Whereas sculpture is an artistic practice that involves not only static but also material, three-dimensional and durable objects, the cinema produces kinetic, immaterial, two-dimensional and fleeting images. However, the history of cinema amplifies the attraction of these opposites: statues coming to life in early cinema and disturbing the peace in Surrealist and trance films; the optical and haptic exploration of sculptural volumes in art documentaries and artists’ films; the lure of the wax museum in horror films; the statuary metaphors of post-war modernist cinema; the mythological living statues of the peplum genre; and contemporary art practices in which film is used as sculptural medium.

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The Museum as a Cinematic Space
The Display of Moving Images in Exhibitions

Elisa Mandelli

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The Museum as a Cinematic Space

Preface

Moving images have become a common feature in museums, where visitors are now accustomed to finding a broad variety of projections and screens. But when did films start to be displayed in history, science, and natural history museums? How did visitors react to the transformation of static displays by means of moving images? And what are the current stakes of showing audio-visuals in exhibition spaces?

The Museum as a Cinematic Space is an extensive investigation of the use of moving images in exhibition design outside the field of art. It explores how museums have incorporated films and audio-visuals in their displays from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the present.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, museum professionals have taken interest in the potential of the new cinematic medium, and have considered the possibility of using films as a means of exhibition. This has led over the decades to explore technological as well as conceptual solutions to integrate audio-visual devices in the gallery space. From the Mutoscopes used in the 1920s to the contemporary immersive projections, curators have had to deal with issues such as the relationship of moving images with museum objects, as well as the way in which visitor movement in space relates and intertwines with the movement of the images on the screen. Moreover, audio-visuals have repeatedly raised the problem of the balance between the serious and educational mission of the museum and the will to entertain the public, with an imbalance in favour of entertainment that today seems in many cases to define the very concept of museum.

In addition to describing the concrete solutions and strategies used by curators to exhibit films, my goal is to identify the practical, technical, and discursive conditions that enabled the use of moving images in museum galleries during the twentieth century and the twenty-first. My focus will be on the inclusion of cinematic elements (films, screens, projections, and so on) within the display. By opening itself to moving images, the exhibition becomes a place where cinema and museum spectatorships converge, reshaping the fixed relations between the public, the images, and the viewing space itself.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I traces a historical overview of the use of moving images in exhibition design outside the field of art. Part II explores the practical, technical, and discursive conditions that enabled the use of moving images in museum galleries during the twentieth century and the twenty-first. My focus will be on the inclusion of cinematic elements (films, screens, projections, and so on) within the display. By opening itself to moving images, the exhibition becomes a place where cinema and museum spectatorships converge, reshaping the fixed relations between the public, the images, and the viewing space itself.

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Preface

Moving images have become a common feature in museums, where visitors are now accustomed to finding a broad variety of projections and screens. But when did films start to be displayed in history, science, and natural history museums? How did visitors react to the transformation of static displays by means of moving images? And what are the current stakes of showing audio-visuals in exhibition spaces? The Museum as a Cinematic Space is an extensive investigation of the use of moving images in exhibition design outside the field of art. It explores how museums have incorporated films and audio-visuals in their displays from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the present.

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The book is divided into two parts. Part I traces a historical overview of
The display of moving images in museums in the twentieth century, focusing on the earliest use of films in exhibition galleries and on their gradual diffusion into the 1970s. I examine how the rules and conditions defining the use of moving images in museums were negotiated during these crucial decades, as well as the kinds of images selected to be shown in the galleries and how they affected the visitors’ experience.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, film was considered an ideal medium for the preservation of memory, and was rapidly included among the educational means used in museums. Although films were mainly projected in auditoriums, attempts were also made to include them in the galleries, alongside other exhibits. One of the best-documented cases of the use of moving images in museum spaces – albeit one that has not been fully studied prior to this book – is the Imperial War Museum in London, which, as early as 1924, began to exhibit war films from its archives in eight Mutoscope machines.

With reference to the 1930s and 1940s, the following discussion addresses the connections between museums, world fairs, and didactic exhibitions by European avant-garde artists, and then provides an overview of the spreading of film projections and other multi-media and interactive devices in museum galleries in the 1960s and 1970s, following the advent of video and technological innovations that rendered these machines more easily available, as well as the growing importance accorded to the visual design of exhibitions.

Archival research, together with the analysis of period magazines, has allowed me to bring to light and describe a set of practices related to the use of audio-visuals in museum spaces that were previously unknown or not adequately considered. Through these sources, the discussion proposed in Part I offers historical background, demonstrating that the use of moving images in museum galleries has a long history that is rooted in the first decades of the twentieth century. My goal is to identify and contextualise where and when continuities and breakthroughs took place.

Part II of the volume, instead, explores the use of films and videos in contemporary museum exhibitions through a series of analysis of relevant case studies. The exhibitions analysed throughout the chapters have been chosen after an extensive survey of contemporary museums’ displays, in view of how efficiently they facilitate an effective discussion of the needs, problems, and practices of the use of moving images in museums. Some of these exhibitions have never been the object of critical analysis, while others are better known among scholars and curators, either because they interconnect with artistic practice (this is the case of Studio Azzurro’s museums, or Peter Greenaway’s installation at Venaria Reale, a historical site near Turin), or because they represent successful or indeed problematic examples of museography (such
as the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester). In this volume, I investigate them paying attention specifically to the ways in which moving images are integrated in the display and affect the meaning of the whole exhibition.

The cases discussed include a sample of exhibitions in which projections of historical characters or testimonies appear, like spectres, to tell their story to visitors (as in the case of the Widespread Museum of Resistance in Turin, or the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres). I furthermore detail installations in which museum narrative could be compared to film narrative, not only because they both unfold in time following a ‘script’, but also because the exhibition employs, through its own media-specific means, filmic techniques such as montage, zooms, and close-ups, as well as a complex articulation of the story and characters (like in the Trento Tunnels, two former highway tunnels reconverted into a museum, and the Peter Greenaway installation at the Venaria Reale).

In other museums, architecture and exhibition design could be influenced by the ‘classic’ cinematic dispositif and its components (screen, dark room, projection, seated spectators), as in the Big Picture Show, an audio-visual show that takes place at the Imperial War Museum North, and in the cinema theatre at the Historial Charles de Gaulle in Paris. I also consider museums that utilise interactive devices, where visitors have to touch the moving images – rather than press-buttons – the surface of which acts as an interface between the spectator and the representation (as happens at the Museum Laboratory of the Mind in Rome, Italy).

Although the two parts of the book apply different research methodologies to the historical investigation and analysis of contemporary case studies, they are in no way disconnected. Although the works I look at follow in chronological order, the aim is not to provide a linear and exhaustive historical reconstruction. Rather, concentrating on some emblematic cases allows an in-depth discussion of the needs to which the moving images exposed in museums respond, the problems they raise, as well as the way in which they lead to a rethinking of the design of the exhibition space and the very idea of museum. I propose an analysis of the forms of negotiation between the exhibition and the cinematic dispositif, identifying four main recurring configurations. For each of them, I discuss the relationship between the moving images, the layout of the space and the visitor’s position. The focus on contemporary history museums allows me to reflect on the specific means of historical representation and the preservation of memory implemented by museums, and on the role of moving images in this process.

The cross-comparison between the historical and the contemporary historical exhibition practices reveals a number of continuities and ruptures, showing that many apparently unprecedented issues have already been
addressed in earlier phases of the history of the institution. The museum remains an interstitial space that establishes relations with the entertainment and even advertising industries. In fact, the analysis of audio-visuals in museum galleries provides a privileged point of view from which to consider the affinities and reciprocal influences between museums and entertainment venues, such as fairs, great exhibitions, and contemporary amusement parks. This approach reinforces the idea that the museum should not be considered as an isolated and out-of-time institution. Rather, its practices politics, and objectives are strictly connected to the broader cultural and leisure landscape, in a two-way exchange: one which the study of the display of moving images allows me to examine in depth.
**Introduction**

Today, art galleries and art, history, science, and cinema museums alike make extensive use of video loops, film installations, and projections, and an impressive amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to the investigation of this tendency. My approach to this phenomenon is both historical and critical. I begin by identifying the coalescence of three major modes of disseminating moving images in museums: the first group of exhibitions treat cinema as a technology or as a specific medium. This category comprises both cinema equipment shown in science and technology or film museums, and film-related objects (such as photographs, posters, or costumes) displayed in exhibitions that focus on the relations between art and cinema or on the work of film directors. Cinema has been used as a medium of visual display since the first decades of the twentieth century: in 1922, for instance, the inventor Will Day lent 500 items from his collection of cinematic apparatuses to the London Science Museum. The Museum exhibited Day’s equipment until 1959, when the items were purchased by Henry Langlois, director of the Cinémathèque Française. It was also in the 1920s that intellectuals such as Ricciotto Canudo, Léon Moussinac, and Robert Mallet-Stevens organised pioneering exhibitions that aimed at legitimising cinema as an art form, such as those that took place in Paris at the *Salon d’Automne* (*Autumn Salon*) (1921, 1922, and 1923) and at the Musée Galliera (1924), where the exhibition *The Art in French Cinema* (*L’art dans le cinéma français*) included enlarged frames, set photographs, and costumes, and was accompanied by film screenings and lectures. The exhibition of cinematic apparatuses remains common in cinema museums as well as in art galleries.

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 blurred), which became widespread in museums and art galleries from the 1990s. In these works, cinema is treated as the source of unlimited iconographic material, narrative techniques, modes of productions, and reception. This mode of display entails a broad series of large-scale collective exhibitions, frequently
curated by artists or art critics, which relate more directly to the relationship between art and cinema. Often these exhibitions propose a general historical overview of the growing presence of moving images in museums and galleries, starting with avant-garde film and the use of video to document artistic performances in the 1960s and 1970s. They differ significantly in their scope and approach and adopt a specific component of the cinematic dispositif (projection, for example) as the starting point to explore the migrations of images among various media and artistic domains. Finally, the multifaceted interactions between cinema and contemporary art also include exhibitions curated by filmmakers, such as Agnès Varda’s L’île et elle, a site of fertile intersections between the director’s installations and her cinematic universe, and Jean-Luc Godard’s Voyage(s) en utopie, which explored a complex web of issues, including the question of cinema’s integration in the exhibition space.

While scholars have investigated these connections, the field still lacks a comprehensive understanding of a third form of penetration of moving images in museums, which is related to their role in museology and exhibition design.

Indeed, from the beginning of the twentieth century, and in a pervasive way in the contemporary landscape, moving images have been exhibited in a wide range of institutions such as natural history, science, or history museums, where video installations, projections, and screens occupy the domain traditionally inhabited by artefacts and artworks. Within these settings, films and audio-visual displays serve as tools for contextualisation, explanation, or visitor engagement. The Museum as a Cinematic Space focuses on this last mode of dissemination of moving images in exhibitions. In these pages I argue that moving images are far from being merely instrumental, as they deeply affect the strategies of museum exhibitions and the meanings that they convey.

THE MIGRATION OF MOVING IMAGES INTO MUSEUMS

At a first glance, cinema and museum exhibitions are clearly distinct, especially in terms of the reception and of the articulation of temporality and movement: the static viewer of moving images could be considered as the opposite of the visitor who moves across the museum space. As Francesco Casetti explains,

The rise of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century . . . created a clear-cut opposition between, on the one hand, spectacles based on images fixed in place and spectators free to move in space according to personal itineraries, as in the case of the panorama and the museum and, on the other hand, spec-
tacles based on mobile images (or at least quasi-mobile) and fixed spectators, gathered together in an audience in front of the screen, as in the theatre or the magic lantern show. Cinema’s inclusion in the latter group inevitably led to the characterization of the first group as non-cinematic.13

Scholars have identified many other differences between cinema and exhibition spaces, such as dark versus light, sound versus silence, and disembodied versus embodied perception.14 These differences are epitomised by the antithesis between the ‘white cube’ of the modernist art museum, a historically and culturally determined system, with its white walls and its allegedly neutral organisation,15 and the components of the ‘classic’ cinema-viewing situation (dark room–projection–screen–motionless viewer) reproduced inside the galleries in the form of the so-called ‘black box’.16

However, these distinctions are less rigid than they may appear, and the interpenetration between the forms of presentation and reception typical of the cinema or the museum are (and have been in the past) frequent and productive, both in the field of art (with video art, experimental cinema, moving-image installations) and in those of education and spectacle.

In the artistic context, scholars have proposed various definitions to name the multiple forms of penetration of moving images in museums, such as ‘other cinema’,17 ‘othered cinema’,18 ‘cinema of exhibition’,19 and ‘artists’ cinema’.20 The issue that lays at the core of the different terminology, which moreover continues to catalyse the debate, is the very definition of this type of artistic practices and artworks. Should the installations of moving images be considered a part of the territories of art or cinema? What is left of the cinema21 when it migrates in the art museum? Can we still call it ‘cinema’?

One of the most influential (albeit often contested) voices in that debate belongs to Raymond Bellour, to whom only the collective projection of a film in a darkened theatre is worth being called ‘cinema’.22 In this perspective, cinema is strictly opposed to the terrain of gallery-based film installation (what Bellour had in previous works defined as ‘other cinema’23): despite the passages operating from one to the other, and vice versa, he firmly asserts that it is not acceptable to confuse the two experiences.

On the contrary, Philippe Dubois advocates for an expansion of the territories of ‘cinema’, to include the artistic forms that introduce in the museum components of the cinematic dispositif (such as screens, or projections) or refer to film history. More broadly, for Dubois cinema has produced an ‘imaginary of the image’, which has penetrated our thoughts and our way of
looking at the world so deeply that it functions as a model that can stand for
our relationship to all other contemporary images. So, to Dubois, cinema is
not disappearing at all, but, on the contrary, it ‘gains ground’ in the diversity
of its forms and practices.24

These are the two poles of a debate that, moving within these conflicts and
polarisations, has led scholars to compose a rich and varied map of the forms
of migration of moving images into the art museum.25 However, the non-
artistic domain remains mostly excluded from these analyses. Moving-images
installations in non-artistic museums, such as those of history or science, have
long been overlooked, or at most considered trivialised or degraded versions
of experimentations conducted in artistic research.26

In order to challenge this attitude, in this volume I want to stress that
the exhibition of moving images outside of the artistic context represents
a rich and fertile terrain for enquiry. These instances illuminate one of the
most multifaceted modes of the circulation on moving images and raise a
variety of compelling questions, regarding the social role of the museum or the
technological availability, maintenance, and obsolescence of images, memory,
personal and collective history, and indeed our relationships with these
elements.

Compared to artistic installations, the exhibitions I deal with present some
peculiarities. In particular, they are not conceived as autonomous works of
art: even when the aesthetic dimension plays an important role (as in the
Studio Azzurro’s museums), they are primarily intended to convey certain
contents (whether historical, technical, or scientific), consistently with the
broader educational and communication strategy of the museums in which
they are installed. The solutions adopted are therefore developed in relation
to a multiplicity of needs on the scientific, museological, and museographic
levels, as well as those of communicator and even spectacle. However, I
would stress that they do not play a merely instrumental role, but contribute
to rewriting and redefining the contents proposed by the museum and the
relation it establishes with visitors.

Moreover, this does not prevent exchanges with artistic solutions from
being frequent and productive, nor that some of these installations can, even
if indirectly, solicit a reflection on the relationship between the cinematic and
museum viewing contexts (a particularly evident case being the Big Picture
Show, analysed in Chapter 9). Likewise, in museums such as those of science,
history, or natural history, we can identify interesting experimentations, more or
less intentional, with the display of moving images, as well as with the variety of
supports and formats, ranging from small screens to environmental projections.

Also, since I conceive the museum as an institution that is far from being
closed, isolated, and timeless, I argue that the exhibitions I analyse here
interact with the wider cultural and media landscape in which they are located. They must therefore be considered in the framework of the wider phenomena of the penetration of moving images in everyday spaces, from urban scenarios to domestic contexts.27

For these reasons, I begin my investigation discussing a matter that I consider crucial in the debates on the circulation of moving images outside the movie theatre: the question of the dispositif. In film studies, the issue was formulated by Jean-Louis Baudry in the 1960s–70s,28 and has since experienced a renewed centrality in the debates on early cinema,29 as well as in the field of investigations on cinema and contemporary art. In the latter field, to discuss the nature of the dispositif has become a crucial concern when theorising and analysing the multiple ways that moving images enter museums.30

In my investigation, I understand the dispositif on the basis of the well-known definition given by Michel Foucault, as a ‘thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble’, a ‘system of relations’ that can be established between a complex series of elements.31 Foucault’s definition was taken up by Gilles Deleuze, who conceives the dispositif as ‘a multilinear whole . . . composed of lines of different natures . . . Each line is broken, subject to changes in direction, bifurcating and forked, and subjected to derivations’.32 For Deleuze, studying this concept means ‘preparing a map, a cartography, a survey of unexplored lands’.33 This idea was already developed by Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus, where the notion of ‘assemblage’ (agencement) identifies, as Francesco Casetti aptly sums up, the ‘heterogeneous elements that are stripped from former combinations, that enter into a new relation with one another, and that form a new general profile’.34

According to Casetti, Deleuze raises two important points: the ‘sense of an opening’35 and of continuous transformation, but also ‘the presence of . . . a kind of comprehensive structure to which all these things make reference – despite the fact that the structure itself is mutable’.36 From this perspective, Casetti proposes to conceive the dispositive (as he calls it)37 as an ‘assemblage’, stressing the importance not only of the different components that it implies, but also of ‘the reasons and the ways in which they find a mutual arrangement’.38

Casetti identifies a set of elements that characterise the ‘cinema-assemblage’, and what brings them together.39 In his view, precisely because it has functioned as an apparatus, cinema maintains its identity despite the many transformations it faces: the history of cinema is marked by multiple experiments with new possibilities, but at the same time it always finds ‘a configuration compatible with the habitual one’.40

In my view, conceiving the cinema as a dispositif in the sense of an assemblage enables not only to recognise of the multiplicity of its manifestations,
but especially to focus on how it can intertwine with other dispositifs, such as the exhibition. In this book I will not only discuss how moving images have obtained a place in museum displays, but also how this migration has involved a constant renegotiation of narrative, presentation, and reception forms between the two apparently different dispositifs of the cinema and the exhibition.

Some of the exhibitions I describe throughout the book maintain a strong link with the cinematic dispositif (the projection, the collective spectacle, the immobile spectator), while others rewrite it in a more substantial way. To consider the museum as a ‘cinematic space’ thus enables underlining of how the very form of the museum display is questioned and reshaped by the elements of the cinematic dispositif, as well as identifying the new possibilities that the latter opens in the practices of exhibition design.

Together with the concept of dispositif, the expression ‘moving images’ deserves a brief explanation. This locution has several advantages. First, it is a broad term, which allows to account for heterogeneous forms of textuality. In this book, it is complemented by the terms ‘audio-visual’, which emphasises the integration of images and sounds, and ‘film’, which refers to more structured forms of textuality.

Also, and more importantly, as Catherine Elwes stresses in her Installation and the Moving Image, the expression ‘moving images’ ‘emphasises the dynamic element of apparent motion’ that unifies the works she analyses. Albeit Elwes recognises that motion in film is given by a series of fixed frames, and that the movement is actually only apparent; she maintains that ‘the impression of movement . . . is not diminished by the technology’s structural stasis’.

The centrality of motion is crucial to my argument: the films that have been projected in museums since the early decades of the twentieth century had, for the commentators of the time, the merit of bringing the movement (and, as one of them wrote, ‘life’) into museum galleries. Also, it is precisely the dimension of movement that questions and disrupts the most consolidated museum display techniques, posing new challenges to curators and asking visitors to rethink the form of their visit.

**Between Film and Museum Studies**

In order to investigate the display of moving images in museums, this book adopts a strongly interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical and methodological tools drawn primarily from museum, film, and media studies. Following museum studies, I will pay attention not only to the way in which exhibition design can influence the meaning of the exhibits, but also to the
type of relationship that the visitor establishes with the contents proposed by the institution. On the other hand, film and media studies offer methodological instruments to investigate the dissemination of moving images in a variety of contexts and situations outside the movie theatre, both in the past and in the contemporaneity.

**Museum Studies**

The so-called ‘New Museology’ trend that emerged in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s provide a set of indispensable methodological instruments towards a critical analysis of the whole system of organisation and transmission of knowledge inside museums. The museum is in fact conceived as a non-neutral tool of consensus building, as a space for control and conflict between different cultures and social classes. New Museology investigates the functions, mission, needs, and developments of the museum, with a particular focus on its relations with visitors. This approach orients the most recent tendencies of museum studies, which extend their scope and strengthen their empirical and practical base. If an exhibition is never neutral, museum scholars reaffirm that we cannot underestimate the multiplicity of levels and factors that contribute to museum communication.46

Museum studies are naturally multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary and cross-pollinate with a variety of other fields, including cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and art history, but also visual, memory, and media studies. At the intersection of museum studies and media studies, a fertile research field examines the use of media devices in the various areas of museum practice, from conservation to exhibition, teaching, and communication. This is undoubtedly one of the most topical and prolific territories of museological investigation, as evidenced by the contributions collected in 2015 in one of the volumes of the *International Handbooks of Museum Studies* series, dedicated to *Museum Media* and edited by Michelle Henning.49 The essays – many of which will be mentioned in this book – explore the different forms in which new media are included in museums, challenging their conventions and redefining their nature. Henning’s volume offers a much-needed systematisation of a broad set of issues: the museum as a medium and its relations with other media; the emergence of immersion and interactivity as crucial concerns of contemporary museums; the increasing importance attributed to audio-visuals and moving images; the evolution of curatorial practices and design in relation to new media devices; and the circulation of contents outside the physical boundaries of the museum through various media, including the Web.

In recent years, some museum scholars have analysed moving-images installations in the context of wider discourses on the musealisation of issues
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such as traumatic memories. I found particularly interesting the works of Silke Arnold-de Simine, Mediating Memory in the Museum and Steffi de Jong, The Witness as an Object. Arnold-de Simine investigates the role of memory, trauma, empathy, and nostalgia in contemporary Western museums, discussing the forms in which memory is mediated in museums, and analysing – among other case studies – a series of audio-visual installations. Steffi de Jong focuses on Holocaust museums, and investigates the use of audio-visual testimonies in the museum narrative and in the exhibition design strategies.

These publications reveal a growing scholarly recognition of the importance of audio-visual media in contemporary museum practices, which my book intends to further encourage. However, albeit that there is a growing interest for contemporary museum audio-visual installations, museum studies still lack a wide-ranging investigation of their history.

Film and Media Studies

It is in the field of film studies that we find the first attempts to study the role of moving images in museums from a historical perspective. Haidee Wasson and Alison Griffiths analyse the use of film in museums in the first decades of the twentieth century, respectively in art institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and in science and natural history museums, including the American Museum of Natural History. These works have inspired and oriented my research, suggesting new paths for further research on audio-visual media in exhibition design.

Although I will have the opportunity to return to these contributions – especially Griffiths’ – on several occasions, let me briefly highlight here their main themes and relevance to my research. In Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema, Wasson focuses on the history of the Film Library at the MoMA and shows how the entrance of cinema into the ‘temple’ of modern art had transformed the common understanding of film, which came to be considered as an art form, placed under the authority of an elite institution. More broadly, Wasson demonstrates that MoMA was part of a wider set of discourses, practices, and institutional contexts that stressed the educational value of cinema. Moreover, she shows that museums embraced mass media for different purposes: to reach a broader and more popular public, due to the growing importance of their educational mission; to disseminate ideas, concepts, and meanings; and to secure a place in the emerging landscape of modern leisure.

Alison Griffiths’ Shivers Down Your Spine provides essential methodological references. Griffiths explores a wide range of immersive and interactive forms
Introduction

of spectatorship, such as those provided by medieval cathedrals, panorama, IMAX screens, as well as by science and natural history museums. Regarding the last two cases, Griffiths discusses the evolution of exhibition techniques in institutions such as the Science Museum in London, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and the American Museum of Natural History of New York. She focuses on the introduction of automatic, electronic, and then digital media in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with a focus on the 1920s, the 1970s, and the present time. Her analysis of the different forms in which cinema made its entrance in museum exhibitions has paved the way to a new field of enquiry, and has brought to the attention of scholars a hitherto neglected array of practices.

Both Wasson and Griffiths underline that audio-visual media cannot be considered as isolated, but should be considered in relation to other media such as print, radio, and later television. Similarly, throughout this book, audio-visual media in museums will be always (albeit implicitly) considered as a part of a ‘media network’ (Medienverbund), to use Thomas Elsaesser’s words: ‘a network of competing, but also mutually interdependent and complementary media or media practices, focused on a specific location, a professional association, or even a national or state initiative’.54

As exemplified by the work of Wasson and Griffiths, in film and media studies the research on the display of moving images is closely intertwined with other lines of investigation, focusing on forms of spectatorship other than the ‘classic’ theatrical reception, and on the uses of films beyond the context of the cinematographic institution.

Over the last few years, a growing number of scholars have been focusing on the so-called ‘useful cinema’ – a term that designates the circulation of educational, scientific, or industrial films in a wide range of contexts (including schools and museums, but also churches and prisons), outside the entertainment and art distribution systems.55 This methodological approach emphasises the need to consider films in the framework of the practices, discourses, and dispositifs that are intertwined with the specific activities and goals of various institutions. It encourages to research, along with textual forms, the modes of production and reception, as well as the social practices connected with them.

Although privileging a historical perspective, the research on ‘useful cinema’ is strictly related to the contemporary digital scenario. Indeed, the advent of digital media has led to a proliferation of places and modes of film consumption, and the ensuing changes have encouraged scholars to investigate the precursors of the current situation in the past centuries.56 This trend is exemplified by Thomas Elsaesser and by scholars of the so-called ‘media archaeology’.57 If, even before the advent of digital media and the current pervasiveness of moving images, there were other forms of film circulation outside the context
of entertainment, according to Elsaesser the peculiarity of the contemporary media scenario strongly encourages a renewed look at the past:

our idea – and maybe even our definition – of cinema has changed even without appealing to digitisation as a technology, which is nonetheless implicit as a powerful ‘perspective correction’ and thus counts as an impulse in this retrospective re-writing of the past.\(^{58}\)

This approach invites us to relativise the supposed novelty of what is happening under the impulse of digitisation. Rather than a technological or aesthetic breakthrough, digitisation brought about an epistemic turn that revealed a series of already existing but hitherto neglected phenomena.

This book adopts a similar approach: the pervasiveness of moving images in contemporary museums suggests a new perspective from which we can question the past and pay attention to the previously overlooked penetration of audio-visual media into exhibition spaces. This does not mean that present and past overlap or that they are bound by a linear progress. I follow up on Elsaesser’s suggestion – drawn from Foucault – to consider both continuities and ruptures by ‘taking in the discontinuities, the so-called dead-ends, and by taking seriously the possibility of the astonishing otherness of the past’.\(^{59}\) As Elsaesser writes,

only a presumption of discontinuity (in Foucault’s terms, the positing of epistemic breaks) and of fragmentation (the rhetorical figure of the synecdoche or the *pars pro toto*) can give the present access to the past, which is always no more than a past (among many actual or possible ones), since for the archaeologist, the past can be present to the present with no more than its relics . . . an archaeology respects the possible distance the past has from our present perspective, and even makes it the basis of its methodology.\(^{60}\)

In the first part of the book I will underline how the museum aligned with the emerging trends of modernity through the use of cinema – one of modernity’s emblematic forms – while in the second part I will observe how today pre-cinematic spectacular forms such as Phantasmagoria re-emerge at the intersection between moving images and museum exhibitions. In short, upon entering the museum, moving images alter the supposed linearity of the development of exhibition practices, technology, and media, opening up unexpected lines of transformation.

**The Museological Discourses Between Continuities and Ruptures**

Museology proves an extremely fertile ground for the dialectics between continuity and rupture. Alison Griffiths remarks that ‘to a large extent, very
little has really changed in the world of museums since the heyday of nine-
teenth-century exhibition culture’. However, for this reason, she argues, ‘as
curators ponder the ontological status and pedagogical value of technology-
dependent exhibits within the twenty-first-century museum, they might do
well to consider what lessons can be learned from the enduring debates of the
past’. Griffiths’s statement demonstrates that this rift between continuity
and discontinuity that lies at the heart of current curatorial debates should be
more accurately described as the debate over the relationship of education to
entertainment. The use of media devices in museums and galleries has fuelled
this debate, along with the ever-increasing need to make them popular, and
therefore relevant to contemporary visitors. As I will show in the following
chapters, while museum professionals are attracted by new technologies and
their ability to appeal to a wider audience, they also worry about the possible
challenge to the institution’s accuracy in transmitting knowledge.

If Griffiths’ perspective emphasises the often-overlooked historical dimen-
sion of the use of cinema and media in the museum, Kathleen McLean is far
more critical, as she deplores a lack of progress in exhibition techniques from
the 1960s to this day, as well as the inability of museum professionals to seize
the opportunities to renew the institution in a profoundly changed scenario.
Provocatively, when comparing the first issue of the journal Curator (1958)
to the one published fifty years later, McLean recognises ‘a disconcerting
similarity’ between the questions discussed in the two periods:

certainly, museums and their exhibitions have changed with the times to
some extent, reflecting the changing values of the societies of which they are
a part . . . But despite these changes, opportunities, and new understandings,
exhibition professionals still seem to be saying the same things colleagues
were saying 50 years ago, while thinking they are new ideas.

Among these recurring matters, McLean identifies the tension between
entertainment and education; the opposition between exhibitions based
on material objects and those presenting abstract concepts; the plea for
experimentation in display techniques; and concerns about visitors’ comfort.
Another recurring theme is the importance of media technologies as part of
the museum’s effort to keep up with the times, as well as the need to take
inspiration from world’s fairs, and more generally from exhibition venues
outside the museum field.

These issues will emerge several times in the next chapters, showing how
problems related to the use of moving images in museums are strictly con-
ected to the definition of the identity and the purposes of the institution, as
well as to its relationship with the public.
Notes

1. Some institutional collections of cinematic equipment were established before Will Day’s donation, for example, at the National Technical Museum in Prague, in 1908–11. See Trope, ‘Le Cinéma pour le Cinéma’. However, the museum was not the first site where cinematic machines were exhibited: several items had been displayed at International Expositions and commercial fairs since the 1890s. For a brief overview, see Albera, ‘Exposé, le cinéma s’expose’.

2. On Will Day’s collection, see Aubert, et al. (eds), ‘The Will Day Historical Collection of Cinematograph & Moving Picture Equipment’.

3. On these exhibitions, see Gauthier, La passion du cinéma, pp. 72–9.

4. One of the most well-known exhibitions is Païni and Cogeval (eds), Hitchcock et l’Art: coincidences fatales, held on 6 June–24 September 2001 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

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

6. Among the vast bibliography on this subject, see at least Autelitano (ed.), The Cinematic Experience; Balsom, Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art; Bordina, et al. (eds), Extended Temporalities; Bruno, Atlas of Emotion; Bruno, Public Intimacy; Bruno, Surface; Connolly, The Place of Artists’ Cinema; Dubois, et al. (eds), Oui, c’est du cinéma/Yes, It’s Cinema; Dubois, et al. (eds), Extended cinema; Elwes, Installation and the Moving Image; Leighton (ed.), Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader; Noordegraaf, et al. (eds), Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art; Trodd (ed.), Screen/Space.

7. These issues are explored in Connolly, The Place of Artists’ Cinema.


12. See, for example, Groys, ‘Media Art in the Museum’.


16. See Uroskie, Between the Black Box and the White Cube.

21. As Jacques Aumont asks in his *Que reste-t-il du cinéma?*
25. For a synthetic bibliography, see notes 6 and 7 to this chapter.
27. See at least Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy*, De Rosa, *Cinema e postmedia*.
28. Baudry first refers to the idea of ‘basic apparatus’ (*appareil de base*) to subsequently discuss the notion of *dispositif* (translated in English as ‘apparatus’) from a Lacanian perspective. He suggests that the technical configuration of cinema (the camera and the projector, as well as the configuration projector–screen–dark room) has an ideological impact on the spectator’s reception. Accordingly, the *dispositif* is a simulating machine that produces in the psychology of the spectator an artificial regression similar to the dream and the scene of the unconscious. Baudry’s theories subsequently generated the so-called ‘apparatus theory’. See Baudry, ‘Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus’; Baudry, ‘The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema’.
30. See Federici, *Cinema esposto*.
31. Foucault, ‘The Confession of the Flesh’. See also Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. As mentioned above, we prefer here the translation ‘dispositive’ to the term ‘apparatus’ used in the English translations of Foucault’s text.
32. Deleuze, ‘What is a Dispositif?’, p. 338. See also Casetti’s discussion of Deleuze’s thesis in *The Lumière Galaxy*, pp. 78–81; italics in the original.
33. Deleuze, ‘What is a Dispositif?’, pp. 338–9.
36. Ibid. p. 80.
37. Casetti proposes to use the term ‘dispositive’ to distance from the traditional ‘apparatus theory’ and to connect to theories such as Foucault’s (see *The Lumière Galaxy*, pp. 233–4, note 1). For the use of the term ‘dispositive’, see also Bussolini, ‘What Is a Dispositive?’
40. Ibid. p. 96.
42. Ibid. p. 5.
43. See Chapter 2.
44. See Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*.
47. See Macdonald, ‘Expanding Museum Studies’.
50. See Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*.
51. de Jong, *The Witness as Object*. See also Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age*.
55. The phrase ‘useful cinema’ has been utilised in the title of the volume edited by Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, *Useful Cinema*. See also Hediger and Vonderau (eds), *Films that Work*; Orgeron, et al. (eds), *Learning with the Lights Off*.
57. See Huhtamo and Parikka, *Media Archaeology. Approaches, Applications, and Implications*; Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?*; Strauven ‘Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art, and New Media (Can) Meet’.
58. Elsaesser, ‘The New Film History as Media Archaeology’, p. 86. See also Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*.
60. Id., ‘The New Film History as Media Archaeology’, pp. 103–4.
62. Ibid. p. 384.
63. It is important to note that McLean considers a less extended chronological period than Griffiths.
64. McLean, ‘Do Museum Exhibitions Have a Future?’, p. 110.
65. See also Pardo, ‘Audiovisual Installations as a Strategy for the Modernisation of Heritage Presentation Spaces’.