«THE CINEMA IS THE THEATRE, THE SCHOOL AND THE NEWSPAPER OF TOMORROW»: WRITING THE HISTORY OF CINEMA'S MOBILITY

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In the last few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the mobility of the moving image. Latest-generation mobile phones are equipped to record and play audiovisual material[1], and travellers encounter moving images at every step of their way, from airport lounges to bars, airplanes and tourist sites. Nonetheless it would be inaccurate to characterize the mobility of the moving image as a genuinely new phenomenon. Rather, as I would like to show, the developments have been gradual. In fact, cinema has always been both a mobile medium and a medium of mobility. Cinema has been obsessed with mobility and movement from its beginnings. Examples from early cinema include the views of trains in Lumières films, ghost rides and views of foreign lands, which the Lumières produced for the 1900 Paris world fair. But films also appeared in a variety of spaces, from Cafés to Fairgrounds to Theatres and Game parlours.

But if I claim that film is not only the medium of movement *par excellence* but also, since its inception, and inherently, a mobile medium, I am aware that this runs at least in part counter to traditional accounts of the history of film. Even "new" film historians tend to tell film's history as one of gradual domestication. First, there were film screenings in all sorts of public venues, and there were travelling movie shows. In the long run however, the accounts provided by new film history assure us, all tended toward screenings of feature-length films in purpose-built theatres. It is what you might call a narrative domestication and *embourgeoisement* of what started out as an illegitimate art: film's ascent to the realm of art goes hand in hand with the medium's moving into a legitimate bourgeois home, the movie palace[2]. Thus in the US, 1914 is not only the year of *Birth of a Nation*, but also the year that the New York Strand, the first purpose-built movie palace, opened its doors[3]. Against the backdrop of this narrative of domestication, more recent trends such as home-viewing and screenings on laptops are often treated as symptoms of dispersal and dissemination. Thus, a concept such as curator Alexander Horwath's notion of "the post-cinematographic condition"[4] only really makes sense if one implicitly assumes that screenings of films in purpose-built movie theatres are the norm from which other forms of screening and viewing deviate.

In my following remarks, I would like to argue against a normative identification of film with its presentation in the *dispositif* of cinema, in particular in so-called "black-box" cinemas. These first appeared in art house theatres in the late 1920s and emerged as standard of film exhibition in the 1960s, at the very latest, in the USA and in Western Europe[5]. I will base my argument on recent research on non-theatrical and utility films. My intention is to bring to the fore the theoretical implications of that research, i.e. to demonstrate how research on non-theatrical film is bound to alter some well-established basic ideas not only of film history, but of film theory as well. In particular, and taking the Apple iPhone and Google's Android platform as my examples,

I would like to discuss how convergence and the ubiquity of digital media affect our current conceptions of the moving image[6].

My key point is this: in the history of the medium since its inception, the screening of films in purpose-built theatres is not the rule, nor is it the exception. Rather, the cinema is one of the many venues where moving images appeared throughout the medium's history. Rather than subscribing to a teleological account where all paths lead to the *dispositif* of the cinema theatre (and then away from it), the *dispositif*'s history should be understood, and written, as a history of continuous, but never entirely successful attempts to domesticate the moving image within the architectural body of modern (European) theatre.

Therefore, rather than asking Bazin's ontological question, "What is cinema?", I am asking both a topological and a performative question, namely, "Where is cinema?", and "When is cinema?". I will try to answer these questions in two steps. I will first review the dominant narrative of film history that assigns a privileged place to theatrical screenings. Based on a critique of this narrative, I will then discuss the implications of recent non-theatrical films research not only on our conceptions of the moving image, but also on our conceptions of urban space and the moving image in urban space.

When cinema "is": three basic conditions that make up the norm

Three basic conditions must be fulfilled for "cinema" to emerge as an object of knowledge in film historiography.

First – public screenings in (film) theatres.

Cinema is if and when the moving image is screened within the framework of the architectural body of post-renaissance, i.e. modern European theatre, or its more austere, modernist derivative, the black box. Coincidentally, film's domestication within the architectural body of the theatre marks the medium's final ascendance into the realm of a capital-intensive market economy. Critical theorists have responded with ambiguity to this aspect of cinema culture. In a famous essay on 1920s film performances, Kracauer decries the peripheral trimmings of the stage show that take away from and even threaten the integrity of the film as a work of art. Underlying his critique, however, is the assumption that the film as it appears on the screen is indeed a work of art, much like, say, a symphony, and that the architectural body of theatre provides the site and space where film can indeed attain the status of a work of art (if and when properly presented and screened)[7].

Second condition: professional, quasi-industrial production of films.

Cinema is if and when providers, i.e. film producers, organize the industrial activity and its market in a way that secures a steady flow of material, or "product" to fill the programs of film theatres. Both in France and the US, film production first emerges as an afterthought of technology. Pathé was a producer of media hardware who invested in software to provide material to operate their gramophone players and film projectors, and the same goes for the Edison (i.e. General Electric)-led trust in the US from 1908 through 1912, which was essentially a patent-pool formed by a handful of technology companies[8]. In its classical, oligopolistical structure with major studios as the key players, the American film industry emerges in the 1910s as a *cinema* industry rather than as a film industry. The industry's main investments were in real estate, and their headquarters were all in New York, the world's single most important movie theatre market. The studios on the West coast basically functioned as content providers; hence the deeper meaning of the term "movie colony"[9]. Only with the Paramount Decree and the film industry's divestment of its theatre holdings at the end of the Forties does the focus shift to film and do the major studios emerge as players in a copyright

rather than an entertainment or real estate industry. This shift is further underscored first by the advent of television and later video[10]. Nonetheless theatrical screenings continue to be vital for the film industry. Even under the current conditions, where DVD and non-theatrical sales make up for 75% of revenue, theatrical screenings are indispensable for the success of a film, because only a theatrical release generates the kind of media attention on which subsequent so-called marketing "windows" thrive[11]. Therefore if cinema "is" if and when an industry provides films for theatrical screenings, it is important to note that the film industry was primarly a cinema industry only for a relatively short period of roughly thirty years, from the mid-teens to the late 1940s.

Third condition: art and legitimate entertainment.

Cinema is if and when film ascends to the rank of an acceptable entertainment for the urban middle and upper middle classes. Since the mid-18th century at the latest, the preferred public site of art consumption for the educated classes has been the theatre and the opera, with its corollary, in the concert hall. Entrance into the architectural body of the theatre, along with the adaptation of the performance trappings of the opera in the late teens marks film's ascendance in terms of cultural legitimacy. In its early days, cinema was a technical novelty first and foremost[12]. Even before anyone ever thought about writing a history of art film, popular histories of the technology of film became bestsellers, elucidating the astonishing behind-the-scenes secrets of movie-making and, in particular, special effects[13]. In the early to mid-teens, the discourse shifted to art. Earl Hollywood feature film studios named themselves "Famous Players" to highlight the fact that they would employ only Broadway-tested actors, Cecil B. DeMille hired an opera singer to perform in a silent rendition of Carmen[14], and movie theatres on Broadway, and in Europe as well, imitated the presentational modes of the opera for their film shows. "Cinema" thus emerged as part and parcel of a system of culture for consumption by the educated middle- and upper-middle-classes. Shortly after the introduction of sound, which in economic terms marks a dramatic shift of input away from the exhibitor to the film's producer, the opulence of opera-style film presentations makes way for the relative austerity of film-only presentations. In no way does this shift to austerity means a shift away from a rhetoric of film as legitimate entertainment and, potentially, art. Rather, the film-only presentation underscores the nature of self-sufficient artefact of the film. In a way, the juncture of film-only presentation and purpose-built movie theatres merely marks the unfolding of certain basic tenets of 1920s art house and *ciné-club* modernism in mainstream cinema culture: film as art (potentially), focus on the individual film as work, elimination of peripheral elements of movie presentation.

Having identified three basic conditions for "cinema" to emerge as an object of knowledge and to establish itself as a norm against which film and media historians can judge other uses of the moving image, I would now like to call into question the dominance of that norm in film history (and film culture, for that matter). My point of departure will be the non-theatrical film, in particular all forms of home cinema and home movie, a long-neglected area of film history which has seen a surge in critical attention in the last ten years.

The case of the home movie

A chronology of small-gauge film reveals striking parallels to the establishment of purpose-built film theatres. From the outset, film technology included small gauge projectors, and later cameras for home use and film screenings in schools, churches and other non-theatrical contexts[15]. All of these devices were mobile insofar as they did not require a cinema hall or a studio for their use.

In Europe, Pathé set the standards in film technology, a company that plays an important role in

the transversal narrative of film history that I am proposing here. Leaving no idea unrealized, as was his reputation, company founder Charles Pathé claimed that he realized as early as 1901 that «the cinema was going to be the theatre, the school and the newspaper of tomorrow»[16]. If you base your business plan on this insight, your corporate strategy will lead to something resembling what Henry Jenkins and others now term "convergence culture"[17] rather than to the emergence of cinema, understood as the screening of feature films in the architectural and discursive body of theatre.

In 1912 Pathé introduced the Kok mall gauge format, which operated with non-inflammable 28 mm film strip. The slogan read: «Sans danger, sans installation, sans apprentissage» (No danger, no installation, no apprenticeship)[18]. Until Pathé-Kok was replaced by Pathé-Baby, a 9,5 mm format, in the mid-1920s more than two thousand reels of pre-recorded film were made available for rent or purchase. Customers buying Pathé-Baby had a catalogue of similar size available soon after the format's initial release[19]. 1922 saw the release of the first portable Pathé-Baby projector, 1923 the release of the first 9,5mm home movie camera. In addition to this, Pathé introduced Pathé-Rural in 1927, a format intended for screenings for audiences of 200 to 300 people in rural areas and the French colonies. Unlike the films in the Pathé Baby Filmathèque, the films in the Pathé-Rural catalogue were for rent only and not for purchase.

Pathé was obviously not the only company catering to small-gauge and home cinema customers. In 1923, one year after the launch of Pathé-Baby, Kodak introduced the 16mm film for amateur and home movie use, which later also became standard in television production. Kodak introduced the first colour 16mm films in 1929. Normal-8mm was introduced in 1932 and instantly became a standard format for home cinema use, as did Super-8, which followed in 1965. Only little more than a decade later video became a fact of life, first with the introduction of Beat in 1975, then with VHS shortly thereafter. Other products and brands proved less resilient, like W.C.Hughes' "La petite" camera from 1900, the Ernemann Kino 1 and 2 (both based on the use of 17,5mm film strips), Messter's small-gauge camera for use in the tropics from 1900, the Kretschmar Heimkinematograph from 1905 and numerous "toy" cameras available after 1900[20].

Right from its outset, then, film was a mobile medium, and the medium's mobility became a key point of business strategy for two major technology providers both in terms of hard- and software. This happened at the very moment of the moving image's cultural domestication within the framework of the architectural and discursive body of the theatre in the mid- to late teens.

Extending the argument about film's inherent mobility further back, one could argue that flipbooks were portable moving images, as were many proto-cinematographic devices, such as the Kinograph, patented in 1868, or the Filoscope, patented in 1898, which was able to play a whole series of different cinematographic subjects. Even the Mutoscope was available in a portable version for home use.

As this brief survey of small-gauge film formats shows, the use of cameras and projectors spread in private homes and other venues outside the cinema along with the establishment of the *dispositif* of the cinema as the supposed paradigm of the cinematic experience. Moving images disseminate in various spaces at the very moment of film's apparently unavoidable domestication in the architectural and discursive body of classical theatre.

Non-theatrical moving images: from deficiency to supplement

It is important to take account of this simultaneity. The difficulty lies in the fact that we usually tend to define the non-theatrical image *ex negativo*, in terms of what it is not and what it does

not achieve, that is, in opposition to the theatrical image. The non-theatrical image is too small, too grainy, the films are shot by dilettantes, they address small and seemingly negligible audiences, they have no inherent artistic value, etc. The term "non-theatrical" itself speaks volumes about the discursive power of the cinema paradigm.

One of the strategies to avoid this trap is to turn the apparent weaknesses of the non-theatrical image into its strengths. Thus, for instance, it is possible to argue that the artistic failure of home movies is a precondition of their success as a form of media practice, as I have done in a longer study on the aesthetics of the family film. In that study, I showed that making home movies usually goes hand in hand with an ambition to actually make a movie. The fact that the attempt is both easily recognizable (people appearing in home movies "act" and reference "professional" films) and an obvious failure (aunt Emma is, most emphatically, *not* Greta Garbo) actually makes the home movie work. That is, the home movie unfolds its potential as a film that contributes to and symbolically perpetuates the family as a social unit[21].

However, in order to define mobile moving images without having to resort to a definition *ex negativo*, we can also look at moving images and judge them not just in and of themselves, but in relation to the spaces that they occupy. More specifically, you can ask how they shape and eventually re-shape those spaces. The moving image in the theatre fits quite neatly into a pre-existing architectural and discursive arrangement – or so it would seem. Home movies and small-gauge films, however, are always fleeting, transitory presences in pre-established spaces the primary purpose of which is usually not to house or host the moving image. Their dynamic in relation to the spaces they occupy may best be described as supplementary – freely drawing on Derrida's notion of supplement. A supplement could thus be defined as something that is inherent in, but not essential to a situation, something that is there in addition to what is already there but acts upon the situation in a way that makes it indispensable to our understanding of the situation.

Take, for instance, moving images in tourist spaces and spaces of travel – moving images on ships, trains, airplanes, buses, cars, etc.[22]. Quite obviously, all these vehicles can operate without the supplement of the moving image. Omitting the moving image, however, fundamentally alters the travel experience, just like adding the moving image altered it in the first place. Tourists taking the elevator to the observation deck at Chicago's Sears Tower will get the opportunity to view short films shown on digital screens inside the elevator. The films detail the building's history, technical data and other information. Pragmatically speaking, these films serve to make people focus on information that will distract them from claustrophobia and acrophobia. The films achieve this by modifying the spatial experience of the elevator in two ways: by augmenting the physical space with a space of knowledge, and by structuring the trip's duration. Key to this modification is the temporal and spatial structure of the moving image itself. The moving image may create an illusion of presence, but what it presents is also always necessarily absent. Thus it enhances the spaces of everyday experience by adding virtual objects of experience that are present and absent at the same time. What I propose to call the supplemental logic of moving images in public space is intricately linked to this double structure. The moving image opens up the space of experience, a space of presence and immediate objecthood, onto a dimension of absence, adding a temporal structure to spatial experience in the process. Films like the videos in the Sears Tower elevator apparently just serve to bridge a time-gap, but they actually transform experience both in spatial and temporal terms.

But if the mobile, non-domesticated moving image – as it becomes increasingly available through portable communication devices – structures social space and its experience, how does this affect our theoretical understanding of the moving image in general. Also, and more specifically, how does it affect our understanding of the relationship of the moving image to the architectural body of the theatre in classical theatrical screenings?

Not like opera, not like theatre

As I suggested above, the continuous circulation of the moving image outside of the body of theatre indicates that the moving image was never fully domesticated to begin with. Opera, for instance, remains essentially bound to the architectural frame of the theatre. The last few decades have seen the emergence of an opera culture around stadium performances in Verona and other venues. Nonetheless, opera as an art form remains essentially tied to theatre space, if we take live performances as a benchmark, that is. Similarly, open-air theatre continued to thrive after the indoor theatre became the standard venue for theatre performances in the 16th and 17th centuries. But the in-house performance did emerge as the key form of public consumption of theatre, with no private consumption of theatre ever emerging in any significant volume. The mass circulation of moving images in public and private spaces in the 20th and 21st centuries, however, is categorically different from opera performances in sports stadiums and street theatre. As I've argued, the moving image has never been inherently linked to the space of the theatre. At the very latest with the introduction of television, the theatre's seeming paradigm starts to wane. As, among other things, the history of theatrical films on television shows, there are some basic economic reasons why not even fictional films, and let alone the moving image in general, could remain exclusively tied to the theatre space in the long run. Given the capital-intensive nature of film production, there is an inherent drive to sell a film as many times to as many customers as possible. The fact that film is indeed a portable and mobile medium, and the moving image can be easily reproduced in variety of forms and sites without losing its inherent qualities, plays to the advantage of investors, since it significantly broadens the choice of opportunities for recuperating and making good on investment. Actually, if we consider the economics of film production it becomes easily apparent that the institutionalization of film screenings in the space of the theatre carried within it the seed of is own demise. The domestication of the moving image helped the film industry to emerge as a legitimate entertainment industry that sometimes even produced art. But it was precisely the economic logic of a major industry, the need to stabilize profits and make a return on investment, that is not only capital-intensive but also highly volatile (only one in ten movies is ever a real hit) that pushed the studios to look out for other venues beyond the movie theatre to sell their product: the home, other public spaces, and eventually in portable media. Thus the supplementary dynamic of the moving image in relation to the space of its performance, in conjunction with the economics of film production, always already undermines the normative model of film screenings within the framework of the theatre. What remains constant, however, is that the moving image structures the time and space of its performance, regardless of where the screening takes place, when, and to what end.

Interfaces, or images that tie the room together

It is important, then, to understand the mobility of the moving image in a way that highlights the dynamic relationship between moving image and space and at the same time brackets both mobile images and moving image performances in theatre spaces. In order to achieve this I would like, in conclusion, to turn to the concept of interface. However, I shall redirect its use: away from the content that the interface makes accessible, towards the space of access.

The concept of interface originally comes from the hard sciences and designates the boundary between two physical phases of a medium. Interface metaphorically describes a Black Box of

which we can only see the "surface" and with which we can only communicate through that surface[23]. One could also argue that the surface renders something visible that eludes direct perception and simultaneously structures the mediated perception. An interface, then, shows and withholds something at the same time. Far from being a neutral medium (and what is?), the interface actually structures communication. For film studies, "interface" is a useful concept because it opens up a new perspective of analysis in which the moving image is no longer a text or an artefact that may or may not be embedded in a social context. Rather, the moving image re-emerges as a key element in enabling and constituting a dynamic network. Such networks usually suppose pre-established social spaces. Film theory has tended to conceptualize spatial experience primarily under the auspices of experiencing the built spaces of architecture in relation to the stylistic devices of film, particularly montage. Alternatively, film theory deploys concepts such as "immersion" to grasp the supposed elision of the boundary between lived space and diegetic space in film experience. The concept of interface that I propose allows us to understand the space of the moving image as a juncture of diegetic space, geographic space and the space of performance. The interface, then, is more than a user surface. It is an agent that productively connects diegetic and social spaces, and agent that produces space and renders space productive in terms of the use and consumption of moving images, and of how moving images contribute to the uses of social space.

Interface: the Apple iPhone example

Ads for the Apple iPhone suggest that it is really «three products in one – Widescreen iPod, mobile phone, and internet device». In addition to these features, the iPhone, which early users in the US half-mockingly baptized the "Jesus phone", includes a digital video camera, maybe not explicitly listed in the ad because of its low resolution. A closer look at the iPhone reveals that the "revolutionary mobile phone" can indeed be used for viewing wide-screen films and other moving images. Much like the computer in German media theory, the iPhone appears to be the medium that simulates all others (cinema, telephone, internet, photography, even writing). If, *pace* McLuhan, the content of a new medium is an old one, this is one new medium that contains all others.

At first glance the availability of Widescreen and other cinema formats on the iPhone appears to subvert my argument about the merely contingent nature of cinema's dominance in the realm of moving images: it remains the point of reference for all other media. Yet, the iPhone shares no other features with theatrical cinema. It is not bound to a semi-public space, it will play in full daylight, the screen is small, and it can be viewed standing, lying down, walking, hanging from a tree, or any other position that the human body can safely take. What the reference to cinema does indicate, it seems to me, is the fact that cinema, understood as a discursive framework, remains a key cultural site for the articulation of longing and desire even in the post-celluloid and so-called post-cinematographic age. Or, to make explicit the iPhone's hidden message about its own place in media history: mobile displays and mobile moving image devices thrive on the undying power of the promise that once was cinema, but at the same time they illustrate, once again in the medium's history, the fact that cinema never was exaclty what we commonly understood it to be.

1 Mobile phones with built-in video beamers will be next. See http://www.channelpartner.de/news/238913/.
2 See Malte Hagener, "Propaganda auf hoher See: Bordkinos und Reisebilder deutscher Reedereien, 1919–1939", in Judith Keilbach, Alexandra Schneider (eds.), *Flugbilder: Bilder vom Fliegen*, LIT Verlag, Münster, in press.
3 Movie palace operators like Sidney Grauman or Sam "Roxy" Rothapfel consciously modelled themselves on opera directors. See Vinzenz Hediger, "'Putting Spectators in a Receptive Mood.' Szenische Prologe im amerikanischen Stummfilmkino", in *Montage AV*, no. 2, 2003, pp. 69-87.
4 "Eine Mutationsära, Alexander Horwath im Gespräch", see http://www.allesfilm.com/show_article.php?id=22024.
5 The term "post-celluloid age" is Charles Acland's. See Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic. Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture*, Duke University, Durham 2003.
6 See also Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television. Visual Culture and Public Space*, Duke University, Durham 2001.
7 Siegfried Kracauer, *Kult der Zerstreuung*, in Id., *Das Ornament der Masse*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1963, pp. 311-317.
8 The earliest text of reference here is Michael Conant, *Anti-Trust in the Motion Picture Industry*, California University, Berkeley 1960.
9 Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Blackwell, Oxford 2003.
10 See Vinzenz Hediger, *The Product that Never Dies. Die Entfristung der kommerziellen Lebensdauer des Films*, in Ralf Adelmann et al. (eds.), *Ökonomien des Medialen*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2006, pp. 167-181.
11 Harold Vogel, *Entertainment Industry Econocmics*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 1998.
12 Tom Gunning, *Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the last Turn-of-the-Century*, in David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins (eds.), *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*, MIT, Cambridge MA 2003, pp. 39-60.
13 The most well-known of these books is Frederick Arthur Ambrose Talbot, *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked*, J.B. Lippincot, Philadelphia 1912. Talbot was a best-selling author of popular science books who merely turned his interest to cinema rather than a *cinéphile* or film historian.
14 See Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture. The Silent Era*, University of California, Berkeley 1994, pp. 20 ff. and pp. 126 ff.
15 Surveys on current research in this field may be found in *Film History*, *Nontheatrical Film*, no. 4, 2007 and *Montage AV*, no. 2, 2005, and no. 1, 2006, both issues dedicated to various species of utility films.
16 Jean Claude Eyraud, *Les Appareils de format réduit*, in Centre Georges Pompidou, *Pathé: Premier empire du cinéma*, Centre Pompidou, Paris 1994, pp. 205-217, quotation at p. 206.
17 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University, New York 2006.
18 Jean Claude Eyraud, *Les Appareils de format réduit*, cit., p. 206.
19 See Alexandra Schneider, "Time Travel with Pathé Baby: The Small-gauge Film Collection as Historical Archive", in *Film History*, no. 1, 2007, pp. 353-360.
20 See Martina Roepke, *Privat-Vorstellung, Heimkino in Deutschland vor 1945*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim 2006.
21 See Alexandra Schneider, *"Die Stars sind wir": Heimkino als filmische Praxis*, Schüren, Marburg 2004.
22 Alexandra Schneider, "Videofilme im Aufzug, Projektionen im Flugzeug. Gebrauchsfilme außerhalb des Kinos", in *Montage/AV*, no. 2, 2005, pp. 142-152.
23 See also Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT, Cambridge MA 2001, see in particular chapter two: "The Interface".