

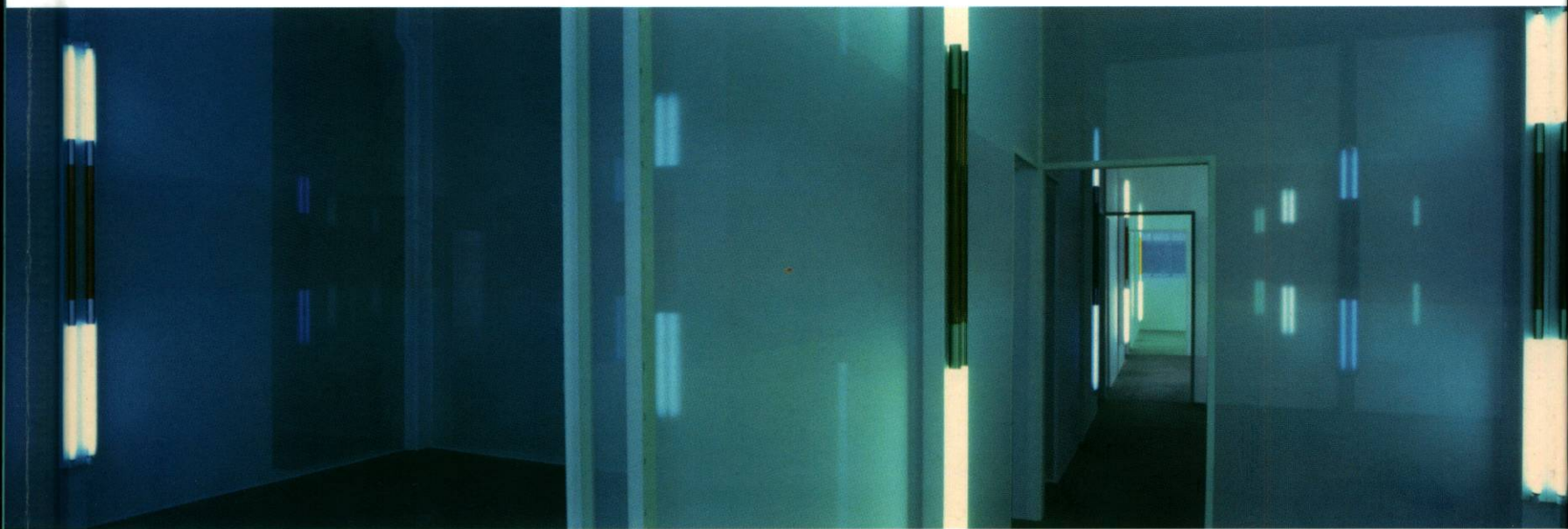
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# Surface

MATTERS OF AESTHETICS, MATERIALITY, AND MEDIA



# Giuliana Bruno

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# Giuliana Bruno

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GIULIANA BRUNO is professor of visual and environmental studies at Harvard University. Her books include *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* and *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*.

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# Introduction

There exist what we call images of things,  
Which as it were peeled off from the surfaces  
Of objects, fly this way and that through the air...  
I say therefore that likenesses or thin shapes  
Are sent out from the surfaces of things  
Which we must call as it were their films or bark.

TITUS LUCRETIUS CARUS, *DE RERUM NATURA*<sup>1</sup>

For Lucretius, the image is a thing. It is configured like a cloth, released as matter that flies out into the air. In this way, as the Epicurean philosopher and poet suggests to us, something important is shown: the material of an image manifests itself on the surface. Lucretius describes the surface of things as something that may flare out, giving forth dazzling shapes. It is as if it could be virtually peeled off, like a layer of substance, forming a “bark,” or leaving a sediment, a veneer, a “film.” This poetic description and its philosophical fabrication go to the heart of my concern in this book as I approach materiality in the virtual age, seeking to show how it manifests itself on the surface tension of media in our times.

What is the place of materiality in our contemporary world? In this age of virtuality, with its rapidly changing materials and media, what role can materiality have? How is it fashioned in the arts or manifested in technology? Could it be refashioned? These are some foundational questions asked in this book, which investigates the surface as it embodies the relation of materiality to aesthetics, technology, and temporality. In considering these issues, I aim to show that there is potential for a reinvention of materiality in our times. I claim that it is visibly and actively pursued in the arts, and I set out to open up a space for its theorization. Most importantly, I argue that materiality is not a question of materials but rather concerns the substance of material relations. I aim to investigate the space of those relations, questioning how they manifest themselves on the surface of different media.

In thinking about space, the architect Le Corbusier wrote that “architecture being... the magnificent play of masses brought together in light, the task of the architect is to vitalize

the surfaces which clothe these masses.”<sup>2</sup> This idea, as we will see, inspires the theoretical direction this book proposes in approaching materiality as a surface condition. The surface is here configured as an architecture: a partition that can be shared, it is explored as a primary form of habitation for the material world. Understood as the material configuration of the relation between subjects and with objects, the surface is also viewed as a site of mediation and projection. By developing this particular theoretical architecture, I thus wish to make a turn in visual studies that can vitalize the surfaces that clothe the material of our objects.

The objects here are multiple, the surfaces manifold. This book approaches object relations across art, architecture, fashion, design, film, and new media. It is especially concerned with what passes between the canvas, wall, and screen, and it insists that the object of visual studies goes well beyond the image. The matter of my concern is not simply visual but tangible and material, spatial and environmental. I have long argued for a shift in our focus away from the optic and toward a haptic materiality. The reciprocal *contact* between us and objects or environments indeed occurs on the surface. It is by way of such tangible, “superficial” contact that we apprehend the art object and the space of art, turning contact into the communicative interface of a public intimacy.

This is why I prefer to speak of surfaces rather than images: to experience how the visual manifests itself materially on the surface of things, where time becomes material space. Digging into layers of imaging and threading through their surfaces, my theoretical interweaving of materials will emphasize the actual *fabrics* of the visual: the surface condition, the textural manifestation, and the support of a work as well as the way in which it is sited, whether on the canvas, the wall, or the screen. I am particularly interested in the play of materiality that is brought together in light on different “screens,” and in offering a theorization of the actual fabric of the screen, outside of figuration. I am also interested in exploring the migratory patterns of such visual fabrications and in tracing their material histories—an investigation that encompasses the archaeology of media as well as their shifting geographies. In this book, then, I perform a series of critical operations on the surface, aimed at articulating it as a site in which different forms of mediation, transfer, and transformation can take place.

**Fabrics of the Visual and the Surface Tension of Media.** Many changes affected by the migration of images happen on the surface and manifest themselves texturally as a kind of surface tension, which affects the very “skin” of images and the space of their circulation. This is a crucial aspect of my argument, and it is particularly developed in chapter 4, “The Surface Tension of Media: Texture, Canvas, Screen,” and chapter 5, “Depth of Surface, Screen Fabrics: Stains, Coatings, and ‘Films.’” These, in close connection with chapters 3 and 6, constitute the theoretical core of the book. From these chapters, the overall argument of the book radiates outward, centrifugally. Embarking on an exploration across a multimedial terrain, the book intends to show that aesthetic encounters are actually “mediated” on the surface and that such mediated encounters engage forms of projection, transmission, and transmutation.



Let me offer some hints of the direction this argument will take, beginning with some examples, in order to make the notion of the fabrics of the visual and its relation to a surface tension more concrete. In contemporary architecture, as the work of Herzog & de Meuron exemplifies, the façades of buildings are engaged as surfaces. Lighter and more tensile than their predecessors, these surfaces may be energized by luminous play, texturally decorated as if they were canvas, stretched as membranes, and treated increasingly as envelopes. In an aesthetic of minimalist elegance, such surface luminosity creates actual architectural space, as becomes especially clear in the “light” spaces of Kazuyo Sejima. At the limit, the architectural surface even turns into a “blur,” as in the hands of Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Surface condition has emerged as a textural form of fashioning the image in contemporary art as well and, as a concept, is driving an aesthetic development that emphasizes the dressing of visual space. Artists as diverse as Tara Donovan, Do-Ho Suh, Pae White, Rudolph Stingel, Sophie Tottie, Luisa Lambri, Isaac Julien, and Krzysztof Wodiczko are all, in their own specific ways, engaged in creating surface tension in different media. Such wearing of surface is an important phenomenon that art and architecture also share with cinema. Think of the cinema of Wong Kar-wai, whose fashioned world is introduced in chapter 1, “A Matter of Fabric: Pleats of Matter, Folds of the Soul,” and treated in chapter 2, “Surface, Texture, Weave.” Here we find a luminously dense, floating surface that shows grain and granularity, residue and sedimentation. We are not asked to see clearly through the fabric of this screen, for several coatings and planar surfaces are built up out of different materials, and all are folded together in the visual pleating of editing. With so many layers to traverse on the surface, the screen itself, layered like cloth, takes on volume and becomes a space of real dimension.

On the surface, patterns of visual tailoring show in a material way. In order to pursue a new materialism, I therefore propose to perform critical acts of investigation on the surface and to engage in an exchange of theory and practice that recognizes the wide potential of material expression across different media. It is for this reason that the book begins with what one might call a sartorial gesture, which engages surface materiality. The first section of the book is devoted to “Fabrics of the Visual,” and the first chapter weaves together aesthetics, hapticity, and affectivity, giving body to surface connectivity. By stitching together a piece of cloth, a strip of celluloid, and a tailored concept, it playfully defines the terms of a sartorial theorization of the visual field as it begins to build the relationship between surface and texture.

A series of folding operations is performed in the first part of the book as a way to embody the tangible sense in which I want to theorize a transformative architecture and thus introduce the important nexus of this work, which concerns how mediatic transformations can be sited texturally on the surface. In proposing that we pay attention to the pleats and folds that constitute the fabrics of the visual, I wish in particular to pursue what Gilles Deleuze calls a “texturology”: a philosophical and aesthetic conception of art in which its “matter is clothed, with ‘clothed’ signifying . . . the very fabric or clothing, the texture enveloping.”<sup>3</sup> To make this textural shift involves tracing what we might call the enveloping “fashioning” of the image and weaving this across different media. This means emphasizing the ety-

mological root of *medium*, which refers to a condition of “betweenness” and a quality of “becoming” as a connective, pervasive, or enveloping substance. As an intertwining matter through which impressions are conveyed to the senses, a medium is a living environment of expression, transmission, and storage.

This intermedial operation requires thinking of the visual in a material way, for it encompasses viewing images as envelopes, textures, traces, and even stains. The visual text is fundamentally textural, and in many different ways. Its form has real substance. It is made out of layers and tissues. It contains strata, sediments, and deposits. It is constituted as an imprint, which always leaves behind a trace. A visual text is also textural for the ways in which it can show the patterns of history, in the form of a coating, a film, or a stain. One can say that a visual text can even *wear* its own history, inscribed as an imprint onto its textural surface. It can also show affects in this way. After all, the motion of an emotion can itself be drafted onto the surface, in the shape of a line or in the haptic thickness of pigment, and it can be tracked down with tracking shots. An affect is actually “worn” on the surface as it is threaded through time in the form of residual stains, traces, and textures. In visual culture, surface matters, and it has depth.

When a surface condition is activated in this way on visual planes, it changes our notion of what constitutes the support of the image and its way of siting a medium. I want to demonstrate that this new form of materialism initiates a major transformation. In surface encounters, novel dynamics are generated, including an innovative form of materiality that is light, diffuse, flexible, and permeable. In closely considering this textural form of fashioning the space of the image, the very nature of what we have traditionally understood as canvas and wall will change to incorporate another form: the screen. An architecture of mediatic transformations comes to the surface at this very junction. Surface tension can turn both façade and framed picture into something resembling a screen. This contemporary screen, I will further argue, far from representing any perspectival ideal, is no longer containable within optical framings, and cannot be likened to a window or a mirror, but is to be reconfigured as a different surface. In my view, a screen-membrane is emerging, performing as a connective tissue, and turning architecture and art into pliant planes of moving images. Made of translucent fabric, this screen is conceptually closer to a canvas, a sheet, a shade, or a drape. Partition, shelter, and veil, it can be a permeable architectural envelope, and it is habitable space. On this material level, the current intersection of canvas, wall, and screen treated here is a site in which distinctions between inside and outside temporally dissolve into the depth of surface. The screen itself signals a state of becoming, and the material realm appears to fold back into screen surface—that reflective, fibrous canvas texturally dressed by luminous projections.

**Screening Material Histories: An Archaeology of Migrant Media.** In weaving through the visual fabrics that link together screen, canvas, and wall across time, exposing the threads that connect the visual to the spatial arts, including the migrations



between cinema and the museum space, my aim is to foster further explorations in surface tension and depth. For the future of a medium shows texturally on the surface—that is to say, in the folds of its architecture and the thickness of its history of visual culture.

In this light, I pursue a theorization of the screen as a surface of substantial transformations. The screen is in need of sustained theorization as an entity in itself, outside of the realm of figuration, in its quality of projective surface. Although still lacking in such theorization, this surface is present in our lives in many spatial forms. The screen has become an ever-present material condition of viewing, and this is occurring paradoxically just at the point that cinema, at the very moment of film's own obsolescence, has come to inhabit today's museums. A refashioning of images is taking place in a proliferation and exchange of screens. Such refashioning of the fabrics of the visual shows tension at the edge, in the space beyond the medium, in the interstices between art forms, at junctions where both transgressive and transitive movements between the arts become palpable on the surface.

The screen acts as the actual surface of this refashioning by returning us to the absorptive materiality of a permeable space of luminous projections. As I argue in chapter 3, "Light Spaces, Screen Surfaces: On the Fabric of Projection," screen-based art practices enact such a return to materiality by emphasizing surface luminosity and textural hapticity. As they return us to the art of projection, the memory of film is materialized in contemporary art. The screen is furthermore activated outside of cinema as a historically dense space—reenacted, that is, as a mnemonic canvas that is fundamentally linked to the technology of light. The history of film is today learned in the museum. Walking through the art gallery and the museum, we encounter webs of cinematic situations, reimagined as if collected together and recollected on a screen that is now a wall, a partition, a veil, or even a curtain.

The tensile surface of the screen canvas is an archive. It contains several "sheets" of the past, which, unfolded, lead all the way back to the birth of modern vision and its history of visual surfaces. In fact, the play on surface, which characterizes the history of ornament, is an expression of modern visibility, and surface luminosity can be said to lie at the very aesthetic roots of modernity. In our times, several projections of past and present materialize on this surface-screen. As we will see in chapter 6, "Sites of Screening: Cinema, Museum, and the Art of Projection," a loop and an editing splice link the turn of the last century to the birth of the new millennium. The public museum flourished in the same age as the cinema and shares with film that fabrication which is the visual, theatrical architecture of spectatorship. In some way, then, today's artists appear to be engaging the very phantasmagoric moment out of which cinema historically emerged as a visual medium. Artists are becoming archivists. As epitomized in Christian Marclay's video timepiece *The Clock* (2010), they are acting as material historians and engaging the materiality of their objects. Why? What is at stake in this history of surfaces? Can we refashion it for the future? If museum culture and film exhibition are mined as an archive of visual fabrics open to reinvention, this cultural archaeology of media, if not nostalgic, can reveal the potential for artistic media to serve as the material conditions for haptic screen encounters.

In chapters 4 and 5 in particular, I also argue that the screen is a site of reconfiguration of the life of media and consider how this surface space affects our lives. The language of the screen has become an actual material condition of our existence, for its geometry is not only ever-present but also manifold. The digital has enhanced the potential of the filmic screen to hold multiple planes, host simultaneity, and foster combinatory patterns and virtual connectivity. Virtual movements are taking place on an environment of screen surfaces. In the art gallery and the museum, screen-based new media practices have become a site of creative screening, which includes magnification and multiplication. Here, as the size and the number of screens are inventively acted upon, a more important expansion comes into being: expanded spectatorial relations are activated, both physically and imaginatively mobilized. This virtual movement signals that the conceptual and practical configurations of the screen have changed, holding less fixity. In architecture as well, the screen has become conceptually lighter and more tensile, as both surface and texture are activated to incorporate motion. The screen is here the surface of a reconfiguration, and it becomes the plane of connection and mediation between art forms.

This screen in motion is also the surface of an expansive mediatic transformation. As we observe the transformative architecture of screening, suspended between stability and mobility, we also observe a movement between art forms occurring on the surface of the screen. This is essentially a luminous surface, and so particular attention must be given to the creation of spaces of light and projection, and to their modification. Following a connective thread here, we weave together the luminous material condition of viewing in painting, photography, architecture, film, and moving-image installation. Traveling on the surface of these different media, we discover that the force of light persists, beyond medium specificity. In the sea of technological change, we find that the art of projection is reinvented and there are new ways in which it holds our fascination. Following this path, then, we ultimately emphasize that transitive movements of the arts reside within luminous environments, in interarts forms. The screen is thus theorized here as a space of crossovers, in which the visual and the spatial arts come to be connected in textural materiality and surface tension.

As this book weaves together filaments of visual existence and patterns of "superficial" transformation across media, it brings together works that exhibit surface tension in different fields, engaging ways in which the surface contains depth. This work explores the build-up of layers, which are also sediments of experience and signs of the accrual and transformation of time. In light of this surface thickness, it considers a wide range of artists, filmmakers, and architects who are working beyond their specific mediums, rethinking new forms of materiality with different materials, including the digital.

With regard to materiality, I aim to demonstrate that the physicality of a thing one can touch does not vanish with the disappearance of its material but can morph culturally, transmuting into another medium. I like to call this technological alchemy, and see it occurring on the surface of different media. Such alchemic transformation is occurring, for example, with the passing of celluloid. A form of materiality returns to the screen at the moment of



film's obsolescence, traveling on the surface of other media. In the digital age, materiality can be reactivated, because it was always a virtual condition.

In arguing that materiality is not a question of materials but, fundamentally, of activating material relations, I aim to convey a sense of transformation of those relations. For me, materiality involves a refashioning of our sense of space and contact with the environment, as well as a rethreading of our experience of temporality, interiority, and subjectivity. Rethinking materiality in this sense, then, means fostering new forms of connection and relatedness. In emphasizing works that exhibit such surface condition, I want to expose these intimate kinds of cultural transformations in their surface tension. For in tensile form, one can experience a material fabrication: the "wearing" of images, which is also a capacity to "weather" change in time.

**Projection and Imagination.** This material reconfiguration of visual space—a "becoming screen"—is a virtual thread that runs through many parts of this book and is particularly developed in the sections on "Surfaces of Light" and "Screens of Projection," where I activate a field of relations between surface, medium, and screen. In particular, I show here that the subtle, complex process of material siting exhibited in the art of projection is a process that exposes different weaves of time and folds of history. A nonlinear sense of time and layers of temporal density emerge while traveling on the surface of media.

Projection offers the possibility to sense this flow of time and to experience duration not only as an external but also as an internal phenomenon. This is a fundamental condition of projection if, as I propose in this book, we understand it as a landscape. The space of projection can sensitize us to the most basic passage of time, which is essentially a passage of light. In projective landscapes we sense light unfolding durationally, as a space. As the works of Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Anthony McCall, Eugènia Balcells, Pipilotti Rist, Carlos Garaicoa, or Tacita Dean show in different ways, light can turn into a permeable architecture. This kind of projection creates a sensing of place, which touches our inner senses while returning us to the environment. For, in the end, light is an atmospheric condition. It is a form of being in the environment, weathering time. And thus, ultimately, as the work of Janet Cardiff will expose, the surface is here an environment.

In many ways, then, I treat the surface as a site of dynamic projections. This surface is tensile in the sense that it is also a landscape of projective motion. This means that the surface holds what we project into it. It is an active site of exchange between subject and object. The surface, like the screen, is an architecture of relations. It is a mobile place of dwelling, a transitional space that activates cultural transits. It is a plane that makes possible forms of connectivity, relatedness, and exchange. Such surface, far from being superficial, is a sizable entity: it is a space of real dimension and deep transformation. Conceived as such a space of relations, the surface can contain even our most intimate projections. The site of an experience of public intimacy, this surface is, indeed, a real screen.

In this book, then, as the surface of projection is emphasized, it is treated as a form of intersubjective transfer that engages the material world and the forms of transformation that operate within its space. Thinking of the screen of projection as this relational psychic architecture gets us close to the idea of a screen-brain and leads us to matters of imaginary space—that is, to engaging the kind of projections that are forms of the imagination. We will turn to such mental fabrications of spaces in the last section of this book, beginning with chapter 8, "Projections: The Architectural Imaginary in Art," which conjoins art and architecture in the fashioning of the imagination. In this last part of the book we will consider the work of artists such as Michaël Borremans, Sarah Oppenheimer, Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Rachel Whiteread, Matthew Buckingham, and Doris Salcedo. There we spend time with the kinds of projections that are mental, psychic processes exhibited in the material world in the form of space, including in this discussion a particular form of projection that is *Einfühlung*, a "feeling into" that is empathy not only with persons but with spaces and things.

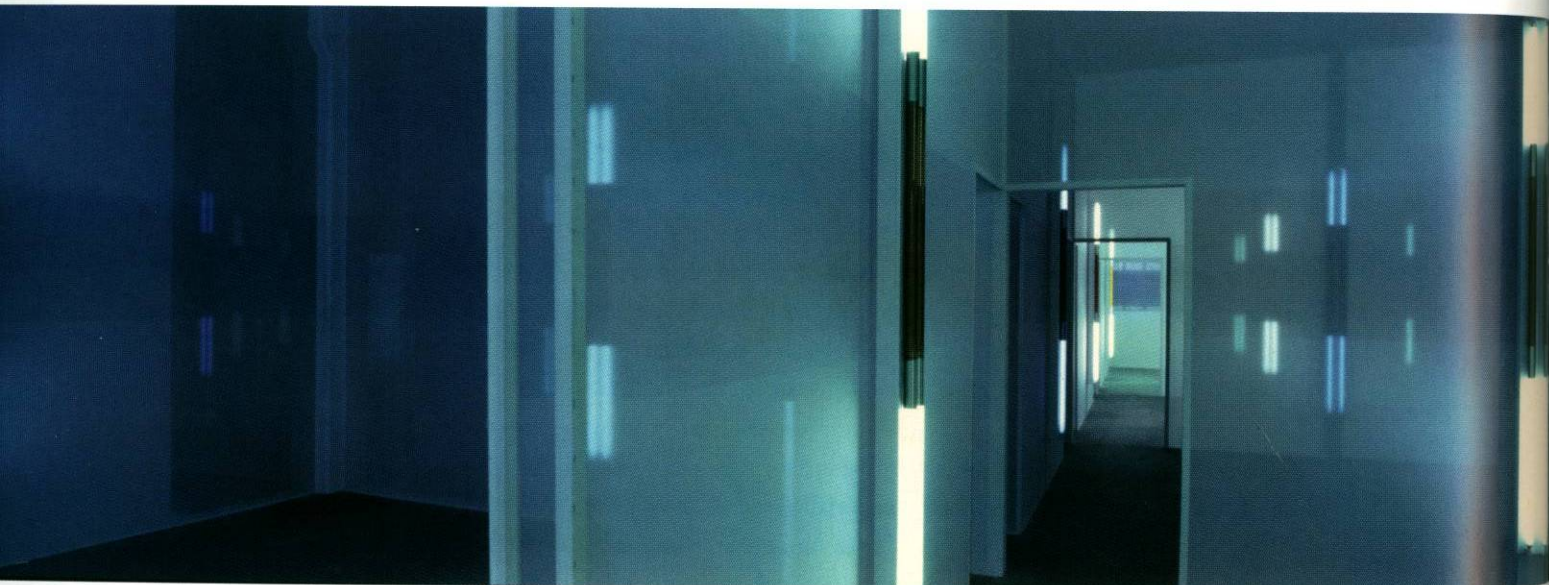
Because of the nature of this particular subject, the final chapters of the book take a subjective turn. Here the form of writing engages experience more directly and shows a more personal texture in the way it spins a narrative out of the surface of things. Mimicking the tone of the entrance into the work, and reprising some of its topics, the exit from the book is lighter and is furnished with personal corollaries that enhance surface materiality by exposing the connection of surface to intimacy. As I explore the different ways in which the surface mediates all matters of relation between interiority and externality, and highlight the forms of public intimacy that are expressed and transmitted on the surface, I engage in this sense the design and circulation of objects. Chapter 9 is essentially a diary, a memoir, an urban travelogue of such surfaces, chronicling objects of material culture and curatorial design in everyday life and non-art museums. Here one can sense how material space and object display affect the making of subjects. Chapter 10, "On Dust, Blur, and the Stains of Time," is written as a virtual letter to render how the surface collects the dust of experience, exposes the stuff of life, and enables the contact of intimacy.

In general, the style of writing matters to me as an author, and I strive to keep the texture of writing closely knit to the theoretical fabrication. This book is accordingly fashioned in its own way. I should warn the reader that it does not progress linearly but weaves through its subjects. Its line of argument does not have an ascending quality; it does not proceed from beginning to end, or from first chapter to last; and the theoretical core is close to the middle. The articulation is rather braided, interlaced, and layered. Threads are interwoven, to be traced throughout the work. The book moves in forms of assemblage and clusters of thoughts. It is organized in four parts, each of which constitutes an entity in itself as it folds into the others. In this fabric there are reverberations. Thoughts may recur, unfolding as a pattern, and ideas presented at one point may be picked up later and rethreaded in a different design. There is a cumulative surface effect. I should add that in the weave of writing there are traces of the different times and forms of writing in which the book came together over the years. In other words, this fabrication is not seamless. I hope you enjoy its pleats and folds.



# Fabrics of the Visual





## 4 The Surface Tension of Media

*Texture, Canvas, Screen*

You walk into the large space of a former New York City warehouse. You adjust your eyes to the ambience and access the mise-en-scène of Robert Irwin's *Excursus: Homage to the Square*<sup>3</sup> (1998). There is a rigorous geometry to the architecture of the installation, and yet this seemingly still environment moves, activated over time by way of light. The scene you experience will depend on the time of day and the state of the weather. A product of decades of work with light and space, originating in Irwin's particular brand of Southern California minimalism, the installation engages the forms of canvas, wall, and screen in architectural inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

The frame of this inquiry is announced in the title of the installation, which refers to *Homage to the Square*, the landmark series of paintings that Joseph Albers began in 1950 and carried on for twenty-five years. The large open space of the third floor of the Dia Center for the Arts appears transformed, as if the canvases that Albers conceived as architectures have materialized in actual architecture. Here Irwin exposes the potential of the square, using scrims to create eighteen similarly constructed rooms. Stretched and invisibly attached to frames, these scrims appear to function as walls; they not only form partitions but also create openings in the shape of doors. But these walls have a particular character. They are light, made of transparent fabric, and they defy the gravity of enclosure. As they dematerialize the tectonics of wall, such forms also materialize into another surface. The fabric of their lightness creates a veiled architecture and a subtly textured space.

These scrim-walls are made of a delicate fabric that is not only transparent but also translucent. The material is fundamentally luminous in the way it reflects and absorbs the natural and artificial light that constitutes an important part of the installation's architecture. At

4.1. Robert Irwin, *Excursus: Homage to the Square*<sup>3</sup>, 1998. Installation view, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, September 13, 1998-June 13, 1999. © 2012 Robert Irwin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Thibault Jeanson. Courtesy of Dia Art Foundation, New York.



either end of the space there is a source of luminosity in the form of large windows, but, like the scrim-walls, these windows confound their given architecture. They are gel-covered such that they no longer simply frame the light but rather filter it. In creating another stratum of luminous filter, they act less like windows and more like sheer partitions: they too become scrim. Further illumination comes from fluorescent lights positioned within the space, their tubes wrapped in layers of theatrical gels that contribute an eerie, colored glow. This use of transparent plastic film further enhances the atmospheric effects of the installation, in clear homage to Albers's own painterly study of color textures and hues.

As you walk further into the space you become increasingly aware of its layered visual fabrication. Filtered through scrim that are essentially veils, light itself appears layered, coated, and textured. As a veil of light bathes the room with ambience, the atmosphere becomes as palpable as fabric and you sense its "weathering." This stratified environment is anything but static, and it is fundamentally temporal. Subtle shifts of luminosity occur over time, changing not only the tone but also the mood of the ambient space.

Immersed in the density of these superficial effects, your awareness of surfaces amplifies. You begin to sense the change of light on fabric as if it were affecting your own skin. A conflation of materials takes place on the texture of the scrim, which take on a cinematic form. The scrim effectively assume the meaning of *pellicule*, that is, of "film," celluloid—that material "skin" that itself reflects, absorbs, and responds to light.

The more the durational fabric of light is registered on the scrim, the more the force of the cinematic pervades the installation. As viewers walk through the layers of their architectural presence in the space, they too become part of the fabric of the installation.<sup>2</sup> Appearing and disappearing through the scrim, these viewers, like actors in a film, enter into a play of light and shadow, becoming shadows themselves. As the scrim activate this subtle play of transparency and shadowing, they "mediate" a spectatorial experience. The veils of these scrim activate rooms that are permeable viewing chambers. And thus, acting as luminous partitions and reflective filters, the scrim-walls are finally understood to be screens. They are the kind of transparent bodies that can enable projection, which is itself a form of transfer and mediation. Their absorbent material is that same fabric that allows a screen to be, in all senses of the word, a medium.

**Wall, Canvas, Screen.** As it unfolds in layers, or rather "sheets," of mediatic connections, Robert Irwin's installation embodies the main theoretical preoccupation of this study: the passages that occur across the material of canvas, wall, and screen. In these passages, we can witness how the status of the image has changed across time: images have come to be manifested more and more as surfaces. This issue of surface encounters, a thread throughout my critical approach to visibility, now comes to the fore. This core section of the book, on surfaces of light, is engaged in particular in reflecting on the presence and configuration of the screen as a cultural fabric. Irwin's installation offers us a way to signal that there are

shifts in the relations between media that appear reflected, and acted upon, on the surface of their material medium of communication. A depth of interesting phenomena of mediation emerges on the surface, which becomes highlighted in contemporary visual culture as a form of communication in itself—that is to say, as a medium. The surface is the locus for the intersection of diverse visual configurations and the site of the mediatic refashioning of visual fabrics. It also acts as a shifting depository of visual histories in the form of palpable sediments and passages of textural density.

Irwin's work suggests in particular that, as we think of images as surfaces, we must reflect on the "superficial" relation between the forms of canvas, wall, and screen, for the surface not only mediates their fabrication but also their modification. The hypothesis put forth here is that a fundamental intersection of these forms has taken place, and today we can witness an important change on the surface of media. The interrelation of these forms is changing on the surface, and as distinctions collapse a form of conflation between canvas, wall, and screen is taking place. Irwin's work is exemplary in that it shows that the very nature of what it is traditionally understood as canvas and wall has changed to incorporate a form that has become ever-present in our culture: the screen. As it "projects" the canvas into architecture, the installation also creates a more permeable understanding of the notion of wall. It shows that the wall has itself changed. The architecture of the wall is no longer rigidly tectonic but rather tensile and textured. Such a wall embodies the property of canvas and the configuration of screen.

The screen thus takes center stage. But it too appears in a fashion that differs from its usual framing. In fact, as we ponder the architecture of this installation, we may come to question canonical notions of the screen and thereby advance its theorization. It is important to re-view the architecture of this form, for the screen, when it does not remain undertheorized, has been too often treated in film theory as a trope akin to the window and the mirror. But the fabric of the screen discloses a change here. This screen is not a window. It slips away from any conceptual framing in pure perspectival geometry and ideal. And it is also not a mirror. This type of screen is not reflective of any form of split identity, and it supersedes the architecture of the Lacanian gaze. The screen, as it emerges here, is dressed as a different surface. It is rather reconfigured as a type of canvas, a sheet, or a curtain. Partition, shelter, and veil, this is a permeable architectural envelope.

In the following pages I want to pursue the idea of this interface, exposed here as it unfolds in Irwin's work, and explore it further to see how it emerges on the surface of different media. This chapter and the one that follows are in many ways, then, a continued meditation on surface, and on the layers of depth that it can hold. Since this is an inquiry into phenomena that are still evolving, it will take the form of an exploratory journey, collecting and assembling clusters of manifestations in different forms. As I interweave this material to present my thesis on surface and screen fabrics, I aim to render theoretically, in the tissue of the writing itself, the transformative agency and the thickness of surface. Because of the vast expanse of the material, I will keep the focus on a few textural readings of visual



works that engage in the idea of “surface tension,” threading a connection to architectural phenomena. What follows, then, is a speculative reflection on works that, in different ways, engage the intersection—and even the conflation—of canvas, wall, and screen, with the aim of demonstrating the varied potential of (screen) surface to mediate cultural fabrics, not only in media but as a new “old” medium itself.

**Luminous Opacity: Screen, Window, Wall.** A most compelling refashioning of surface as the site of a conceptual reconfiguration of wall, window, and screen resides in the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, an artist known for his large-scale video and slide projections on architectural façades and planes. Since 1980, this Polish-born artist, who lives in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts, has produced more than eighty such public projections, in many different countries.<sup>3</sup> His use of visual technology and new media is particularly relevant to my perspective, for Wodiczko has incessantly used the medium of projection to interrogate the face and façade of architecture as a dense surface: a permeable site for the mediation of memory, history, and subjectivity. Recently, turning the object of his long-standing investigation inside out, Wodiczko has architected works that further mediatic potentials in digital form.

Two related Wodiczko installations effectively play with the surface of interior and exterior space: *If You See Something . . .*, shown at New York City’s Galerie Lelong in 2005, and *Guests*, exhibited at the 2009 Venice Biennale. Both show a mise-en-scène that is lucidly complex. As one walked into the dark interior space of the Polish Pavilion of the Biennale, where *Guests* was installed, one thought one was seeing eight windows, scattered on three walls, and, looking up, one skylight. But in fact, the walls of the pavilion had no openings. Wodiczko carved out these frames not in stone but in imaging. The windows were actually projections, “screens” on which one could catch glimpses of life and the personal narratives of immigrants, the “guests” of a country. *If You See Something . . .* is similarly structured, with four windows projected along one side of the dark interior space of the gallery. Here too, this time in New York, one could access the narratives of society’s invisible citizens. Although they are overexposed in policing and immigration surveillance, the migrants in this installation, as in *Guests*, are never seen clearly.<sup>4</sup> They appear as shadows through the light, and their silhouettes enact a form of digital shadow theater. The interrelation of visibility and invisibility in society is materialized here, uncovered on the nonexistent panes of glass windows dressed as screens.

The surface of these architectures, with their imaginary windows, functions as an elaborate form of mediation. Here we have a complex visual fabrication that, as the art historian Ewa Lajer-Burcharth notes, pushes boundaries and negotiates borders: because the migrants remain visually elusive, with the sounds of their voices audible but muffled, the installations convey an experience of subjective opacity in which not only the physical borders but also the contours of the inner life of citizens are at stake, and at risk.<sup>5</sup> Going beyond the trope of





voyeurism, Wodiczko enacts an intersubjective play on the border between self and other, inner and outer space. As he forces us to confront who and what is inside or outside, he creates a window in which positions between outsider and insider may be not only mediated but even shifted around.

The surface of the installation's architecture renders possible not only the experience of the border but also a crossing of limits. This is a function of the density of the space. The fabric of this installation is thick, and deliberately never transparent. We are confronted with a material that is neither pure wall nor window, and yet has properties of both. On this particular canvas, a space of both conflation and displacement, the psychic space and the everyday space of people who are themselves displaced can reside. This can happen because of the added element of "screening" involved here. Subjective transparency is defied in favor of an opacity that reflects layers of projection. This surface is an imaginary architectural formation in which projections, both literally and metaphorically, can occur.

As we look closely at these walls, which act as windows, we can actually perceive them as screen surfaces, and this produces further effects of conflation and diffusion between forms.<sup>6</sup> In order to see, we must navigate a surface that is visually configured as a white, dense material. A milky, textured substance appears to our senses, and, acting as a cover for the window-walls, it mediates the relation between seer and seen. In this sense, we perceive the materiality of projection, which is digitally configured to approach screen surface. Closer to a veil or curtain than to a pane of glass, this surface is the actual visual tissue of projection. Thus it is not just the function but also the consistency of these window-walls that is closely related to the fabric of the screen. Through the textural manifestation of the latticed image we can perceive—envisage—the support of the image and its representational medium. The projection screens, far from being invisible, are made palpable as projective matter. And thus, as we try to make out the foggy figures of the displaced people and hear their stories, we experience the mediatic quality of the screen as a veiled, and veiling, surface.

Wodiczko here expands on his long-standing practice of exposing the architecture of projection. In this artistic enterprise, the body of the person is consistently animated with and against the body of building forms. The space onto which the images are projected is never invisible but always rendered tangible. For example, in *The Tijuana Projection* (2001), the face of a woman mouthing her story is projected as if her skin were adhering to the spherical surface of the dome of the city's Centro Cultural. In *The Hiroshima Projection* (1999), it is the hands of survivors that speak, projected in close-up onto the moving surface of a river that appears to activate mnemonic flow. In this way we are made aware of the very texture of the surface onto which the image is projected. One might even say that the image is carved out of the material surface of the architecture that supports it, animates it, and moves it. The skin of the building becomes exposed, shown as a palpable, interstitial space of projection. A form of mediation, the architectural surface thus acts for Wodiczko as a partition; that is, it functions as a visible screen.

*If You See Something . . .* and *Guests* go even further than previous installations in dis-



playing the material of projection. As the surface is made physically present, it shows a pellicular quality. In these installations, screens can act as membranes. The fabric of the images is solidly permeable, and on the milky, veiled surface of projection the figures of the migrants concretely appear as a moving blur. As the figures move, their contours come in and out of focus, becoming more consistent as they approach the limit of the screen. The effect makes the screen feel like a tissue, a permeable, thin sheet. Such a screen appears to move like a membrane that is being stretched. Wodiczko plays ironically with this permeable materiality as he shows people trying to clean the impossibly foggy substance, and rain seems to fall at times, further veiling the surface. The surface is rendered as tensile as skin, even from the perspective of the viewers. Some visitors to the installation come up to the site of projection as if wishing the space could extend or stretch like a membrane. In turn, the migrants act as if the partition could bend or warp to create a passage, or as if it could be

4.3. Krzysztof Wodiczko, *If You See Something . . .*, 2005. Four projected video images with sound. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York.



visually traversed, like a veil. They push their bodies up to the surface and hold up pictures and objects as if wishing to push them through a layer of tissue. In many ways, this screen is shown to be elastic, flexible, and pliant.

Surface tension occurs here. This membrane is an actual screen: a site of partition in which migrants can negotiate status and story. In a way, one can imagine this membranelike surface acting as a protective layer for those figures, projected so they can affirm their existence and project their stories. But the membrane also still acts as a wall. There is substance, which is also a form of resistance, in this material of projection. As if to rebel against their status as shadows, the migrants push up against the partition as if against a real border. But let us not forget that the virtual architecture constructed by Wodiczko is also a window. In this capacity as aperture, the resilient surface can enable a passage. Possibilities of openings and a potential for exchange are sited on this composite and permeable screen that acts as a membrane.

The passage created in this installation mimics the actual form of surface tension that occurs on a film screen. Coated in the material fabric of projection, this is a space of cinematic traversal that includes spectatorial projections. As a visitor to this space, one is not safely positioned on the other side of the screen but rather stands on the border, for in order to perceive one must cross over and project oneself into the space of the other. Caught in the web of the installation, one cannot escape this mode of projection. The fabric of this screen is so absorbent that it absorbs the viewer too in its surface tension. To look is to feel this tension. One cannot simply stare at the surface. The tension of this tensile surface forces one to become engaged—to the point of wishing that borders might be crossed and contact might be made through the membrane, across the fabric of the screen. More than just a site of critical distance, this kind of screen is both resistant and embracing because it holds affects in its fabric. Its porous membrane enables the passage of empathy, which is itself a form of projection. In staging an epidermic form of exchange, this surface-membrane thus mediates the potential for relatedness that is inscribed in filmic projection.

The surface of this installation thus makes us tangibly aware of the many aspects of “screening.” And as the absorbent, luminous opacity leads us, visually and cognitively, to sift through the complex psychogeographic landscape of projection, a last layer of screening emerges. We sense the memory of film come to the surface. This turn to cinema is even more evident in Wodiczko’s . . . *OUT OF HERE: The Veterans Project*, an installation shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston from November 2009 through March 2010. Here, one enters into a dark space in which dim light appears to come from rectangular industrial windows above. Again these windows exist only as projections on the walls, and again the projections are also dressed as screens, but here they no longer project figures. On this walled, windowed canvas of projection, the atmosphere seems serene. People are heard but not shown. The sky appears calm, and a soccer ball goes by. Then, as when film evokes an unseen horror, something terrible happens offscreen. We cannot see clearly and cannot grasp the information that hits us from all directions. The

destruction that is war assaults us sensorially. The tension is palpable. The windows finally break. The crack in the interior-exterior space that is the product of war and globalization is here, embodied in digital space.

The indexical quality of celluloid may no longer be with us but this new pellicular membrane is just as affectively tensile. It can still hold us in deeply articulated surface tension. And so as the shadow theater that is cinema is reconfigured and rematerialized architecturally, and the white cube of the gallery turns luminously dark, we are given back the absorbent, relational fabric of projection, displayed on yet another form of screen-membrane.

**Absorbent Luminosity: Surface, Projection, Screen.** As it reworks the architecture of projection, Wodiczko’s cinematic installation keeps the language of film closely knit to architectural configurations. In doing so, this work resonates deeply with some contemporary turns in architecture, where the surface has also become a canvas of interesting projections. The phenomenon is vast, but what is relevant for our argument here is to note that the architectural surface has itself become a screen. I do not mean this literally, merely in terms of media walls, though these certainly play a role.<sup>7</sup> I am rather interested in stressing that architecture has annexed the moving image on a play of material surface that involves the fabrication of transmissible membranes, in a fundamental rethinking of transparency and opacity, darkness and light, with respect to conditions of subjective absorption.

In a concrete way, a renewed architectural interest in experimenting with luminosity and translucency has led to the emergence of surface in a new light. Terence Riley, who curated the landmark exhibition *Light Construction* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1995, clearly showed this turn to surface luminosity as a space that exists between transparency and opaqueness and emphasized “the tension between the viewer and object implied by the use of the architectural façade as a veiling membrane.”<sup>8</sup> The diverse projects represented in the show, by architects ranging from Herzog & de Meuron to Steven Holl, span a range of efforts to reconfigure the notion of surface and its material condition, a project that still endures. There appears to be a widespread “superficial” movement engaged in uncovering the strata and thickness of surface, and in creating deep, textured, layered surfaces. In this sense, this is an impulse that connects the visual arts to architecture on the translucent ground of screened images.

An interrelation of surfaces is emerging in visual fabrication, and this often resides in an aesthetic of textural, minimal simplicity that contains conceptual material complexity. In this regard, the reconfiguration of wall, window, and screen activated in the installation works that we are analyzing finds correspondence in architectural work such as that of Kazuyo Sejima and her Tokyo-based firm SANAA, founded together with Ryue Nishizawa. Think of the Glass Pavilion at the Toledo Museum of Art (2006), for which SANAA created a wall that had the density of thin membranes. The curved layers of glass make for a





4.4. Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa/  
SANAA, Glass Pavilion at the Toledo  
Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, 2006.  
© SANAA. Courtesy of SANAA.

thickness of volumes that borders on a sense of visual opacity. This is an ambiguous space of translucency, neither clearly transparent nor fully opaque. Here, too, as in the installations we have described, transparency is ultimately defied in favor of the creation of a membrane that enables layers of passage, which are not only physical but also redolent of projective effects. In fact, as architectural historian Eve Blau shows in her sustained analysis of tension in transparency, this glass pavilion creates a spatial feeling and a time-thickened sense, and in this atmosphere the visitor can be absorbed and projected.<sup>9</sup> Such space is relational, in the sense implied by Wodiczko's installations. Furthermore, the kind of translucent membrane engaged by this architectural surface can also be understood to mediate a projection, and it is closely linked to the layers of experience of cinematic projection that we have been discussing. This too is a surface that generates a form of "screening" space that is projective and durational and in which the distance between inside and outside, object and subject, is reconfigured as a passage.

**Surface (Self) Reflections: Canvas, Mirror, Screen.** This kind of surface tension, which is an opaque effect of screening and of the layering of time and space, is also

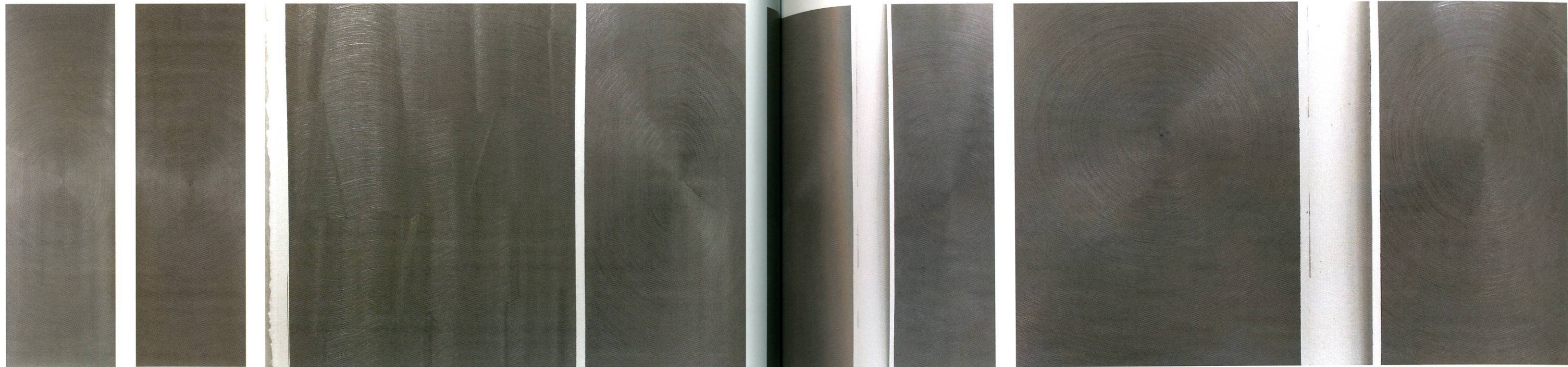


found in artworks that engage the support of the image. This is the gray area that Gerhard Richter works in *Six Gray Mirrors* (2003), where the process of surface encounters is made palpable in exemplary ways. In this translucent installation at Dia:Beacon, six large, gray, opaque glass surfaces are presented for view. Made of reflective enamel material, these colored mirrors transparently incorporate three decades of the artist's production of gray paintings on canvas, as they fuse pigment onto the back of the glass.<sup>10</sup>

The reflective panels are projected from the wall on cantilevered supports in such a way as to defy any analogy to pure window or mere mirror, although they reflect the space that they are placed within, including the large rectangular industrial windows set high on the walls around the room. As in Wodiczko's work, we are presented with a geometry that engages glass, window, wall, canvas, and screen fabric, and fundamentally shifts the terms of the use of these mediums by conflating their qualities on the surface. This is a composite architecture that engages all these different forms on its planar shape, and thus invokes the

4.5. Gerhard Richter, *Six Gray Mirrors*  
No. 884/1-6, 2003. Installation view,  
Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Beacon, New  
York. Photo: Richard Barnes. Courtesy  
of Dia Art Foundation, New York.





4.6. Sophie Tottie, sketches for *White Lines* (*wubg.tds*), 2010. Oil, gesso, paper, 37 5/8 × 12 in. each (details). Photo: Marcus Schneider. Sophie Tottie. Courtesy of the artist.

language of painting, architecture, photography, and film and fuses their treatment of the surface. Furthermore, with Richter, the effect of the cantilevered projection of the plane enhances the relationship between architecture and sculpture that is built into the surface. Built in such a conflated way, this luminous surface is quite voluminous and deep.

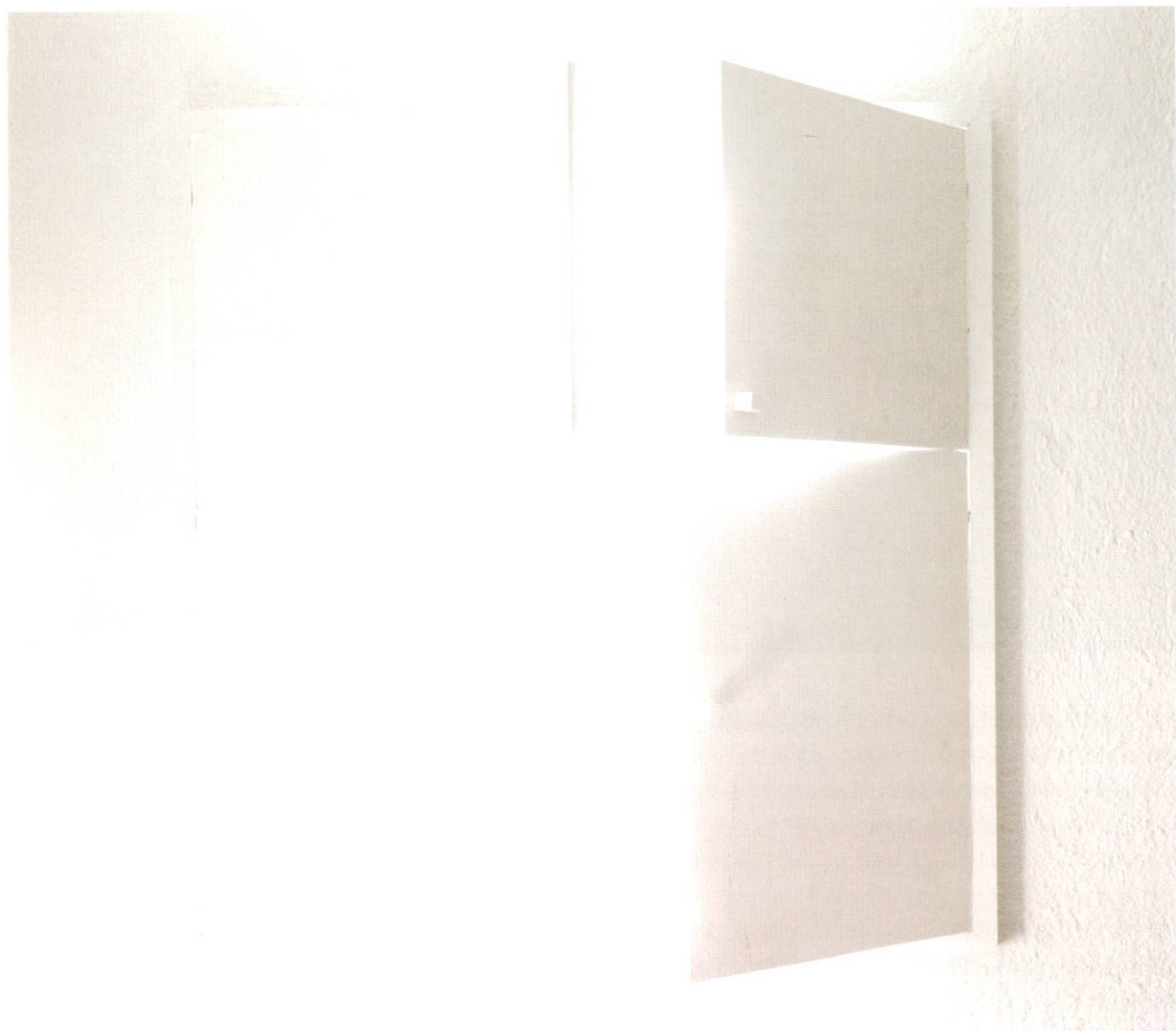
Both a reflective and a projective canvas, the thick surface of Richter's work incorporates us, the viewers, and does so in time as both the planes and our position shift. The composite architecture of the installation is built in a way that not only refracts but also filters the environment. There is an effect of "weathering" built into the work, which changes with time. The panels can be tilted at various angles, and depending on the time of day or the weather condition the effect of the work is different for the observers reflected—or rather, projected—into the architecture of the artwork.

In this installation, radiance and opacity meet in an atmospheric form of projection. Here too we have effects of absorbent opacity, close to those of the layered surfaces and the fabric of veiling we encountered earlier. Pure transparency is again defied in this glass architecture, but this time in a different shade of gray. On this surface we can experience the ambiguity of penumbra, the obscurity of somber shades, and a range of crepuscular hues. Ultimately, the color of the light here is rather dark, as it is in Matisse's painting *French Window at Collioure* (1914), an almost abstract canvas that pulls you into the darkness filtered by the window opening it depicts. In some way then, this particular surface-effect of absorbent opacity is akin to the kind of perceptual "blinding" that art historian Yve-Alain

Bois describes as an effect of perceptual slowness.<sup>11</sup> In order to actually see, we must slow down and adjust our gaze over time, and, in the process, we must let diffusion, dissolution, and decentering come to the surface. In such a way, we can come to experience the gray zone that is the darkness of light.

**Environmental Projections: Canvas, Window, Screen.** Understood in this way, the sensing of the surface cannot be separated from the experience of the self as a subject of perception, who becomes absorbed in time in a space of projection in which the material of light is activated on a surface. To further this point, it is important to recall that, historically, the experience of light on canvas created a space in which the observer, no longer capable of existing outside the space of observation, actually became incorporated into it. Art historian Jonathan Crary theorizes this important passage when he speaks of the effects of light in the paintings of Turner. As he puts it, "The distance between subject and object, that is, between a viewer and the world, collapses in the physical inscription of the sun onto the body," and thus "the lived body of the spectator and the exterior world of physical events are one indivisible field."<sup>12</sup> When experienced as mediated on a surface, the sensory quality of light opens up this potential space, which is able to incorporate subjectivity, holding its inscription and projections in space. In this sense, one could argue that the surface of the canvas can act as a screen. It can act, that is, as an actual projective surface





4.7. Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (Barragan House, #06)*, 2005. Laserchrome print, 33 7/8 x 37 3/4 in. © Barragan Foundation, Switzerland. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

onto which an experience of close relations between subject and object is inscribed, in a way that overcomes divisions between outside and inside, inward and outward.

As a pictorial phenomenon, this effect of absorption in the surface is returned to us in contemporary works that strive to hold light on surface and in this way create textural materiality in minimal forms. Such is the case for the painter Sophie Tottie. She has experimented with capturing light on canvas in a series of paintings entitled *R.W.B.* and *G.R.S./B.R.Y.* from 2009, followed by *White Lines (wubg.tds)*, a series of gray paintings from 2010. Tottie's gray paintings produce an effect of absorbent opacity that, as with Richter, issues from sustained observation, the mobility of the observing subject, and the projection of temporality that

is built into the work. In her gray paintings, the reflection of light is held in the physical brushstrokes that strive to capture and retain the physicality and the texture of light. Tottie makes the surface of the painting as radiant as a screen, defying immediate illumination in favor of a projection of duration. The effect of the work changes a great deal over time depending on the existing light in the environment and the position of the observer. The texture of this luminous surface is sensitive to shifting weather conditions, which, in turn, become absorbed on the surface. On these canvases, as on the fabric of the screen, the experience of light as it is mediated on a surface becomes an environmental experience that incorporates the movement of observation and the sensing of time as an atmosphere.

When encountering textures of light and fading shadows, whether reflected on canvas or on screen fabrics, the observer is thus enveloped inside a layered sensory experience of ambience: an absorption in the temporal effects of environmental surfaces. The sensing of a luminous surface produces such an environmental tension, for it holds us to the rhythm and passage of time in space. This effect can also be seen in the luminous photographs of Luisa Lambri, who constructs the depth of architectural surfaces with minimalist elegance and care for the atmosphere of a place.<sup>13</sup> Working in the register of architectural photography, pioneered with particular conceptual rigor by Candida Höfer, Lambri activates the architectural surface with light. But departing from Höfer, her abstracted spaces strive to include inhabitation in the absence of people. In this sense, her approach is not unlike that of the evocative architectural picturing of James Casebere, who for the last thirty years has been building models of places and photographing them, using light to suggest an atmospheric, mnemonic sense of narrative for the site.<sup>14</sup> Casebere's luminous abstract spaces cinematically evoke previous and potential events, and, in its own way, Lambri's treatment of architecture also constructs such a projective surface, with the possibility for viewers to be fictionally projected in the site.

A series of photographs from 2005, *Untitled (Barragan House)*, is particularly significant because in it Lambri tackles the extraordinary work of Luis Barragán, the Mexican architect for whom light was an architecture and who created his own brand of modernism by building with light surfaces and sculpting with vivid color.<sup>15</sup> Focusing on a window of Barragán's house in Mexico City, Lambri creates a sequence of experiential sensations of the intensity of the space. In this series, the frame of the photograph incorporates the frame of the window, and the language of photography meets that of architecture in the creation of a conflated surface. Using the shutters as partitions, Lambri renders the environmental feeling of observing light filtering into the space of the house. Partially obscuring the frame, the shutters furthermore give volume to the flat photographic surface, which appears to comprise different and moving planes. In this representation of windows, the transparency of the glass is defied in favor of an articulated surface in which light reflectively transpires in textural ways. As observers of this series, we sense the passage of time on a surface that screens the light and renders atmosphere, and we are included in the living fabric of Barragán's space. In the end, as the series progresses, the image becomes almost abstract, turning into a mere



4.8. Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 1994. Oil and enamel on canvas, 12 × 12 ft. © Rudolf Stingel. Collection of the artist. Photo: D. James Dee. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

white texture. Represented here is an enveloping luminous substance, a fibrous canvas of light. No longer a window, this aperture is a screen. It is a fabric of projections.

**Pliant Textures.** As it emerges here, the transitive passage between canvas, wall, and screen is an aesthetic phenomenon engaged in a textural reconfiguration of surface that is, at some level, intrinsically architectural. This aspect of the contemporary reworking of the surface finds its own expression in the art of Rudolf Stingel, which, as Chrissie Iles notes, is characterized by surface tension. Stingel creates reflective surfaces that can be inscribed by the viewers, remakes tapestries in the form of canvases, and builds works in which the horizontality of wall and the verticality of floor are challenged as the entire space becomes a canvas.<sup>16</sup> For Stingel, walls not only can turn into floors but can mutate into mirrors, and they can become screens as well. In an aesthetic that might be called “minimal Baroque,” surfaces are highlighted and conflated. Stingel refashions the effects of décor, decoration, and ornament and reconfigures their positions in space, making them resurface as substantial planes of visual expression and essential fabrics of the visual.

In its multiform architectural expressions, Stingel’s work always shows a tensility in the surface that is textural and, at times, even atmospheric. For this artist, surface tension includes a textured treatment of luminosity that is elaborately fabricated on canvas. In a series of large paintings from the early 1990s, *Untitled*, Stingel sought to capture luminosity in ways that are not optical but rather haptic, inventively using oil and enamel on canvas. He applied layers of colored pigment to the canvas and spray-painted a coating of silver through the porous, netted surface of a sheet of tulle, which was used as yet another layer of fabric in the artwork. The tulle was then peeled away, as if it were skin, but it remained present as a textural trace on the painting. The effect of the work is subtle, offering a complex textural manifestation that is sensuously tactile. As Stingel seductively reworks the actual material of canvas and makes us aware of the layers and porosity of its surface materiality, the painting itself reads as an actual fabric. The tension held by the canvas is projected in its layered architecture, and the surface shows the fabric of this fabrication. In encountering such a surface, a new minimalism of closeness rather than distance can be experienced, for the intimate fabric of the work draws the beholder in with the simple, elegant textuality of its visual pattern.

**Curtained Spaces.** Architected in planes akin to layers of cloth, the surface emerges as an elaborate form of textural fabrication, the envelope of a material mediation that does not exclude intimacy. To further experience this effect of closeness in the conflated surface as it is built across canvas, wall, and screen, think of how the artist Do-Ho Suh reworks the surface, transforming the material of sculpture and architecture into cloth.<sup>17</sup> This Korean artist, who lives in New York, is known for having made exact replicas of his homes in Seoul





and in New York, casting them in fabric. *348 West 22nd St., Apt. A, New York, NY 10011, USA* (2000), for example, is a tentlike structure, with every element made of nylon cloth through which one can see. Here, tectonics is defined as the architectural surface comes close to being a permeable canvas, or even a curtain. Walls, doors, and windows are made of a light, translucent material as a way to enable viewers to access a psychic geography profoundly marked by dislocation. As the scrims transform the relation between inside and outside, turning architecture inside out, they become a form of projection of geopsychic displacement, and the physical marker of existence in between cultures.

This particular fabrication, in which scrim-walls project a hybrid cultural geography, becomes even more evident in *Blueprint*, the installation Do-Ho Suh produced in collaboration with the Seoul-based studio Suh Architects for the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale. The installation is twofold. Floating in suspension on top, a translucent fabric refashions the actual volumes of the townhouse in New York where Suh now resides, with verticality turned horizontal. Below, on the floor, a laminate surface, a shadow of the fabrication above, features faint images of the façade of the New York townhouse, the artist's former home in Korea, and a Venetian villa, creating a composite geography. A projection of conflated cultural configurations takes place in the texture of this work. On these planes we can experience the intimate space of dislocation through material surfaces whose conflated properties act as screens of multiple cartographies. In this architecture of dwelling, a foldable structure as pliant as curtains, the hybrid effect of cultural mobility is intimately fashioned in material portability.

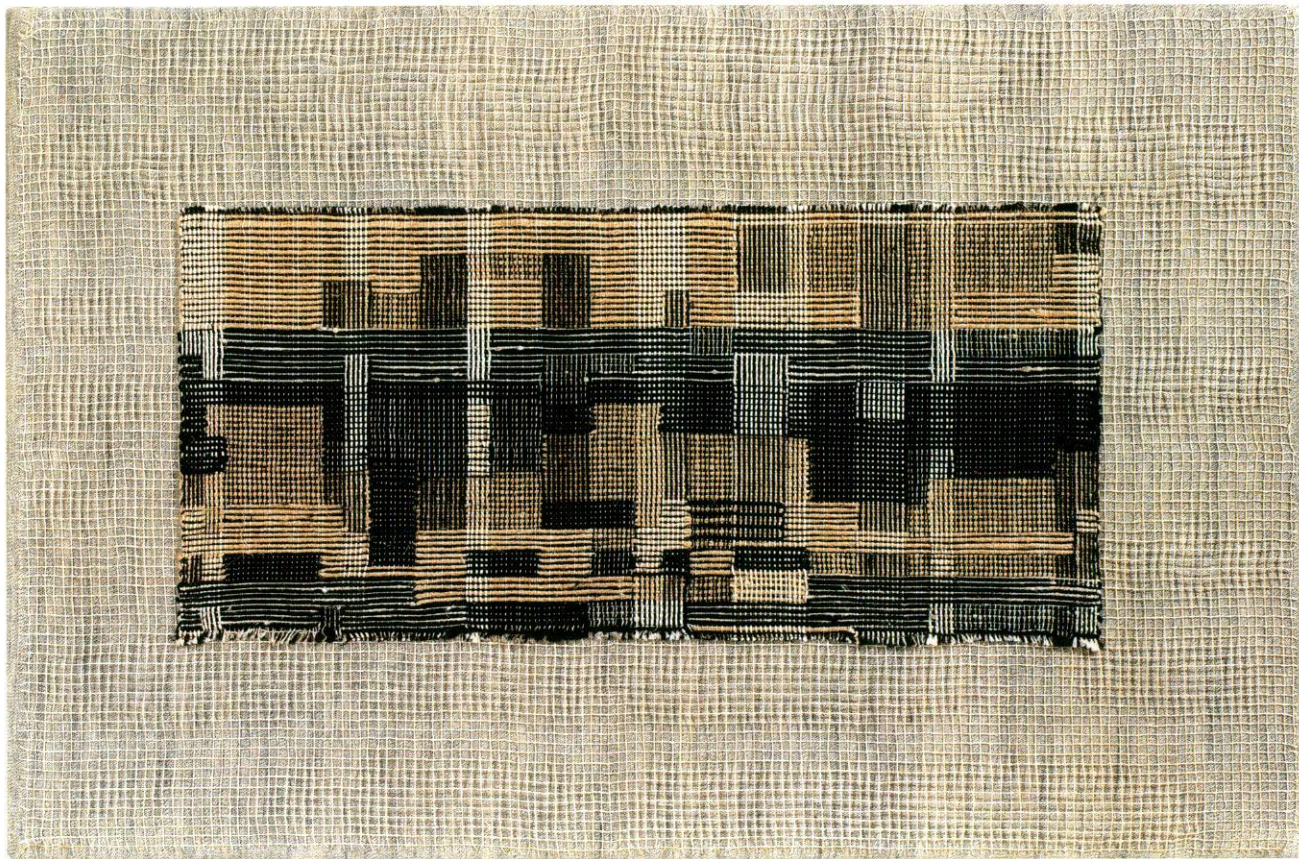
**Envelope, Curtain, Screen.** The translucent depth of Do-Ho Suh's work in pliant fabrics leads us to reflect further on how deeply the textural aspect of surface tension, as manifested in contemporary art, resonates with the history of surface as a material site for architectural reconfiguration. The history of modern experimentation that links the pliable plane to textile in architecture owes much to the Bauhaus.<sup>18</sup> As the art historian T'ai Smith has shown, the study of cloth and weaving enabled the Bauhaus to overcome the limits of opticality and to explore tactility and materiality.<sup>19</sup> A sartorial understanding of space was advanced by women weavers such as Otti Berger, who wrote of "fabrics in space" in 1930 as she considered "the tactile in cloth" and thus pioneered the sense of textile in the design of haptic spatiality.<sup>20</sup> In both her practice and her writings, Anni Albers also theoretically pursued the relation between surface and textile, and inscribed mobility on this plane.<sup>21</sup> She insisted that there is a fundamental relationship between textile, mobilization, and cultural transit, putting forth ideas that we have observed at work texturally in contemporary times, as exemplarily activated on the surface of Do-Ho Suh's installations.

In her essay "The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture," written in 1957, Albers suggested thinking of the processes of building and weaving as related rather than antithetical modes, using an argument that goes beyond even Gottfried Semper's notion that architecture orig-



4.9. Do-Ho Suh, *Blueprint*, 2010. Installation view, Venice Biennale 2010, 12th International Architecture Exhibition. Polyester fabric, laminated panel, 43 ft. 7 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. × 20 ft. 10 in. × 11 ft. <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. © Do-Ho Suh and Suh Architects. Photo: Stefano Graziani. Courtesy of Do-Ho Suh and Suh Architects.





4.10. Anni Albers, *City*, 1949. Linen and cotton pictorial weaving, 17 1/2 x 26 1/2 in. © 2011 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society, New York. Courtesy of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

inates in textile.<sup>22</sup> She dwelled on the forms of mobility that the lightness and pliability of cloth can afford, and connected architecture and clothing on this plane. “When we revert to nomadism,” she wrote, “as travelers, we are open to textile behavior.”<sup>23</sup> She understood the movable, portable, adaptable, transformative quality of fabric, and the moving sensibility that it can culturally convey. Albers furthermore called for the affirmation of touch, for “the soft play of folds, and the luster or fuzz of fiber.”<sup>24</sup> In her essay “Tactile Sensibility,” from 1965, she pledged that we “will make of our surfaces textile surfaces.”<sup>25</sup> The word “textural” makes a substantial appearance in her writing, describing something apparent on the surface, a component of what she calls a “surface play.”<sup>26</sup>

As she described “the character of mobility in our fabrics,” Albers made an aesthetic out of material surfaces that were considered neither architecture nor worthy of aesthetic consideration.<sup>27</sup> She was interested in material objects that “can be lifted, folded, carried, storied away, and exchanged easily” and claimed that “the very fact of mobility makes them the carrier of extra aesthetic value.”<sup>28</sup> Her pioneering interest in surface included the texture of fabric walls, veil-like fabric panels, and curtains, for they can be “drawn open and closed, letting in light or shutting it out, thereby changing dramatically the appearance of

a room.”<sup>29</sup> By now, this textural approach to the surface is less marginal and marginalized. As we consider the ways in which contemporary architects such as Toshiko Mori are interested in sensory fabrics and “extreme textile,” we can appreciate how far the legacy of Albers has extended.<sup>30</sup>

Cloth has gained acceptance in architecture. In particular, curtains, once relegated to interior décor, have come out into the open, becoming central to the architectural redefinition of boundary and envelope.<sup>31</sup> We can see this activated in particular in the work of Petra Blaisse and her studio Inside Outside, which was responsible for designing curtains for SANAA’s Glass Pavilion at the Toledo Museum of Art, described earlier.<sup>32</sup> Composed of tissues and membranes, filaments and scrims, Blaisse’s curtained universe is a moving space of fabric and matter that is activated by light. The reflective material of her curtains reminds us of the surface of the screen, itself a material that is acted upon and activated in luminous ways. In a way, then, Blaisse’s screen-curtains return us not only to Anni Albers but also to Loïe Fuller’s dance of veils as it transformed into the electric fabric of cinema. In their textural ability to convey the art of projection, the transfer between inside and outside, and the surface play of atmosphere and mood, these curtains join with film’s own moving space of luminous theatricality and projection.

**Envelopes of Surface Materiality.** As architecture rethinks the distinctions between structure and ornament, function and décor, form and façade, the surface no longer has the status of decorative element but becomes an entity in itself. In contemporary times, surface turns into actual architecture. In construction, it exerts great seduction as a material site of inventive fabrication. As David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi put it in their book *Surface Architecture*, “Once the skin of the building became independent of its structure, it could just as well hang like a curtain or clothing.”<sup>33</sup> Going far beyond the notion of a “curtain wall,” the potential elasticity of the skin of a building has become the focus of an expanded architectural experimentation of texture. The envelope is dwelt on as a tactile fabric, and, as Farshid Moussavi and Michael Kubo show in *The Function of Ornament*, the surface becomes “weighted, deep, differentiated, tartan, alternating, camouflaged, tonal, gradated, textured, branded, serial.”<sup>34</sup> When worked on as an essential texture of visual fabrication, the surface is treated as a pliable fabric of communication.

In dressing the surface in this way, architecture joins the conceptual work of tailoring and recalls the refashioning of materiality that we have observed in visual art. This new “superficiality” is a fundamental issue for architecture, for, in its function as cloth, the surface is a fabric that mediates important material relations. With the aid of digital design, as architectural historian Antoine Picon argues, we not only see an emphasis on surface but also a mediatic refashioning, because, as exemplarily expressed in the work of Herzog & de Meuron, the reworking of ornament and envelope is not just a redressing of materials.<sup>35</sup> This is a matter of form that can affect structure. When the shift to the digital becomes a



field of relations, engaging a flexibility that empowers the body, as the new-media scholar Mark Hansen proposes, it can constitute a defining material cultural shift of our time, and this is bound to affect the design of architecture.<sup>36</sup>

The surface, in my view, is poised to be at the center of this process of rematerialization insofar as it is constituted, by its very nature, as an architectural partition. The surface is a form of dwelling that engages mediation between subjects and with objects, and in this sense, it can become a site of screening and projection. As in visual art, in architecture the material of surface becomes the site of expression of a new materiality as the surface is texturally reconfigured to hold different forms of material relation and convey their transformation. A material manifestation of the negotiation of architectural space, surface has not only become structure but can restructure our sense of contact to the environment. Like a new form of skin, a surface condition can activate new relations, in the sense of different forms of relatedness. In its function as cloth, the architectural surface can also mediate permeability between inside and outside. As the architectural curtain reworks interior and exterior, inner and outer space, it does so not only physically but also imaginatively. This process can lead to an incorporation of emotion into the landscape of surface interaction. After all, a surface condition creates sensitivity to the skin of things, and this kind of sensory interaction includes atmosphere and mood. In some way, then, the permeable envelope of the surface can create an expansion of the sensorium and a renewed access to the life of interiority as well as extend the reach of affect. In all these ways, this pervasive surface condition signals a substantial refashioning of materiality. Here, in surface tension, we can sense a profound cultural transformation as modes of surface encounters and connectivity take place in this theater of surface.

**Screens: The Theater of Surface.** As the surface has acquired its own theatricality and performativity, it is not surprising that it would return to the stage in more luminous forms to refashion theatrical space. Think of Alice Tully Hall in New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, as refurbished by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Curtained with a thin veneer of wood, the interior walls of the auditorium are as light as curtains and become as luminous as screens. As light transpires from behind the thin layer of their material surface, it creates atmosphere and mood throughout the auditorium. The pinkish light emerges through the surface of the walls, like perspiration through skin, giving the impression that the walls are blushing. In such a way, the surface shows its tangible potential to become theatrically atmospheric.

When light is filtered outward in this way, it creates a textural surface that takes on several performative qualities. Activated by atmospheric translucency, wall, curtain, and screen take on similar characteristics, becoming conflated spaces of performance. A particularly effective example of this transfer on the surface can be found in *MetaFoil* (2008), the stage curtain designed by the artist Pae White for the auditorium of the Oslo Opera



House. When seen against the dark, timbered walls of the auditorium, designed by the Norwegian architectural firm Snøhetta, this curtain, composed in different shades of gray, changes fantastically. Seen and touched up close, the fabric is flat. But when activated by the light in the auditorium, and perceived from a spectatorial position, the bidimensional plane of the textile is transformed into a plastic, three-dimensional material. The effect is made possible by a digital twist to traditional forms of weaving: White worked with digital images of aluminum foil and transferred them to a computer-driven loom. The resulting metallic fabric has the texture of tapestry, and this “feel” of the fabric becomes enhanced by luminous effects. The stage curtain creates an actual foil when lit, offering the illusion of depth and the sensation of volume. Shifts of scale and pattern appear on the reflective surface, which ends up projecting shades of plasticity and tones of movement.

When one sits in the audience of this theater and looks straight ahead at this illuminated geometry, there can be no doubt that the curtain is a screen. White's stage curtain,

4.11. Pae White, *MetaFoil*, 2008. Cotton, wool, polyester, and Trevira, 35 ft. 11<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. × 94 ft. 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. Stage curtain for the Oslo Opera House theater. Photo: Erik Berg. Courtesy of the artist, the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, Public Art Norway, and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.



in fact, not only looks like a screen but acts like one. Represented here is one of the most fundamental aspects of cinema: the fabric quality of the screen. This stage curtain calls attention to the textile ability exhibited by the filmic screen and makes us reflect further on its textural potentiality. In a way, it shows how film can act like a curtain, or even like a vertical carpet, as Philippe-Alain Michaud, speaking of carpets and cinema, aptly proposes.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, film is a form of tapestry. But its tapestry work extends further than the vision of carpets because it goes beyond figuration, narrative assemblage, and textual weave. The textural work of the moving image is not only figurative or textual, for it begins with, and on, the white surface of the screen. It is, in its most basic form, a matter of fabric.

As in Pae White's stage curtain, the cinematic screen is a luminous, reflective surface that refracts not only light but motion. Its reflective capacity extends to shifts in size and scale. This is a textured, volumetric space that, when luminously activated, can also create an illusion of depth. The flatness of textile is defied and transformed not only into depth of field but also into volume, as various planes and shifting shapes appear on its surface. On the screen, the surface is given body. It becomes a form of sculptural, three-dimensional space in which bodies of light can haptically materialize in motion. In this sense, there is a fundamentally ornamental structure in filmic space. This is a place of textural moving forms, where surfaces that are radiantly activated turn into architectures of material opacity and plastic materiality. In film, as environments and atmospheres are projected on a surface, the surface itself becomes an environment. The moving image is, ultimately, a movement of surfaces. This is not surprising, for the meaning of projection is rooted in something cast on surface. And this includes the spectators, for on the fabric of the screen, it is us who experience an actual "projection" in this movement of surfaces.

**Landscapes of Pliable Matter.** Whether displayed on Pae White's curtain-screen or on the film screen, the surface is neither flat nor two-dimensional but—against the grain of geometry—conveys volumes of cultural motion and aesthetic plasticity. In order to theorize this dimensional surface movement, it has been important to thread it through different material expressions. To this end, I close with another surface encounter in the visual arts, as offered by the elegant art of Tara Donovan. This artist starts with everyday objects—plastic cups, straws, Scotch tape, pencils, pins, toothpicks—obsessively arranging them in seemingly infinite series to make large-scale installations. The walls or floors of the installations become landscapes populated by these forms, which, unfolding in apparent replication, are perceived as both organic and inorganic. Donovan's material surfaces evoke a vast range of topographies, from the scientific exploration of inner forms to the aerial mapping of cityscapes. Her pliant, latticed matrixes extend from geologic to biologic to nano scales, as if capturing the volume of their generative processes. Transporting us from exterior to interior geography, they cover the range of our cellular life.



4.12. Tara Donovan, *Haze*, 2005. Installation view, *Tara Donovan*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, October 10, 2008–January 4, 2009. Translucent plastic drinking straws, dimensions variable. Photo: Dennis Cowley. © Tara Donovan. Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York.



This plastic surface effect is enhanced by the artist's frequent use of translucent materials: Elmer's glue, in *Strata* (2000–2001); Scotch tape, in *Nebulous* (2002); monofilament line, in *Lure* (2004). Her more recent use of materials such as Mylar and polyester film further enhances the capacity of the surfaces to absorb, reflect, refract, and diffuse light. *Untitled (Mylar Tape)*, from 2007, for example, has the three-dimensional sense of a shimmering wallpaper bas-relief that, in a play of surface displacement between wall and ceiling, becomes the decorative form of a starry constellation. The effect is of an opaque absorption in luminosity that ambiguously shifts. Haze is how it can be described, as in the title of one of Donovan's atmospheric installations. In *Haze* (2005), thousands of translucent plastic drinking straws are irregularly piled onto one another, their original, ordinary form transformed as they converge into a vertical plane and are morphed into an abstract, translucent, volumetric surface. Seductive to the touch, this minimally constructed, elegantly textured plane becomes a wall of filtered, reflected light—a screen of surface materiality.

Here we sense a reinterpretation of earlier luminous spatial works, as we do in Tony Feher's exhibition *Next On Line* (2011), in which clear vinyl tubes filled with colored water and hung from walls or ceilings transform themselves and the space into luminous arabesque fabrics. As in Feher's installations, the sensation of space Donovan devises strongly recalls the experience of being in the light spaces Robert Irwin has created since the 1960s, with which we opened our investigation of surface. But it is as if Irwin's landscape is subjected here to another phenomenological transformation, and a different range of experiential phenomena. This is Irwin filtered through the morphology of the digital age. The translucent surfaces Donovan activates respond to the technological remapping of surfaces in our era, a time in which, as we have argued, surface is being fundamentally redefined. As art historian David Joselit puts it, "For artists steeped in an electronic image world . . . the 'beyond' is articulated as a 'beside.' . . . There is an implosion of space within the surface itself, where information flows are internally segmented or regulated."<sup>38</sup> In a way, Donovan's form of abstraction responds to this transformation of surface into network. This is a cellular cartography, which indeed exhibits the material of electronic, molecular, neural, or even viral networks. But her landscape is not constituted as a "beside," and this surface does not do away with the articulation of a space between inside and outside; rather it redefines its borders through different forms of connectivity.

With respect to this redefinition of sites, the digital space represented by Donovan is, in fact, constituted as a connective architecture. The superficial materiality exhibited by this visual artist resonates most closely with contemporary architectural experimentation, which is itself in dialogue with scientific and technological languages and deeply fascinated by their matrixes. One can read Donovan's opaque translucency in the light of such field relations and at the same time notice in her work a particular fashion of digital formalism that is also manifested in architecture. In fact, as we have noted, following an interest in Gilles Deleuze's dynamic, unfolding, continuous, and multiple universe,

architectural design has pursued a formal research that strives to render the fluid form of this materiality. Deleuze's pliant conception of the fold is particularly consonant with the dynamic systems put in place by contemporary technological and scientific developments, and it follows that the architectural surface has embraced this envelope, hosting a field of forces in motion. As we approach the constitutive shape of Donovan's universe in light of this work, we can see the connective thread come to the surface. The infinite, folding curves of her superficial universe appear very close in shape to those produced today by digital architectural design, which they strongly resemble, even in physical appearance. Donovan's reworking of the surface is closely aligned with the outcome of digital architecture: it shares not only its shapes but, what is more important, its fundamental interest in materials, not as things per se but as a way of producing materiality. In Donovan's universe, there is not only a representation of digital universes but also a manifestation of how the digital can reinvent a surface condition that is a form of materiality.

This particular form of digitally inflected design is invested in redefining the folds of space, which include the borders of connectivity between interior and exterior as they are manifested on the surface. Donovan reworks this space "in between," as is evident in one of her most accomplished installations, *Untitled*, which opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 2008 and creates a dialogue with the architecture of the building, designed again by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. A long rectangular aperture is cut into the wall that faces the large glass window-façade of the museum, which opens onto a spectacular sea view. Inside this aperture, which can be seen from both sides, there are infinite folds composed of thousands of sheets of polyester film, which together create a thick stratum of translucent material. The effect is reminiscent of light filtered through colored stained glass in Gothic architecture, and it is suggestive of how this may be an early example of what makes projection possible. With Donovan's aperture, we face an elaborate, kaleidoscopic universe of opaque material luminosity. This aperture is not a window but a screen. A material of display, it does not simply refract the light but fully screens it. As the illuminated rectangular shape of the display case refashions the luminous geometry of the screen, it also reminds us of its exhibitionary fabric. This screen is a medium that acts as a refracting canvas and a textured wallpaper. Shaped like a dimensional painting of light, this is an absorbing panoramic architecture. A digital reinterpretation of the visual architecture that generated the medium of cinema, this work is also time-based. Depending on the time of the day or the darkness of the night, the featured view changes, and we experience it differently. This folding surface, which rests between interior and exterior, is sensitive to the extent of time, its infinite folds, and the effects of weathering. Not exactly a window or a canvas, and yet with the properties of both, this is a fabric of projection. Such work defies flatness and puts the surface into movement, as if it were remastering an actual process of screening. Hence, in the folds of this fabric, a reinvention of materiality takes place as the environmental geography of screen surfaces and their moving form of projection are refashioned in the shape of mediatic connections.





4.13. Tara Donovan, *Untitled*, 2008. Installation view, *Tara Donovan*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, October 10, 2008–January 4, 2009. Polyester film, dimensions variable. Photo: Dennis Cowley. © Tara Donovan. Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York.

**Tensile Surfaces, Screen Fabrics.** Whether the material is canvas, wall, or screen, surface tension has emerged as a central condition of contemporary visual art and architecture, signaling a refashioning of materiality and a reinscription of textural movement on our cultural screens. As we have threaded together material relations on the surface, we have observed a process of conflation between canvas, wall, and screen in renewed forms of projection. The surface of the medium is concretely turned into a membrane and substantially revitalized in stretchable, moving forms. No longer an ephemeral or marginal part of the work, the surface is pushed to the limit of its potentiality to become the actual core and structure of the work. In most of the works considered here, a reinterpretation of ornament and texture engages a renewed form of tactility in elegant visual ways. In an aesthetic of minimal simplicity, attention to material defines a surface condition that is an affirmation of materiality intended in the largest sense. As textural matter builds a dense plane of perceptual intersections between inside and outside, a thick, layered space of interactions between subject and object, interior and exterior, emerges in time. As pliable material, sensitive to environmental mutation and mobile subjectivity, this pliant surface shows itself capable of holding the folds of time and the inner structure of temporality. Insofar as it is a physical skin, it can also express the sensorium of affects, the sensations of mood, and the sensuality of atmosphere. It is in this sense that surface can be read as an architecture. Not only is it constituted as a space in itself; it is a maker of space. Furthermore, the surface has the character of architecture in the crucial sense that it is not flat. This surface is acted on, plastically activated, and sculpted. It is carefully dwelt on, articulated in planes that are mutable and fabricated as transformative fabric. Densely built up in this way, it is constructed as deeply tensile, in the sense that it also a landscape of projective motion and connectivity. Such a surface, far from being superficial, is indeed a sizable, moving entity: it is a space of real dimension, a site of intimacy that can, in turn, be inhabited. Which is to say, it is a real screen.

**Layers and More Layers: Immersive Environments.** In the end, please refold. Rewind back to the beginning, and fast-forward to 2010. The space of the Dia Center for the Arts in New York that was home to Robert Irwin's 1998 installation is by now closed. But the mode of this installation lives on as a mnemonic canvas in contemporary works that activate the movement of surface and refashion translucent minimalism in surface intimacy. Its way of refashioning the fabric of the screen also returns as an architecture, reinvented with a mediatic twist in the new media works shown in the same Chelsea art district.

Think of *Layers Mama Layers*, the 2010 installation by Pipilotti Rist, as a case in point that provides a bookend to this discourse.<sup>39</sup> Here, the space of the gallery is redefined by a series of cascading "sheets" that hang down from the ceiling, made of diaphanous fabric.

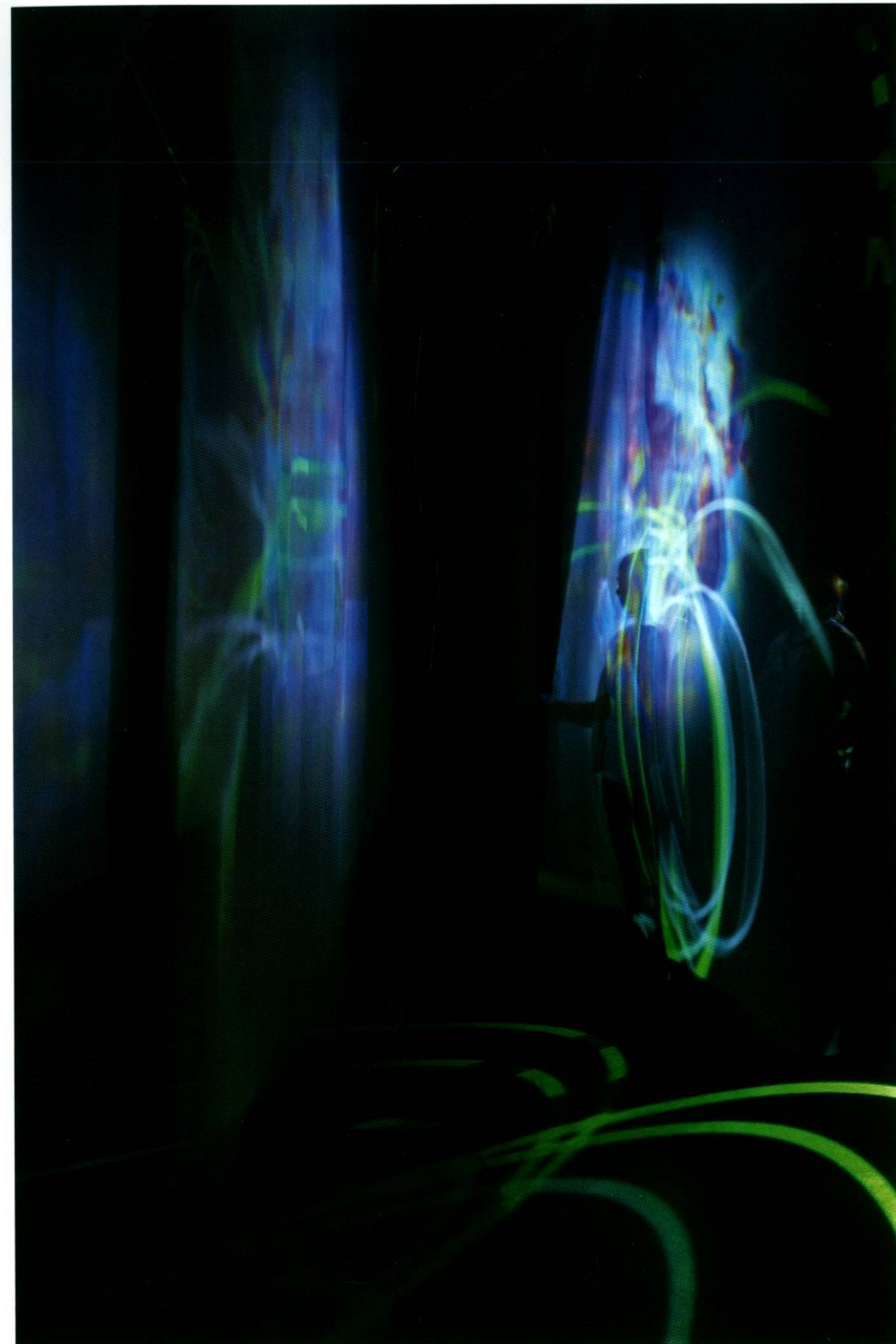


The fabric is as thinly transparent as a veil, and, like a curtain, it reflects and absorbs light. This translucent gray fabric creates a layered atmosphere for the site and becomes the canvas for multiple projections. On two sides of the walls are video projectors that feed images, respectively, of a pastoral landscape dotted with sheep and an abstract landscape of luminous animations. The images appear on the fabric, which, effectively, becomes a screen.

Rist's installation makes palpable how the fabric of the screen has endured but at the same time changed geometry. No longer held down by a frame or to a frame, this screen is definitively not a window. Or rather it is no longer a singular window. It incorporates the changes of the digital age in the form of screening, a process that also involves multiplied and multiplying windows. More specifically, it renders the ever-present environmental screen-effect within which we now live. We no longer face or confront a screen only frontally but are rather immersed in an environment of screens. We move within a continuous world of projections that extend from the exterior walls of the architectures of our cities all the way to our homes and offices, and to the screen extensions constantly attached to the palms of our hands. On these portable screens tactility is rekindled, as touch is digitally reinscribed on pads. Haptically experienced as a texture, and even as a membrane, the fabric of the screen has become a canvas of refashioned materiality, while screen surface extends to an entire screen environment that itself becomes experienced as a surrounding membrane.

Rist's installation is interesting for the way that it architects a fluid, haptic world of surround screens in which one can experience both similarity to and difference from the luminous screen space created by Robert Irwin. The changes that have occurred in between these two moments in the very architecture of screening are reflected in the way visitors experience this installation. As a visitor to *Layers Mama Layers*, one becomes an integral part of a pervasive screen environment in which it is no longer preferable or even possible to be positioned in front of the work. As spectators experience projection by entering into layers of scrim, their own figures are reflected and projected back into the work. The corporeal presence of the viewers in the midst of these projections thus ends up itself screened through the veils of the installation. With the complete collapse of frontality and distance also comes a less reverent and more interactive relationship to the work. As one walks into the layers of hanging scrim, one can not only move freely through and pause within the space but also play with the scrim, using one's own screen to interact with the other screen layers. Visitors appear encouraged by the nature of the work to tweet, text, or phone a friend to feed their impressions, to snap a photo or make a quick video to send into virtual space. The installation not only incorporates the visitor but integrates a relational screen response in its very flow.

*Layers Mama Layers* rests on the phenomenon of screen multiplication and expansion in which we live, and it does so in interesting, conceptual ways that are seductively provocative. However, it shows an excessive degree of comfort with total screen immersion, a



4.14. Pipilotti Rist, *Layers Mama Layers*, 2010. Four projections (two moving, two fixed) on curtains, two moving mirrors, sound; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



problematic issue that is presented lightly and not really called into question. The sound of the installation reinforces this impression: ambient music creates a rhythm that compounds the effect of the ambient visuals. Counting sheep is no longer a way to put you to sleep. It is rather your computer that is asleep here. It's like endlessly staring at the screen saver with Pandora on a sonorous roll.

The wallpaper on your screen, or rather the wallpaper that is your screen, has become an extensive, extended environment. It is not by chance that this work by Pipilotti Rist appears in the era of such films as *Avatar* (2009), James Cameron's own response to, and recreation of, immersive environments. The installation renders an effect of total immersion that is similar to the one the Imax screen strives to achieve. Its plastic form is not far removed from the dimensionality of this screen. It resonates with the coterminous insistence on immersive dimensions and the return to the technique of 3D, which literally try to explode the frame of the filmic screen inward and outward to make its visual aspect into a surrounding space, equal to surround sound. In the immensely popular *Put Your Body Out* (2008–2009), Rist's multimedia installation set in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, one senses a similar desire to be fully incorporated in this surface environment.

The question here is the degree of difference—as well as the connection—between absorption and immersion.<sup>40</sup> While the form of “superficial” absorption that I have theorized in both digital and nondigital work engages a projective relation of transformative becoming between subject and object, immersion involves a more pleasing, attractive engagement that, in its focus on extending sensory pleasures, is not as invested in destabilizing the subject's position or its becoming. One form, however, does not exclude the other, for absorption is itself a form of surface pleasure, and immersion involves criticality, however differently configured. And, as we have shown, there can be absorbent effects of immersive screening. In this sense, *Layers Mama Layers* is interesting for our purposes, for it exposes the virtual intimacy that is created with the digital screen as one holds this screen close to oneself in “touching” interaction. Here, the transformative web of relations that the material of surface can hold in the digital age is conceptually palpable in seductive ways.

As is the case with Tara Donovan's attractive proliferating plasticity, which is a distinct product of the digital era, or with Pae White's digital screen-curtain, Rist's form of screening also suggests we should think further about the process of rematerialization that the digital can convey, including the forms of relatedness it can afford us and the public intimacy that results from a refashioned relational screening process. As one wanders through the layers of these scrim-curtains, this digital situation reminds us that there are not only interruptions to but also continuities with the complex dynamics that we have seen developed on the fabric of the filmic screen.

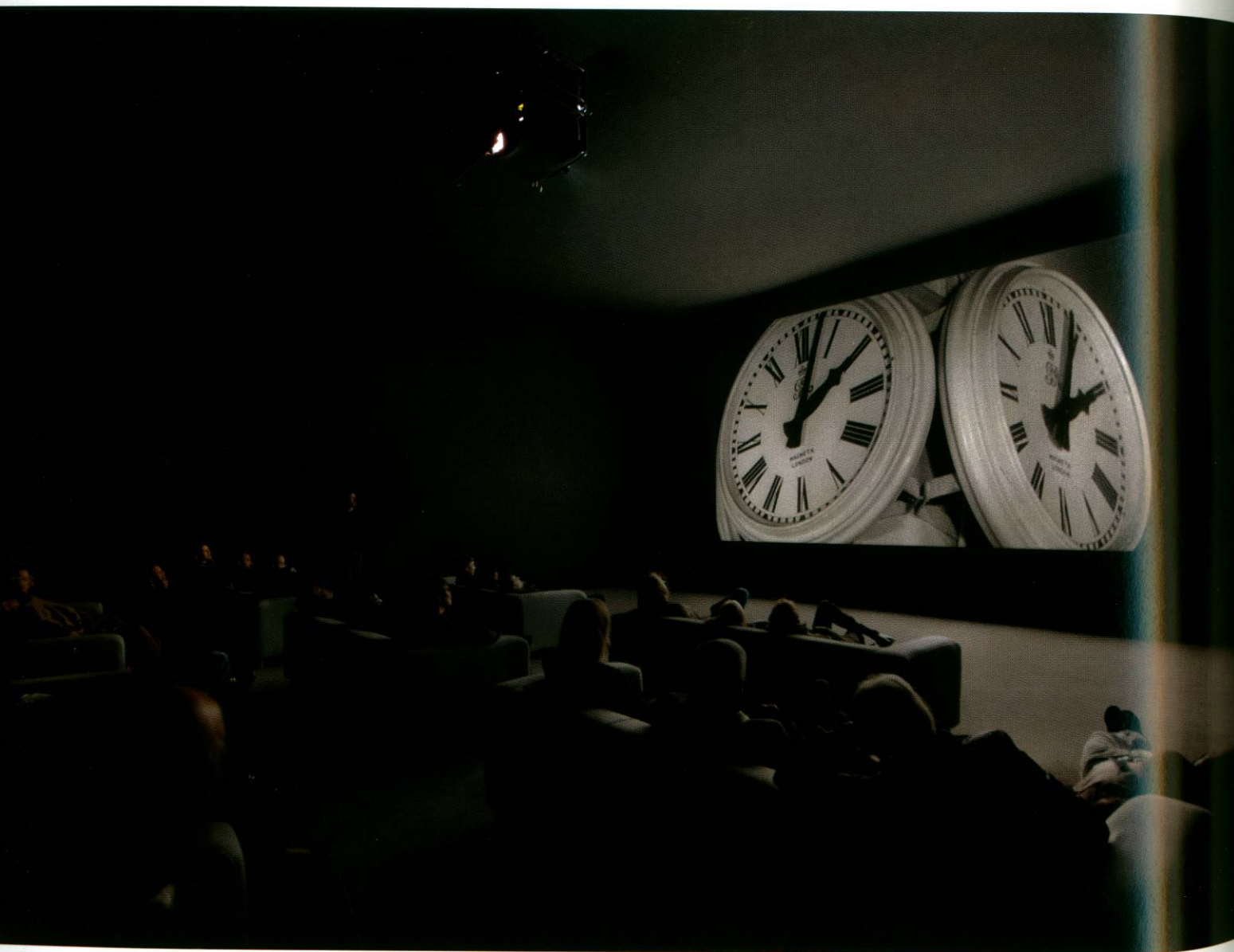
In fact, at some level, the sculptural fabric of these works renders effects of virtual materiality to which the filmic canvas was not alien. It, too, was able to function like a curtain that moves in the wind. And now the screen has become an actual curtain. It is so light that when you move through it, it moves too, as it moves you. You may no longer feel trepidation

at touching this screen-curtain, or reverent amazement in traversing its space, for by now you are quite used to this haptic activity of spectating. This scrim has the familiarity of a mnemonic canvas. As you move through the layers of its fabric, you are reminded how, at the origin of the medium, cinema too hung on a veiled surface. Film required a sheet of cloth hanging on a wall to make its own curtained yet open space of traversal. And so the textured materiality of screen space persists, reinvented through the layers of the digital, reimprinted on the surface like a trace of memory, or a stain in its fabric.



# Screens of Projection





## 6 Sites of Screening

### *Cinema, Museum, and the Art of Projection*

Starting itself as a chance accumulation of relics, with no more rhyme or reason than the city itself, the museum . . . presents itself to use as a means of selectively preserving the memorials of culture. . . . What cannot be kept in existence in material form we may now measure, photograph in still and moving pictures.

LEWIS MUMFORD<sup>1</sup>

In announcing the death of the monument in 1937, the architectural historian Lewis Mumford foresaw a major change in the configuration of the archive as a cultural fabric when he recognized the role of moving images in the virtual preservation of the material existence of things. His observations were prescient, and lead us to continue our exploration of virtual materiality by reviewing the cultural function of the museum and also reconsidering it in relation to other sites of public exhibition such as the cinema.<sup>2</sup> The public museum is a product of modernity and an outcome of modernization, and as such it should be considered not as an isolated space but rather as a connective architecture. As we noted earlier, it was configured in its modern form in the same age of visual display that gave rise to the cinema, the defining art of modernity, and it shares with film that surface of communication which is the visual, theatrical architecture of spectatorship. Today, as moving images become relocated in the museum, we witness a fundamental renewal of this relationship. And so with film itineraries becoming ever more linked to museum walks, I propose to reflect further on this relationship between cinema and the museum as sites of exhibition and archival fabrication. In exploring this material connection, I intend to show that a particularly porous museum sensibility—a sense of public intimacy—developed as a modern, hybrid phenomenon out of the interaction among different sites of mobility, cultural memory, and public exhibition.<sup>3</sup> In particular, through a series of museum promenades, I wish to retrace the itineraries that the museum and the cinema imaginatively share in light of the ways in which these mobile architectures of public intimacy offer us, and transform, the experience of projection.

6.1. Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010.  
Installation view. Single-channel video  
with stereo sound, 24 hours, looped.  
© Christian Marclay. Courtesy of  
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



**The Museum Sensibility.** Although the relation between the museum and the cinema is not an obvious one, we can begin by observing that, as institutions of visual knowledge, they are connected through the phenomenon of cultural motion, which affects how we perceive the surface of the world. Both are public spaces of viewing that emerged out of the modern process of mobilization that culminated in the twentieth century and transformed the relation between subjects and objects, images and things. They are products of an era that activated the gaze in sequence, mobilized and narrativized (object) space, created the very impulse to exhibit, and constructed—indeed, architected—the actual experience of spectatorship. As such, the museum and the cinema further share a private dimension: they are visited in spectatorial itineraries that trigger private, affective responses. Here, the separate domains of private and public become connected, and the boundaries between the two are redefined. In both the museum and the cinema, intimacy occurs in public. Borders are crossed as this intimate form of public exhibition activates journeys of memory and projections of the imagination. In such an intimately public way, the museum and the cinema share a cultural sensibility that is tangibly modern.

The architectures of the twentieth century enhanced a sensibility that art historian Alois Riegl called a “modern cult of memory,” whose “age-value” consists in “giving emotional effect . . . evoked by mere sensory perception.”<sup>4</sup> This modern museological sense “manifests itself immediately through visual perception and appeals directly to our emotions.”<sup>5</sup> In this regard, I maintain that a modern, cinematic museum sensibility engages the sense of the haptic, an experience of intimate transport, and a transfer between motion and emotion. Let me then review and summarize these concepts, which circulate throughout different parts of this book, in order to more precisely define the connection of film itineraries to museum walks in the intimate geography of publicly lived space.

As I have argued elsewhere, the creation of public intimacy is a haptic affair: as Greek etymology tells us, the *haptic* is what makes us “able to come into contact with” things, thus constituting the reciprocal *con-tact* between us and our surroundings. We “sense” space tangibly, in art as in film exhibition, as contact becomes communicative interface. This is because hapticity is also related to our sense of mental motion, as well as to kinesthesia, or the ability of our bodies to sense movement in space. The mobilization of cultural space that takes place in both cinema and the museum is thus fundamentally a haptic experience of mediated encounters. Usually confined to optical readings, the museum and the cinema need to be remapped, jointly, in the realm of haptic, surface encounters if we are to understand their tangible use of space and objects, the movement that propels these habitable sites, and the intimate experience they offer us as we traverse their public spaces.

There are many aspects to consider in these material encounters. One factor is that hapticity engages a relationship between motion and emotion. In this regard, it is interesting to note that cinema was named from the ancient Greek word *kinema*, which means both motion and emotion. The fabric of this etymology indicates that affect becomes a medium

and also shows the process of becoming that is materially mediated in movement. Film moves, and fundamentally “moves” us, with its ability not simply to render affects but to affect in transmittable forms and intermediated ways. This means that such a medium of movement also moves to incorporate and interact with other spaces that provoke intimate yet public response, such as the art gallery.

Proceeding from this haptic, kinematic premise, I want to expose the surface of communication between the arts and claim that the motion and emotion of cinema extend beyond the walls of the movie house: they have been implanted, from the times of precinema to our age of postcinema, in the performative space of the art collection and in the itinerary of the museum walk as well. Let us turn, then, to look more closely at this interface between the museum wall and the film screen. To follow the moving activity of virtual recollection that materially connects cinema to the museum, we will embark on an extended architectural promenade and take a few museum walks. On this museological journey, we will see how moving images have become the moving archive in this twenty-first century: our own future museum.

**A Tour through the Film Archive of the Art Gallery.** The convergence of the museum and the cinema began in the age of modernity as the culture of exhibition developed, creating an archive of images and mobilizing the process of collection and recollection. Today, this convergence has become a newly articulated strain in contemporary visual culture. This is especially visible in the realm of installation art. We have observed a cultural migration between art, architecture, and moving images, and this includes the fact that film exhibition has relocated itself and is merging with museum installation. What does it mean that motion pictures have exited the movie house to take up residence in the museum, becoming, in different forms, a steady feature of gallery shows and museum exhibitions? In some way, as Raymond Bellour puts it, we have been positioned “*entre-images*.”<sup>6</sup> But I claim that this phenomenon goes beyond the image per se. The passage that we have been observing affects the sedimentation of the visual experience, its residues and transformations. Such passage exceeds the reconfiguration that Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have named “remediation” because it concerns not simply the medium but also the space of image circulation, forms of siting, and the situational experience.<sup>7</sup> This is a geography of substantial transformations. An exchange has taken place on the field screen of visual archives, which profoundly affects the fabric and architecture of the visual experience.

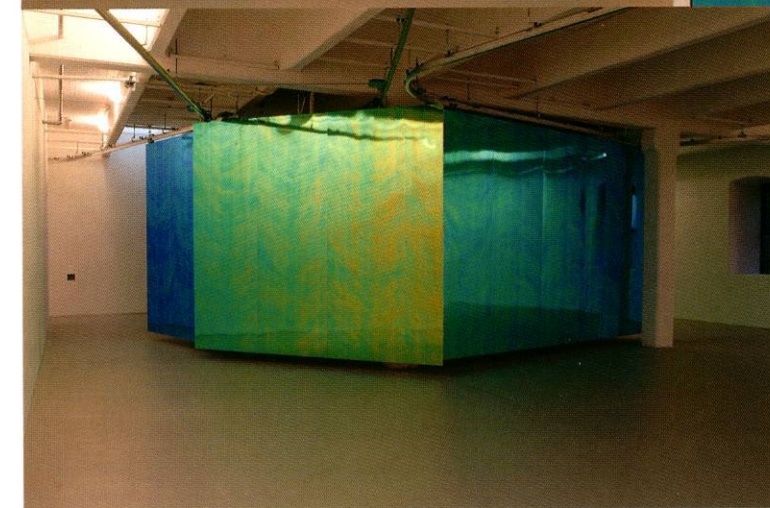
In a concrete sense, the new interface between the museum wall and the film screen has led filmmakers to produce installations that reformulate the very architecture of the moving image and of museum exhibition. These include installations by Chantal Akerman, Atom Egoyan, Peter Greenaway, Werner Herzog, Isaac Julien, Abbas Kiarostami, Chris Marker, Yvonne Rainer, Raúl Ruiz, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Agnès Varda, Apichatpong





6.2. Peter Greenaway, *The Wedding at Cana*, 2009. Installation view, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Palladian Refectory, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. © Luciano Romano/Change Performing Arts. Courtesy of the artist and Change Performing Arts.

Weerasethakul, and Wim Wenders. As is evident in Akerman's decomposition of her film *D'Est* (*From the East*, 1993) into the form of an installation piece, film is literally dislocated in the gallery.<sup>8</sup> With motion pictures housed on video screens spread across the museum space, the gallery viewer is offered the spectatorial pleasure of entering into a film, and of physically retraversing the language of montage. This kind of viewership signals a passage between art, architecture, and film, predicated on exhibition. Peter Greenaway, who has prominently linked cinema and the museum as related visual archives, muses, "Isn't cinema an exhibition . . . ? Perhaps we can imagine a cinema where both audience and exhibits move."<sup>9</sup> And so, in installations such as *The Wedding at Cana* (2009), which audiovisually interprets a painting by Paolo Veronese, he mobilizes aesthetic forms of art reception by filmically reactivating them, with surface effects.<sup>10</sup> This movement of filmic relocation is engaged directly in the exhibitionary, museographic ability to collect and recollect repre-



6.3. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day Follies*, 2003. Installation view, Dia Art Foundation, New York, October 31, 2003–January 11, 2004. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Ken Tannenbaum. Courtesy of Dia Art Foundation, New York.



sentational archives. Such is the case also for Isaac Julien's installation *Vagabondia* (2000), which, as we will see in the chapter devoted to this work, journeys through the house museum of the architect Sir John Soane, traversing the surface space of an art collection as it offers a wandering reflection on recollection.<sup>11</sup>

A hybrid screen-space has come into place.<sup>12</sup> Moving images have made their way into the art gallery and the museum in many forms, returning spectatorship to "exhibition." The rooms of the museum often become an actual projection room, transforming themselves into renewed filmic space, and this has consequences. As Pierre Huyghe shows in his installation *Streamside Day Follies* (2003), the architecture of the museum changes when it turns into film architecture.<sup>13</sup> In this work, the walls of the gallery are made to open and close, creating an intimate projection room and a fluid motion from art to film exhibition. As discussed earlier, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller also create public yet intimate projections in *The Paradise Institute* (2001) when they compel the gallerygoer to access the architecture of film and experience its emotional intimacy.<sup>14</sup> In this exchange between the art gallery and the film theater, the seduction of the screen is displayed—in all its fragmentation and dissolution—at the "nerve center" of viewing positions, creating possibilities for exploring the art of framing, points of montage, and narrative movement, thus allowing visitors to experience the material conditions of the art of projection.

A "screening" of film history becomes exhibited in such installation works, turning both cinema and gallery spaces into moving, material memory archives. Christian Marclay's very popular moving-image event *The Clock* (2010) is in some way the epitome of this vast phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> In this video work, frequently shown in gallery and museum spaces, clips from the history of world cinema that indicate the passage of time are edited together in a mesmerizing montage, which spans a twenty-four-hour cycle and is synchronized with the local time of the exhibition space. As one watches the flow of cinematic time unfolding in real time in the rhythmic assemblage, the piece turns into a meditation on the relation of cinema to time as its material condition, and, by extension, to history. The architecture in which the work is sited recreates for the gallerygoer the possibility of concretely inhabiting not only the time but also the space of cinema. An architectural hybrid of the white and the dark cube, the darkened gallery space provides couches on which to lounge, enabling viewers both to regain and to revitalize the experience of the cinemathèque in an art space. Gallerygoers line up outside the crowded gallery awaiting their turn to spend time inside, leisurely and in a social way watching time pass in a creative atlas of film history. In an age of pressured time, and again at the moment of film's obsolescence, the inner, temporal, communal architecture of film spectatorship is reinvented in the art of projection. This is significant because it addresses the increasing technological privatization of screen time and space that is occurring today. What is exhibited, and rematerialized, here is an experience of the public sphere: the public intimacy of haptic screen encounters.

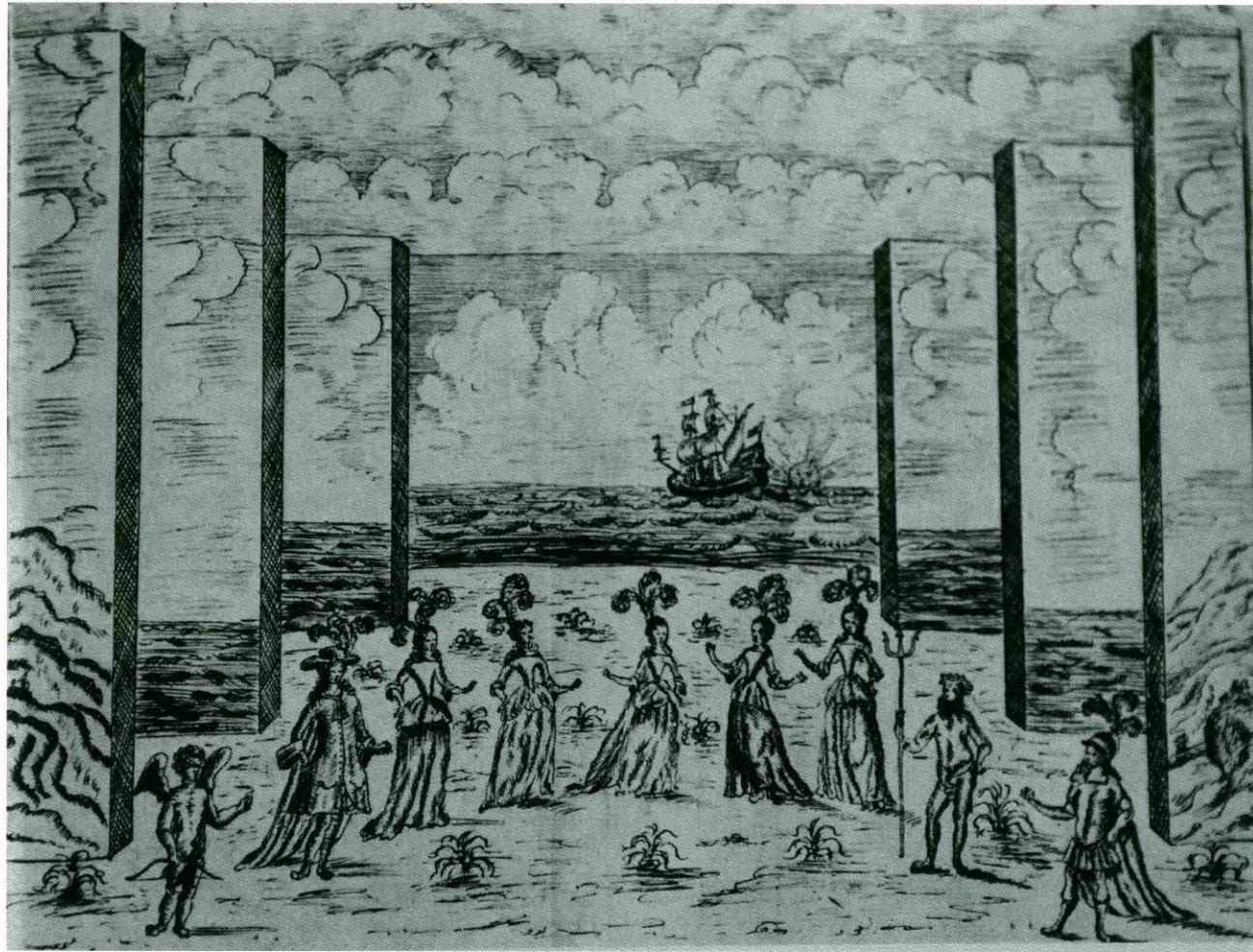
While Marclay creates a contemporary version of a film archive in the art gallery with



the aid of digital technology, Chris Marker pushes the possibility of a relationship between cinema and the archive further into digital space. A prominent example of Marker's unique way of constructing filmic "immemory" in relation to art is displayed in his *Pictures at an Exhibition*, an ongoing digital installation that is literally imagined as a virtual museum.<sup>16</sup> The archival potential of film is also expanded in the gallery by Tacita Dean, who, as we have shown, is fascinated by the culture of obsolescence and reflects on the idea of the archival, especially in works like *Kodak* (2006), the major meditation on the material existence of the film medium and the material history of light that we analyzed in depth.<sup>17</sup> In a different way, Douglas Gordon also engages the filmic reel as a loop of memory in his archival circuits.<sup>18</sup> His works, together with the many contemporary installations that play with circular, wheeling motion, such as Bill Viola's *Slowly Turning Narrative* (1992), represent a technological reinvention of the art of memory.<sup>19</sup> Today, by way of image technology, we are invited to play in virtual ways with the antique moving

6.4. Chris Marker, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, 2008. Digital installation on YouTube.





6.5. Precinematic screens in a set designed in 1690 for a staging of the play *La fiera, el rayo y la piedra* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, 1652.

images of Ramon Lull, who, back in the thirteenth century, demonstrated the role of movement in memory and represented psychic motion by setting figures on revolving wheels.<sup>20</sup> Motion and emotion meet again in filmic reels and in mnemotechnical installation art that reworks the matter of cinematics in the museum. In these contemporary loops, it is the loop of our imagination and the very memory of film history that become projected in the museum.

In many ways, then, the history of cinema haunts today's museums.<sup>21</sup> Cinema exists for today's artists outside of cinema as a historic space—exists, that is, as a mnemonic history that is fundamentally linked to a technology of luminous opacity. Walking through the gallery and the museum, we encounter fragments of this history, reimagined as if collected together and recollected on a screen that is now a wall. The memory of film is not only materialized but also tangibly reinvented in this haptic process of encounter. In the gallery or the museum, one has the recurring sense of taking a walk through—or even into—a film

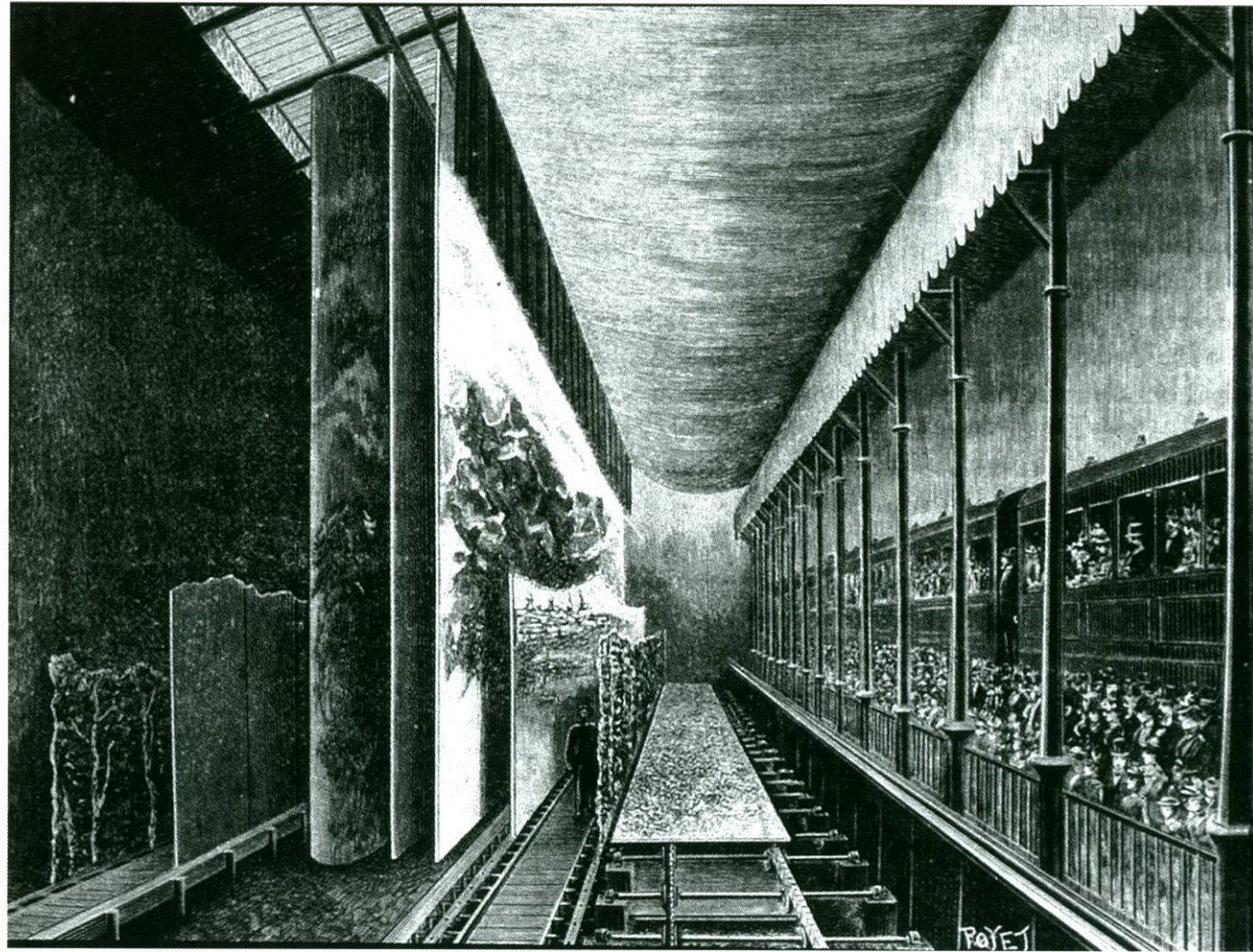
and of being asked to reexperience, and renegotiate, not only the history but the movement of cinema. Entering and exiting the exhibition space of an installation increasingly recalls the collective ritual of inhabiting a movie house, where forms of liminal traversal and cultural habitation are experienced in public, surface intimacy.<sup>22</sup>

This movement linking film to the spatial arts is current, and even trendy, but it is not a new phenomenon. It is important to remember that there was an actual history of “installations” that took place at the very origin of film. The convergence of cinema and the museum that was established at the dawn of modernity is rooted in the birth of the medium. Today's artists appear to be winking at this very historic moment out of which cinema was born. In some way, artists are becoming historians. They are turning into materialist scholars. Every time a materialist turn takes place in history, it becomes compelling to ponder the potential lessons that may be inscribed in the specific gesture.<sup>23</sup> In the present refashioning of cinema in the museum, there is a tension manifested at the edges of media and acting upon the borders that mark the very existence—the actual time—of the medium of film. In view of this surface tension of media, I find that the processes of digging into cultural history, retrospectively excavating museum culture and practicing a form of media archaeology, are productive paths for a scholar to take in order to explore the future potential of old “new” media.<sup>24</sup> If museological culture and filmic exhibition are mined as an archive open to reinvention, this cultural archaeology can show artistic potentiality, and even expose the potential future of a medium. To my mind, cinema is functioning as this open archive of potentialities for today's installation artists, for, as it becomes abandoned as a medium, a moving visual history is creatively refashioned in gallery-based art. This is what motivates me to dig further into the history of exhibition that links cinema to the museum space: in tracing a history of moving screens of public intimacy, my aim is to activate museum culture as a potential form of cinematics, that is to say, as imaging in public, intermedial motion. I want to pursue this migration of visual archives from the cinema to the gallery, for it signals a potential reinvention of the material experience of “projection.”

**Film Genealogy and Museographic Visual Culture.** In looking at the history of exhibition space, I want to suggest that our age of postcinema is turning to the era of precinema as a way of reinventing the exhibitionary possibilities and museological potential of the art of projection. When we consider the exhibitionary fantasies that emerged at the time of precinema, we may recognize forms of projection that are becoming actualized today on the multiple screens of our postcinematic times. Furthermore, as we open up this potential archive of prefilmic exhibition, we can see how exhibition itself developed in cinematic ways.

As a form of spectatorship, film exhibition is in fact historically linked in profound ways to the culture of exhibition and the art of projection of early modernity. Cinema





6.6. The moving panorama *Trans-Siberian Express*, exhibited at the 1900 Exposition Universelle Internationale, Paris.

emerged from a specific “architecture” of tactile vision and mode of exhibition, coming to light in the wake of an interactive geovisual culture of museumlike “installations.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, early museographic spectacles and practices of curiosity gave rise to the public architecture of interior design that became the cinema. This was a spectacular theatrics of image collection that activated recollection. The spaces for viewing that would become filmic architecture included many sites of public intimacy and projection: the interior-exterior projections of magic lantern shows and phantasmagorias, cosmorama rooms and camera obscuras, wax and anatomical museums, performative tableaux vivants, cabinets of curiosity, vitrine and window display, wordly collections turned actual museums, fluid visions and sequences of spectacular motion, exhibitions of a georamic nature and panoramic vision, dioramic shows, the panoramas of view painting, and other techniques for viewing collections of images.

Film exhibition developed in and around these intimate sites of public viewing and

projection, within the history of a mobilized architectonics of scenic space and in an aesthetics of fractured, sequential, and shifting views. Fragments were crystallized, serialized, and exhibited with mesmerizing surface effects in the cabinet of curiosity, the precursor of the museum; cultural souvenirs offered themselves to spectatorial musing; views developed into an art of viewing, a gallery of *vedute*. This absorption in urban viewing space was a form of “installation” *avant la lettre*. Cinema descends from this museumlike architecture of display—an intimate geography of public exhibition that came of age in the nineteenth century and molded the following one. Motion pictures were born of an expanded practice of panoramic exhibition, which was, in some way, a projection of the future, for, as Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio’s 2008 installation for the *Native Land* exhibition at the Fondation Cartier in Paris suggests, current installation practices are digitally refashioning this itinerant mapping of image collecting.<sup>26</sup>

This survey of exhibition practices makes apparent that what turned into cinematic motion was a virtual, imaginative museum trajectory that required physical habitation and liminal traversal of the sites of display. And the establishment of a public in a historical itinerary in which art became housed in a salon ultimately enabled art exhibition to cross over into film exhibition. Cinema, like the museum, was born with the emergence of public consumption, and it is *architecturally* attached to this notion. Both emerged from the mobilization of public space into an architectonics of display, and from an architectural promenade that experientially bound images to the surface of spectatorial life.

**Projections: Filmic and Architectural Promenades.** To further explain the journey of the imagination, the mental activity, and the mnemonic traversal that link cinematic to museographic architecture, it is helpful to revisit Sergei Eisenstein’s ideas on the art of projection in his essay “Montage and Architecture,” for their impact still endures.<sup>27</sup> These views have in fact inspired contemporary architects such as Bernard Tschumi, who is interested in recreating cinematic promenades in public spaces.<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein showed that the film spectator moves across an imaginary path, traversing multiple sites and times in the course of a filmic projection, as distant moments and far-apart places become connected on the screen. Film inherits the possibility of such an imaginative mental voyage from the architectural promenade:

An architectural ensemble . . . is a montage from the point of view of a moving spectator. . . . Cinematographic montage is, too, a means to “link” in one point—the screen—various fragments of a phenomenon filmed in diverse dimensions, from diverse points of view and sides.<sup>29</sup>

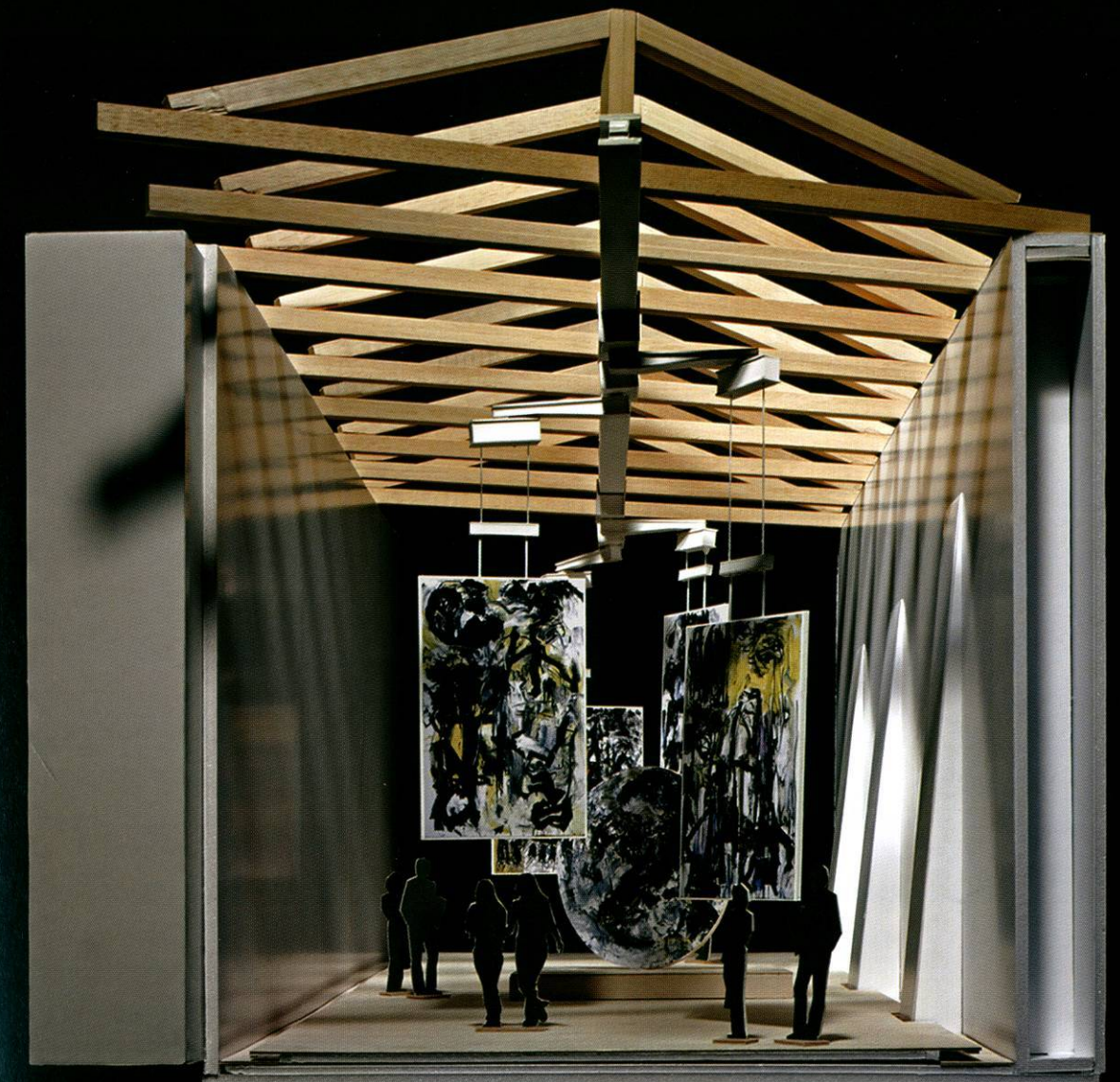
The filmic screen is the modern version of the architectural itinerary, with its own montage of cultural space. Film follows a historical course—that is, a museographic way of collecting



together various fragments of cultural phenomena from diverse geohistorical moments that are displayed for spectatorial recollection in space. In this sense, film is linked not only historically but also formally to a specific kind of architectural promenade: the virtual material exploration that occurs in architectures of display. The consumer of these museumlike viewing spaces is the prototype of the film spectator. In other words, the filmic journey is a remake of the museum's own architectural promenade.

**"Tracking" Museum Itineraries.** It is this haptic sense of cinematic motion that is materially returned to us today in the architectonics of exhibition. Think, for example, of the itinerary constructed by Renzo Piano for the exhibition space devoted to the collection of Emilio Vedova's artworks, which opened in Venice in 2009 in the restored salt warehouse that had once been the artist's studio. Piano mobilizes a form of exhibition that uses the actual motion of cinematic montage to activate the mnemonic assemblage of an art collection. This is a museum in movement, where the paintings glide through the space, literally moving in sequence on tracks that are reminiscent of filmic tracking shots. The spectator becomes a passenger sent on an architectural journey that retraces mental itineraries, and this cinematic-architectural walk "sets" artistic memory not only in place but in full motion. In such a way, the cinema imaginatively rejoins the museum as a collection of images that activate ideas and feelings, which are haptically bonded in the "re-collective" itinerary of spectatorship. The filmic voyage, like the museum's promenade, turns into a transformative journey as the architectonics of memory becomes a mobile, corporeal, *emotional* activation of public intimacy.

**Mobilizing Inner Landscapes.** This notion that memory, imagination, and affect are linked to movement—embodied in film itineraries and museum walks—has an origin that can be traced further back in time, to the moment in modernity when motion became tangibly craved as a form of haptic stimulation. With modernity, a desire for tactile sensation and surface experiences increased, driving an impulse to expand one's universe and, eventually, to exhibit it on a screen.<sup>30</sup> The images gathered by the senses were thought to produce "trains" of thought and to project a personal, passionate voyage of the imagination.<sup>31</sup> "Fancying"—that is, the configuration of a series of relationships created on imaginative tracks—was the effect of a spectatorial movement that evolved further in cinema and the museum. It was the emergence of such sensuous, sequential imaging (a haptic "transport") that made it possible for the serial image in film and the sequencing of vitrines in the museum to come together in receptive motion, and for trains of ideas to inhabit the tracking shots of emotion pictures.



6.7. Renzo Piano, project for Magazzini del Sale, exhibition space for Emilio Vedova's artwork, Venice, 2009. © Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova, Venice. Courtesy of Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova.



In this modern, haptic, moving configuration of sequential picturing, there are also echoes of the picturesque aesthetic, whose landscape design “enable[d] the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eye.”<sup>32</sup> A memory theater for pleasures of the sensorium, the picturesque garden was an exterior designed to put the visitor in “touch” with inner space. As one moved through its haptic space, the exterior of the landscape was transformed into an interior map—the landscape within us. Picturesque space, not unlike cinematic space and the display of collections in that precursor of the museum, the cabinet of curiosity, was furthermore an aesthetics of fragments and discontinuities—a mobilized montage of multiple perspectives and asymmetrical views. Such a montage of relics activated our own modern museographic experiences of recollection. We can sense the inner force of this historical motion on the grounds of Peter Eisenman’s Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, in the tangible form of a cinematic memory walk. In this “moving” way, we have come to approach the kind of intimate transport that drives film spectatorship and museumgoing in their fluid creation of public intimacy. In the movie theater and in the museum, one can walk, once again, in mental space and in the imaginary garden of memory.

**The Filmic-Architectural Journey of Light.** The picturesque promenade extended into modern itineraries of recollection in the realm of built space. “Picturesque” views were transformed into peripatetic vision not only by Eisenstein but by Le Corbusier.<sup>33</sup> Declaring that “architecture and film are the only two arts of our time,” Le Corbusier went on to state, “In my own work I seem to think as Eisenstein does in his films.”<sup>34</sup> Both architect and filmmaker conceived of a filmic-architectural promenade, following the same mnemonic path that engages the intimate journey of the imagination.

This perspective has become relevant today in the development of contemporary museum architecture, which often aims to reinvent a moving, spectatorial itinerary in the museum.<sup>35</sup> In this architectural itinerary that binds the filmic journey to the museum walk, one performs a particularly imaginative traversal: a kind of transport that is fundamentally a moving play of light. As Le Corbusier put it when developing his idea of a *promenade architecturale*, “The architectural spectacle offers itself consecutively to view; . . . you play with the flood of light.”<sup>36</sup> In architecture, as in film, “a true architectural promenade [offers] constantly changing views, unexpected, at times surprising.”<sup>37</sup> As exemplified in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin, an architectural ensemble is both framed and “read” as it is traversed by light, and a residual history tangibly emerges out of this mobilized, luminous museum trajectory. This is also the case for the cinematic spectacle, for film—the screen of light—is read as it is traversed and is readable inasmuch as it is traversable. As we go through it, it goes through us and through our own frame of mind and inner geography. A practice that engages psychic change in relation to movement is thus historically *architected*, in between the museum wall and the film screen.



**Projective Spaces, from Cinema to Museum Installation.** In thinking of these imaginative promenades, one travels the contact zone between the architectural journey enacted in film and the one mapped out in the art gallery, where the passage through light spaces is today revived in surface play. We become all the more aware that cinema and the museum can be architectures of light and motion in museum sites that are scenically assembled and imaginatively mobilized. As the light surfaces of Kazuyo Sejima and Steven Holl show, and the textural façades and museum spaces built by Herzog & de Meuron make particularly evident, an inner sensing is atmospherically fabricated and projected in space.<sup>38</sup> A geopsychic traveling is generated in museum walks that embrace filmic itineraries; both create imaginary space for viewing, perusing, and wandering about, and thus engage the luminous, fanciful architecture of mental imaging. Zaha Hadid’s design of the spectacular ramps for the MAXXI is exemplary in its own way. Here, the visitor to Rome’s Museum

6.8. Steven Holl Architects, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, 1998. Photo: Paul Warchol. Courtesy of Paul Warchol and Steven Holl Architects.



of 21st-Century Arts is offered many chances to rejoin the itinerant spectator of the filmic ensemble as she travels on intersecting ramps and encounters moving light space as an imaginative projection of imaging.

Intersecting in so many ways with modern architectural itineraries, film movement likewise activates the intimate trajectory of public exhibition, in several projective motions. If, as we have seen, the exhibitionary itinerary became a filmic voyage of spectatorship during the era of modernity, now this zone, in which the visual arts have interacted with precinema, is a renewed architecture. Today, back in the museum and the gallery space, this moving topography once again can be physically and imaginatively traversed in more hybrid forms, where the architecture of cinema is displayed on walls of light to be walked through and redesigned.

She who wanders in the rooms of a museum installation acts precisely like a film spectator, absorbing and connecting visual spaces. The installation exhibits the imaginative paths of projection inscribed in filmic montage and spectatorial journeys. If the filmic-architectural promenade that takes place in the movie theater is an imaginative process, in the art gallery one walks quite literally into the space of this art of memory and into its architecturally produced “projections.” Here, one’s body traverses sites that are places of the imagination, collected as fragments of a light space and recollected by a spectatorial motion led by emotion. Ultimately, then, the art installation rematerializes the haptic path that makes up the very museographic genealogy of cinema.

An editing splice and a loop thus connect the turn of the last century to the dawn of the new millennium. The age of precinema speaks to our postcinematic times. In a historic loop, the moving geography that fabricates the cultural mapping of cinema now comes to be exposed, even remade—at crucial nerve points—on the field screen of the art gallery. An archive of moving images comes to be displaced in hybrid, residual, interfacing screens. This is not surprising, for, after all, the term *museum* derives from the activity of “musing.” Not unlike “fancying,” this is a haptic space of moving absorption. In the kind of musing that comprises both the museum and the cinema experience, to wonder is to wander in the moving fabric of exhibition.

**Precinema and Postcinema: A Morphing of Viewing Chambers.** Before we reach the end of our cinematic-museographic journey, I wish to stress the ways in which cinema is linked to the museum by a specific design of haptic materiality: a layered form of projection that activates public intimacy on the surface of things. This is a matter of folding spaces and coated materials, for the museum and the cinema are also textural places: fabrications of visual fabric, moving archives of imaging. To reactivate the museum and the cinema is to “refashion” them together, rethreading their forms of exhibition as cultural fabrications and social fabrics. After all, we “suit” ourselves to these spaces;



we inhabit them as a habit. A haptic, enveloping bond links this form of habitation to clothing, as we saw in the Italian word *abito*, indicating both dress and address, and in the German word *Wand*, in its double sense of wall and screen, in relation to *Gewand*, meaning garment or clothing.<sup>39</sup> In other words, space is an intimate fabric, as delicate as a dress: it is a fabric that is worn and that can wear out. To occupy museum space is, literally, to wear it.

A cultural landscape shows its wear, for it is in many ways a trace of the memories, the attention, the imagination, and the affects of those inhabitant-passengers who have traversed it at different times. Cinema and the museum are this terrain of passage and carry this receptive itinerary in the threads of their fabric, weaving it on intersecting screens. A palpable imprint is left on their moving landscape; in its folds, gaps, and layers, the geography of the museum holds remnants of what has been projected onto it at every transit, including the *emotions* of viewers.

We see this clearly in Thomas Struth’s insightful series of photographs depicting visitors to museums.<sup>40</sup> As an urban architecture, the museum is a liminal space, which publicly houses the performance of private voyages, inscribed in the ritual history and dramas that constitute its spectatorship.<sup>41</sup> In the narrative habitation of the gallery space, as in the movie house, intimate experiences and geopsychic transformations are transiently lived in the presence of a community of strangers. Indeed, the cinema and the museum are linked in

6.9. Lina Bo Bardi, gallery at São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), 1957/1968. © Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Paolo Gasparini. Courtesy of Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi and Paolo Gasparini.





6.10. Pietro Antonio Martini, *Exhibition of the Royal Academy, 1787, 1787*. Engraving; plate: 14<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 20<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of William Gray from the collection of Francis Calley Gray, G2576. Photo: Imaging Department, © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

this collective itinerary of recollection. They are tophophilic places that can hold us in their psychogeographic design and navigate our stories. In this interface between the wall and the screen, memory places are searched and inhabited throughout time in interconnected visual geographies, thus rendering, through cumulation and scanning, our fragile place in history. This modern architecture is an absorbing screen, breathing in the passage and the conflated layers of materially lived space in motion.

In fact, as the art historian Aby Warburg recognized at the very threshold of the cinematic age, the museum is a place where “the figurative language of gestures . . . compels one to relive the experience of human emotion . . . the representation of life in motion.”<sup>42</sup> Conceived by Warburg as a *Mnemosyne Atlas*, this modern museum became a new kind of space: a multiscreen theater of (re)collection. An intimate public screen. A museum of emotion pictures. A public archive of material exploration.

And thus today, as cinema and the museum become joined together once again in the design of visual fabrics, and postcinema reinvents the potential of precinematic exhibition, we continue to be held in this *projective* space of public intimacy, in a close binding that “transports” us—and “projects” us—back into the future. In the contemporary museum, a new form of *kinema* houses our personal, mental projections. *Kinematic* media can expand



6.11. Thomas Struth, *Louvre 4, Paris 1989*. Chromogenic print, 73<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 83<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. © 2011 Thomas Struth. Courtesy of the artist.





6.12. Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003. Installation view, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, October 16, 2003–March 21, 2004. © Tate, London 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Tate, London.

the museum's potential to affect our sense of temporality and change our experience of subjectivity. As the voyage of memory and imagination turns into visions projected on the walls of the gallery, a multiscreen, luminous architecture of mental projection is mobilized in relational fashion. Evanescent and fugitive, emotion pictures appear on screen surfaces in interconnected viewing chambers. This imaginary "voyage around my room," once held in the "room" of the camera obscura—that dark room that is the movie house—is now revisited in the room of the art installation, in the public privacy of the museum.<sup>43</sup> As redesigned by Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* (2003) at the Tate, the museum experience is indeed, like the cinematic experience, a transformative, psychogeographic journey of inner sensing that becomes intermediated in material space.<sup>44</sup> It is an actual matter of exterior "interior design": a surface architecture of partitions that enables one to partake in communal space. In this public architecture of emotion pictures, a wall that is a textured screen "projects" a very intimate text: the inner film that is our own museum.