is free to move around, interact with exhibits and explore the different chronological or thematic sections independently. But while the show is on, the typical motion of the museum visitor is transformed in to the immobility of the cinematic spectator. This is a crucial effect, since visitors are theoretically free to wonder around the space when the show is on, but they actually choose to stand in one point, or sit on the benches situated along some of the walls, as in a cinematographic *séance*.

Furthermore, the spectators in fact become surfaces of projection, and are immersed, emotively and bodily in an audio-visual narrative that has seeks to touch their feelings profoundly. This is more evident when considering the content of

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Casetti, "The Relocation of Cinema," in *NECSUS*, no. 2, Autumn 2012, <http://www.necsus-ejms.org/the-relocation-of-cinema/>, last visit 6 April 2015.

<sup>41</sup> See Francesco Casetti, "L'esperienza filmica e la rilocalizzazione del cinema," in *Fata Morgana*, no. 4, 2008, p. 31.

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the projections, which focus on personal stories and the intimate feelings of those who experienced war: they do not aim to investigate the causes of conflicts or their developments in full detail, but rather to depict the impact of war on people's lives.

### *Conclusions*

As I have illustrated through this selection of examples, films and audio-visu-als can play a pivotal role in museums, and should not be understood as isolated elements: their meaning is influenced by all the other elements of museum dis-course, which they in turn contribute to determine.

The analysis of some contemporary high-tech, audio-visual museum instal-lations has showed through which strategies museums deliver emotional and engaging experiences, rather than concentrating on facts, information and ar-gumentation. Digital technologies and moving images are used in exhibitions to create spectacular presentations and to astonish visitors with uncanny effects, in a sort of contemporary version of eighteenth century phantasmagoria.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, considering museum and cinema as dispositives has allowed me to illustrate how their relations can be articulated at different levels. All the ele-ments of museum discourses, including objects, architecture, exhibition design and the visitors' role, can be fashioned in a way that resembles and evokes the language and representational strategies of film. More broadly, an investigation of the relationships between cinema and the museum in pragmatic terms has re-vealed how museum signification can be shaped by ways of reception and social practices typical of cinema in its "classic" form.

<sup>42</sup> See Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, cit., pp. 187-200.