RECENT SURVEYS ON THE PROJECTED IMAGE: A LOOK AT DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

Ariane Noël de Tilly, Universiteit van Amsterdam

In 2005, the art historian David Joselit published an article in which he commented on projection, now the most common spatial application of video. To describe the space in which images are projected, Joselit renamed the "white cube", the "light cube"[1]. During a round-table on "The Projected Image in Contemporary Art", the art historian Hal Foster argued that «film or filmic effects are so pervasive in the art world that they have begun to reformat all kinds of other practices»[2]. Joselit, Foster, and many other experts have discussed the omnipresence of projection in contemporary art. Since the celebration of the 100th anniversary of cinema in 1995, this phenomenon has also been greatly investigated by several institutions that organized survey exhibitions on the relationship between cinema and contemporary art, and on how projection-based works have been integrated in the museum since the 1960s. The exhibition *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945* presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, was the first to reflect on the phenomenon[3]. Among the major surveys organized in the following years, one can mention *Cinéma Cinéma: Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience* (Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven)[4]; *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York)[5]; *Le Mouvement des images* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris)[6]; *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection. Films, Videos and Installations from 1963-2005* (Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin)[7]; and *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007* (University of Toronto)[8].

As early as 1974, projection-based works caught the attention of curator Martin Friedman, who organized the exhibition *Projected Images* at the Walker Art Center[9]. In the catalogue, the curator underlines that the six artists selected for *Projected Images* conceived «film and video images essentially in environmental terms – as dominant elements of interior spaces – and they [were] as much concerned with the changing spatial and psychological relationships between observer and image as with the character of the image itself»[10]. Right then, Friedman was able to pinpoint what was at the core of the contemporary realizations of the artists. Some thirty years later, this emphasis on the relationship between the viewer and the work, as well with the treatment of space is what art historian David Joselit focuses on in his essay "Inside the Light Cube". According to Joselit, «projection reintroduces a more conventionally theatrical mode of spectatorship in which the audience remains outside the media feedback loop rather than participating as actors within it»[11]. Two effects are mentioned by Joselit: first, instead of having an active participator, as was the case in the 1970s when artists such as Peter Campus realized closed-channel video installations, the viewers are given a passive role; they no longer have to interact with the artwork; they are only invited to look. Second, projection creates this «new electronic skin that engulfs architectural elements»[12].

In order to study the effects described by Joselit, this article delves into the presence of

projection-based artworks in the museum by looking specifically at two recent surveys covering the same historical period: the 1960s until the present. The first one, *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection. Films, Videos and Installations from 1963 to 2005*, was presented at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin from September 2006 to February 2007. The second one, *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007*, was presented in four venues at the University of Toronto in the Spring of 2007. One exhibition gathered works of international artists, the other focused on works by Canadian artists. The main difference between these two exhibits is the approach adopted by the curators: in Berlin, all artworks exhibited were moving image works; they were all recorded on either film or video. In Toronto, the curator, interpreted "projection" in a broader sense and selected a greater variety of media (such as slides), and went so far as to include the works of artists who were merely inspired by the theme of projection, but who did not actually use this technique in the making of their artworks. After describing the context of both surveys and their aims, I will analyze how they bring different moments of the history of projection-based works to the fore.

Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection

Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection. Films, Videos and Installations from 1963 to 2005 was organized by four curators: Stan Douglas, a Canadian artist who occasionally acts as a curator[13]; Christopher Eamon, the Director of the New Art Trust and curator of the Kramlich Collection (San Francisco); and two curators from the Hamburger Bahnhof: Joachim Jäger and Gabriele Knapstein. In the catalogue, the curators wrote:

> *No attempt has yet been made to relate current and historical works, and thus to enable comparisons between early experiments and contemporary works. In this spirit, the exhibition* Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection *is intended to broaden this horizon and point to the continuities leading from the film projections of the sixties to the complex film and video works of the present*[14].

As the title indicated, the curators of *Beyond Cinema* had the desire to present a significant number of works using projection, which were not presented in a theatre. In the catalogue, the curators also wrote that «in contrast to classic narrative cinema, the art of projection increasingly seeks to reflect on and consider the prerequisite conditions of the filmic, to test the effect they have in space and ways of questioning habitual patterns of perception»[15]. The manner in which the curators have done that will be discussed further in this article.

Beyond Cinema was presented in a museum context, and to display the twenty-seven artworks, the curators were granted an extraordinary space: the Rieckhallen of the Hamburger Bahnhof, which is 320 meters long and has an exhibition surface of 13,000 square meters. The artworks were borrowed from the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection in Hamburger Bahnhof, from the Kramlich Collection, and from nine other different public and private collections. *Beyond Cinema* was divided into six sections; six visuals axes, as specified by the curators, «leading to six central areas of the art of the projection since 1960»[16]. The respective segments were given the names "Phantasmagoria", "Persona", "Repertory Cinema", "Body Double", "The Liminal", and "The Optic".

Rodney Graham's *Edge of a Wood* (1999) was the first work one saw upon entering the exhibition space. The Rieckhallen was turned into a real "light cube", and indeed in the case of

Graham's work, into a "sound cube" as well, as the sound track of the work was striking. The only light in the space was produced from the two projectors hung very high in the air. *Edge of a Wood* consisted of two films projected onto two large screens. The two sequences displayed the edges of a wood illuminated by a helicopter searchlight. The sound of the installation was the recorded noise of the helicopter carrying out the search.

The visitor's journey in the dark began with Rodney Graham's installation, as the entire exhibition space was left in the dark and the light was provided almost exclusively by the projections. The impressive exhibition space at the Hamburger Bahnhof allowed the curators to present projection-based works on a large scale. However, these works did not invite the viewer to be active, even though some of them were architectural environments (such as Doug Aitken's 1998 seven-channel video installation *eraser*). In many of these spaces, benches were provided to the visitors, inviting them to sit down. Moreover, most of the projection surfaces in this exhibition were essentially flat: they were either wall or screen projections. Only Tony Oursler's *Criminal Eye* (1995) offered a different projection surface: in this work, the detail of an eye is projected onto a smooth ball. For the majority of the works presented in the exhibition, it was really the moving image that attracted the attention of the viewer, more so than the effect that the moving image had on the exhibition space. It would be difficult to argue, however, that the works could have been presented in a movie theatre. For example, Douglas Gordon's *24-Hour Psycho* (1993) was exhibited in the "Repertory Cinema" section of the survey. Stretching Hitchcock's 90-minute film over 24 hours, Gordon made it impossible for the viewer to see his work in its entirety, as the projection continued after the museum was closed. Other artists used multiple projections, but even then, the viewer was *looking at* them and not *moving in* them. One can think of Pipilotti Rist's *Ever is Over All* (1997) or John Massey's *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)* (1982) to further illustrate this point.

Exhibition projections

The curator Barbara Fischer, also the director of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in Toronto, organized the exhibition *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007*. In the booklet provided to the visitors, the curator wrote that «the works in this exhibition exemplify why projection – using light, slides, film, video, and television – has become such a compelling medium»[17]. Barbara Fischer put together a show presenting only the works of Canadian artists in order to highlight that even if projection art is trendy internationally, Canadian art is distinctive in the sense that it is, according to her, «much more spatial and more self-conscious about the aspects that make up cinema»[18]. According to Fischer, «most international film and video work is narrative, dealing with shifts in time»[19]. Barbara Fischer's exhibition could have been (or perhaps we ought to say should have been?) presented in a museum. The show had the potential to be seen in major Canadian institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada. However, Fischer received a grant to present in the four galleries of the University of Toronto: the Doris McCarthy Gallery, Blackwood Gallery, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and the University of Toronto Art Centre. Two of the venues were in downtown Toronto, and the two others were outside of the city (in Scarborough and Missisauga, two suburbs of Toronto). The visitors who wished to see the entire show had to travel in between the different venues. Since the main objective of Fischer's exhibition was to present a survey of projected-based works in Canada from the sixties until now, the curator had to choose enough artworks to give an idea of the diversity of projection methods artists used over that period of time. The curator divided the

exhibition into four sections, each «focusing on a specific element of the cinematic projection and its conceptual implications»: the screen, light, theatre of projection, and travel[20].

Within the given space, Barbara Fischer could not present many large-scale installations. In this regard, Fischer presented works that were significant but that did not demand too much space. For example, in the section "Theatre of Projection", she displayed Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *The Muriel Lake Incident* (1999), a miniature cinema. Had she been provided with a bigger space, Fischer could have considered presenting Cardiff and Miller's *The Paradise Institute*, a replica of a small theatre in which the viewers can enter and watch a short film. Nevertheless, *The Muriel Lake Incident* highlights in a subtler way the elements required for a cinematic experience. In the small space of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, this work (which only allows three visitors at a time, since there are only three pairs of headphones) provided a very intimate experience. Another example in the same section of the show was Rodney Graham's *Coruscating Cinnamon Granules* (1996), which required a smaller physical space than *Edge of a Wood* presented in Berlin. The installation consists of a rough construction of a small screening room with five cinema seats in which the viewer can enter and watch a film showing cinnamon granules burning in a visually spectacular manner on a stove's burner coil.

In Fischer's show, not many works were projected onto screens. As E.C. Woodley wrote in her review, both exhibitions, *Beyond Cinema* and *Projections*:

> *Unlike the Berlin show – and its vast, all-but-invisible projection screens – the Toronto show constantly presented viewers with objects, "things-in-the-world" on which something was being projected. The projection medium was used as a tool within a larger narrative, one that suggested the critical importance of place in Canada*[21].

As Fischer noted, the concern of the space was very present in the artists' minds when creating their works, Wyn Geleynse's *An Imaginary Situation with Truthful Behaviour*, a series of seven diminutive glass houses sitting side-by-side on a table, constituting an example. In one of the houses, the figure of a naked man trying to break one of the walls of the house in order to get out is projected. The projected man looks so real (even though he is only a few centimetres high) that it is very tempting for the viewer to place himself in between the projector and the series of houses in order to verify if the man exists or not. Geleynse's work is not interactive, but it nevertheless invites the viewer to walk about in order to understand what projection makes possible. David Hoffos' *Scenes from the House Dream: Bachelor's Bluff* (2005) had the same effect. It is one of the only rooms in the exhibition that was completely blacked out. Here, Hoffos created a diorama into which he projected persons of different scales in specific settings. As the projections look real, especially that of the human-scale lady, it is challenging to determine what is real and what is illusory in the exhibition space.

The exhibition space in Fischer's exhibition was relatively dark, but it was not as dark as that of *Beyond Cinema.* In Fischer's show, the viewer was more aware of the sculptural space. The works she presented often invited the viewer to move and to walk about.

The space and the viewer

According to curator Chrissie Iles, in terms of their display in the exhibition space, video and film installations have been through three distinct phases: a phenomenological, «performance

phase»; a «sculptural» phase; and a «cinematic» phase, which is the current trend[22]. As noted by Iles, the video and film installations produced in the mid- to late-1960s show two different philosophical approaches to space: first, the expanded cinema events during which artists were showing «large-scale projected environments involving film and 35 mm slide sequences», and second, «an emerging body of video work with a rigorously conceptual approach to viewer participation and social space»[23]. On one hand there were the spaces where the «large projected film images transformed the space into a three-dimensional image, a kind of communal dream space, or metaphor of expanded consciousness»[24], and on the other, the video spaces in which the real-time feedback property of video was being used to invite the viewer to take part in the artwork. Examples of the first phase defined by Iles could be found in the exhibition *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection*. The other example of "Expanded Cinema" chosen by the Berlin curators was Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), a thirty-minute film presenting the drawing of a large circle onto a wall. In this artwork, the viewers are invited to walk into the projection trajectory in order to grasp a key element of the projection technique: light. *Line Describing a Cone* is a work that takes place in time and space and is all about being experienced. Also created in 1973, Valie Export's *Adjungierte Dislokationen*, a triple projection, served to illustrate how artists used the camera as an extension of their body. In this work, Valie Export used three cameras: two of them were attached to her body and the third was filming her. The end result is one large projection – from the film of the third camera – juxtaposed with the two projections, what the two cameras tied to her body recorded. Peter Campus' *Prototype for "Interface"* was also exhibited in the section "Persona" of the show *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection*. In 1999, Campus reconstructed his early closed-circuit video work *Interface*, first made in 1972. When walking into the space, the viewer can see a camera, a large sheet of glass and a projector. The camera records the movements of the viewer, which are projected in real time on the large glass. Here, the visitors were invited to interact with the artwork and to move into the space. In the exhibition *Projections*, Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974) can be cited as an example of this first phase[25]. Snow's work consists of two synchronized films, each projected on one side of an aluminium screen hung in the middle of a room. The two films are projected from opposite sides, each projection presenting one side of the same story. The visitor is invited to constantly shift from one side to the other; by changing views, he/she sees the projection from the opposite angle, and will never be able to see the two points of view at the same time.

When looking at the selection of artworks gathered by the curators of *Beyond Cinema*, the presence of works from the 1990s is striking. Twelve of the twenty-seven works presented in the exhibition were made during that decade, eleven of which were supported on a video format. This can be explained by the fact that video projectors became more accessible for artists in that decade. As stated by Chrissie Iles, a new cinematic form of video installations appeared in the 1990s where a «major shift ha[d] taken place, away from the object and towards a more internal, psychological experience, in which space is no longer tangible and theatrical, but illusory and filmic»[26]. Art historian Hal Foster shares this point of view: «The pictorialism of projected images today often doesn't seem to care much about the actual space»[27]. By projecting moving images in the exhibition space rather than displaying them on television monitors, the artists freed the image from its frame. To quote Iles again, «[t]he boundary between the physical object and the projected image has disappeared»[28]. The absence of the physical aspect of what used to frame the image also contributed to the loss of sculptural aspect of these works. As the curators of *Beyond Cinema* were interested in highlighting how artists have considered the prerequisite of the filmic in their works, it explains why more works from the cinematic phase of video and film installations were selected.

As mentioned earlier, almost half of the artworks presented in *Beyond Cinema* were made in the 1990s. In *Projections*, only two artworks from the 1990s were selected: *The Muriel Lake Incident* described above, a work that doesn't include a projection as the short film is displayed on an LCD screen, and Rodney Graham's *Coruscating Cinnamon Granules*. The latter work consists of a rough construction of a small screening room with five cinema seats in which the viewer can enter and watch a film showing cinnamon granules burning in a visually spectacular manner. Both works consist of constructions – a miniature cinema for Cardiff and Bures Miller, and a small projection room for Graham – meaning that the architectural elements are at the core of the works. With Fischer's selections of artworks in Toronto, the sculptural phase of video and film installations is extremely present. The space remains very tangible. The projection-based works that she selected almost always combine a projection with other objects. It can be concluded that Fischer's exhibition didn't focus on the cinematic phase of video and film installations as defined by Chrissie Iles as in fact, no large-scale wall or screen projections in dark spaces where the architectural elements are blacked out were presented.

In conclusion, as much as the approaches of projection-based artworks adopted by the curators in Berlin and in Toronto can said to be different, they brought dissimilar aspects of the history of this medium to the fore. The curators of *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection* chose a thematic approach and focused much attention on the cinematic phase of video and film installations. The curator of *Projections* followed a more conceptual and technical-based approach, resulting in an exhibition which presented a wide inventory of all the variations that the technique of projection allows. Assuredly, both exhibitions illustrate the formidable venture attempted by museums and art institutions to dig into the question of the place of the moving image in the museum.

1 David Joselit, "Inside the Light Cube", in *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 7, March 2004, pp. 154-159. Joselit makes allusion to Brian O'Doherty's essay *Inside the White Cube* published in 1976.
2 Hal Foster, "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art", in *October*, no. 104, Spring 2003, p. 93.
3 *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film since 1945*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, March 17-July 28, 1996 (curator Kerry Brougher).
4 *Cinéma Cinéma: Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience*, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, February 13-May 24, 1999 (curator Jaap Guldemond, in collaboration with Marente Bloemheuvel).
5 *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 18, 2001-January 6, 2002 (curator Chrissie Iles).
6 *Le Mouvement des images*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, April 5, 2006-January 29, 2007 (curator Philippe-Alain Michaud).
7 *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection. Films, Videos and Installations from 1963-2005*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, September 29, 2006-February 25, 2007 (curators Stan Douglas, Christopher Eamon, Joachim Jäger and Gabriele Knapstein).
8 *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007*, University of Toronto, Toronto, April 8-June 17, 2007 (curator Barbara Fischer). The exhibition was presented in the four art galleries of the university: Doris McCarthy Gallery, Blackwood Gallery, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and the University of Toronto Art Centre.
9 The exhibition gathered the works of six artists: Peter Campus, Rockne Krebs, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, Ted Victoria, Robert Whitman. Even though it was a small exhibition in terms of the number of artists selected, the variety of projective media used was striking: closed-circuit video projection, camera obscura projection, laser, super 8 synchronized sound films, and 16mm films.
10 Martin Friedman, *The Floating Picture Plane*, in *Projected Images: Peter Campus, Rockne Krebs, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, Ted Victoria, Robert Whitman*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis 1974, p. 6.

11 David Joselit, "Inside the Light Cube", cit., p. 154.
12 *Ibidem.*
13 Stan Douglas notably organized the exhibition *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* in 1988 at the Vancouver Art Gallery.
14 Stan Douglas, Christopher Eamon, Joachim Jäger, Gabriele Knapstein, *About the Exhibition*, in Joachim Jäger, Gabriele Knapstein, Anette Hüsch (eds.), *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection. Films, Videos and Installations from 1963 to 2005*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2006, p. 11. It could be argued that *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection* was not the first exhibition to do this, as the aim of *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film since 1945* presented in 1995 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles was «to map the social and aesthetic issues that have shifted painting toward cinema, film toward the visual arts, and have fused the two together into hew hybrid forms». See Kerry Brougher, *Introduction and Acknowledgments*, in Russell Ferguson (ed.), *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*, The Museum of Contemporary Art/The Monacelli Press, Los Angeles-New York 1996, p. 13.
15 *Ibidem*.
16 *Ibidem*.
17 Brochure of the exhibition *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007*, cit.
18 Quoted in Leah Sandals, "Unfolding Frames", in *National Post*, June 17, 2007.
19 *Ibidem*.
20 Brochure of the exhibition *Projections: A Major Survey of Projection-Based Works in Canada, 1964-2007*, cit.
21 E.C. Woodley, "Projections", in *Canadian Art*, vol. 24, Fall 2007.
22 Chrissie Iles, *Video and Film Space*, in Erika Suderberg (ed.), *Space, Site Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 2000, p. 252.
23 *Ibidem*.
24 *Ibidem*, p. 253.
25 Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* was created for the exhibition *Projected Images* (Walker Art Center, 1974). It was also included in other surveys on the presence of projected image in contemporary art: *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945* (Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995) and in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001-2002).
26 Chrissie Iles, *Issues in the New Cinematic Aesthetic in Video*, in Tanya Leighton, Pavel Büchler (eds.), *Saving the Image: Art after Film*, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester 2003, p. 132.
27 Hal Foster, "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art", cit., p. 75.
28 Chrissie Iles, *Issues in the New Cinematic Aesthetic in Video*, cit., p. 135.