



Affective Immersion in Large-Scale Moving Image Installations

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Abstract. The post-cinematic moving image installations enabled by high-definition projection technologies create such atmospheric environments for their visitors that generate new forms of spectatorship activating both self-reflexive awareness of mediation and affective response to the surrounding audio-visual spectacle. The article intends to provide a description of this viewer experience by developing two concepts (embodied self-reflexivity and affective immersion) apprehending the spectacle of the exhibited moving image. To this end, phenomenological theories of affectivity will be briefly explored alongside the invocation of Deleuze’s term affection-image and Giuliana Bruno’s idea of atmospheric projection. The final suggestion of the paper is that the spectators’ experience of such moving image installations is best understood through the description of the interplay between what I term embodied self-reflexivity and affective immersion.

Keywords: affectivity, moving image installation, phenomenology, Stimmung, Julian Rosefeldt, Ragnar Kjartansson.

Entering the huge, dark galleries, where except for the large screens every wall around and above us had been painted in black, produced a truly post-cinematic¹

1 In this article, I use the term “post-cinematic” to refer to works of film installation that structurally alter the traditional cinematic apparatus while still retaining certain aspects of it. These works are typically large-scale, multichannel projections displayed in dark or dimly lit environments, where visitors can experience a sense of cinematic immersion into the diegetic universe of the projected moving images, while simultaneously engaging with the distinctions introduced by the non-cinematic apparatus. Post-cinematic installations also have a specific relation to interactivity: a greater freedom of choice compared to cinema is offered in selecting what, how, and for how long to watch, but the visitor – in contrary, for example, to early works of video art – has no influence on the projected audiovisual material. This understanding of the post-cinematic aligns with Volker Pantenburg’s perspective on video art, which, he argues, comprises two distinct historical phases. The second phase, emerging since the 1990s, is called by him “artists’ cinema” or “cinematographic installation” (Pantenburg 2012, 78). The concept of the post-cinematic can also be related to Victor Burgin’s notion of “the uncineumatic” (Burgin 2012).

experience in the visitor in both moving image installations to be discussed in this article. As we walked in, we found ourselves surrounded by so many projections that, at first, we could not even count them or take note of what was actually shown to us. Thus, we were just walking around literally in-between screens, absorbed in, and enchanted by, a mesmerizing audiovisual spectacle that still awaited perceptual and cognitive exploration. Ragnar Kjartansson's *The Visitors* (2012) and Julian Rosefeldt's *Manifesto* (2015), though quite different in their subject matter, invited us into very similarly conceived dispositifs based, in both cases, on the precise sonic synchronization of all the screens producing the above described experience that seems achievable only in such an installation format.

In the case of *The Visitors* [Figs. 1–4], the Icelandic musicians that took hold of an old lavish mansion in up-state New York, are shown individually on each screen, playing in separate rooms on their instruments, whilst the ensemble of the melancholic, repetitive music piece lasting more than an hour can be grasped only by paying attention to all the projections. This means that neither visually, nor, more importantly, sonically do any of the projections function individually, separately from the installation. It is only through such an enabling apparatus that the work can function as a whole. In the case of *Manifesto* [Figs. 5–8], the individual videos are linked, on the one hand, by Cate Blanchett's figure in thirteen different appearances and roles, and, on the other, – and this is more essential to us here – by the so-called “recitativo” part of each of the sequences. At a certain, but always different, moment of each video, she abruptly changes her tone and starts reciting her text in a musical way. Due to the synchronization among the projections, this happens at exactly the same time within the installations, thus transforming these sequences into surprising and odd choir-like moments, where each singer is the same person recorded at different times. Similarly to the first installation, this choir-like impression could only be experienced by the split sonic attention between the projection that we were actually watching and the ensemble of screens constantly surrounding us. Thus, the absorption was not (only) achieved through a specific situation presented on an individual screen, but through the synchronized functioning of the whole dispositif that allowed its visitors to immerse themselves in the unique atmosphere of the projection.

In what follows, I will discuss the affective experience of moving image installations based on the two works briefly evoked here. I aim to point out that what I will call affective immersion takes place in the context and almost despite of a so-called embodied self-reflexivity (described in the next chapter) only to create what Giuliana Bruno (2022) has termed “atmosphere of projection.”

Finally, I suggest the term affective immersion to describe the experience of such large-scale moving image installations.

Embodied Self-Reflexivity

As I have argued elsewhere (Gyenge 2022), experiencing a video installation generally means that the spectator is constrained to constantly acknowledge their bodily position within the space of every installation. I have used the term embodied self-reflexivity to describe the process through which the visitor of an installation effectively finds their place within the space from where the work can best be observed. Such an experience is unavoidable due to the differences in scale, spatial organization, and spectatorial presence that exist between installations, which force us to reconsider our spatial and bodily position each time.

This is what Raymond Bellour emphasizes when he delineates cinema and contemporary video installations, arguing that the former is based on a *dispositif* that is *a priori* singular, whilst the latter “invents, in each of its manifestations, its own specific *dispositif*.” “This *dispositif* – he continues – must therefore above all, be designated on each occasion, to the extent that it induces an experience that is invariably unexpected, comparable to no other, thereby giving rise to new forms of behaviour” (Bellour 2018). Each time we need to bodily and physically adapt to the installation we encounter (while finding our place, exploring its structure and understanding its functionality), we never take the projection of video work – contrary to the cinema – for granted. This is precisely the reason why we need to explore the projection space through bodily movements from the start: we need to find the position from where the projection is best visible; we need to observe how many people are around us; decide whether we can sit on a bench or on the floor; how we can accommodate ourselves and have the best viewing conditions without being in the way of other visitors. Thus, we begin to interpret and comprehend the moving installation before and without even glancing at the screen(s). Contrary to cinema, in moving image installations the artwork induces a state of embodied self-reflexivity irrespective of what is projected on the screen.

The French theorist of video art Philippe Dubois considered that the shift from the movie theatre to the museum resulted mostly in the dilution of the effect of absorption, and the transformation of the hypnotized spectator to a certain degree into a distanced *flâneur* (Dubois 2013, 315). Galleries rarely offer the level of immersiveness achievable in a theatre, and it is precisely the embodied

acknowledgment of the situated perception, of the bodily limitations and possibilities of spectatorship that enables the works to open up for interpretation. In many cases, the embodied exploration of an installation choreographs the visitors' movements in such a way that it forces the spectators to acknowledge the possibilities and the limits of their own movement and perception, and ground their interpretation on this self-reflective embodiment. This is why, as I see it, embodied self-reflexivity could become a general concept that is able to provide a common ground for the different descriptions of many moving image installations. The use of the adjective in the term is partially motivated by the fact that, in many cases, we talk about a concealed, somehow hidden self-reflexivity. It appears that many contemporary large-scale film installations are cinematic to the extent that they omit or sideline the essentially critical and self-reflexive character of early installation art and video art, leaving almost no room at all for open media awareness. Thus, self-reflexivity arises not from the central topic of the work but only from its spatial organization, that is, its installation.

Claire Bishop, however, has a different take on the issue, when discussing what she calls "the return of phenomenology" in installation art in the 1990s, with artists returning to an emphasis of the subjective moment of perception (Bishop 2005, 82). When describing the effect of darkness in black box video installations, she argues that "rather than heightening awareness of our perceiving body and its physical boundaries, these dark installations suggest our dissolution" as here the "space is obscured, confused or in some way intangible." She concludes that "At its extreme, this lack of orientation can even raise the question of whether it is accurate to speak of 'self-awareness' in these circumstances" (Bishop 2005, 82). Later, when analysing some of James Turrell's darker installations, she even states that "his installations *undermine* the self-reflexivity of phenomenological perception" (2005, 85, emphasis in the original). Bishop then introduces the term self-obliteration to describe the effect of those artistic practices that do not take the clearly self-reflexive path of the early works of video art she terms as post-minimalist installations (2005, 91).

Contrary to Bishop, I consider that it is precisely this disorientation that forces the viewer *not* to take the viewing environment, the apparatus as given, but to look around as much as it is possible, and find their place in the space for the time of viewing. This necessary orientation, which sometimes even needs relocation in the case of multichannel projections or due to another spectator coming after us and positioning themselves in a way that obstructs our view, is in fact constantly reminding us of the situation and – possibly to the detriment

of immersion – forces us to a self-reflexive perception of the work. Such a viewer attitude is completely different from what happens in cinema, where – as Robert Smithson, cited by Bishop, notes – “one forgets where one is sitting” (cited by Bishop 2005, 94).

It has to be noted, nonetheless, that partially in contradiction to her previous assessment, towards the end of the same chapter, Bishop speaks of a dual fascination in contemporary video installations with both the immersive cinematic image on screen and the conditions of its presentation. “Carpeting, seating, sound insulation, size and colour of the space, type of projection [...] are all ways with which to seduce and simultaneously produce a critically perceptive viewer” (Bishop 2005, 95–96).

An important aspect of the installations discussed in this article is that, instead of singular videos, both present a multitude of projections simultaneously (thirteen in the case of *Manifesto*, nine in the case of *The Visitors*). In the case of multichannel film installations, a cinematic temporal structure is added to the individual videos (which are often cinematic themselves). When multiple film projections are visible simultaneously, the viewers have to figure out if a viewing strategy is being suggested to them or if they have the freedom to find one: should they watch all videos one after another (as is the case with *Manifesto*), or opt for a general view with alternating the focus from one screen to another (as it happens with *The Visitors*)? Moreover, the structure of moving images composed of series of photographs is in a sense expanded to a larger scale, when a series of moving images are presented, offering a temporal super-structure to the whole installation over the individual projections. The reason I tend to consider the apparatus-dispositif as being central to the analysis of film installations is that the viewer experience in such cases can be described as a “film of films:” the interactive, always personal film of the spectators edited together by their attention and sensibility.

Another important issue discussed in detail by Bishop is the political aspect of installations in general related to the viewing subject they envision and construct. The problem is rooted in the (apparent?) contradiction that no matter how decentred the viewers are supposed to become, the recognition of this displacement needs a rational centredness, thus they are required to be decentred subjects and detached onlookers at the same time (Bishop 2005, 130). As everything about installation art’s structure and modus operandi repeatedly valorizes the viewer’s first-hand presence, Bishop concludes, the installations necessarily construct a second object (beside the work itself): “the viewer’s

consciousness as a subject” (2005, 130–131). Bishop’s central idea here, and the main element of her appreciation of installation art, is based on the conviction that this conflict between the centred and the decentred subject “is in itself decentring since it structures an irresolvable antagonism between the two. Installation art calls for a self-present viewing subject precisely in order to subject him/her to the process of fragmentation. [...] By this means, installation art aims not only to problematise the subject as decentred, but also to produce it” (2005, 131–132).

All this suggests that there is something more than self-reflexivity at play in the reception of the so-called post-cinematic moving image installations, and it is precisely the antagonism presented by Bishop that I intend to describe and expand upon in what follows.

Affective Images

One important issue that might be relevant to the topic of affect can be observed from the discussion above. It seems crucial to understand the relation of immersion to criticality: to what extent is it possible to get intimately lost in an installation if one is regularly reminded of their own embodied presence in the room? How can someone be self-reflexive and seduced at the same time?

In the large-scale video installations I am discussing in this article, the exhibition of the apparatus is reduced to the minimum by the installation of the projectors and screens in a way that offers the impression of free-floating images around us. On the dark black walls, only the screens and the precisely matching projections are visible, and the overhead projectors are spotted only if a visitor is consciously looking for them. The experience is in some respects similar to how Bishop described Turrell’s installations, where visitors lose their sense of spatial limits, as only the reflecting light of the projections provides enough light for us to navigate.² Following Bergson’s description of affect, Gilles Deleuze identifies the close-up and the face as the prominent example of the *affection-image*, defined by the two extreme poles of a reflective surface and intensive micro-movements (most often achieved through a series of images), of a reflexive face and an intensive face. As he argues, “It is this combination of a reflecting,

2 Bishop, when writing on the perceptual experience of Turrell’s work entitled *Arhirit*, considers that “the extreme effect of these colour fields frustrate our ability to reflect on our own perception: subject and object are elided in a space that cannot be plumbed by vision” (2005, 87). The darkness of these video installations is also an important factor. Claire Bishop cites French psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski, who in the 1930s considered that “darkness touches the subject in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space” (2005, 84).

immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements which constitutes the affect” (Deleuze 2009, 87). According to Laura Marks, the concept of *affection-image* describes “the gap between perception and action,” which “is usually a brief moment for the organism because it is easy to deduce and effect a course of action based on what is perceived” (2015, 4).

Presenting Tacita Dean’s affective intermediality, Ágnes Pethő follows a somewhat similar dual pattern when she emphasizes the importance of the medium’s materiality and its non-transparency (2023, 3), whilst Dean’s tendency for creating series instead of singular works is identified as symptomatic of a deep affinity with cinematic structures “adding the dimension of temporality to the images” (2023, 5). In the case of the two installations presented here, embodied self-reflexivity accounts for the non-transparency of the medium, whereas the multichannel structure confers a cinematic temporality to the already cinematic individual videos. In these projections, thus, the cinematic structure goes beyond the simple fact of having moving images screened, and is being extended to the serial structure of several simultaneous projections. Finally, Dean’s cinematized exhibition practice is described as one where “the viewer is invited not to watch the films, but to be in their company” (Pethő 2023, 12). Besides pointing to the media awareness generated by the exhibited projection mechanism in Tacita Dean’s works, this formulation very accurately describes the affective, atmospheric experience of being within an installation.

In this article, Pethő concludes that Tacita Dean’s intermediality emerges not as a combination of elements from different arts, “but as a versatile artistic strategy for re-sensitization that enables the viewer to rediscover the sensorial richness and affective qualities of an artistic medium by approaching one art from the point of view of another” (Pethő 2023, 21). My aim here is to find a term and an accurate description of a similar experience taking place in large-scale film installations as I think that – though in a different way and involving different arts – a similar effect of affect through intermediality seems to be achieved in the two installations discussed here. The terms affective immersion and embodied self-reflexivity are meant to describe the sensory experience of the visitor of such installations, which is based on the interference of the medium of cinema and gallery film.

The Phenomenology of Affect

In phenomenological accounts of affectivity there are several issues regularly debated. First, there is the question of discerning the conscious and unconscious layers of affect, that is the distinction between the non-intentional moods and feelings and the intentional emotions, or, in Kantian terms, between affects and passions (Kant 2009, 154).³ Closely related to this, it also seems important to understand the relation between these two layers, more precisely, the way the unconscious affects influence our conscious life. Martin Heidegger, for instance, considers that while affective experiences are of vital importance to our lives, they also reveal fundamental features of our own, human existence. As Elpidorou and Freeman explain, “in fact Heidegger holds that our capacity to have moods is constitutive of human existence” (2015, 661). Second, affectivity supposes the distinction between subjectivity, that is the interiority of the psyche, and the exteriority of the outside world (Richir 1993). This distinction translates into the field of representation in the form of understanding how much of affectivity comes from the observed picture (or any kind of artefact, for that matter), and how much stems from the subjective feelings of the observer.

Finally, what seems to be most relevant from the perspective of this article – and this appears to be Edmund Husserl’s concern – is discerning the feelings that belong to the characters and situations depicted by an image, and the moods and emotions that are generated by the way these characters are being depicted. As Husserl points out, “Artworks everywhere not only exhibit things and not only exhibit persons who have feelings, thoughts, and so on; they also exhibit various moods, thoughts, etc., such that we must say: these are characteristics of exhibited things and are themselves exhibited characteristics; and, on the other hand, they do not belong to exhibited persons as their experiences, thoughts, and so on” (2005, 566). If we tried to transfer Husserl’s ideas to the case of film installations, we could reach the conclusion that Husserl’s description of artworks exhibiting moods beyond those belonging to the depicted characters or situations might be analogous to the apprehension of the affective effects emerging from the enabling *dispositif*. Thus, as there is no room in this article to fully uncover the phenomenological descriptions of affectivity, my aim here is to understand to

3 “Affects are specifically different from passions. The former are related merely to feeling; the latter belong to the faculty of desire, and are inclinations that make all determinability of the faculty of choice by means of principles difficult or impossible. The former are tumultuous and unpremeditated, the latter sustained and considered; thus indignation, as anger, is an affect, but as hatred (vindictiveness), it is a passion.” (Kant 2009, 154.)

what extent spectators' affective responses originate from the projected moving images, and to what extent from the apparatus that makes those images available for viewing.

For this purpose, I shall briefly turn to Heidegger and his *Being and Time*. *Befindlichkeit*, usually translated as “disposition” or “attunement” and described by Elpidorou and Freeman as “a basic ontological structure of human existence that makes it possible for human beings to find themselves situated in, or attuned to the world in a way that is meaningful to them” (2015, 663). Heidegger thus removes emotional disposition from a secondary or subordinated position compared to rational understanding, and places it in the centre of the construction of meaning. As he sarcastically comments in *Being and Time*, “the fundamental ontological interpretation of the affects has hardly been able to take one step worthy of mention since Aristotle,” because they are treated only as psychic phenomena, thus “they sink to the level of accompanying phenomena” (1996, 130–131). For him, “Attunement is an existential, fundamental way in which Da-sein is its there. [...] It not only characterizes Da-sein ontologically, but is at the same time of fundamental methodical significance for the existential analytic because of its disclosure” (1996, 131). Moreover, after discussing fear as a paradigmatic example of attunement, Heidegger contends – and this might be important to the discussion of experiencing artworks – that “understanding is always attuned,” where understanding is considered “a fundamental mode of the *being* of Da-sein” (1996, 134). It seems that attunement belongs to the structure of Dasein's existence and is always manifested through mood.

Later, Heidegger further develops the concept, emphasizing its absent presence: “attunement is something that in a certain way is simultaneously there and not there,” which is closely linked to its unobservability, as attunement cannot be made “into an object of knowledge” (1995, 61). Moreover, he stresses that attunements “are not a mere emotional event or a state in the way that a metal is liquid or solid, given that attunements indeed belong to the being of man” (1995, 65). Here Heidegger uses the example of grief to explain the attunement of a human being and the intersubjectivity of the concept. As in these cases “It is the grief that constitutes [...] the way in which we are together,” we can say “that attunement is not at all inside, in some sort of soul of the Other, and that it is not at all somewhere alongside in our soul.” Instead, “attunement imposes itself on everything” (1995, 66).

Furthermore – and this is where this line of argument becomes relevant to the topic of this paper – Heidegger likens the way attunements are already there

for us to being immersed in an atmosphere: “It seems as though an attunement is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through” (1995, 67). To strengthen the atmosphere metaphor even further, Heidegger argues that “Precisely because the essence of attunement consists in its being no mere side-effect, precisely because it leads us back into the grounds of our *Dasein*, the essence of attunement remains concealed or hidden from us” (1995, 68). In the case of the experience of moving image installations, this partial concealment of attunement is in some respects comparable to what I will later describe with the term “affective immersion.”⁴ For Heidegger, thus, moods are not only psychic, internal, subjective, mental states, but fundamental modes of existence that are both constitutive and disclosive of the way one exists. Moods are not side effects, and Heidegger likens them to atmospheres: “moods, like atmospheres, are already there, and we exist *in* them” (Elpidorou and Freeman 2015, 664). Moods are atmospheres of existence, and they have an important revelatory dimension as they affect and to a certain extent even determine how things appear to us. Moods – and here we get close to projections – are like irremovable lenses through which the world is made manifest to us, though we hardly focus on them.

Atmospheres of Projection

Atmosphere is an inspirational metaphor in the case of large-scale moving image installations because it surrounds us in a way that is as invisible as it is inescapable. Thus, the term allows us to grasp both the intersubjective character of viewing moving image installations, the sharedness of this experience, and the inherent immersion that inevitably affects us.

Giuliana Bruno starts her book by analysing pictorial representations of the famous myth of Dibutades on the birth of drawing through the shadow on the

4 It is noteworthy that Elpidorou and Freeman point out that in fact Heidegger uses two terms to describe affectivity: *Befindlichkeit* (attunement) and *Stimmung* (mood). “The terms ‘*Befindlichkeit*’ and ‘*Stimmung*’ hence designate one and the same phenomenon, each, however, signifying it in a different way. As an ontological structure of *Dasein*’s existence, *Befindlichkeit* is a basic mode of existence in, and openness to, the world. As the ontic manifestation of *Befindlichkeit*, *Stimmungen* are the various and specific ways in which *Dasein* can relate to and disclose the world, all of which occur against the backdrop of the structure of *Befindlichkeit*” (Elpidorou and Freeman 2015, 663). However, not all English translations of Heidegger’s works make this distinction, and we often find the terms attunement and mood used as synonyms. Marc Richir also discusses some contradictions observable in the Heideggerian understanding of the two concepts, and reaches the conclusion that “there is neither ‘affect,’ nor ‘passion’ without being symbolically coded” (Richir 1993).

wall of the lover set to leave. On the one hand, Bruno points out how these scenes are less about drawing and more about the setting of a projection, and, on the other hand, she emphasizes the affective dimension of the scene, considering that “it transmits desire.”⁵ Although Bruno develops a much wider sense of both atmosphere and projection, many of her analyses are applicable to “environmental screen media” – that is moving image installations – in an “effort to define projection as a medium of ambient transmission” (2022, 12–13).

She also brings to the fore the issue of self-reflexivity by pointing to installations that reflect on and expose their own *dispositifs*, and considers noteworthy that, despite the many technological changes, we are “not just attracted but even mesmerized, galvanized by what the projection of moving images can do” (2022, 14). She points out that we are fascinated by projections in public spaces of exhibition even beyond representation – that is, even beyond what is actually being projected on the screen(s). Moreover, she adds, since the 1990s, when projection started to massively exit the movie theatre into the gallery and museum spaces, a particularly spatial, ambient form of cinematic projection has emerged in the form of moving image installations that expose the materiality of the film medium and the elements of projection “both on their screens and in space.” Defying traditional modes of narration – Bruno continues – these works “choose to ‘perform’ the act of projection” (2022, 121–122).

Although I acknowledge the importance and relevance of such works within the history of video art, here I am not referring particularly to self-reflexive installations that performatively expose their mechanisms of projection, but to those where this “projectedness” is hidden in a post-cinematic way, keeping a cinematic sensibility alive within a non-cinematic environment or *dispositif*.

To account for the effect of the scale on atmospheric projections – which is central to the installations I am discussing – Bruno chooses Jesper Just’s famous large-scale installation *This Nameless Spectacle*, unfolding on two very large screens facing each other at the opposite walls of a large gallery hall. By relating the work to 19th-century pre-cinematic moving panoramas and to Abel Gance’s legendary triple-screen projections of his film *Napoleon*, she reaches the conclusion that a large part of the work’s effect on the viewer is related to its massive scale that “provokes a physical reaction, and the work demands that the viewer becomes incorporated to it” (2022, 177); and adds that “spatial magnitude

5 Bruno argues that “here the scene of projection is an environment in which a transmission of affect takes place” and “in a process of retrospective projection here painting becomes cinema” (2022, 2.) She, then, reaches the conclusion that the scenes are positioned in such a way in these paintings “as if projection were itself an ambiance, an atmosphere” (2022, 3).

contributes greatly to achieving the desired effects of empathic absorption [...] in the environment itself of the projection” (2022, 184). Giuliana Bruno also explores the narrative ambiguity of Just’s works, and considers that this ambiguity in effect “draws us away from any plot line,” leaving us instead to observe how the device makes us see the surrounding environment (2022, 187).

Something very similar takes place in the examples brought to the fore in this paper. The almost in-graspable link between the artistic-political manifestos and the micro-narratives woven around them in each sequence in Rosefeldt’s work draws us away from logical reasoning after having spent some time in the installation. Simultaneously, this undecipherability allows us to pay attention instead to the many metamorphoses of Cate Blanchett, on the one hand, and especially to the overall sensation of being immersed in the audiovisual choir of screens surrounding us, on the other. Ragnar Kjartarsson doesn’t even seem to bother himself with any storyline except the minimalist narrative structure of the musicians arriving at the beginning and leaving at the end. After we realize that there are no narrative clues to look for, we start to let ourselves emotionally immersed in the highly affective experience created by the atmosphere of the disintegrated and then reunited musical parts and the accompanying projections.

Bruno suggests that scale plays a crucial part in the affective effect of Just’s installations, but also adds that the Danish artist treats the atmosphere of projection self-reflexively. In interpreting the effect of large-scale projection of Just’s installations on their viewers, Bruno points out that the scale here never becomes monumental or sublime, but rather “takes the gallery viewer into an ambiguous affective and cognitive space that asks for attentive, almost contemplative absorption” (2022, 194). Just – Bruno continues – “conceives the composition of large screen and its installation in ways that defy the simple effect of immersive viewing, for here immersion is not understood to produce virtual illusion or presence but, rather, spatial awareness” (2022, 195). Although I see the great descriptive value of the term “contemplative absorption” proposed by Bruno, I think that in order to understand the interplay of criticality and affectivity in such installations, the combined use of the aforementioned embodied self-reflexivity and affective immersion would be more enlightening.

Affective Immersion

The first chapter of Claire Bishop’s seminal book on installation art is entitled *The Dream Scene*, where she discusses through several earlier and later

examples how the idea of an immersive scene that the viewer enters was present in installations from the start. On the one hand, the immersive qualities of the “dream scene” installations are somehow related to the character of absorptive painting; on the other hand, it is important to emphasize that it is precisely traditional perspective that is being overturned by installation art’s provision of multiple vistas (Bishop 2005, 17). However, when examining video installations, one immediately notices a step backward in the sense that with a proper “work” in the centre, a re-centring of the viewing subject takes place when a viewing position seems to be – at least partially – reinstalled.

When describing contemporary art installations to support her argument on the architectural and atmospheric nature of projection, Giuliana Bruno points to some works (mostly by Alfredo Jarr) that omit figuration in favour of ambience, where the deliberately non-representational works make “a political as well as an aesthetic statement by way of creating a pure atmosphere of projection” (2022, 138). With its focus on music, Kjartansson’s *The Visitors*, despite the representational nature of the projected images, displays somewhat similar characteristics when it makes essential and unavoidable that we primarily focus on the musical aspect of the work. This effect of the installation is observable even in the behaviour of the spectators, most of whom tend to sit randomly scattered on the floor in a relaxed position, without focusing specifically on any of the videos. [Figs. 1, 4.] When observing this work, it seems crucial that, surrounded by screens and sound sources from all directions, we experience foremost the music being deconstructed into nine separate sources (individual projections) and then being reconstituted as a complex musical piece only in our fleeting and evanescent perception. This ephemerality, the fact that the final work does not exist outside of our fading memory, is the key to affectively grasp the melancholy of the whole original event, the recording of which we were about to see. The powerful effect of this installation is mostly due to a feeling of permanent, incessant loss when confronted to a moment that is unrepeatable both in the sense of the unique musical event that took place in front of the cameras, and, more importantly, in the sense of the constantly evaporating atmosphere that has been created for us in the installation but has actually never been recorded in its totality. This immersive effect is strengthened by those repeated moments when some of the musicians, having nothing to play for a few minutes, leave their spot and walk to another room where a colleague is playing, thus creating in the viewer the illusion of a coherent spatial continuity.

Julian Rosefeldt's *Manifesto* is similarly orchestrated, featuring thirteen distinct videos projected onto nearly invisible screens within large, dark gallery halls, with the arrangement and number of screens varying across exhibition sites. [Figs. 5–10.] Although the sound of each video segment is separate and strictly related to that single projection, the proximity of other screens keeps us continuously visually and aurally aware of their presence. Initially, this might be experienced as disruptive – especially when spectacular video or audio effects occur at other projections than the one we are actually observing – demanding intentional concentration and commitment from the viewer to fully engage with a particular video. Nonetheless, as soon as we discover that the videos are related to each other despite their different narrative or diegetic universe, the sound, the murmur of the other videos merge into a subtle aural ambiance to each of the videos that we are focusing on – a phenomenon emphasized by the choir-sequences described at the beginning of the article. Thus, the self-awareness induced by the disruptive effect of the multichannel installation format (i.e. embodied self-reflexivity) gradually dissipates, giving way to a distinct immersion in the atmospheric and affective dimensions of the work.

Giuliana Bruno, after describing many installations that expose the materiality and architectural quality of screens, points out that such works illuminate what is not seen: the invisible screen and the apparatus of projection itself (2022, 138). She also repeatedly emphasizes the viewer's bodily positioning in front, or more precisely, in-between the screens, regularly underlining its immersive aspect. As she argues, "You must position yourself in the midst of this moving work and negotiate a space between the large ambient screens" (2022, 178) and "do so kinaesthetically, imaginatively, and virtually, as with actual motion" (2022, 184).

However, in the case of those spectacular, post-cinematic moving image installations that I am discussing in this paper, critical self-reflexivity is kept to a minimum especially because such an illumination of the apparatus does not take place. As far as I see it, the spectatorial experience of these works is better described if we consider this bodily negotiation of space, the constant perambulation between several screens that also takes place in the case of *Manifesto* and *The Visitors*, as embodied self-reflexivity. However, there is clearly something else also taking place that I propose to describe with the term affective immersion: a phenomenon due to which the self-awareness described above does not necessarily result in a critical media-consciousness as one would expect based on classical/early installation art experiences. Although the simultaneous presence of multiple screens is essential to the spectatorial experience of such

installations, the post-cinematic apparatus results in the end in a somewhat partial immersion, limited precisely by the embodied self-reflexivity induced by that very *dispositif*. This is why, instead of a clear-cut media-critical approach, an embodied self-reflexivity takes place, which acknowledges the enabling apparatus somewhat unconsciously and simultaneously with its perception, leaving space for what I describe with the term affective immersion.

What seems crucial here is that it is not (only) the projected image that transmits affects and creates the potentially immersive experience of the viewer, but it is crucially the projection and the *dispositif* that, on such a large scale, has to do less with criticality, creating instead a transmission of affect. Thus, we can say that the visitors – both the musicians in Kjartansson’s film and the visitors of his installation – immerse themselves in the affective atmosphere of the space, represented in the former case by the impressive country house, in the latter by the projection enabled by the *dispositif*. Invoking affectivity here seems appropriate also from another perspective: as Marc Richir (1993) emphasizes, “the concept of affectivity beholds the concept of a passivity [...] even in a sense of a passivity that is constitutive of the subject.” Attaching this idea of passivity to the description of the immersion experienced in video installations is important especially because it allows for a distinction from the interactive immersion achievable through VR devices, for instance.

Based on all these arguments, my suggestion is to interpret the experience of such large-scale installations through the description of an interplay that takes place between embodied self-reflexivity and affective immersion. The adjective “affective” is meant to emphasize that the immersion observed in such cases is not optical as in movie theatres or, more recently, in the case of virtual reality devices, and that it is partial as it is always paired with a bodily consciousness that in a sense goes against that very immersion.

Conclusion

The goal of this article has been to offer a phenomenologically inspired description of certain aspects of the experience of large-scale moving image installations. To this end, I have tried to elaborate a term that is able to accurately describe the immersion taking place in these post-cinematic installations by observing Deleuze’s term the affection-image, some phenomenological accounts of affectivity, and Giuliana Bruno’s concept of atmospheres of projection. Based on all this, the final suggestion of the paper is that the spectators’ experience of

such moving image installations is best understood through the description of the interplay between what I term embodied self-reflexivity and affective immersion.

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Figure 2. Ragnar Kjartansson: *The Visitors* (2012). Installation view at SFMOMA, San Francisco, 2023. Author's photograph.

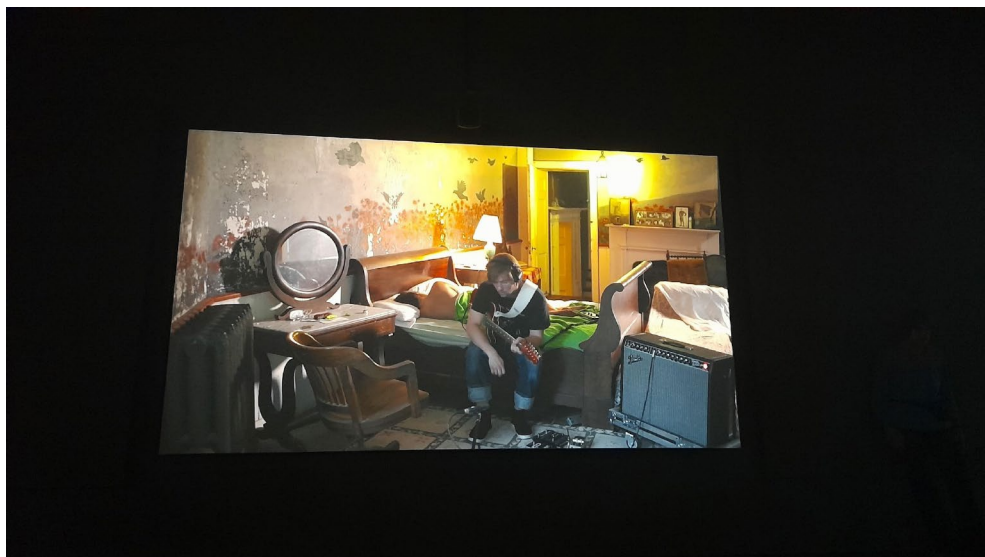


Figure 3. Ragnar Kjartansson: *The Visitors* (2012). Installation view at SFMOMA, San Francisco, 2023. Author's photograph.



Figure 4. Ragnar Kjartansson: *The Visitors* (2012). Installation view at SFMOMA, San Francisco, 2023. Author's photograph.



Figure 5. Julian Rosefeldt: *Manifesto* (2015). Installation view at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, February–November 2016 © David von Becker. Courtesy of the artist.



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Figure 7. Julian Rosefeldt: *Manifesto* (2015). Installation view at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., June 2019–April 2020. Courtesy of the artist.



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