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The Dissipating Aura of Cinema
By *Kristen Daly*

For over one hundred years, moving images have been recorded onto frames on expensive celluloid tape and projected by fairly simple machines. This has been a remarkably reliable way of recording and exhibiting, but also a remarkably static media technology. Films cannot easily be reproduced, delivered or manipulated. The film print costs between two and three thousand dollars and can be over a mile long. In many ways, the film reel had resisted the characteristics attributed to it in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Robert Flaherty dropped a cigarette on his original edited version of *Nanook of the North* (1922) destroying his only print. He had to organize an entire second expedition north to gather footage and again edit it into the version we know today (Canudo). Film ages and degrades, so it is estimated that less than ten percent of the earliest films currently exist. Only with the introduction of digital and computer technologies have Benjamin's expectations of cinema been brought to fruition. Reproducibility, or as William J. Mitchell terms it "digital replication" of cinema, has brought about a diminishing aura, and a "tremendous shattering of tradition" as movies have morphed from ritual art objects into "fragments of information that circulate in the high-speed networks now ringing the globe and that can be received, transformed, and recombined like DNA to produce new intellectual structures having their own dynamics and value" (52). This manic reproducibility of the digital object changes our experience of cinema as cinema changes from a mass ritual to a form of interactive communication.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin wrote about mechanical reproducibility and its affect on the aura of an art object. According to Benjamin, previous to mechanical reproduction, the original was the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity. Mechanical reproduction reduces this primacy of the original for two reasons. First, mechanical reproduction is "more independent of the original than manual reproduction," and "substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" ("The Work of Art" 220). Secondly, he writes, "Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (221). These two processes he describes as leading to a "tremendous shattering of tradition" (221). As Samuel Weber points out in Benjamin's notes, the word "aura" is related to "setting," "case," or fixed location—"reproduction for distribution and exhibition represents a modification of the way artworks *take place*" (85). It is these two focal features, the concept of the "original" and the way cinema "takes place," that we will examine in detail.

Benjamin described the work of art at a moment of flux, an historical and discursive caesura, as the work of art lost its aura and entered into circulation as a commodity (Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* xxxi). Similarly, digital and computer technologies have brought us to the next decisive caesura. This paper will argue that cinema, as film, retained its aura and that only now, with the introduction of digital and computer technologies, is this aura of cinema dissipating. Cinema, as we have known it, is disintegrating, no longer functioning as a tool of national

consolidation, common culture or ritual activity as it did in the past. Digital and computer technology create a cultural, social and economic logic system characterized by variability, manipulability, dispersion, excess and hybridity. This paper will attempt to examine this shift as the logic of digitality pervades cinema production, consumption and culture. This requires an expansive definition of cinema because cinema is no longer sufficiently described by a two-hour movie in a theater. Movies now exist in variable forms and come embedded in a social world of interpretation and manipulation from the banal of the fast-forward to the invasiveness of the remix. Therefore, when we look at the penetration of digital technologies into cinema, we must consider a broad definition of cinema, encompassing production, distribution, and exhibition. It has become, in Sean Cubitt's terms, a "distributed medium." (364)

Cinema provides an interesting subject for the study of this moment because it has resisted becoming digital. Cinema is being trained as a new media along with us. Hannah Arendt intimates in her introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, that he was such a potent and incisive observer of twentieth century technologies because he was in essence a nineteenth century man living in the twentieth century (22). Cinema, too, acts as a twentieth century observer of the twenty first century. For this reason cinema, its life or afterlife, can best represent our own transformation from an industrial culture to a digital culture. Books became new media with the invention of the printing press and movable type, music with the invention of the magnetic tape recorder, but cinema has resisted, remaining hard to produce, reproduce, distribute and exhibit until the conversion to digital technologies and computerization. Thus, it is on the cusp of becoming new media and can be analyzed at a moment of rearranging paradigms.

The Original

Amos Vogel best describes the experience and aura of film in his essay "On Seeing a Mirage". He describes seeing Werner Herzog's *Fata Morgana* ten years after having seen it for the first time. He writes, "Having originally been exposed to the crystal clarity and sharp-edged photography of a first-generation 35mm print projected on a large screen, I found myself peering uncertainly into the dim, contrastless recesses of a cheap 16mm print, decorated with striations and scratches. The tones – the gross and subtle details so central to the film – were gone." He laments:

> What kind of art is this that depends so heavily on the nature of its presentation, and to which access in a form close to its "original" becomes ever more impossible? What shall we do with the evanescence of film stock? . . . It is as if *King Lear* were available only one day per decade in one city per continent, in fiftieth-generation, pirated, Hong Kong copies of which entire pages were missing, individual paragraphs not quite readable, portions of characters obliterated with frustrating intimations of potential greatness; the stuff of Borges, of Kafka, of Marquez. (Vogel 48)

Vogel writes of a disappearing or even lost form of cinema experience where "each showing will hasten [the film's] demise" (qtd. in Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema* 67). For him, the first-generation 35mm print is the "original." These filmic artifacts, the specific scratchings and fadings of a film object, make it a unique object different from other copies of the same film. This returns the originality to the film print, as one could theoretically trace through these artifacts the history of the object. Archivist Paolo Cherchi Usai writes, "Every copy, so long as it is onfilm, remains a unique object, distinct from others" ("The Unfortunate Spectator" 174). Stephen Prince calls these aspects "filmic artifacts," and writes nostalgically about them. He writes, "Let's celebrate the dirt, the scratches, the grain, . . . In the clean, crystal-clear, and diamond sharp world of digital video, they are the ghostly traces of our former love, artifacts of the stuff that dreams once were made of" (Prince 33). These filmic artifacts were a sign of love, signifying that a print had been passed around from theater to theater and was much watched. For *Grindhouse* (2007) the double feature co-creation of Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino, the more technically savvy Rodriguez showed Tarantino, who wanted to shoot on aged film, that these artifacts could be recreated digitally, thus simulating a well-loved grindhouse feature without the need for love. Love as

plug-in. So Tarantino shot on film, then, in the digital intermediary, the scratches, burns and fades were added, and only then the movie was exported again on film. [1]

Unlike film prints, digital prints do not get scratches - they do not fade or burn. Copies are identical to one another. Digital copies need not age. They need not disappear. They can be shown in the same form and quality over and over. Any copy can be a master. Thus the film object is no longer so valuable as either an object of ritual, nostalgia or memory. Lev Manovich complicates this idea of the identical, never degrading digital copy when he writes in his discussion of *What New Media Is Not* that although in theory these are characteristics of digital reproduction, in actual use files must almost always be compressed when they are copied or transferred or saved in a different form. Thus information is lost in each compression (55). Digital objects exist in a code that is unreadable or untranslatable by humans. To view digital objects, we require software translators. So the threat of the lost or degraded object is replaced by a different set of fears – fears of accessibility and filing in an infinitude of stored information. Yet, even the idea of digital format issues and loss is fairly moot as we archive in multiple on increasingly cheap storage space, the software of which is updated with a click. As Tom Scocca writes, the great fear in the digital age was format obsolescence, that, "People would throw out old-fashioned paper in favor of electronic archives, only to suddenly find that they had all the works of human knowledge stored on five-and-a-quarter-inch floppies and nobody was making floppy drives anymore." But, as he says, web video allows people to transfer all their previously "near obsolete" formats, VHS tapes and Super8 home movies, to a digital format which is stored and updated online. Thus the media object loses its aura of impending loss. A spoof technology article in parodic newspaper *The Onion* touts a new product from Kodak:

> Eastman Kodak released an imaging software package that yellows, fades, and even loses digital photos over time . . . "With the click of a mouse, Fotomatshop will make your digital photographs crease, develop fingerprint spots, and even stick together in their 'virtual shoebox.'" ("New Software Yellows Neglected Digital Photos Over Time")

Lev Manovich says in describing computers that there is no decay; we must go out of our way to delete an object in order to remove it and yet we can probably still recover it. He writes, "Thus if in 'meatspace' we have to work to remember, in cyberspace we have to work to forget" (63). Because the copy is so easily replicated, the copy has little value and this value need not grow with time as there is no deterioration and no scarcity. The fragility and scarcity of the film copy provided it a measure of aura, which digital copies do not retain.

In the world of digital replication, the digital image and the video object lose the aura that the photograph and film had retained because the copy isfinally independent of the original; in fact there is no sense of an original at all. What is lost is the concept of cinema as a finished art object tied to an *auteur* vision and created to be seen in a certain ritual way – an "original" as Vogel terms it. Peter Lunenfeld argues that media made by computers is always unfinished. He says that "'unfinish' defines the aesthetic of digital media" (7). As Lev Manovich stresses, digital objects are modular, meaning they are made up of objects put together to form larger objects, with each piece maintaining its independence. Therefore, they can be taken apart and put together in innumerable different forms. He calls this the "fractal structure of new media" (30). This modularity leads to variability in that, "A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions" (36). With digital replication we no longer necessarily have the reproduction in the form of an object. Edmond Couchot calls digital media "immedia," because there is no longer a medium per se. Although digital objects need not degrade or fade and are so easily reproducible, there is little fear of their being lost; a new media object can exist in so many different, variable forms that any concept of an authentic original may be lost.

An example of this new mode of variability is provided by the experience of the movie *2046* (2005) directed by Wong Kar Wai. *2046* arrived for its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in

pieces. The opening was delayed as the last few reels arrived. Reviewers saw a movie in the midst of the editing process. The premise of the movie is a writer who writes stories about the future: the year 2046. Wong Kar-Wai says that he came up with the idea when Hong Kong was turned over to the Chinese and they promised not to change anything for fifty years. This absurd idea gave him the inspiration to create the story of a writer writing about 2046 – a time and place you can visit where nothing ever changes, but no one, except our writer, ever comes back. Innumerable copies of *2046* exist. Film critic Nathan Lane refers to it both as an "epic remix" and a "phenomenon." (31) It came out over the course of a year or more, after five years in production, and from what reviewers wrote, versions were variable in different countries and on the published and imported DVDs. The movie's subject is memory and loss and the actual film has itself participated in that story, existing and being lost in different forms – database gone mad. Lane writes, "And it isn't difficult to imagine other versions surfacing some day: a pure sci-fi, an experimental montage, a wordless pantomime, a melodrama in Japanese, a half-dozen self-contained romances" (31). Thus cinema changes from a representational art producing finished objects, and becomes increasingly tele-cultural, with social interaction and mutation preventing the formation of an authentic "original." Instead of the nostalgia and sense of loss with each viewing of a film print, as expressed by Vogel, the viewer in the digital world is left with an untethered relation to the movie which can exist in uncountable forms and formats, none more authentic than the next.

The idea of the original is tightly linked to the concept of the *auteur*. Digital technologies serve to undermine the status and authenticity of the *auteur*. Jean-Luc Godard, whose new mode of cinema helped solidify the concept of *auteur*, admits outrage at this state of events. He says, "The cinema, as we knew it and as it no longer exists, helped make things visible. . . . The metaphor of the film negative and the positive print was a moral metaphor. But with digital cameras the negative no longer exists – there's no more negative!" (Bonnaud 40) The unique negative provided a measure of authenticity and *auteur*ity. With digital moving images, the negative has been transformed into a code, thus having, as Jean Baudrillard and W.T.J. Mitchell have pointed out, much in common with viral replication. Digital technologies unhinge the ties between *auteur*, negative and original as movies become variable and ubiquitous. Roland Barthes sees the death of the Author as the birth of the Reader. He writes of how a text's unity no longer lies in its origin but in its destination, which is the Reader, who can hold all the different parts, viewpoints of a text together. (148) In this way, cinema follows in the footsteps of text. Novels have long been intertextual and interactive, requiring user-participation and user-interpretation. While film remained ephemeral and inaccessible, subject to a one-time reel-time viewing, it could retain its aura and reduce the mass audience to a single spectator, but as the cinema becomes subject to remix and review and user engagement, it becomes increasingly heterogeneous and hypertextual. [2] New Wave *auteurs* laid the groundwork for this type of reader, creating texts which were discursive, intertextual and subject to interpretation, but digital and computer technology has made this type of reading ubiquitous as the language of cinema becomes increasingly two-way. As Niels Ole Finneman puts it, the receiver is "changed to the more active role of 'writer,' 'co-writer,' 'selector,' 'editor' or simply user" (233). William J. Mitchell takes this to be the next step from Benjamin's description of mechanical image reproduction. As he says, if exhibition was substituted for cult value in Benjamin's description, then digital imaging substitutes use value, or "input value" for exhibition value. (52) Digital technology can greatly empower Barthes's Reader who now has authorial capacity and is capable not only of interpreting texts, but interacting with them and changing them.

As Friedrich Kittler writes, "What was impossible to store could not be manipulated" (*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 36). Thus the photographic camera, the movie camera and the phonograph enabled the beginnings of manipulation of images and sounds. But with the conversion of all media to numbers, digitization, *everything* can be stored by *everyone*. Previous to digitization, only a few people had the resources and access to manipulate films, but we find ourselves in a situation in relation to moving images much like that described by Benjamin at the

turn of the twentieth century: "For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. . . . But today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere" ("The Work of Art" 232). Similarly, digital new media enable more people to produce and distribute moving images, blurring the formerly strict lines between reader and writer or, in the case of cinema, between producer and viewer. Cinema literacy is becoming universal. In 1998, Elizabeth Daley, dean of the University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television (the USA's oldest film school) opened up film classes to students in the other schools and currently half of the 16,500 undergraduates take at least one cinema/television class. She said of her reasons for doing so: "The greatest digital divide is between those who can read and write with media and those who can't" (Van Ness). Digital technologies take a decisive step from analog technologies, and can be much more immersive than traditional text because they naturally incorporate networks, communities and connectivity (Alm).

Movie fans are increasingly becoming filmmakers, using movies as the "raw material that can be appropriated, manipulated and reshaped into another work of art" (Smith 27). People re-edit movies; they put themselves and their friends into movie scenes; they turn home video into music videos; they put still photos to music. The remix is endless. A popular movie like the *Star Wars* series or *Lord of the Rings*, or even *Napoleon Dynamite* will have thousands of remixes and mash ups that populate the Internet. A search for "Star Wars" on YouTube (January 15, 2007) brought up 33,251 videos: a database of variability. Our relationship with cinema is being radically changed by this modularity and variability. In his first book to take place in the present time, *Pattern Recognition,* cyberpunk author William Gibson captures the emerging interactive, interpretive relationship between producers and viewers. A character, Cayce, tries to find the source for what is called "the footage" – a series of remarkable movie clips that appear sporadically on the web. She discovers a global group of people, called the footageheads, who track new clips and discuss the possibilities of their origin and how they are meant to be combined. It is not known if the footage is the work of one person nor whether or not it is live or computer-generated nor whether the clips are bits of a completed work or a work-in-progress. So footageheads edit together different versions of the clips, all of which are accessible on the web. This form of discursive, interactive production and distribution characterizes our experience of cinema in the digital world: we might catch bits of video in passing, we might change, add or respond to them and pass them on. The captions never reveal much. As the character Bigend says, "The spinning of a given moment's scenarios. Pattern recognition" (Gibson 57). This, too, might qualify under Benjamin's measures as a "tremendous shattering of tradition" – a vast change in the relationship of the original to the copy. As Samuel Webber writes:

> What is condemned in the age of technical reproducibility is not aura as such but the aura of art as a work of representation, a work that would have its fixed place, that would take its place in and as a world-picture. What remains is the *mediaura* of an apparatus whose glance takes up everything and gives nothing back, except perhaps in the blinking of an eye. (Weber 107)

Cinema as ritual has given way to cinema as a form of interactive communication. As Sean Cubbitt writes, "Digital media do not refer, they communicate" (250). Moving images move virally with global information flows replicating or representing a networked, globalized, economic system. Cinema changes from a representational art to a telecommunicative model, thus losing the aura it had previously retained. Art is judged by aesthetic criteria, but communication technologies must be judged differently, on how effectively they communicate meaning – can people understand and use the medium to communicate what they want or does it reduce them to incoherence.

How Cinema Takes Place

"With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the

exhibition of their products" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art" 225).

From solely the purview of theaters, movies have moved out into our homes, the streets and our pockets. Movies can now be seen on TVs, computers, on cell phones, on Gameboys, and on posters. We might glance at it in passing or have a low quality version. No longer do we stare "at cinema screens for hours at a time, alert and motionless, backs straight and arms at sides," as Ken Kalfus describes the early twentieth century moviegoers (52). The viewer is increasingly refusing to be part of the absorbing masses sitting in the dark. According to the Motion Picture Association of America (the film industry's trade group), in 2004, the average American spent 78 hours watching videos, DVDs and video-on-demand. He or she spent only 13 hours in the movie theater. British director and theorist Peter Greenaway is dramatic in his edicts: "Cinema died on the 31st of September, 1983, when the zapper, the remote control, was introduced into the living rooms of the world" (Gaydos). As Jonathan Crary points out in *Suspensions of Perception*, Benjamin already anticipated this world of the fragmented and circulating art object. He writes:

> Perception for Benjamin was acutely temporal and kinetic; he makes clear how modernity subverts even the possibility of a contemplative beholder. There is never a pure access to a single object; vision is always multiple, adjacent to and overlapping with other objects, desires, and vectors. Even the congealed space of the museum cannot transcend a world where everything is in circulation. (Crary 20)

Cinema to some extent resisted this circulation and maintained its contemplative beholder until the advent of videotape and then digital technologies. In 1991, Timothy Corrigan published his book *A Cinema Without Walls*, the title a tribute to André Malraux's "Museum Without Walls," to describe the cultural collapse of authoritative walls in movie audiences and culture since Vietnam. He writes, "Since the shifting family of contemporary viewers can now literally possess images as the ubiquitous backgrounds and ornaments of their lives, those images are recast as social objects defined by the conditions and contexts in which they are viewed" (Corrigan 6). The convergence of media has created an uneasy balance of immersion and distraction.

Film critic Joe Morgenstern of the *Wall Street Journal* writes of seeing *King Kong* (2005) at the Sony Lincoln Center complex in New York: "The movie was up there where the movie should be, but smaller screens kept flickering in the audience as people checked their messages, reviewed their portfolios or issued not-so-whispered instructions to babysitters at home" (Morgenstern). Theatres have gone to great length to develop pre-movie announcements to turn off cell-phones, and have explored the legal possibilities of cutting off service. [3] Morgenstern, though, takes this to be a generalized change in viewing habits and ways of experiencing the world. He writes:

> What is genuinely new here is the splitting-off of attention. When Samuel Coleridge coined the phrase "willing suspension of disbelief," he was talking about a kind of emotional investment that readers or audiences have made not just willingly but usually eagerly – until now, when the watchword has become a willing suspension of attention. In decades and centuries past, people plunged into novels or plays, and then movies, to escape from reality. Now, restless and frequently anxious, they're reluctant to leave the quasi-reality of the virtual world that's accessed too easily via portable gizmos. . . . movies are becoming less of an immersive experience, as more and more moviegoers seek distractions from their distraction. (Morgenstern)

Interaction with media through the computer provides a conflict of information versus absorption. We are being trained by our interaction with computer technologies to switch between immersive, representational, informational and communicative experiences. On a computer, people generally have more than one window open and, as Sherry Turkle points out in *Life on the Screen*, one window might be a grant proposal, one might be a database, one might be email, one might be a virtual reality world and today, one is bound to be YouTube. This is certainly a different type of media experience from the classic cinema experience, where the

illusion is meant to be preserved. As such, the traditional cinema experience seems far removed from the contemporary media experience of ubiquity and multi-tasking and semi-absorption. Our contemporary experience of moving images is increasingly interactive, blurring the line between producer and consumer, spectacle and spectator, representation and information. Cinema enacts new sets of relations between art, culture, work and communication. Currently, we are always available to our tools of communication, even the movie theater cannot protect us from the everyday shocks of total connection.

For Benjamin, cinema was seen as training for, and soothing the modern masses from the shocks of industrialization. As Susan Buck-Morss explains in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, film allowed early viewers to step back and examine their modern existence through montage from "the position of an expert" (268). [4] Only film could provide this therapy because text was no longer protected in the form of books from fragmentation and circulation. In the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin demonstrates how in the nineteenth century print escaped from literature onto the wall in advertisements and infiltrated into everyday experience. He says, "Printing, having found in the book a refuge in which to lead an autonomous existence, is pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements [. . . that] force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular" (qtd. in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* 268).


Times Square March 28, 2007 8:30pm, taken by author.

Digital signs with moving image advertisements populate our public spaces – a form of *re*enchantment of the social world, as Susan Buck-Morss describes with respect to Benjamin's nineteenth century Paris (253-4). These signs attempt to capture the digital demographic who are busy in the home playing video games and absorbing media through a computer without exposing themselves to traditional advertisements. Only in the outside world are they forced temporarily to "look up" from their own immersive media environment (Kersnowski 57). The signs are mutable and can be aimed at different demographics according to time slots, different days, or different weather. Thus the moving image, like text, is now freed from the theater and its traditional ritual, and is flexible and mobile enough to pursue a pure commodity form in a world where information functions as currency. The *flâneur*, already a fading memory in the sped up time of Benjamin, loses more prerogative in the contemporary world, as expressed in the movie *Minority Report* (2002) based on a short story by Phillip K. Dick. [5] Here, the protagonist, Chief John Anderton, played by Tom Cruise, wanders through a futuristic mall where artificially intelligent hologram advertisements recognize him, referring to him by name, telling him that the pants he likes are available and in the size he bought last time. He need not even look at the object; the ads know what he wants, accessing him, despite his distracted attention. [6] This is the future-perfect completion of the condition captured in Benjamin's quote from Georges Duhamel who says, "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images." (qtd. in Benjamin, "The Work of Art" 238). In the movie, every building wall is a flat screen projecting advertisements and news. This is not such a far cry from the current Times Square in New York.

Artist Doug Aitken spent a summer living in a cheap hotel behind these signs in Times Square. He used this as inspiration for his project *Sleepwalkers,* which was projected on the outside walls of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in February 2007. He said, "Living there made me aware

of the violent way images come at you while creating this completely sensory environment" (Yablonsky 29). He describes his project, which shows a night in the life of five night workers taking place in different boroughs, as "a river of images moving up and down the walls of the city" (Yablonsky 29). The work from an artist who has said he finds the "watching of an unbroken story from a seat before a single screen about as compelling as the study of a blinking light," well demonstrates the new forms of distraction and absorption and remixing of public and private, work and play, of our digital culture. The banal private lives of these characters are projected building-size onto the walls of the museum, and absorbed by passersby who may or may not be paying attention. [7]
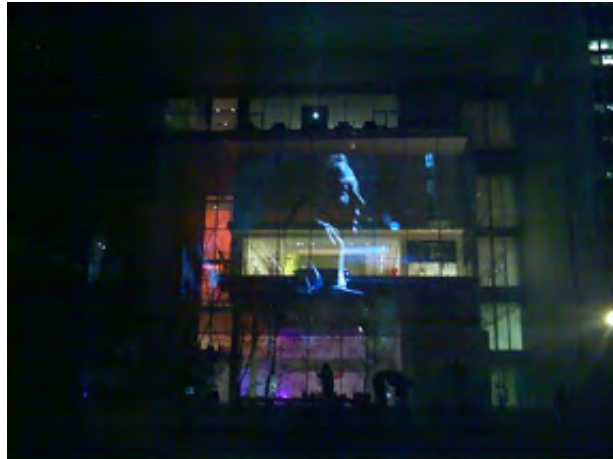
Picture taken by author on cell 'phone, February 2007.

Cinema on the street provides a telling example of the changing face of cinema as the walls, ceiling, and seats are blown out of the cinema and the images escape like gremlins to populate our lives outside the theater. Information about the project could be had by dialing a number on a cellphone. This interaction of different media with public cinema projections has been used by a number of artists. Thus, as new media theorist Holly Willis has pointed out, instead of being just moving images in an outdoor space, this form of interaction, incorporating different technologies, "invites participants into 'electronic territories' and dataspheres" (94). This interactive form of navigation better represents how we currently navigate the urban environment, both indoors and outdoors. The moving image alone does not hold our attention; rather, what does hold our attention is the moving image in conjunction with an immersive and interactive media experience.

In the digital age, we interact less and less with an unmediated environment. The aura of the moving image is diminished as it becomes ubiquitous. As Lev Manovich puts it, "From commanding a dark movie theater, the cinema image, this twentieth-century illusion and therapy machine par excellence, becomes just a small window on a computer screen, one stream among many others coming to us through the network, one file among numerous others on our hard drives" (211). Any concept of ritual and tradition has been obliterated with the Internet distributed web video. Images are poor quality, disconnected, sourceless and distracted. Cinema becomes fragmented information to be absent-mindedly transferred rather than absorbed. Along those lines, Fredric Jameson argues that the spectatorship of cinema regains a certain aura in this world of new media. He writes, "On the other hand, all of this can be said in another way, in which we celebrate the return of Benjaminian aura to the movie screen, where looking retrieves a kind of splendor and authenticity from the perceptual habits of video and television: the "good print" then becomes something like an "original" again" (217).

Moving images have finally lost the aura they retained for almost a century as they become ubiquitous and tied into other new media and communication experiences and untied from the contemplative and immersive ritual art object. According to Benjamin, film allowed the masses to see themselves, equating the actor and the politician and enabling the aestheticisation of politics. Currently, with the ubiquity of moving images and the distracted reception they entail, we have

not just the actor and the politician and the mass, but we have a sixteen-year-old girl's room next to video from Darfur, equally captionless – the aestheticisation of the everyday in a flurry of accidental montage. This interactive experience might empower us as Barthes's reader or it may, as Jean Baudrillard foresees, take us from subjects and spectators to "interactive extras, the meek freeze-dried extras in this immense reality show" (153). Either way, it is a "tremendous shattering of tradition" foreseen by Benjamin and coming to fruition today. Moving images operate at the intersection of communication and culture, helping to define our imagination of, and our way of being in the world. For this reason our changing relationship with cinema is important to our morphing society as technology threatens to out-develop and out-inform our institutions of culture, politics, and art. We too can take a close look at the changing nature of our relationship to moving images to foresee a potential emerging social order. Benjamin's concepts of the changing nature of the work the art can provide us a way of considering our own moment of technological change.

Kristen Daly is a doctoral candidate in Communications at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University in New York. She is in the last throes of a dissertation on the effects of digital and computer technologies on cinema. Kristen holds a Masters of Science in Mathematics from Stanford University.

Endnotes

1. In a digital intermediary, DI, a motion picture is digitized in order to manipulate colour and image characteristics to change the look before output for distribution.
2. "For the commercial distribution of video and audio equipment is destroying the extraordinary technical capacity of the old cinema to shape society through vision, to turn a thousand film-goers into a single spectator." (Virilio 67)
3. Russia's oldest theater, the Alexandrinsky in St. Petersburg, uses a short-range jamming system during performances.
4. Artwork essay, I, p. 488.
5. Benjamin, already in the early twentieth century, marvels at the *flâneur* of the nineteenth of whom he writes, "In 1839 it was considered elegant to take a tortoise out walking. This gives an idea of the tempo of flânerie in the arcades," implying that at the time of his writing this would be unheard of. Franz Hessel, too, gives us an idea of the fleeting time period of the *flâneur* as he writes in a piece, "The Suspicious Character": "To walk slowly down lively streets is a special pleasure. To be left behind by the rush of others – this is a bath in the surf. But my dear fellow Berliners do not make it easy, however gracefully one might move out of their way. I always receive suspicious looks whenever I try to stroll as a flâneur between the shops. I think they take me for a pickpocket." (*The Arcades Project* 422)
6. Chief Anderton has stolen someone else's eyes and the eye recognition software makes the talking ad holograms refer to him as Mr. Chang.
7. Artist Doug Aitken describes the script as "a cross between a haiku and a grocery list." (Yablonsky 29)

Films Cited

2046. Dir. Wong Kar Wai. Screenplay by Wong Kar Wai. Sony Pictures Classics, 2005.

Fata Morgana. Dir. Werner Herzog. Screenplay by Werner Herzog. Werner Herzog

Filmproduktion, 1971.

Grindhouse. Dir. Robert Rodriquez and Quentin Tarantino. Screenplay by Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino. The Weinstein Company, 2007.

King Kong. Dir. Peter Jackson. Screenplay by Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens. Universal Pictures, 2005.

The Lord of the Rings. Trilogy. *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, *The Return of the King*. Dir. Peter Jackson. Screenplay by Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, Phillipa Boyens. Adapt. From novel by J.R.R. Tolkien. New Line Cinema, 2001, 2002, 2003.

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