

“Are you talking to me?”

Spectatorship in Post-Cinema Art

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Consider, Douglas Gordon’s 1999 video work *through a looking glass*: two projectors are installed opposite each other in the gallery space, slightly askew, and projecting directly onto the opposing walls the so-called “mirror scene” from Martin Scorsese’s 1976 film *Taxi Driver*. The first projection shows the scene in its original form, featuring Robert De Niro’s famous monologue delivered to his mirror image. By turning the image left to right, the second projection reverses the scene. The two projections thus come to mirror each other. At least that is how it appears at first glance. If one spends some time in the gallery, however, one will notice that a temporal displacement is taking place; the second projection increasingly lags behind the first until the tables turn and it then takes the lead, only to repeat the cycle. As spectators, we find ourselves in a curious position: addressed directly by an antagonistic, double reflection of DeNiro’s character Travis Bickle with gun in hand, yet left out of the loop, which continues to run after our departure. We are enfolded in the projected images as they pervade the space, yet invited to ponder their iconic position in film history. *Are you talking to me? Are you talking to me? What, and where, is the spectatorial position in this work?* This question fuels this essay.

Again and again, film or video installations that, like Gordon’s, explicitly incorporate elements culled from the cinematic and televisual register have been encountered in galleries and museums over the last two decades. Increasingly labeled cinematic or post-cinematic, these works may include found footage, remakes, narrative conventions, or simply the reflexive employment of media technologies of which video projections are the pivotal example.¹ Such works bring together, activate, and reorganize a range of spectatorial experiences from different institutional and physical settings of the art and media spheres, to the extent that one can now talk of a new spectatorship. In the last few years, a number of texts mapped out how the spectatorship that is associated with narrative cinema is complicated or even overturned by the association with (minimalist) sculpture and installation. Simply put, this scheme outlines how the visuality

1 With existing genre films as their raw material, most of Gordon’s video works fall under this rubric, as do influential works by artists such as Johan Grimonprez, Pierre Huyghe, Paul Pfeiffer, Candice Breitz, Omer Fast, Seth Price, Cory Arcangel, and Christian Marclay, to mention but a few.

associated with the image is challenged by the embodiment associated with sculpture and installation, how the spatial preconditions of the (classical) museum are confronted by the temporality and movement of film and video, and how immobile cinemagoers are now turned into mobile museum wanderers. While certainly productive for outlining the general terms of this emergent spectatorship, the scheme falls short in two distinct ways.

First, the art/cinema framework accounts only to a limited extent for the interplay between image and embodiment and between the temporality of the moving image and the spatiality of the gallery. Seemingly regardless of the features of the imagery in question, cinema is frequently treated more or less as a constant that is predetermined either by the codes of Hollywood or by its opposition to the latter as experimental cinema, both with their respective spectatorships, “complacent” or “critical.”² The medial specificity and variations of the imagery – such as its particular audiovisual encoding, narrativity, technological mediation, cultural history and materiality – is ignored or at best glossed over, its precise imbrication with its surrounding space then being difficult to determine. One thus easily ends up with general statements about the embodied spectator of media installations and the active spectatorship they produce, which are based predominantly on arguments about the spatial layout of the work and the way it stages the relationship between media object and viewer.³

Second, the strict art/cinema framework can seem reductive with respect to the significance of this meeting within the art system, but also to its close interconnection with the present media sphere. The expanded cinema movement of the 1960s is frequently cited as the precursor for today’s “post-cinematic” practice, yet equally significant for grasping its relevance is cinema’s current migration to

2 Interestingly, as it is presently articulated in much art criticism, such a dualist conception of the spectatorship construed by post-cinematic and new media installations as “complacent” (Hollywood cinema) or “critical” (avant-garde and experimental cinema) repeats in significant ways the understanding of the film spectator as either “passive” or “active” that dominated film studies of the 1970s. However, this conception is now supplemented by cognitive or more historically situated models informed by a notion found in cultural studies of an empowered audience. See for instance Judith Mayne, 1993, “Introduction” in *Cinema and Spectatorship*. A recent notable exception to this dualist conception is represented by Kate Mondloch’s study of spectatorship in film and video installations from the 1960s and up to the 2000s. In its analysis of key media installations from this period, the study aims to draw out “the typically obscured relationships between bodies, sites, and the object-hood of the screen-based apparatus.” Kate Mondloch, 2010, *Screens. Viewing Media Installation Art*.

3 Examples of this tendency are found for instance in Ursula Frohne, “Dissolution of the Frame: Immersion and Participation in Video Installations”; Liz Kotz, “Video Projection: The Space Between Screens” and Andrew V. Uroskie, “Siting Cinema,” all in *Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader*, Tanya Leighton, 2008.

new media platforms and the user-based viewing positions that emerge with converged media. It seems that when cinema and the moving image enter the museum, their interconnections with other nodes in the contemporary media sphere are neglected in favor of a new alliance. We are not only hindered from grasping features of the works that are crucial for appreciating their potential as instances of art; also at stake here is a conception of how we are construed as spectators, and thus ultimately as contemporary subjectivities, through our imbrication with the present media sphere in its more and less tangible manifestations.

Perhaps the most significant reason for this delimitation is the widely accepted conception of the media of art being fundamentally other than the so-called mass or communication media, and indeed so “different” that a clear separation between them can be upheld.⁴ Whereas institutionally, ideologically, and aesthetically a separation has historically been the case, since the 1960s artists’ experimentation with media technologies necessitates a conception of the artistic medium that does not sever it from the rest of the mediatic system, but rather includes it as one of several notions of media and their manifestations.⁵ This is not to reduce the history of art to a chapter in the history of media or to propose a single, essentialist denominator of the concept of media. Rather it is my intention to acknowledge the various notions and manifestations of the media that are operative in contemporary post-cinematic works and explore the very point at which they differ.⁶ With

4 Under the term “the post-medium condition,” Rosalind Krauss has influentially argued that we have witnessed a fundamental change in conceptions of what constitutes the “medium” of art through its dislodging from the technical support instigated by artist’s use of film, television and video. Yet in spite of the centrality of technological reproduction media in her argument, she makes a clear distinction between the “mediums” of art and the “media” of communication. Rosalind Krauss, 1999, “*A Voyage on the North Sea.*” *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition.*

5 The 1960s are often singled out as a key transitional period in the relationship between mass media and art media, in spite of a trajectory of previous art movements that actively engaged with the technologies, materials and conventions of the burgeoning mediasphere, Collage and Russian Constructivism being just two examples. Yet the art of the 1960s is unprecedented in its interaction and dialog with the mediasphere, either oppositionally or conceiving of it as a laboratory, both by actual use of professional equipment and so on, and as a channel for transmitting works. This was also the moment when live television was fully introduced and the technical possibility for new forms of temporality became a reality.

6 Interestingly, however, during the last fifteen years or so, the history of modern art has in fact been increasingly envisioned as a history of media art. One example of this was the exhibition *le Mouvement des images: Art and Cinema*, at Musée National D’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (2006), which sought to reformulate the history of art since the last turn of the century in relationship to the development and dispersal of moving images. Another example is provided by German art historian Dieter Daniels. Based on the understanding that each new audiovisual medium raises

this perspective, this essay aims to grasp some of the complexities of the spectatorship, that post-cinematic works produce, and by extension, how they may articulate conditions of spectatorship more generally as constituted in the present media sphere.

By seeking to scrutinize in some detail how moving imagery and the spatial dimension of its extension into post-cinematic installations intersect with each other as well as the surrounding media sphere, my approach here is also implicitly aligned with recent developments in media theory that are best described as media ecological. Of particular relevance for the present argument is what Ursula Heise (2002, pp. 149-168) has called the relational focus of recent articulations of media ecology as it strives to make visible many of the less apparent and perceptible connections between what W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen have formulated as “the singular, specific ‘medium’ and the constellation of things known as ‘the media’” (2010, p. xx) (see also Fuller 2005). Recent media ecology combines a holistic perspective that envisions media as an encompassing system and environment along with a local one that points to the specificities of particular “ecosystems” inside and outside of this larger system, in order to understand what goes on in the conjunction between them (Heise 200, p. 165). Importantly, contrary to the first wave of media ecology that was widely criticized for its technological determinism, that is, envisioning the media as a closed circuit that deeply affects its habitants but leaves no or only minimal room for human agency, its subsequent reformulations conceive of media as an “environment for living” as Mitchell and Hansen put it, and foregrounds the interdependence and local variations of the human/technology relation (2010, p. xii).

Moreover, a media ecological approach is, as the term signals, a conception of human perception and experience of technology in terms of spatial and environmental metaphors (Heise 2000, p. 165). Hence, there is a striking resonance between this macro-level approach to the human/media relation and the micro-level awareness of the spectator’s spatial coordinates and bearings – his or her position – opened up by contemporary media installations. More than a simple homology between current art and theory, this joint interest should instead be seen to indicate the conception of spatiality as conditional for the interrelation between the sensing subject and the technological object (as discussed in other essays in this volume).⁷ Situated at the intersection of art history on the one hand and film and media studies on the other, this essay also implicitly draws on theo-

new aesthetic questions that create new art forms and is taken up by existing art forms, he claims that “all modern art is media art.” *Kunst als Sendung. Von der Telegrafie Zum Internet.*

7 See Mary Ann Doane, “Has Time Become Space?” and Eivind Røssaak, “The Moving Image in the Museum: Real-time, Technology and the Spectator’s Cut” in this volume.

ries of spectatorship, from both fields. Seeking to understand the relationship between the individual and the filmic process or artwork, and fundamentally inseparable from theories of the human subject, the concept of spectatorship has, since it emerged in the early 1970s, represented an ongoing attempt to come to terms with the interface between humans and media, viewer and work, in the aesthetic field (Deidre Pribam 1999, p. 146; see also Buckland 1995).

For my purpose here it is useful to distinguish between three medial dimensions of post-cinematic work that also reflect three different dimensions of the notion of media: the imagery and what it represents (particularly its configuration of time and space); the material and technological organization of the work and its site (what might be called situated technology); and the surrounding media sphere of which the two other dimensions are constituent parts and from which the contemporary viewer is already familiarized with different forms of media spectatorship. This approach opens up the possibility for exploring the precise interaction between these three medial dimensions in the work in question.⁸ Thereby one can cut across the dualism implied in the opposition posed between the time-based, visual spectatorship of cinema and the embodied, spatial spectatorship associated with sculpture and installation. This tri-partition also corresponds roughly with Arjun Appadurai's notion of mediascape, in that it refers both to the flow of distribution and uses of media technologies and to the flow of images produced by them. As the suffix "-scape" implies, together these dimensions make up parts of a milieu or environment that is mediated as well as a mediating landscape. The spatial metaphor and the relational focus are significant here as well, and Appadurai's concept can be considered ecological in this sense. His "scape" is fluid and irregular, and changes according to our position in it – not unlike the frequently immersive environments of the post-cinematic media installations of concern (Appadurai 1996, pp. 33-35). As this correspondence suggests, the spectatorship explored in recent post-cinematic art may serve as cogent explorations of the conditions of contemporary media spectatorship, outside of the art sphere, as well.

Gordon's *through a looking glass* is a particularly instructive work to discuss in terms of media art spectatorship for a number of reasons. Reconfiguring an iconic scene from narrative cinema, the work explicitly signals its close entanglement with the surrounding media sphere. Moreover, from the outset, the di-

8 To reflect these different medial dimensions throughout the text, I distinguish between "media" and "mediums" in the following: I use the term "media" to refer to the overall system of interconnected technologies and institutions, what Hansen and Mitchell refers to as "the system of 'things'", and "mediums" to designate the plural form of what Hansen and Mitchell calls "the singular, specific medium" (2010, p. xx).

rect audience address of the scene also effectively frustrates any easy dualism of spectatorship as either identificatory, frequently associated with cinema, or as activated, as increasingly associated with installation. Significantly, during the ten years after it was made, the work's particular staging of spectatorship has proven itself to be even more pertinent because it cuts through the core of ongoing discussions of the relationship between image and embodiment, time and space, and complacency and criticality in contemporary spectatorship, and does so in ways both formally simple and conceptually complex. In accordance with the three-part model suggested above, I first discuss the imagery of the work in some detail, concentrating on the spectatorial position embedded in Scorsese's scene as it is prescribed through cinematic representation of time and space. I then consider the implications of Gordon's subsequent spatial and temporal reconfiguration for the spectatorship already embedded in Scorsese's scene, and the function video performs as the technological tool for this operation. In conclusion, I discuss how *through a looking glass* articulates a fundamental condition of contemporary media spectatorship, which ultimately hinges on the deeply ambivalent feeling of control and lack thereof as it may be experienced from our living in the present mediasphere.

Scorsese's mirror scene: No secure place to stand

Let us now consider the film clip chosen by Gordon for his *through a looking glass*: How does Scorsese's mirror scene address its audience, before Gordon intervenes? Through what stylistic and formal means is this address orchestrated? Truly an iconic scene in popular memory, what first strikes most spectators when encountering Gordon's work is the overwhelming sense of recognition, an immediate déjà-vu. Indeed, the scene offers one of the most-cited lines in American film history: "Are you talking to me?"⁹ Generally recognized as De Niro's breakthrough as an actor, *Taxi Driver* is steeped in anecdotes about his improvisational skills and his acting against a mirror. Further adding to the film's mythology is its curious fate as inspiration for the copycat crime of John Hinckley III, who in order to impress actress Jodie Foster (who played a child prostitute in *Taxi Driver*) five years after its release, conducted an assassination attempt on U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

9 Illustratingly, this line was rated number ten on the American Film Institute's list of the most influential film lines (*AFI's 100 Years...100 Movie Quotes*, 2005). In interviews, Gordon has himself recalled how he heard the line in the school yard far in advance of seeing Scorsese's film.

Scorsese's film also holds a central position in the discipline of film history and its canon. It is habitually held up as exemplary for its breaks with narrative continuity and preoccupation with the social alienation, failed masculinity, and disintegration of the self that characterized much of post-classical and New Hollywood cinema of the 1970s.¹⁰ Embedded in the cinematic material employed by Gordon is thereby already a quite specific configuration of spectatorship, the preconditions of which are productive to assess in order to outline its precise investments in the spectatorial position solicited by *through a looking glass*. After all, it is no coincidence that in his cinema-based works, Gordon frequently chooses films that depict psychopathological or altered states in which the relationship between self and world, subject and object, is rendered precarious, and that aim to instill a similar experience in the viewer.

In Gordon's excerpt of *Taxi Driver*, the film's status as a hallmark of post-classical filmmaking is evident in that classical, narrative continuity is broken in a series of minor, yet fundamental ways. Three factors are particularly crucial. Firstly, the very brief close-up shot of the gun being drawn is followed by a medium close-up shot of Travis in which the movement not only continues but also overlaps. Taken from the same camera position but with different framing (from medium close-up of his torso holding the gun to medium close-up of his shoulders and head), this shot arrangement results in a jump cut by which a part of the action is briefly repeated: we see Travis draw the gun and point it at us in a rapid yet strangely staccato movement, which is further accentuated by the reverberation of his "uh?" on the soundtrack. While obviously not a truly disruptive or elliptical jump cut, this moderate version of it is nevertheless significant in terms of spectatorship as it works to fragment our point of view in relation to the action and cinematic space. Furthermore, the slight overlap and repetition of action between the two shots emphasizes the quickness with which Travis draws the gun; it is as if he attempts to draw faster than the camera can follow, as implied by his challenging statement, "I am faster than you." An intense, aggressive mood accompanied by a sense of unpredictability is thus established by this relatively subtle jump cut. Editing here serves both to draw attention to the scene's formal organization and to convey the psychological state of the protagonist.

Secondly, the changed camera position between the two first shots of Travis represents an inventive manipulation of the 180° rule and its maintenance of spatial

10 See for instance *Contemporary American Cinema*, Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond, 2006, eds; Geoff King, 2002, *New Hollywood Cinema. An Introduction*; Richard Martin, 1997, *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls. The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Cinema*.

order and continuity.¹¹ In Scorsese's setup, this imaginary axis would run through the mirror on the one hand and De Niro/Travis Bickle on the other. Accordingly, focusing frontally on Travis, the second shot in the scene implies that the camera is positioned more or less directly on this axis. Here Scorsese uses the 180° rule as the point of departure for a cunning post-classical play with the continuity system of classical Hollywood cinema. As the camera angle changes from a medium profile shot of Travis via the momentarily frontal shot of the gun, into the confrontational head-on shot of the protagonist, our sense of spatial continuity and screen direction is disturbed: Where in the space is Travis actually positioned? And how are we positioned in relation to him? Moreover, as the camera balances on the demarcating line, so does the character Travis Bickle. This scene is indeed the narrative turning point in the film, leading up to his psychological disintegration and subsequent realization of his homicidal fantasies (Taubin 2000, p. 58; Williams 2006, p. 159). Combined with the jump cut, the camera seems to circle around the protagonist, unsuccessfully attempting to pin him down. In effect, the spectator "is not offered a single stable relationship with the character, or a clear point of judgment," as Geoffrey King has observed (2002, p. 34).

Thirdly, the presence of the mirror in the scene becomes a relay for the scene's perhaps most intriguing departure from the continuity system, more specifically from that of a classical dialog scene. Scorsese's scene follows a classical shot/reverse-shot setup in most respects, but with one crucial difference. Due to the presence of the mirror, Travis Bickle fills the positions of both characters. One consequence is the immediate confusion resulting from the fact that Travis now occupies two different spatial positions. Our orientation in diegetic space is frustrated. Yet this doubling is somehow motivated by the mirror's presence. Even more disruptive is that the looks exchanged (through eyeline matching and over-the-shoulder shots) in a classical setup are here passed between Travis and his reflected Other. We share Travis's point of view when he looks into the mirror as well as the point of view of his mirror image looking back, and are eventually confused as to which is one or the other. Travis's identity is quite literally split, distributed across an increasingly hostile and aggressive exchange of looks and threats between the character and his reflection, making the confusion between the two absolute. Travis, in effect, faces and seems to address the spectator directly with his provocation: "Are you talking to me?" Likewise, when Travis draws the gun as if attempting to move faster than the camera can follow, the specta-

11 For readers not well versed in the vocabulary of film production, this principle states that the camera should stay throughout a scene on one side of an imaginary line that demarcates the action, often referred to as the *axis of action* or the *180° line*, in order to produce a clear sense of screen direction for the spectator.

tor herself is threatened, looking straight into the barrel of the gun. Combined with the other continuity breaks, this peculiar exchange of point of view between Travis and his mirror image elicits the effect of the spectator being simultaneously put in the position of both the aggressor and the threatened. The viewer is, as Richard Martin observes of *Taxi Driver*, “encouraged to identify with the neuroses, obsessions and paranoia of Scorsese’s protagonist” (1997, p. 87). Scorsese’s mirror-facilitated play with the standard shot/reverse-shot sequence not only lets Travis Bickle’s emotional and psychological disintegration quite literally be acted out between Travis and his mirrored double; this disintegration is reflected onto the spectator, who is invited to share the schizophrenic point of view of both Travis and his mirror image and to negotiate the impossibility of identifying with both.¹²



Ill 1: Douglas Gordon. Through a Looking Glass, 1999. Two screen video installation, dimensions variable. Installation view Gagosian Gallery, Soho, New York, 1999. From Taxi Driver, 1976, USA. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. © Studio lost but found / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Stuart Tyson. Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

12 The crucial stylistic and thematic function of the mirror in this scene also results in the scene easily lending itself to Lacanian-informed film analysis, in which the analogy between Lacan’s psychological mirror-stage and the film experience is central.

It is no coincidence that the turning point of Scorsese's film is a shot/reverse-shot. Allowing the spectator to occupy the points of view of both characters grants the shot/reverse-shot an essential role in the continuity system. Through it, the spectator is seen to be stitched (or with a more psychoanalytically loaded term, *sutured*) into the narrative through her sharing of a character's point of view, thus claiming ownership of the visual field of the previous shot. The centrality of the shot/reverse-shot in classical Hollywood cinema is reflected in the amount of film-theoretical debate concerned precisely with its effects on the spectator, particularly in psychoanalytical film theory. When the character Travis Bickle fills the position of both subject and object in the primordial scene of the shot/reverse-shot, the drama of psychoanalytical film theory is thereby fully acted out. Travis fills the position that in Lacanian film theory is reserved for the spectator, who in classical narration becomes both subject and object of the look in order to create a ("false") sense of wholeness.¹³ Significantly, my evocation of psychoanalytical film theory here must be understood as a direct implication of the stylistic and thematic features of the mirror scene. As it happens, the genre of film noir and its post-classical manifestation of the neo-noir were deeply informed by psychoanalytical theory, and the mirror scene must be seen as a reflection of this influence. Moreover, when isolated and reworked in Gordon's work, this peculiar version of a shot/reverse-shot acts as what Mieke Bal has called a theoretical object; that is, an object that in itself "theorizes" cultural history; in this case, that of film history and its theoretical positions (1999, p. 5).

Embedded in the cinematic material of Gordon's work is thus already an ambiguous and precarious spectatorial position, which signals a relationship between viewer and image that can only be described as double. We are made aware of cuts and camera positions, that is, the film's "suture". Whereas this process in the case of classical narration would "unsuture" the spectator from the smooth identification that "cinematic suture" normally implies, in the mirror scene's post-classical editing this awareness rather serves to demonstrate the deteriorating demarcation between self and Other, subject and object as it is lived by Travis. Crudely put, one might say that the very post-classical means that according to suture theory would draw us *out* of the fictional universe do in fact serve to draw us *in*, since the spatially articulated confusion between Self and surrounding is a central theme in the film. Yet these stylistic means work very specifically by redistributing the diegetic work between the character Travis, who now acts out the spectator's role in the drama of suture, and the spectator, who is

13 In that it is seen to effectively center the subject and produce a sense of all-seeing mastery of the visual field, the shot/reverse-shot has become a particularly important object of critique in terms of the discursive construction of subjectivity in Lacanian film theory.

called upon to share Travis's paranoia by subjectively experiencing the very same alienation and disorientation in relation to the diegetic space as that which Travis experiences in his psychological relationship to his surroundings but does not identify with his increasingly disintegrating self. Are we inside or outside? Where is our position? Are you talking to me? Indeed, Scorsese's mirror scene – spatially or psychologically – offers us “no secure place to stand” (Monk 2003, p. 149).

Significantly then, and contrary to the denigration of the spectator of mainstream cinema as predominantly passive and uncritical that is often assumed in writings on media installations and post-cinema (even though long since challenged in film and media theory by approaches as varied as cultural studies and cognitive film theory), a closer analysis of what actually *takes place* in sound and image in Gordon's work alerts us to the complexity and ambiguity of the spatial and psychological position “cinema” here allots for its spectator. Confused more than complacent, alert rather than inactive, invited to muse on the blurry line between fictional space and its outside and attend to both in tandem (the very line that fully disappeared for copycat felon John Hinckley), the spectator of the mirror scene bridges any easy dualism. Thereby, the relationship between spectator and filmic process signaled by Scorsese's mirror scene significantly foregrounds key characteristics of the “new” spectatorship, as it is outlined in recent work on post-cinema and media installation art.

Becoming installation: Entering the firing line

Consider now another dimension of the work, which in the introduction I called the material and technological organization of the work and its site. What happens to the cinematic spectatorial position of Scorsese's mirror scene when Gordon reconfigures it into a post-cinematic art installation through the technological tool of video? Gordon subjects the scene to a set of formal operations that encourage the ambiguity of its spectatorial position even further. The formally simple material and technological reconfigurations Gordon subjects the mirror scene to nonetheless establish an intricate medial situation. As described at the beginning of this essay, in *through a looking glass*, the scene is projected directly onto two opposing walls of a gallery space in particularly designated fields.¹⁴ The projections are installed so as to not directly face each other, but are instead positioned

14 At least if installed in accordance with the installation instructions. When showed at the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo in 2009, the work was projected on two screens and not directly on the walls.

slightly askew, as is often the case in Gordon's audiovisual works. While the first projection shows the excerpt of the mirror scene in its original form, the second projection shows the scene reversed, flipped left to right. Both image tracks are looped. Starting out in full synchronization, a temporal adjustment effectively controls the evolving dynamic between the two images. In the second projection, Gordon has inserted a progressively increasing number of video frames in the interval between the beginning and end of the scene.¹⁵ Starting with one frame, the number of frames inserted is consistently doubled, to 2, then 4, 8, 16, 32 and so on, until it reaches 512, when it reverses according to the same principle – and then starts all over again.¹⁶ Hence, while the scene itself lasts only a little more than a minute (71 seconds, to be precise) it is repeated here in a cycle that lasts approximately an hour.

Three simple formal and conceptual operations can be identified in the work: *doubling*, *reversibility*, and *reflection*.¹⁷ *Doubling* takes place both through the duplication of Scorsese's mirror scene onto two opposing projections and in the successive, numerical doubling of the number of inserted video frames that causes the temporal displacement. Hence a spatial as well as a temporal doubling take place, in addition of course to the theme of doubles and psychological dissociation already present in the scene. Thus, the spatial relationship between the two images is defined – and continuously redefined through the successive temporal doubling. *Reversibility* operates by the fact that the work is a loop in which, through these doublings, both projections alternate in taking the lead. *Reflection* operates in that the second image is reversed from its original appearance in Scorsese's film, so that it appears as a reflection of the first image in Gordon's installation. More than mere formal operations however, these technological interventions are conceptually structured by the theme and style of the mirror scene itself, in which doubling, reversibility and reflection indeed are key concerns. When working in conjunction, they thereby engage with the precarious spectatorial position of the mirror scene in a manner that efficiently complicates the opposition frequently assumed between cinematic spectatorship and installation.¹⁸

15 The video image is fundamentally electronic and is thus produced by a continuous signal rather than comprised by distinct entities, as is celluloid based film which is made up of separate photographs or frames. It is therefore debatable whether it is meaningful to talk of video frames.

16 Information provided in an e-mail from Gagosian Gallery in New York. In his book on Douglas Gordon's works based on Hollywood films, Jonathan Monk also discusses the specific numerical formula of the artist's operations (2003, p. 134).

17 In his discussion of *through a looking glass*, Monk (2003, p. 141) identifies these three operations, but does not specify their exact nature. The following explications are therefore my own.

18 Certainly, theories of cinematic spectatorship and installation art are far more complex and varied than what is referred to here, assuming a range of different positions with respect to the

One obvious outcome of these operations is that the mirror scene is transformed from a two-dimensional image contained by a film screen or a video monitor into a three-dimensional installation that engages the space between the two adjacent images. Generally considered “the type of art into which the viewer physically enters” and which insists on being regarded “as a singular totality,” according to Claire Bishop, the key characteristic of installation art is that it “addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in space” (Bishop 2005, p. 6).¹⁹ In *through a looking glass*, this address is literal even in a double sense. The spectator of Gordon’s work is invited to physically enter the space that simultaneously separates and connects the two mirror projections of Travis Bickle. Therefore, the cinematic image field is extended to also include the physical space of the gallery. By entering this extended space of the cinematic image field, the viewer is required to relate to the two adjacent images that demarcate it and find her spatial position between them. The relationship between on-screen space and the space outside the screen becomes subject to scrutiny. Whereas *through a looking glass* addresses the viewer as a “literal presence” in this capacity alone, this address is raised to another level when we also consider the specific dynamic of sounds and images that plays out between the two projections, that is, when we also look at what takes place *on* the screen.²⁰

In Scorsese’s original version, the mirror scene is already identified as a sequence of shot/reverse-shots of Travis from the point of view of his reflected dialog partner. It is as if one half of the standard dialog setup is missing. With Gordon’s doublings and spatial reconfiguration, however, what is missing from Scorsese’s original scene, that is, Travis’ reflection, is in a sense restored (Monk 2003, p. 132). Yet Gordon’s restoration by no means causes the insecure spectatorship, produced by Scorsese’s editing style to be any less so – quite the contrary. As Annika Wik has pointed out, in extensive parts of *through a looking glass*, the relationship between the two projections forms a dynamic exchange of point of view and shot/reverse-angle shots (2001,p. 105). Whereas it is only

degree of identification and “decentering” at stake in the two different genres. Yet, in the growing body of texts on post-cinema or media installations that fuse these two forms, this dualism continues to be reproduced.

19 Bishop’s main argument in this book is that installation art should be studied in terms of the viewing experiences and the different models of the subject it produces, rather than its themes or materials. Thereby Bishop foregrounds the significance of spectatorship as integral to installation art.

20 As argued in the introduction to this essay, if we are to develop a nuanced conception of the spectatorship in post-cinematic art, it is not sufficient to settle with a consideration predominantly of how the spatial, material and technological configuration of a work choreographs the movement and positioning of the spectator. Instead, we have to consider in detail the specific ways in which these elements are organized in relation to what takes place in sound and image.

implied in Scorsese's original scene, a classical conversation setup in effect fully plays out across the space between the two images in Gordon's version. While the first Travis starts the series of aggressive gestures and verbal provocations, the second Travis responds either by mimicking or with an equally provocative gesture and answer, depending on where in the cycle we come in. The sound augments the effect of a dialog as it evolves from being that of a synchronized monolog, via a slight echo to a full-fledged dialog, in which Travis and his reflection alternate in taking the lead.²¹



Ill 2: Douglas Gordon. *Through a Looking Glass*, 1999. Two screen video installation, dimensions variable. Installation view Gagosian Gallery, Soho, New York, 1999. From *Taxi Driver*, 1976, USA. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. © Studio lost but found / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Stuart Tyson. Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

However, for the restoration of the shot/reverse-shot sequence described above to fully take place, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is asked to quite literally “fill in the gap” between the two images, thereby being put in the middle of

21 Interestingly, in his excerpt, Gordon has omitted the panning shot in *Taxi Driver* that introduces and positions the mirror in diegetic space, which in one sense makes the spatial confusion and aggressive mood of the scene even more profound. Yet, since a reversed version of the mirror image is now in place on the opposite wall, the mirror is in fact no longer needed.

Travis' firing line. Through bodily action such as the turning of the head and the positioning in space, the spectator performs the work otherwise done by conventional continuity editing, that is, the suturing together of the images into a continuous diegesis. This act of "stitching" together the narrative is now displaced from the temporal succession of shots taking place inside the image frame to the spectator who is asked to complete the dialog across the space between the images. While the presence of the spectator is in one sense already acknowledged in Scorsese's original mirror scene through the reflexive, stylistic devices such as jump cuts and spatial disorientation, with Gordon's reconfigurations, here she is also asked to participate as an *embodied* presence in the work. While in one sense it is integral to the very genre of installation art due to its spatial extension, embodiment is here not construed simply by the material configuration or temporal and spatial layout of the work. Rather it is carefully orchestrated through the interaction of these elements with the style and particular succession of the sounds and images of the cinematic material.

Implicated in the exchange between Travis and his Other, yet grappling to find the spatial coordinates for this implication to take place, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is asked to distribute her attention equally between the absorbing images and the surrounding space that simultaneously separates and unites them. As already implied, Gordon's setup can be construed as a meeting of two theoretical accounts of spectatorship, seemingly at odds, each produced by different mediums (technological and artistic) and each opened up by the formal and conceptual qualities of Gordon's work itself. One deals with the specificity of the cinematic material with respect to narrative, (disembodied) vision, and the image. Spectatorship is here assessed in terms of the viewer's visual mastery over the image and identification as construed through narrative "suture."²² The other foregrounds the "activated" space, presence, and embodiment invited by sculpture and installation. Critically reassessing Michael Fried's rejection of the "theatricality" of minimalism (or as he prefers, "literalist" art), due to its shifting of the viewer's experience from the intrinsic qualities of an art object to the "object in a situation," spectatorship is here construed as a result of the relationship between the material object, its surrounding space, and the viewer's position in it (Fried 1998, pp. 52-55).

In ways both illuminating and problematic, Joanna Lowry addresses the consequences of this conflict between (disembodied) vision and embodiment in Gordon's video works in general (1999). In their merging of cinematic spectatorship with that of installation and video art, we witness an "abdication of a posi-

22 That is, through conventions for temporal and spatial continuity in vocabulary less psychoanalytically charged.

tion of visual mastery over the image,” she claims. Instead of the identificatory models of spectatorship, associated with film theory (apparatus and gaze theory most notably) and classical cinema, video installations establish the spectator as “a kind of performer in the space of the object” based on the notion of “a failure in the optical system at the moment of bodily encounter,” the author asserts (Lowry 1999, p. 276). More specifically, she states that the disruption of cinematic identificatory spectatorship, that occurs in video installations is ensured in that the “embodied spectator is forced into literally acting out their engagement with the image,” resulting in a heightened attention towards the space beyond the image frame (“beyond the edge of the screen”) and towards the technological apparatus (ibid, p. 279).

Lowry’s account fittingly describes salient features of Gordon’s reconfiguration of Scorsese’s scene, most notably the splitting of attention between image and its contextual space. Yet it misses a crucial aspect that underplays the position that the imagery allots to its spectator through its particularly cinematic configuration of time and space. In *through a looking glass*, the spectatorial position is certainly not one defined predominantly by “visual mastery.” On the contrary, in the films Gordon chooses to rework into video installations, which range from B-movies and noir films to medical films, fictional as well as factual, vision is not to be trusted, and altered consciousness, strong pathological bodily reactions, and psychic disorder take center stage. *Taxi Driver*, from which Gordon takes his material for *through a looking glass*, is invested specifically in a negotiation of the terms of spectatorship of narrative cinema related to the Lacanian film theory on which Lowry founds her argument. Indeed, in both film and art theory as well as in moving image-based art practice of the 1970s, including that of post-classical cinema, forms of “decentered/decentering” spectatorships, alternative to the identificatory models favored by Hollywood were explored.²³ That the mirror scene epitomizes this historical shift from within the institution of cinema is indeed one of the reasons why Gordon’s *through a looking glass* makes such a salient object for analysis of contemporary media spectatorship. Because it treats cinematic spectatorship as a somewhat stable entity, Lowry’s analysis is symptomatic of much writing on contemporary post-cinema. In this it demonstrates precisely why it is productive to consider the particular configuration of time and space in the imagery and the resulting position allotted to the spectator. Even though competing with the experience of embodied presence that

23 In her book on installation art, Claire Bishop suggests that “decentering” is one of two central ideas that underpin the history of installation art’s relationship to the viewer (“activation” being the other idea). See Claire Bishop, 2005, *Installation Art. A Critical History*, particularly pp. 11-14 and pp. 82-102.

the installation setup undoubtedly entails, the ways in which the specific imagery of the mirror scene is inscribed in a wider context of moving image history is a crucial aspect of the work.

A problem with Lowry's argument, then, is that it accounts for how and where the image takes place, but not for what takes place in the image or for the specific relationship between what is "inside" and "outside" of it. As previously pointed out, embedded in Scorsese's mirror scene and furthered by Gordon's formal interventions, a disruption of classical continuity and thus of the psychoanalytically-charged spectatorial position of classical cinema is already present, in which the viewer is envisioned as "sutured" into the narrative through devices such as the shot/reverse-shot. Thus, of concern in *through a looking glass* is not, as Lowry states, an abdication of the visual mastery over the image in favor of embodied awareness of what goes on "beyond the edge of the screen"; instead, it is a spatial extension and embodiment of the already deficient visual mastery suggested in the mirror scene. This extension results from the specific dynamic *between* the image and the space "beyond the edge of the screen."²⁴ Through this merging of on-screen and off-screen space, the spectator is asked to distribute her attention between image and its surrounding space and yet also to reconcile the two, thus joining forces in directing the attention towards the spectator herself.

In *through a looking glass*, then, a spectatorial position emerges that is even more insecure than in Scorsese's original scene, one that is conditioned both by the style and editing already present in the mirror and by the "hybrid" medial situation through which it is reconfigured by Gordon. Already deeply intrinsic to the genre of film noir, the spatial disorientation and confusion that is further radicalized by Scorsese's post-classical editing style and Gordon's reconfiguration expand to include the gallery space and the embodied spectator in it. As one is enfolded between the doubled Travis, the confusion between subject and object, self and Other, projected (self) image and physical presence around which the mirror scene pivots spills over to also include the relationship between the spectator and the work. The space of the fiction and the space in which the spectator is positioned fold into each other, and this is emphasized by the spectator's position quite literally in Travis Bickle's firing line. Obviously, the work's character as an installation thereby works to strengthen rather than destabilize the already precarious spectatorial position present in the cinematic material. However, if we broaden the scope from the highly directed spectatorships, of cinema

24 The three models she discusses are Michael Fried's discussion of minimalist sculpture and its embodied spectator, Rosalind Krauss's notion of video as a narcissistic medium, and Lacanian psychoanalytical models of cinematic spectatorship (Lowry 1999, p. 279).

and the art gallery to include the everyday viewing experiences of “new” media technologies that the spectator brings into the work, another perspective emerges from which the fundamentally insecure spectatorial position of *through a looking glass* might be seen to be balanced or at least disturbed.

The space of fiction, the time of the spectator

Just as the cinematic material of Gordon’s installation entails a spectatorial position that can only be fully acknowledged when considered in relation to the specific conventions of narrative cinema, the medium of video also affects the spectatorship in the work in distinct ways. In addition to the work’s spatial doubling and temporal dynamic, which depends on the successive doubling of the number of video frames executed by the artist, of particular relevance here is the spectator’s own everyday experiences with consumer video technology and its capacity to intervene in the temporal flow of narrative cinema.²⁵

Anne Friedberg and Laura Mulvey have both critically revised aspects of what Linda Williams has called the “gaze theories” that are also addressed by Lowry. A turning point for Friedberg and Mulvey is how video’s capacity for time shifting has wide-ranging implications for the experience of narrative cinema (Friedberg 1995). Importantly, the consequences of this time-shifting capacity are considered in terms of increased interactivity and as a displacement of control from the filmic object to the spectator. An implication of this increased control over the cinematic object, which is emphasized by both Mulvey and Friedberg, is that it breaks the spell of classical diegesis. Both see the concepts of repetition and return as particularly crucial for this process, presenting them together almost as a paradigmatic figure for the theorized video spectatorship, (ibid. p. 8; Friedberg 1995, p. 61 and pp. 74-76). Mulvey notes, for instance, that the DVD chapters, the possibility of instantly skipping or returning to a certain segment, the many temporal modes available on the DVD player, and the extradiegetic material often included with DVD releases all contribute to the fragmentation and reordering of linear narrative (ibid. pp. 27). Video spectatorship thus allows for control of the temporal dimension of cinema in an unprecedented manner. However, this notion of an empowered spectator in control of the film stands in stark contrast to the almost disempowered and insecure spectatorial

25 In keeping with the underlying ecological perspective announced in the introduction, the relations between film and video are examined here with respect to how the introduction of a new medium affects the existing media and their functions.

position – the lack of a secure place to stand – foregrounded in Scorsese’s mirror scene and advanced by Gordon’s reconfiguration of it.

It is productive to conceive of this situation as a meeting between cinema space and video time. Throughout the preceding discussion of *through a looking glass*, space and the spectator’s position in it was a key concern – whether it is the diegetic space of *Taxi Driver* or the physical space of the gallery. Yet, as previously noted, Gordon’s temporal doubling of a number of video frames is crucial for the spatial dynamic between the two projections to fully unfold. To establish this dynamic relationship, the two individual image tracks are constantly repeated (as we remember, the cycle starts all over again approximately every hour). Thus, within the one-hour cycle of Gordon’s work, each individual projection is marked precisely by the “repetition and return” that Mulvey (2006, p. 8) and Friedberg (1995, p. 76) find so crucial for the new, interactive spectatorship, instigated by video.²⁶ In addition, because the work is looped in a structure integral to the work, the one-hour cycle in itself is also continuously repeated. The work thus reiterates the series of repetitions that are present in the sampled scene itself, as Travis Bickle asks his mirror image over and over again, “Are you talkin’ to me?” On several levels, a repetitive yet dynamic structure marks the temporal relationship between the two image tracks of *through a looking glass*. Mulvey finds that these repetitions and delays contribute to the fragmentation “from linear narrative into favorite moments or scenes,” by which the spectator “is able to hold on to, to possess, the previously elusive image,” resulting in what she calls a possessive spectator (ibid. p. 161). In this sense, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is invited to scrutinize De Niro’s gestures, movements, actions, and appearance in far more detail than would have been possible if the film had proceeded in a regular forward flow.

If we follow Mulvey, this process simultaneously both exaggerates and disempowers the iconic status of the star and shifts the power relation between film and spectator. Through the detailed scrutiny of the star’s gestures and performance, the time of the film’s registration (indexical time), displaces or at least comes to coexist with the narrative time of the fiction, allowing the star’s extradiegetic persona to shine through the screen. Thus, “disbelief is no longer suspended, ‘reality’ takes over the scene” and the star’s “extra-diegetic presence intrudes from outside the scene and off-screen” (ibid. p. 173). In *through a looking glass*, we consider the actor’s strikingly young face, listen to the exact phrasing of the familiar question, try to remember when we first watched the film (if we

26 Friedberg describes the home video viewer as one who “is always able to repeat, replay, and return,” while Mulvey states for instance that “[r]eturn and repetition necessarily involve interrupting the flow of film, delaying its progress, and, in the process, discovering the cinema’s complex relation to time.”

ever did), thereby emphasizing De Niro's star persona and the mirror scene's status as fetish object. However, as Mulvey has it, filtered through the medium of video, single scenes are not simply elevated but simultaneously potentially "subordinated to manipulation and possession," that is, they become objects of the spectator's fascinated control. This struggle between the experience of control and that of fascinated immersion plays out in *through a looking glass* in a very particular way.

The experience of manipulation and control must here be understood predominantly as part of the experiential repertoire of contemporary media spectatorship that Gordon's work activates. Indeed, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is not herself in control or possession of the temporal flow of Scorsese's mirror scene as she would be if she were watching Scorsese's film on DVD in her own living room; the true control of the film object is obviously reserved for the artist. Nonetheless, Gordon's use of video technology is here so closely associated with – and even originates from – the regular viewer's everyday experiences of consumer technology media spectatorship, that it is illuminating to consider the work in this regard; of concern in the present essay is precisely how the medium of video serves to remediate the spectatorship embedded in Scorsese's mirror scene, both through its manifestation as art video installation and in its capacity as everyday consumer technology. As Amy Taubin has pointed out, the fascination for the mirror scene as fetish object can be seen, at least in part, as "a response to the fetishism inherent in the scene itself" (2000, p. 56).²⁷ The spectator's video-instigated temporal control over both the scene and the star in a sense thus repeats the very drama of the mirror scene, where Travis, by challenging his reflection in the mirror, "disavows its status as an image, endowing it with autonomous powers" and "turns his reflection into an opponent in order to prove to himself that he's the better man" (Taubin 2000, pp. 56-58). One can say, somewhat speculatively, that this fetishistic control of the image, which is inherent in the mirror scene itself, is taken to a new level through the video-enabled repetitions of Gordon's work.

There is another crucial reason why the temporal repetition of the mirror scene alters the (already interrupted) spectatorship embedded in the scene to a different degree than does its reconfiguration into a spatial installation. While the diegetic space of the mirror scene through Gordon's reconfigurations conflates with the physical space of the gallery, the diegetic time of the scene is displaced by, or at least alternates with, its indexical time. While the former is an operation

27 Taubin here relies on a definition of fetishism presented by Mulvey (1996): "Fetishism, broadly speaking, involves the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly man-derived object."

of synthesis or union between diegetic and extra-diegetic space, the latter is an operation of splitting between diegetic and extra-diegetic time. It is precisely this curious combination of (cinematic) spatial expansion and (video instigated) temporal splitting that ultimately defines the spectatorship, of Gordon's work, as it simultaneously serves to enhance the threatened and insecure spectatorial position embedded in the mirror scene and to evoke the spectatorial experience of some control over this fetishized object of film history.

Thus, Gordon's work employs the video medium as a tool to expand, examine, and revisit elements already inherent in its cinematic origin, Scorsese's iconic mirror scene. When seen through the filter of consumer video spectatorship, then, Gordon's use of video moderates the immersive experience of the insecure spectatorial position enhanced by Gordon's spatial expansion of Scorsese's scene into an installation. Video's capacity for temporal reconfiguration and disruption of the narrative flow is central here. While the true control of the film's flow is of course reserved for the artist, the new power of the spectator over the film is nonetheless evoked as a crucial backdrop for the accidental spectator's experience of Gordon's work. From this perspective, the work reflects on the intricate and complex relationship between the hands-on-engagement with and struggle for control over media material and technologies that is part of contemporary everyday life on the one hand, and the experience of being uncontrollably surrounded and addressed by a mediascape to which there is no clearly demarcated "outside" on the other.

Concluding remarks: Well, I'm the only one here ...

The three different dimensions of media that organize this essay each condition the spectatorial position of *through a looking glass* in specific ways, which in turn have consequences for conceptions of the human/media relation more generally. First, considering the medial dimension of the imagery alone, we saw that Scorsese's original mirror scene puts the spectator in a highly insecure relation to the protagonist and the action on the screen. Our perspective jumps between disparate views of Travis, and does not allow us a clearly defined position in diegetic space. Scorsese's breaks with classical continuity editing and the overall post-classical style of *Taxi Driver* effectively frustrate any such possibility, resulting in a confused experience of the relationship between self and surroundings for Travis as well as the spectator (the separation between the life-world of the spectator and the narrative world of cinema is difficult to maintain). In its merging of subjective and objective perspective and by destabilizing the relationship between the life-world of the spectator and the fictional world of the

film, the mirror scene epitomizes the emergence of a historically “new” model for cinematic spectatorship in narrative cinema.²⁸

Second, looking at the medial dimension of what I called situated technology (i.e. technology as employed in a specific situation), both the formal operations carried out by Gordon and his use of video add another layer of complexity to the spectatorial position. Expanding the scene to a dual-screen video installation, Gordon takes as his starting point the very terms of the cinematic spectatorship, embedded in the mirror scene. Due to the oppositely projected images, the spectator is required to bodily engage with the work by turning her head and shifting her view between the two versions of Travis. Whereas cinematic spectatorship has predominantly been theorized as a product of vision and as confined to (mastery and ownership of) the visual field, Gordon’s doubling of the scene extends the precarious spectatorial position installed in the mirror scene (in which mastery of the visual field is frustrated) to also contain the spatial field by including the embodied position of the spectator in the physical gallery space. The confused demarcation between self and surroundings, between the life-world of the spectator and the fictional world of the film that was introduced in Scorsese’s film is advanced yet another turn in Gordon’s work, where any potential experience of “mastery” of both the visual and the spatial field is challenged. Yet, the spectatorial possibility for some sense of control is opened up by the conception of video (and various other media platforms with it) as a “new” and empowering medium that allows the media user to virtually handle, hold and intervene in the heavily codified image flow of narrative cinema. Or differently put: one can let one’s own time and space dictate that of the media, rather than the other way around. Whereas indeed no such possibility exists for the viewer of Gordon’s work, the specific use of situated media technology here nonetheless implies this liberatory sense of empowerment and control over media material and processes as one (indeed often unrealized) potential of contemporary media spectatorship.

Third, the last medial dimension of my tripartite approach is the notion of mediasphere, of which the two other medial dimensions of imagery and situated technology are constitutive parts. More concretely, the mediasphere is conjured up in two ways: as the general background of moving image culture and history from which the specific cinematic scene from Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* is isolated and reflects back upon; and through Gordon’s spatial extension of the scene into a three-dimensional installation, which addresses the presence of the mobile spectator and enfolds her into the continuously shifting exchange of threats be-

28 *Taxi Driver*’s postclassical style has been described for instance as amounting to a “realignment of the relationship between the audience and film.” Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman.

tween the two versions of Travis. From this perspective, *through a looking glass* stages a media ecological system on a micro level. It foregrounds the relation between cinema, digital video and installation, each medium in turn comprising a distinct system of its own; it evokes the experience of an extended and limitless field that integrates the visual and spatial; and it puts the spectator in a precarious position right at its center, struggling for a sense of “mastery” over the surrounding field and striving to find her bearings in it.

At stake in my approach here is ultimately the question of how our interactions with other “virtual” and ever-changing times and spaces – fictional or not – are integrated into the flow of our everyday practice and experience. From this perspective, my analysis of the spectatorial position in *through a looking glass* opens up to a more general discussion of how the present mediasphere addresses and constructs its subjects at the very intersection between image and space, visibility and embodiment in arenas far removed from the white cube or black box, as well. One example is provided by recent studies of the role of moving image screens in shopping malls, which indicate that cinematic ideals of spectatorship, are thematically and structurally encoded in the space of the shopping malls (Bolin 2004). In her study of Internet spectatorship, Michele White critically interrogates various forms of visual and textual representations of, in her words, an “active and empowered Internet ‘user,’ who is in control over the interface, situated within the screen and moves actively within the Internet ‘space’” (2006, p. 1). White argues in contrast that Internet spectatorship is shaped just at the intersection between looking on (rather than “using”) and the embodied positions and identities of spectators, and that passivity as well as regulation and structuring of the subject is as decisive for Internet spectatorship as are the liberatory notions of an active “user.” Lisa Parks, discussing the question of digital mobility in relation to the interface of the World Wide Web, considers how different web applications and websites *place* the user in multiple senses (2004). She analyzes software that enables visualization of users’ electronic, virtual movement in concrete, spatial terms – for instance by specifying the number of hops taken between IP addresses, and the full IP addresses, node names, city locations, time zones and network ownership through which data “moves” when a user navigates from one point to another. This form of visualization counters the effacing of the infrastructure through which data moves in most web interfaces, and grounds the notion of “free” and nomadic web navigation in material geography. Thereby these visualization applications further a form of technological literacy, she argues (2004).

These brief examples focus particularly on the intersection of the spatial and visual. Being local variations of the human/technology relation that differ greatly from Gordon’s work in significant ways, it is nonetheless instructive to see these

brief examples as being part of a continuum of contemporary media spectatorship, that also includes post-cinema art. Hence, as suggested by these examples, whereas contemporary media spectatorship to some extent embraces the ideology of control and individualized power, as in any complex system, this ideology is constantly challenged through the “forces of flux, transience and unmanageability” that make up the mediasphere.²⁹ Are you talking to *me*? Indeed, Travis Bickle’s near-paranoid conception of his surroundings can stand as an apposite summation of the deeply ambivalent spectatorship of post-cinema art and contemporary media more generally.

In a wider perspective, the increased reflection in current post-cinema art on processes and events that take place in the media should be seen as a working through, as well as a contribution to, mediatization, the process by which, in Roger Silverstone’s words, “The media are seen to be increasingly central as defining the terms in which the global citizen goes about his or her everyday life as well as increasingly central to the political culture within which that everyday life is in turn conducted” (Silverstone 2005, p. 190). In this process, “the media are becoming a second order paramount reality” that does not replace but runs through the “experiential world, dialectically engaged with it, eternally intertwined.” (Silverstone 2002, p. 763). By distinguishing between three different dimensions of the media as well as their manifestations in recent media installations or post-cinema art – imagery, technology, and media sphere – we may grasp some of the complexity in which this intertwining of the media and the experiential world is worked through and addressed in contemporary art production.

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29 Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy make this point to describe the dialectic relationship between order and disorder integral to the experience of what they call MediaSpace. “Introduction” in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Couldry and McCarthy, 2004, p. 3.

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