

Things Said Once *
Esperanza Collado
2015

Please turn out the lights.¹

We are in the dark theatre, comfortably seated, surrounded by strangers and people we know. We are about to «remove our bodies»², just as the projector is turned on and throws its rectangle of light above our heads.

Suspended in this null space, «with the habit of our affections as our only luggage»³, we surrender ourselves to an inter-subjective time – «the psychological time of a community»⁴, a communitarian exercise of attention and concentration.

This is the only place where that «which is worthy of being called cinema», «a unique experience of perception [of at least two of our senses] and memory», can take place.⁵

It is here where the intermittent light of the rectangle responds more palpably to the unison of our vital breathing.⁶

The rectangle of light lives literally in our mind⁷ and bathes our absent bodies intermittently.

It is our rectangle.

«Perhaps its sheer presence has as much to tell us as any particular thing we might find inside it».⁸

«Contemplate my word which speaks about cinema and you will see my *film*»⁹

Cinema is an idea, an abstract power, a “cosa mentale”. Photo-chemical film is a material, a physical thing full of gaps, like life.¹⁰

Cinema is immaterial, it can be conceptualized, and it's free of any form of technology.¹¹

Cinema is montage, formation of light and duration. Cinema is projected with or without machines.

Cinema is an intelligible matter that invokes mobile thought – «the One which becomes two and gives it a new unity»¹². Our culture obsessively requested a body for it.¹³

A cultural dream:

The invention of the camera obscura. Our skull. Plato's Cave. The software of the Earth.¹⁴ Cathedrals and their stained glasses. The electrical synapses of thought.¹⁵ Renaissance painting. The invention of perspective. The theory of relativity. The seventh art. Stonehenge.¹⁶ The convergence of an obsession: the myth of total cinema.¹⁷

Cinematography is the art of writing cinema:

- Anonymous: *Comment va la peinture?*
- Cézanne: *Imbécile, je ne fais pas de la peinture, je fais un tableau.*¹⁸

Perhaps the invention of the cinematographic apparatus is no more than a historical contingency.¹⁹

The apparatus:

«[T]he medium or support for film being neither the celluloid strip of the images, nor the camera that filmed them, not the projector that brings them to life in motion, nor the beam of light that relays them to the screen, nor that screen itself, but all of these taken together, including the audience's position caught between the source of the light behind it and the image projected before its eyes»²⁰

«You know, when you're really expanding it, you've almost constricted it again!»²¹

Behold the enigma of material dialectics in the (film) apparatus:

Light. Darkness.
 Camera. Projector.
 Before. Now.
 Darkroom. Lightroom.
 Negative. Reversal.

Projector. Screen.
 The eye. The hand.
 Projection booth. Auditorium.
 Tekné. Fabula.
 Local space. Any point of the universe.²²
 Projectionist. Spectatorship.
 Front. Back.
 Body. Mind.
 Absence. Presence.

Interval. Frame.
 Movement. Stillness.
 Rotation. Propulsion.
 Supply reel. Take-up reel.
 Mechanics. Choreography.²³
 Spectacle. Geometry.²⁴

Time structure. Space structure.
 Rectangle. Cone.²⁵
 Volume. Surface.
 The zoom. The room.²⁶
 Trajectory. Horizon.
 Visual magnification. Spatial narrowing.
 Suspension of disbelief. Present situation.
 Ontology. Phenomenology.

24 frames. 1 second.
 Illusion. Material.
 Rhythm. Flux.
 Flicker. Epilepsy.
 Solid state. Gaseous state.
 Mathematics. Architecture.
 Objecthood. Theatricality.²⁷
 Greenberg. Krauss.²⁸
 History of Art. History of Film.²⁹

Cut

In the running of film «you´re actually watching an illusion of only half of what took place. The camera´s shutter was closed the other half of the time. So that there is another cinema of equal length that could have been made precisely at the same time»³⁰

«Be a precision instrument myself»³¹

Intervene in the spatial syntax of the apparatus. Reorganize its mise-en-scène.

«The parts of the apparatus would be like things that cannot touch *on* each other without themselves being touched, [...]»³²

Articulate connecting vectors. Conceive choreographies around and in the “betweens” of the apparatus: *montage-gestures*.

The nexus (a complementary feat): «the resurrection of bodies in space from their dismembered trajectories»³³

Film’s body, the projectionist’s body, the audience’s body. *One* heterogeneous body.

The space. The spaces between two parts, sculptures in negative. The traced movements, the sequences of movements, the distances, the displacements. A finite set of related positions. Enchainment.

Positions and objects (the possibilities of action they project). The perceptual bond to things in our own bodily space (volume, mass, density, scale, weight).

Draw trajectories, vectors, tensions, vanishing lines. A dance.

The difference between showing and *letting see*.

The wait, the processes, accentuate attention.

The act of listening in the dark.

«Use these *impatiences*»³⁴

Bring into life subtle emergences by virtue of *montage-gestures*.

Time and space as projective powers.

The act of writing cinema, an action.

So, this is where I came in.

The chant of my generation, the reinvention of film.³⁵

Experience is mental. It's thought and feeling acted upon and rationalized.

I've had my own experience of the things others have done. It's helped to clarify my own life. My experience –my view- came about this way. On the other hand, you try to account for your work in terms others can understand. I think I'm interested in sharing and would like to share. I owe my survival to others sharing their experiences. We work to serve our needs, to give some coherence view of the world. So, if we have needs in common, our work will be of value to others. Learning can be helpful. It can illuminate our condition. The arts are supremely sociable activities.³⁶

Notes

* Things Said Once was first published in English and Farsi by Contemporary Art Publications in Tehran (Iran) 2015. A French translation appeared in the brochure of the exhibition *Le film et son double* (MAC Val Paris 2015), curated by Érik Bulloot. A Spanish/English limited edition was published by La KINO and Loop Festival (Barcelona) to accompany the exhibition *Things Said Once / Cosas dichas una vez*, 2016.

¹ Hollis Frampton, "A Lecture". *On The Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton* (Ed: Bruce Jenkins), MIT Press, 2009, p. 125.

² «We may remove our shoes it that will help us to remove our bodies», *ibid.*

³ Frampton actually says, «bringing with us a certain habit of the affections» (*ibid.*), but I prefer the Spanish translation (Hollis Frampton, *Especulaciones. Escritos sobre Cine y Fotografía*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007, p. 9.), which I've re-translated into English.

⁴ José Luis Brea, "Transformaciones contemporáneas de la imagen-movimiento: post-fotografía, post-media, post-cinema", *Acción Paralela* n° 5, Madrid, 2000, p. 39.

⁵ Raymond Bellour, *La Querelle des dispositifs* (Paris, P.O.L., 2012, p. 14), as cited in Érik Bulloot, *Cine sin cine. Notas de lectura sobre "Paracinema: la desmaterialización del cine en las prácticas artísticas"*, Salón Kritik, Madrid, August 2015.

⁶ «Of all the arts, none responds more fully and intricately to the flow of the breath of life than does film, nor does any other give itself so freely to the sharing of breath», Hollis Frampton, "Mental Notes," *op. cit.*, p. 255.

⁷ «In the very process of seeing, our own skull is like a dark theatre, and the world we see in front of us is in a sense a screen», Nathaniel Dorsky, *Devotional Cinema*, Tuumba Press, 2005, p. 23.

⁸ Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁹ Roland Sabatier, "Contempla mi palabra que habla de cine", in *Próximamente en esta Pantalla: el Cine Letrista. Entre la Discrepancia y la Sublevación* (Ed. Eugeni Bonet and Eduard Escoffet), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2005, p. 331. See also: Nicole Brenez, *Introduction to Lettrist Cinema* (Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2014).

¹⁰ «You might be driving your car and your mind wanders off into thought, and six blocks, two red lights, and a left turn later you return to your driving and think, "Who was driving?" How did I do that? I stopped at red lights. Where was I? In other words, life is full of gaps», Nathaniel Dorsky, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹¹ For further discussion, see my *Paracinema: la desmaterialización del cine en las prácticas artísticas*, Trama, Madrid, 2012. A chapter is translated into English and published online in *Experimental Conversations* Journal n. 11 (Spring 2013).

¹² The third law of Eisenstein's dialectic montage. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Athlone Press, 1986, p. 34.

¹³ «One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later». Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, Pimlico, 1999, p. 230

¹⁴ Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, EP Dutton & Co., New York, 1970.

¹⁵ Stan Brakhage, "Inspirations" (1996), in *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking*, Documentext, 2001, p. 211.

¹⁶ According to Frampton, «a monument to the intercourse between consciousness and LIGHT», as cited in Robert Haller, *Lecture on Hollis Frampton*, paper transcript in Hollis Frampton file in Anthology Film Archives (as consulted in Summer 2006).

¹⁷ André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema", in *What is Cinema*, University of California, 1967, p. 236

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Godard, *Pensar entre imágenes. Conversaciones, entrevistas, presentaciones y otros fragmentos*, (Ed. Nuria Aidelman and Gonzalo de Lucas), Intermedio, Barcelona, 2010, p. 450.

¹⁹ See Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in the Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," in *October*, Vol. 103 (Winter 2003), pp. 15-30. For further discussion, see Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁰ Rosalind Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000, p. 25.

²¹ Jodie Mack, *Interview with Jodie Mack* (by Jennifer Stob). INCITE Online Journal, Published June 4, 2015. This contradiction is elucidated in Jonathan Walley, "Identity Crisis: Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion" (*October* Vol. 137, Summer 2011, pp. 23-50).

²² Dziga Vertov defined his *Kino-Glaz* as «that which couples together any point whatsoever of the universe in any temporal order whatsoever». His "Theory of the intervals" (published 1922) designates the gap between images as «an empty place which prefigures the human subject in so far he appropriates perception to himself». Cited in Deleuze, "Towards a Gaseous Perception," op. cit., p. 80-81.

²³ A performance occurs in the relationship between the film and its indispensable support. According to Nicole Brenez, «the advent of the digital makes it possible to grasp *a posteriori* a specific constituent of the image made on film: its instability. And it does this in three different ways: within the frame, where the density of the print is variable; from one frame to the next; and in the traction movement produced by the unreeling of the film» In "Perennial Unstable", Tacita Dean, *Film. A book about the importance of the analogue in the digital age* (Ed. Nicholas Cullinan), Tate, London, 2011, p. 55. Bruce McClure, who has exploited the possibilities of these constituents in his performances, presents us with «the projector, whose machinery, optics, and sound system have been shunted to the wayside, re-enters the theatre not as cinema's silent and faithful servant, but as a star» Cited in Jonathan Walley, "Not an Image of the Death of Film': Contemporary Expanded Cinema and Experimental Film," in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, Tate, 2011, p. 247.

²⁴ «Projection arises from a little known history belonging to the fields of physics, of geometry, of optics, of psychology, of pictorial representation, of show business [spectacle]. In its shortest definition, the most ordinary dictionary relays the equivocal character of the word: the action of projecting images on a screen and the representation of a volume on a flat surface. [...] To the word *project*, common sense associates the words *envision*, *imagine*, *pre-meditate*, *foresee*, as much as *eject*, *expel*, *throw*, *push*. Put otherwise, words that evoke the activities of thought as much as of physical or bodily exertion» Dominique Païni, "Should We Put an End to Projection?" in *October* no.110 (Fall 2004), p. 23.

²⁵ «Physically, the conic shape is directive toward the projector lens; yet, we sense the internal projectiveness of the beam directing itself toward the screen, as if magnitude was its target» Paul Sharits, "Words per Page" (1970), in *Paul Sharits* (exh. cat., ed. Yann Beauvais), Les presses du réel, 2008, p. 109.

²⁶ «I like to have ecstasy and analysis. [...] Or is film the only occasion for this meeting?» Michael Snow, in "Michael Snow and Bruce Elder in conversation", *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994, p. 226.

²⁷ In "Art and Objecthood" (1967) Michael Fried invoked a kind of theatricality, in the phenomenological sense of the term, to designate the pull of minimalist sculpture.

²⁸ Rosalind Krauss embraces the notion of "differential specificity" (or "differential condition") to posit the work of artists who understand that their task is to look beyond reductivist modernism (an approach associated to theorist Clement Greenberg) in order to reinvent or rearticulate the medium of film in the age of the post-medium condition. For further reading see: Bruce Jenkins, "Unmasking the Post-medium Condition," (in Tacita Dean, *Film*, op.cit., p. 87), and Andrew V. Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Post-war Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2014, pp. [7]- [15]).

²⁹ «A time will come when the whole history of art will become no more than a footnote to the history of film», Hollis Frampton, op.cit, p. 160.

³⁰ Simon Field and Peter Sainsbury, "Zorns Lemma and Hapax Legomena: Interview with Hollis Frampton", *Afterimage* no. 4 (Autumn 1972), London, p. 66. Cited in Christopher Burnett, "Frampton's Other Work", *Afterimage* no. 12 (March 1985), p. 8.

³¹ Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, Urien Books, New York, 1977, p. 1.

³² « [...] and this interdependence would figure forth the mutual emergence of a viewer and a field of vision as a trajectory through which the sense of sight touches on what touches back» Krauss, op. cit., 25.

³³ Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace and Hypotheses," op. cit., p. 135.

³⁴ Bresson, op. cit., p. 28.

³⁵ «There is no history except as it is invoked in The Present» Stan Brakhage, op.cit., p. 210.

³⁶ Hollis Frampton, as cited in Robert Haller, op. cit.