CFP: Total Cinema: Film and Design

Discussion published by Elif Sendur on Friday, January 7, 2022

Expected timeline of the publication process:

January 15: submission of abstracts (300 words)
January 30: feedback on accepted proposals
March 30: deadline for submitting the finished papers
July 2022: publication

full name / name of organization:

Disegno - Journal of Design Culture

contact email:

disegno@mome.hu

The next issue of Disegno will investigate, from the perspective of design culture, the contemporary role and significance of cinema, film, VR and moving image installations within the context of the institutional, technological, and media-related developments and lifeworld in the twenty-first century. Our basic aim is to shed more light on how critically oriented design culture studies conceive of design not as it is in the world but how it creates our lifeworlds (Lebenswelten) as seamless webs of discursive meanings and sensual experiences. On closer inspection, our particular interest lies in how this worlding (scil. es weltet) can be understood in the realms of cinema and film making. That is, how life worlds - with their meanings, practices and qualia - are constructed and perceived in cinema. Working this out with respect to movies involves, as Ben Highmore has claimed, “[h]ow the world seems to us, how it feels to us, is materially embedded in the technoaesthetic assemblages which are design culture’s natural objects.”

The myth of total cinema is one of the key concepts and seminal essays of André Bazin, who argues that the impulse towards a total technological representation of reality is essential to cinema, thus - and quite surprisingly for many of his contemporaries - he welcomed any spectacular technologies pointing in this direction, like technicolor, widescreen or 3D projections. The apparatus of cinema has been subject to thorough investigations from ideological and psychoanalytical perspectives, but we suggest that a design-focused approach could reveal intriguing aspects related to the construction of spectatorship in the context of the Bazinian myth of total cinema. Especially given the constant changes to how moving images are received, which started with television, and continued with home cinema driven by VHS and DVD only to migrate on our computer screens, and lately to our mobile phones. A different kind of moving image spectatorship has been created by game designers and recent developments in immersive film experience/Interactive Digital Narrative (360 degrees recording, VR films) are also opening new paths for the reception and interpretation of moving images.

As Vivian Sobchack described in her 1992 book The Address of the Eye, one of the major effects of
films is how they variously address our senses. This is true, even of lesser-known senses such as our vestibular system, nociception and thermoception which Luis Rocha Antunes discusses in his 2016 book, Multisensory Film Experience. To control and direct the sensory experience of the viewer, creators must be aware of these various effects. In the case of traditional cinema and film, the effects are largely direct but unilateral, and the system cannot accommodate the audience’s responses. The early days of interactive cinema (and even VR) already anticipated and contributed to the myth of total cinema mentioned above. In her seminal work Hamlet on the Holodeck, Janet H. Murray uses the symbol of the holodeck as the ultimate story experiencing apparatus. Murray explains that interactive digital narratives can already offer us an advanced level of agency, interactive storytelling productions that bring the viewer closer to the notion of holodeck. When designing IDNs, a key aspect is whether they can offer a transformative experience. This transformative experience is closely related to some important questions:

1. How the transformation is enabled by the possibilities of technology?
2. Is a sense of immersion and presence enabled by design?
3. Does this affect the user and what kind of empathy creating strategies can be identified?

And finally, it is also important to raise the issue of ethics. These immersive technologies aim to offer a certain sense of embodiment for their viewers/experiencers, we thus should ask the question, what did the creators intend when designing their immersive work? Towards whom does the viewer feel empathy? How is this sense of empathy constructed, how does it address the user on an emotional and sensory level?

The emergence of video art, and later gallery films and moving image installations in contemporary museums, have significantly widened the possibilities of cinema and the type of audience. Designing installations that create site-specific spectatorial experiences, able to actively influence the interpretation of the artworks has been a central preoccupation of many video artists. Moreover, enhanced immersion is only one direction in which artists have moved. Others have shed light on the cinematic mechanisms and materials that created moving images. Thus screens, projectors, cameras, and film stocks have become integral parts of artworks, their physicality contrasting with the transient projection of images. This has promoted self-reflexivity, but has also stirred up nostalgic attitudes towards past technologies and design.

Furthermore, design has been associated with film since its beginnings, not only regarding the technological apparatus of recording and projection, but also concerning the design of different representations of reality, of the onscreen lifeworld of the characters. One can identify at least three issues associated with this:

1. How films use and create markers (signs and symbols) of specific periods of time or locations, how buildings, objects, clothes, elements of graphic design, sound and musical excerpts etc. contribute to the representation?
2. To what extent we can track and trace trends of design that are contemporary with the production of motion picture that represent distant past or future events?
3. How films contributed to the dissemination and popularity of revolutionary evolutions in product design?

Finally, Disegno is very interested in approaches that highlight the ways in which media and media technology are used as tools of social transformation. A particular example of this can be identified in
the recent democratization of moving image production, where the production and distribution of short format videos has become an everyday practice for millions of users worldwide.

The proposed articles can be related (but are not restricted) to the following topics:

- historical and/or critical approaches to developments in the technology of cinematic representation
- analysis or interpretation of object- and design-centered films and authors (editors suggest considering Todd Haynes, Pablo Larraín, Jacques Tati and James Benning)
- rules and roles of production design in film; creating on-screen diegetic worlds through design
- how the projection apparatus designs spectatorship in different contexts (cinema, television, computer, museum/gallery, etc.)
- how the different forms, formats, technologies of moving images affect our senses
- lifeworlds of total cinema – totalizing internal logic (e.g. Sándor Kardos, Tamás Waliczky, Zbigniew Rybczyński)
- lifeworlds of total cinema – totalizing sensory experience, from B movie gimmicks (and their milieu as in Joe Dante’s Matinee) to art installations
- cinematic VR versus interactive VR production
- interactive films
- social consequences of developments in media technology
- the effect of video art and moving image installations on the reception of films
- media archeology

Disegno accepts research papers (5-7000 words), essays (c. 3000 words), and book/exhibition reviews (c. 2000 words). Research papers undergo double-blind peer review; reviews and essays are generally reviewed by the editors.

Please send your abstract proposals (300 words) and a short bio (100 words) to our email address: disegno@mome.hu