
Circadian Cinemas

To consider somnolent spectators is to restore the textures of embodied particularity to the scene of reception, as the previous chapters argue. Such a consideration also lays the groundwork for a renewed understanding of moving-image reception as a public, social, and communal activity. Although these qualities were singled out as defining attributes of cinema from its early history, associated with its democratic promise as a popular medium, this promise was also thoroughly interwoven with anxiety, as the discourse of narcotic reception demonstrates. As so many have insisted, inside the movie theater, an experience in common takes shape only to the extent that the presence of others in the audience is extinguished for the sake of a one-to-one communion with the image. This commonality is forged paradoxically by means of depersonalization and the excision of intersubjective bonds. In order to become a part of the cinema's audience, one must leave behind some part of one's self or, in André Breton's striking formulation, must willingly "abstract" from one's own life.¹ And so we take our place among strangers as faceless as ourselves, deactivating our identities and fusing together into a single sense and subject position. This abstracted notion of spectatorship informs not only apparatus theory and theater design, but also historical accounts of the rise of cinema as a mass medium, as Miriam Hansen has pointed out. Writing about the latter in the American context, Hansen relates the construction of a solitary generic spectator starting in about 1910 to an emergent sense of the medium's capacity to overwrite social distinctions and submerge diverse identities within a universal mode of address and culture of consumption. She writes, "The concept of the spectator made it possible to precalculate and standardize individually and locally varying acts of reception, to ensure consumption across class, ethnic, and cultural boundaries."² Throughout the history of cinema, the question of watching with others—the same thing, at the same time, in the same place—has been shadowed by concerns about neutralization and homogenization, concerns deepened by cinema's institutional and industrial trajectories.

If the filmgoer's consciousness undergoes a reduction within the movie theater—"consciousness limited to a single sense," to repeat Jean Epstein's formulation—a parallel process of evacuation can be said to transpire from body to body. Cinema convenes an audience in order to drain away its social substance as an audience, it has been argued. Eyes without bodies find a correlate in the lonely crowd of spectators—gathered together in a place but solitarily and individually absorbed, held together not by virtue of person-to-person ties but rather by the gravitational pull of the screen. To turn to another one of Epstein's metaphors, "the sensibilities of the entire auditorium converge, as if in a funnel, toward the film."³ The discourse of narcotic reception turns to sleep as an apt illustration of this vexed form of collectivity instantiated in the movie audience, simultaneously together and separated. For sleep at its heart describes a condition that is shared in common by all while still remaining fundamentally unshareable, one that we experience together but alone. Grasped in these very terms, however, sleep can also exert a counterpressure *against* such totalized and totalizing conceptions of the mass audience. It prompts a question about the relational potential obtaining within what seems or feels like solitude. How might a social rapport nonetheless take shape across individual instances of absorption, a rapport that, crucially, is not staked upon the consistency of an identical vision? To the extent that somnolent spectatorship calls attention to the embodied filmgoer as a locus of untranscendable differences and residues—restoring the "I" to the "we" of the movie audience—it simultaneously illuminates the peculiar characteristics of this we. As Victor Burgin suggests, only by confronting an audience that "sleeps together in . . . a *touching* space" can we begin to grasp the character of this audience as "a totally aleatory conglomeration of alterities."⁴ In Hansen's formulation, the shared social horizon of cinema is constituted not solely as the fixed predicate of "the consumption of standardized products," but also as an effect of the entangled heterogeneities, aleatory relationships, and unanticipated exchanges that are negotiated within the public space of the theater.⁵

The unique perspective on the cinema experience afforded by sleep is also a timely one. For the question of what it means to be a part of the viewing collective forged by cinema becomes only more vexed as this experience outgrows the originary scene of the moviegoing public gathered before the big screen. The mass audience of old is remolded by the currents of spatial displacement and technological disruption, spinning out into manifold configurations of watching alone together or together alone. And indeed, today we might just as readily encounter somnolent spectators in other situations. Perhaps they will be discovered in the private setting of the home in front of a small screen, as in the very last of the series of digitally animated "frames" in Abbas Kiarostami's film *24 Frames* (2017). Its composition recalls the title shot from *Holy Motors*, placing a film and its viewer within a space of obscurity. A woman sits at a desk with her back to the camera, facing windows that open onto a twilight sky. She slumps forward asleep on her



FIGURE 64. *24 Frames* (Abbas Kiarostami, 2017).

desk, allowing us a clear view of the glowing computer screen before her on which the final scene from William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)—the close-up of the kiss between Teresa Wright and Dana Andrews—plays frame by frame as it is rendered by a video editing program, until the words “The End” appear. Like its counterpart in *Holy Motors*, the scene refers nostalgically to an earlier era of cinema, embodied in this classical Hollywood picture that hovers at the precise center of the composition like a transmission from another time, out of sync with everything that surrounds it in its slow-motion stagger and affective vibrancy, the most animate element in this still composition. The historical distance separating this era from the present is further marked by the digital technology that renders and remediates the filmic image; by the shifts in scale transpiring as the framed view migrates from screen to window to the computational interface that functions as a proxy for both, while also shifting the locus of display from sites of leisure to the workstation; and by this unconscious viewer who sleeps alone rather than in the company of others.

As well as doubling the sense of an ending (of both *24 Frames* itself and *The Best Years of Our Lives* as the film-within-the-film), the scene suggests the fading away of a shared public experience of spectatorship, echoing a by now familiar story of shrinkage and fragmentation in the age of disseminated playback.⁶ The figure dozing in front of the computer recalls not only the actual and hypothetical sleepy moviegoers discussed in the previous chapters, but another familiar persona in the long history of narcotic reception. Prompted by either personal experience or the cultural imaginary, we might envision the television viewer passed out on a sofa who, like the character in *24 Frames*, has been lulled by the familiar sounds and images of old movies whose endings are already known. A bleakly humorous

portrait of the zoned-out television viewer that also makes reference to the rituals of movie watching, in a dark parody of cinephilia, comes from Ottessa Moshfegh's 2018 novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*.⁷ The book's narrator, a bereaved woman who decides to spend an entire year in deep hibernation, goes about this mission with the aid of an antiquated VCR, a stack of VHS tapes from the 1980s and 1990s, and a battery of prescription-strength sedatives. She watches, rewinds, and repeatedly rewatches *Working Girl*, *The World According to Garp*, *Moonlight and Valentino*, etc., while gulping down handfuls of Ativan, Ambien, and Nembutal. The sleepy spectator gains ground on the broadening terrain of moving-image display rather than losing traction. New modes of narcotic reception proliferate.

It is no coincidence that at this moment, many have begun to reassess the implications of silent, static viewing in darkened rooms.⁸ From the vantage point of an era in which privatized, atomized viewing is par for the course, the theater beckons as an idealized memory and "a lost site of relationality," to quote Erika Balsom.⁹ As the clouds of obsolescence gather, the anticipation of imminent loss is sparked, which in turn galvanizes a current of nostalgic preservationism. The lament of "the end of cinema" that has gained in amplitude at the turn of this century fixates on the irretrievability of cinema as it was once experienced. Consequently, the suspicious view of the black box theater as a machine that disciplines and disconnects its occupants gives way to a reattachment to this same space as a vanishing horizon of sociality. This nostalgic reattachment runs the risk of obscuring the intertwined histories of the atomized collective and the movie theater, and of unreflectively retrenching the receptive norms inculcated in this space. To react to changes in cinema by mourning the theater as we once knew it—as the only haven in which a collective, concentrated viewing experience remains tenuously available—is to fall back on a single model of spectatorship that has long served as "the normative anchor of our entire thinking about viewership," as Lutz Koepnick writes. Moreover, it is to fall back on old norms and definitions precisely when new models are required "to theorize today's exploded landscapes of cinema and spectatorship."¹⁰ The consideration of sleep answers to a need to reexamine spectatorship at a moment when cinema is being reconstituted by new technologies of circulation and display, strategies and sites of exhibition, and networks of reception. The proposition explored in the preceding chapters—that sleep can productively and radically recast the web of involvement between the moving image, its viewers, and the place where they meet—bears upon the rethinking of reception demanded by the present moment. As much as sleep discloses previously unglimped dimensions of the theatrical experience that was once synonymous with cinema, it also offers lessons for a time when moving-image display exceeds the confines of the theater by reopening the question of cinema's "communal imaginary" and potential.¹¹ To discover the routes through which cinema might evolve and survive, to discern what we can hope to preserve of cinema as a perceptual and social

experience, what is first required is a better grasp of this potential, without recourse to reified ontologies or atrophied notions of reception.

A growing body of scholarship contributes to this endeavor by excavating cinematic genealogies that extend beyond the standardized settings of commercial theatrical exhibition toward different parts of the world and other locales, such as the factory, classroom, prison, museum, and the outdoors.¹² The project of “mapping cinema’s long and variegated genealogical routes,” in the words of May Adadol Ingawanij, generates a more comprehensive picture of cinema as “bodily encounters with mediated images and sounds within a spatio-temporal ambiance.”¹³ With this striking formulation, Ingawanij intervenes in the theorization of cinema as a dispositive. To the extent that cinema is a technical dispositive with a recursive capacity, it is above all contingent and malleable, amenable to improvisatory remaking by marginalized agencies and adjustable to manifold circumstances. Rather than a fixed apparatus or a permanently binding structure, cinema was and remains “an ensemble of projected moving image, sound, spatial, spectatorial and symbolic practices, whose composition at distinct periods and in specific locations is provisional and adaptive.”¹⁴ The countless varying iterations that constitute a larger history of moving-image projection can be read as “formative precursors to this current situation of saturation and ubiquity.”¹⁵ Furthermore, these variegated genealogies contribute a vital perspective on the present situation in the form of a counter-ontology that registers the dynamic range of the cinematic ensemble and thus bridges the divide between its past and present.

In his book *The Lumière Galaxy*, Francesco Casetti argues that the mutations of cinema both permeate its entire history and carve a path for its continuing future existence. When we look back to the past, it quickly becomes apparent that cinema “has always been a much more adaptable machine than we have often been led to believe.”¹⁶ And when technological changes build to a head—when cinema seems poised to turn into something else altogether, that can no longer be recognized as such—it is all the more urgent to come to grips with the dialectic of mutation and survival, to grapple with the tension between cinema’s transformations and its persistence by way of these very transformations.¹⁷ If the survival of cinema can no longer be staked upon a specific set of technologies, a type of environment, or even a stable attentional-corporeal attitude, then the locus of inquiry must shift to other domains. As Casetti writes, cinema endures as an experience—or even more subtly, as a *need for experience*—poised delicately between continuity and change.¹⁸ This experience exceeds a spectator’s confrontation with projected images and sounds, he writes, for it also encompasses a way of relating to a place, to others, and to the world.¹⁹ Or as Balsom puts it, “Far more than just a support for an incandescent image, the screen is a nucleus around which a complex aggregate of practices, affects, and relations condense. As screen culture changes, so do these notions, making their examination all the more vital.”²⁰

Proceeding from the basis of sleep, we have arrived at an expanded sense of what it means to experience moving images as part of an audience. The singular notion of watching a film splinters into a multiplicity of possible modes of involvement and participation, all entailing varying degrees of attention to the projected image. In this respect, somnolent spectatorship reveals cinema to be a malleable system and provisional ensemble. The moviegoer who zones in and out aptly illustrates the way that spectators figure within the exhibitionary process as a “dynamic element” rather than a predetermined subject effect. As Casetti argues, if the viewer is absorbed as a constitutive element of the dispositive that contributes to its equilibrium and guarantees its functioning, at the same time they hold it open to a wider “horizon of possibility.”²¹ That is, the viewer marks a point at which everything either comes together or, potentially, breaks apart and enters into new recombinations. While Casetti writes in mind of viewers who actively “intervene upon the object of their vision” and the exhibitionary situation—who perform actions “to make their own viewing possible”—the claim applies just as well to those who intervene in a more passive mode.²² The sleepy spectator lends support to a definition of cinema as an *assemblage*, capable of being “repeatedly re-formed under the pressures of circumstance,” rather than an apparatus that has been “pre-arranged once and for all.”²³ This dispositive is not a closed and static system, but one that is flexible and continually remodulated by the rhythms of the bodies it contains. Sleep thus serves as a valuable resource for building capacious models of encounter, contact, and engagement between viewers and moving images that are adequate to the contemporary mutations of cinema. And this accounts for why filmmakers like Tsai and Apichatpong combine the exploration of new cinematic experiences beyond the movie theater with the appeal to sleep in the form of a reimagined, reassembled circadian cinema.

Another exhibit of somnolent spectatorship: the setting is a large exhibition hall with numerous projected images lining its walls and many viewers reclining in its dim interior. The multichannel projections are typical of the installation formats adopted by museums and galleries—although, in contrast to the standard look of the white cube, this space has an unpolished, industrial, and slightly derelict quality. The ceiling is lined with a metal grid, the room empty of objects except for an enormous tangle of dried branches, and the floor packed with bodies up to the edges of the walls, some awake but mostly unconscious, crashed out in a convivial disarray and colorful patchwork of sleeping bags and blankets. In one corner, a viewer sits on the floor watching the projection, solitary in his wakefulness and hemmed in on all sides by a sea of sleepers. The branches cast shadows onto the screen he regards. In other areas of the exhibition, sleepers huddle together in smaller rooms, or wedge themselves into narrow corridors, sometimes with the light from the projectors washing over them and making them a part of the image.



FIGURE 65. *Stray Dogs at the Museum* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2013). Photo by Chang Jhong-Yuan. Courtesy of Museum of National Taipei University of Education and Homegreen Films.



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The images projected on the walls are scenes from Tsai's 2013 feature film *Stray Dogs*, and the site of the exhibition is the Museum of National Taipei University of Education in Taiwan, where Tsai recreated his film as a solo exhibition in 2014, entitled *Stray Dogs at the Museum*. Along with daily screenings of *Stray Dogs* in its entirety and a series of live events, the exhibition included audiovisual installations created from takes and outtakes from the film displayed on the museum's three

floors. Tsai has described the process of building the exhibition as one of “disassembly and reassembly,” extracting individual scenes to isolate them as independent short videos projected on each channel and, in some instances, restoring the entire length of takes that were edited down in the original film.²⁴ Chronologically deconstructed in this fashion, *Stray Dogs* undergoes a durational expansion along with a spatial detonation. The film is transformed into a “crystal,” in Tsai’s words—expanded beyond the fixed confines of the single frame, its components scattering, reflecting, and refracting across the museum’s material surfaces. The projections were trained upon not only mounted screens but also walls, corners, the reflective steel doors of an elevator, a wrinkled paper screen rescued from one of Tsai’s stage productions, and the bodies of visitors. Along with this profusion of images and sounds, the exhibition offered its visitors a variety of viewing options. They could arrange themselves on folding chairs and benches, or mattresses and other less conventional props. The floor of one of the rooms was strewn with pillows resembling cabbages (handmade by students from the University of Education), encouraging the audience to make themselves comfortable while also referring to a head of cabbage that actor Lee Kang-sheng smooches and devours in one of the film’s unforgettable scenes. The situations of communal slumber described above took place over the course of several evenings when the museum remained open to visitors for the entire night at the request of the filmmaker, making *Stray Dogs at the Museum* into an exhibition to occupy as much as to see. Performances by musicians and “storytelling” by the filmmaker continued late into the night. Afterwards, those gathered (including Tsai himself) went to sleep inside the museum.

The remaking of *Stray Dogs* as an exhibition prompted experimentation with both the material forms of projection and unusual modes of reception, exploring ways of experiencing moving images and sounds that become available in a new setting. Tsai has pursued this line of exploration in other settings even more removed from the typical spaces of moving-image display, like the Zhuangwei Sand Dune Visitor Center, an ecological park in Taiwan that was inaugurated in 2018 with an installation designed by him, an exhibition of the films in his Walker series (including the latest addition to the series, *Sand*, shot on the black sand beaches of the ecological park), and a related series of overnight events. Such experimentation is mirrored in *SLEEP CINEMA HOTEL*, a work similarly poised between cinema and installation. Like *Stray Dogs at the Museum*, *SLEEP CINEMA HOTEL* incorporated a multiform exhibitionary platform, as described in the previous chapter, including open spaces in which viewers could circulate on foot, fixed seating like that found in a traditional theater, and supports of a more lateral kind such as cushions and beds. As both projects demonstrate, with the exit from the movie theater to other settings, a fixed and standardized architecture of reception gives way to flexible and configurable spaces, one in which the audience might discover a variety of ways to orient themselves to the image. With this exit, moreover, the time of projection is uprooted from the unremitting turnover of the

commercial screening schedule. It assumes a more elastic form that can shrink or expand, even to the point of absorbing the transitions from day to night and back again.

Stray Dogs at the Museum and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* exemplify the rise in recent decades of moving-image and sound displays that more or less reconstruct the cinematic dispositive in museums, galleries, and other spaces. They relate to what has been termed the “gallery film,” the “other cinema,” or, in Balsom’s phrase, “cinema beyond cinema,” describing moving-image installations by filmmakers and artists for nontheatrical spaces.²⁵ Tsai and Apichatpong are notable contributors to this phenomenon. Among the many things the two share in common—beyond their prominent global standing and filmmaking aesthetic—is the fluidity with which they move between the film industry and the contemporary art world. Both have built a corpus of work that extends from feature films to experimental shorts to audiovisual installations that can only be experienced in spaces of art exhibition. And both can attest to the embrace of the film director by institutions of art in recent years. Their films are frequently screened by museums, such as Tate Modern, which has presented programs of shorts by both directors in the last decade. A retrospective of Apichatpong’s films was programmed at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco in 2016 as the inaugural event in their Modern Cinema series. In 2020, retrospectives of Tsai’s films were scheduled at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, DC (both canceled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic). Like Apichatpong, Tsai has been commissioned to create moving-image installations for art venues, including the National Palace Museum in Taipei and the Venice Biennale; his film *Face (Visage)*, (2009) bears the unique status of a feature film commissioned and coproduced by the Louvre. The remaking of *Stray Dogs* as a site-specific exhibition continues this pattern of institutional collaboration.²⁶

Tsai considers such migrations of his practice as vital for not only his efforts to reach an audience, but also the very survival of the endangered medium of cinema. “It sounds like a contradiction, but movies need to leave today’s theaters to be resurrected,” he states.²⁷ The contradiction embedded in his statement finds an echo in the director’s career trajectory. After announcing his retirement from filmmaking in 2013 at the Venice International Film Festival, where *Stray Dogs* received the Grand Jury Prize, he entered a period of intense productivity, making short films for web distribution such as *No No Sleep*, experimental documentaries like *Afternoon* (2015) and *Your Face* (2018), and VR films like *The Deserted* (2017)—bearing out the idea that withdrawing or taking leave might be a strategy of perseverance and continuation. Tsai’s comment, from a 2010 interview, anticipates a claim made by Casetti a few years later, that “it is precisely this *relocation* of the experience that allows cinema to survive.”²⁸ Apichatpong has expressed a similar view while comparing cinema to one of the beings in his films, entities that do not die but rather reincarnate in new forms. Just as the phantom will never

disappear, continually transforming itself, so “cinema also has been transforming itself,” he observes, undergoing its own process of resurrection and reincarnation.²⁹ “I attempt to transform cinema by taking it outside of the theater,” says Apichatpong.³⁰ Leaving the theater, the moving image discovers another life in other environments and in reconfigured formations. In the cinema beyond cinema, Balsom writes, the medium becomes “other to itself,” the stabilized structure in which its components adhered breaking apart, such that it shatters “into a multiplicity of attributes that separate, recombine, mutate, and enter into aggregate formations with other media.”³¹ In the creation of a reimagined circadian cinema, the resurrection of cinema is staked upon an appeal to somnolence, thus also breathing new life into a familiar figure from the history of narcotic reception.

Stray Dogs at the Museum and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* call to mind a recent phenomenon that Pamela Lee terms “lying in the gallery,” referring to the recurrence of cushions, beanbags, sleeping bags, and other horizontal platforms in contemporary art spaces.³² Such arrangements often appear in combination with video installation as an integral component of the work, as in the example of Korakrit Arunanondchai and Alex Gvojić’s *There’s a word I’m trying to remember, for a feeling I’m about to have (a distracted path toward extinction)* (2016), which enjoins its viewers to sprawl on giant custom-made beanbags. Along with this increasingly common reclining format, *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* also partake of the marathon lengths that have become something of a blockbuster trademark in cinematically inspired installation art. For instance, *24 Hour Psycho* (Douglas Gordon, 1993) and *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, 2010) have prompted some venues to organize around-the-clock viewings that push the very premise of opening hours to a self-canceling extreme. Such ultra-long works surpass the capacity or desire of the majority of viewers to sustain their attention—and when exhibited alongside valuable art objects requiring oversight, also strain the limits of a humane working schedule for museum employees. Their display comes with the requirement of night shifts, imposing upon museum guards the schedule of the shift workers who bear the brunt of adjustment to economies untethered from the limits of the body. In this regard, the exhibition and viewing of twenty-four-hour installations conform with 24/7 as a regime of “continuous work and consumption,” recalling Jonathan Crary, without breaks and indifferent to the need for rest. Indeed, as Lee observes, *There’s a word I’m trying to remember* and similar works do not generate relaxation or even a minimal degree of comfort. Despite their recourse to the domestic accoutrements of lounging and leisure, they reflect a condition not of idleness but of work—and specifically, a contemporary “technics” that renders the place of work as ubiquitous as the computational networks that constitute its infrastructure, such that the “work-place” becomes “flattened, rendered horizontal, everywhere.”³³ Lying in the gallery is part and parcel of a late capitalist 24/7 order that overrides the divisions between labor and leisure, exhausts free time, capitalizes horizontality as “productive space,” and hastens the end of sleep.³⁴

If twenty-four-hour installations register a prevalent regime of labor—and of looking as laborious and belaboring—they also reveal the limits and contradictions of this regime. Taken to such lengths, the time of the work dissolves into a time of indifference, signaling the wholesale abandonment of any expectation of beginning-to-end viewing. For this reason, their durational extremity can be read as a harbinger of the final conquest of the coherence of the time-based work by the fractured and mobile glance that now constitutes the inescapable condition of the contemporary viewer. In recent debates about spectatorship, the contrast between this desultory unbounded glance and the traditional perspective of the seated filmgoer, who is locked into one position in space and a prescribed duration of time, has frequently been marshaled in a manner that resuscitates familiar attentional hierarchies. On the one hand, some have celebrated the exit of the moving image from the theater as a liberation of the viewer from their stupor, affording them a newly mobilized, self-directed posture.³⁵ The passive filmgoer is held up as the negative counterpart of the active gallery viewer. On the other hand, others draw a parallel between the viewing formats of the gallery and dominant modes of visual consumption, both offering the visitor a menu of options to sample and navigate at will—like a window shopper strolling the streets or the user of screen-based media scrolling through an endless array of windows.³⁶ Considered from this angle, the movie theater comes to embody a refuge for temporal coherence, a sanctum for perceptual unity amid a dominant culture of ubiquitous distraction, and one of the few remaining places where viewers can access an active (rather than merely reactive) mode of “sustained perceptual engagement.”³⁷ Uniting these opposing readings is a recruitment of well-worn binaries—active versus passive, concentration versus distraction—in the effort to map the temporal and spatial displacements of the moving-image experience.

Koepnick points out that, as processes of migration and mutation continue apace, less and less “does it make sense to consider a viewer’s sense of fixity or mobility, or distracted or contemplative viewing, as an automatic key to a work’s meaning and politics.”³⁸ The old schemas fail to impose a clear order upon a landscape of changing practices and uprooted encounters. Indeed, Tsai and Apichatpong’s reimagined circadian cinema drives home this point. It neither stages the extinction of cinema, transforming the audience’s experience into something that can no longer be recognized as part of the latter’s history, nor seeks to restore cinema to its original condition. While temporal linearity does not wholly set the terms of the viewer’s perceptual experience, neither do these works entirely divest from duration as a way of structuring this experience. *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEEP CINEMA HOTEL* immobilize their audience and install them within a duration of viewing by methods even more extreme than those available within the traditional auditorium. It is precisely by leaving the movie theater that Tsai and Apichatpong realize even more radically the idea of a machine for oblivion, literalizing the metaphor of cinema as a cave of sleep and dreams. But at the same

time, their goal is not to improve on the theater as a dispositive for the capture of the spectator's complete attention, thereby fulfilling an ideal of total absorption and perceptual unity that was only ever partially attainable in the film theater. Even as *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* extract from their audience a commitment to stay for the long haul, they simultaneously relinquish any claim to its undivided attention and release it from the expectation of continuous looking and listening. And rather than recasting a 24/7 technics of work in the domain of exhibition, reconstituting reception in accordance with the nonstop "functionalities of non-human apparatuses and networks," these projects stage the interruption of such functionalities by the body's biorhythms.³⁹ Besides a posture of flatness, the experience of these works takes shape in a temporal frame that amplifies the tensions between continuity and discontinuity, laboring and letting go, attention and inattention.

Paradoxically, this circadian cinema breaks the spell of absorption by means of the very techniques long relied upon to consolidate this spell. Beckoning the viewers' bodies to a comfortably supine position and lulling them into inertia, it brings them to the point described by Christian Metz of a slippage of consciousness, in which the spectator's orientation breeds peculiar states of disorientation. The recumbent audience, reminded even more of the darkness of the bedroom, will likely find the onset of narcosis all the harder to resist. Or if physical ease does not suffice, additional reinforcement comes from the passage of time. While the latter has always conspired against the filmgoer's restlessness, enabling gravity and darkness to weave their cocoon around the body, the circadian cinema extends into the nocturnal hours when drowsiness readily comes to the aid of languor. *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* fold cycles of sleeping, dreaming, and waking into the experience of reception. Besides the durational ambitions of the blockbuster installation, they evoke a history of overnight film exhibition that ranges from the all-night Times Square movie theaters frequented by Weegee to the outdoor screenings that brought movies to rural audiences located afield of the networks of theatrical exhibition throughout East and Southeast Asia. Being open to the air, such screenings began with the setting of the sun and proceeded through the night. Ingawanij has described the "durational expansiveness" of Thailand's itinerant makeshift open-air cinema—beginning with the wait for darkness, extending into the early hours, and provoking "the body's susceptibility to intensities of temporal rhythms." These screenings did not end conclusively so much as trail off gently, crossing a point "when the number of human bodies around the screen dwindled and those still remaining in the space may have already drifted off."⁴⁰ A similar elongation and intensity would be sought by the avant-garde filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos for his grand opus *Eniaios*, an eighty-hour-long cycle of films exhibited in portions every four years on a mountaintop in Arcadia. Called the Temenos, a Greek term for sacred sites, the event refers to the temples of the divine physician Asklepios where the afflicted would come to spend the

night and sleep “in order to dream their own cure.”⁴¹ Markopoulos conceives his cinema as a strain of incubation, a consecrated slumber that readies the sleeper for divine visitation and healing. As Rebekah Rutkoff recounts, “Markopoulos drew a line around a generous field in the creation of *Eniaios* and the Temenos, one that included not only his projected film reels but the place and the journey and every register of time, including sleep.”⁴²

To recall Kracauer’s formulation, at any moment during the viewing of a film, absorption might give way to abandonment. The potential for involuntary responses and reveries to come to the fore, for the viewer’s stream of thoughts to start to peel away, is omnipresent in the situation of projection. But the overnight format of circadian cinema escalates the fluid interplay between absorption and abandonment by providing it a generous field, a larger zone in which to unfurl. It heightens the mental drift that was always an intrinsic part of moving-image spectatorship. More than a mere reflection of contemporary developments that make an anomaly of the theatrical experience of moving images, these projects emphasize the historical endurance of dispersive, fluctuating forms of attention in the sphere of spectatorship. They magnify the irregularities and interferences that have always impinged upon the ideal of perfect attentiveness. In this regard, *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* challenge the schematic contrast between the immobility, fixity, and absorption of the theater and the interactive, mobile, and distracted spectatorial practices of the postcinematic era.

The strategies pursued by Tsai and Apichatpong hearken back to earlier aesthetic explorations of deviant spectatorship, both within and beyond the sphere of cinema, and provoke a consideration of their relevance for present-day transformations of moving-image reception. To resume a point from the introduction, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* resonates with a lineage of avant-garde performance in which prolonged duration gives rise to a mode of reception to which Richard Schechner refers as “selective inattention.” The audience participates in such events by giving their attention to the performers, turning away, conversing with their neighbors, pausing for refreshments, or taking a nap—all of which, Schechner notes, amounts not to “ignoring the performance” but rather “adding a dimension to it,” not expressing indifference to the event but rather evoking additional ways of valuing it.⁴³ To illustrate his point, he turns to the example of Robert Wilson’s twelve-hour-long opera *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, staged in 1973 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In addition to stretching from the evening until the following morning, the presentation included a space adjacent to the theater dedicated to breaks for socializing and refreshment, which was available to the audience continuously throughout the performance. Likewise, *SLEEPCINEMAHOTEL* included a similar type of space connecting to the main exhibition hall to which visitors availed themselves for eating, drinking, and hanging out during the run of the installation. The pattern of wavering attention elicited by the project thus took shape around a host of cravings—for food, drink, and conversation,

in addition to the urge to sleep—with the intersubjective exchanges thereby generated becoming as much a part of the experience of the work as its audiovisual content. Here, as in *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, the “social end” of the exhibition was as important as the “aesthetic end.” In *Stray Dogs at the Museum*, too, the sleepover events linked the aesthetic component of the museum show with a structure of experience that included eating, storytelling, and live musical performances.

Closer to the time of Schechner’s writing, selective inattention was explored in the arena of film by Andy Warhol, also in concert with long viewing times. Apropos of his five-hour-and-twenty-minute-long film *Sleep*, Warhol said, “It’s a movie where you can come in at any time When people call up and say, ‘What time does the movie start?’ you can just say ‘Any time.’”⁴⁴ Jonas Mekas, who operated the camera for *Empire*, Warhol’s notorious eight-hour-long film of the Empire State Building, wrote of this work, “The Author won’t mind (he is almost certainly encouraging it) if the Viewer will choose to watch only certain parts of the work (*film*), according to the time available to him, according to his preferences, or any other good reason.”⁴⁵ The extreme length, static camera set-ups, and minimal action that have come to be seen as hallmarks of Warhol’s filmmaking are not simply aimed to drag the audience to the nadir of boredom, Justin Remes has argued. Rather, they redirect the energies of the audience away from the screen—back to themselves, their environment, “the people next to you,” and whatever responses these might provoke. As Warhol said of his films, “You could eat and drink and smoke and cough and look away and then look back and they’d still be there.”⁴⁶ What these works pursued was not a trial of the viewer’s stamina and patience, as is often assumed, but instead, Remes writes, “a distracted, fragmentary, and unfocused mode of spectatorship.”⁴⁷

Did they succeed in this pursuit? Writing about the first screenings of *Sleep* at the Film-Makers’ Cinematheque (one of New York City’s premier experimental film venues in the 1960s), Stephen Koch reports that in this forum, the film was greeted by viewers game for its provocation. “At the early screenings, audiences came forewarned, intending to make an evening of it. People would chat during the screening, leave for a hamburger and return, greet friends and talk over old times.”⁴⁸ Other accounts, however, describe reactions to the film’s unusual spectatorial contract that include rejection, bafflement, and even violent rage—including one from a Los Angeles theater where *Sleep* played in the year of its release.⁴⁹ The premiere of *Empire* in New York City was likewise met by an angry mob, as Mekas recalls.⁵⁰ And while the passing of time has brought increased attention to Warhol’s films, along with sharper critical insights into his moving-image practice, this has not necessarily impacted the way his films are shown. In fact, the now mythic status of these early works has pushed selective inattention even further out of reach. A public screening of *Sleep* that I attended in 2019 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, organized in conjunction with its retrospective of the artist,

transpired entirely in a frozen reverent silence, broken only by a small scattering of self-conscious whispers and restless stirrings. The film drew a small but committed group of attendees, most of whom stayed until the end. The effort with which they trained their focus on the screen produced an atmosphere of palpable tension, at odds with Warhol's own casual stance.

The audience's conduct (myself included) owed much to the manner in which *Sleep* was shown—projected on a large screen in its original 16mm format, inside a completely darkened gallery filled with tiered rows of seats, with a designated start time and a separate ticketed entry. The museum eschewed the commonplace exhibitionary practice of transferring Warhol's films to video in order to play them on monitors or digital displays on a continuous loop, within light-filled spaces designed for ambulatory viewers. In its commendable fidelity to *Sleep* as a work of celluloid film, however, the presentation also betrayed the spirit in which it was meant to be received. The arrangement of the screening space not only prompted the attendees to comport themselves as if in a regular theater, but also introduced yet another set of behavioral codes specific to the museum, with its security scrutiny and strict prohibitions on consumption. The audience, far from being free to meander in body and mind, was ultimately pinned down at the intersection of two disciplinary dispositives.

Watching *Sleep* in this way prompted me to fantasize about more hospitable circumstances in which the multivalent reception envisioned by Warhol might be accessed. As well as being a cinematic work of its own, *SLEPCINEMAHOTEL* could serve as the prototype for an ideal viewing environment for films like *Sleep*, *Empire*, or even Warhol's rarely screened twenty-five-hour-long **** (*Four Stars*) (1967). While Warhol himself never drew a connection between *Sleep*'s primary subject and the viewer's potential response, this connection was explored in the 1997 installation *Sleep with Me*, by the artist duo Bik Van der Pol. The installation consisted of a 16mm projection of *Sleep* in its entirety during the overnight hours in an exhibition space in Duende, an independent artist cooperative in Rotterdam, outfitted with 30 beds. *Sleep with Me* executes a reinterpretation of the original work in the mold of circadian cinema, an intervention reframing the film as an event. Describing the reactions of those who attended, Liesbeth Bik recalls, "They didn't sleep immediately. At first there's this kind of excitement, reminiscent of youth hostels and puberty, maybe even erotic excitement. All the beds and the floor are occupied." And then after a while, "you only hear snoring and the rattling of the film projectors transporting the celluloid." This, Bik states, "is sleeping together . . . as well as experiencing that film."⁵¹ As in *Stray Dogs at the Museum* and *SLEPCINEMAHOTEL*, the sleepover installation lays the groundwork for the withdrawal of the viewers' attention. At the same time, a heightened situational awareness emerges from this collective scene of slumber, taking shape across its unfamiliar proximities, affective transferences, and charged relationality. Like Tsai and Apichatpong, Bik Van der Pol turns to sleepy spectatorship to intensify cinema's dynamics as a situated social experience.



FIGURE 67. *Sleep With Me* (Bik Van der Pol, 1997). Duende, Rotterdam. Photo by Bob Goede-
waagen. Courtesy of the artists.

Looking beyond the realm of galleries, museums, and film festivals to that of commercial film exhibition, one might well imagine experiencing *Sleep* in an environment that replicates the pleasures of watching movies in bed. In 2015 CJ CGV, South Korea's largest multiplex cinema chain (and the fifth largest in the world, operating more than 3,800 screens in seven countries), introduced Tempur Cinema, appointed with reclining double beds and pillows instead of seats. If the darkness of the theater is “like that of our bedrooms before going to sleep,” then why not transform the theater into one giant bedroom and advertise this as a luxury viewing experience? The strategy is but the logical extension of a move toward slouchy spectatorship that began some time ago with the adoption of over-size reclining armchairs by upscale movie theaters, anticipating the inclinations of the indolent filmgoer described by Barthes and enticing them with the comforts of the bourgeois interior.⁵² As the sleepy spectator exits the movie theater to enter a wider array of viewing spaces, so a reverse invasion transpires, with the horizontal affordances of the domestic sphere becoming a feature of theatrical exhibition. Weegee's assertion that movies are better than ever—a good place to eat, sleep, and make love—continues to prove its viability among contemporary exhibitors, factoring into their business models. For global high-end theater chains like CJ CGV or the Mexico-based Cinépolis (the fourth largest exhibitor in the world), the idea of an audience completely at home with the film fuels a multiplication of marketing strategies and distinctive viewing environments. Implied in these

strategies is a recognition that the differentiation of the shared public space of cinema—achieved with the aid of architectures of horizontality and enclosure, in combination with tiered levels of cost and exclusivity—might well be the very key to the movie theater’s financial survival. As Juan Llamas Rodriguez observes, “In the consumption-based era of cinema, it is not the film that determines viewership, but the material, affective, and technical conditions of its exhibition.”⁵³ With its diversionary comforts, Tempur Cinema might very well elicit the disdain of the purist cinephile. Nonetheless, its affirmation of filmgoing as a “communal social experience” shares in the vision of reception advanced by the artists and filmmakers discussed above. With changes in spectatorship come a scrambling of the aesthetic hierarchies that have traditionally structured the landscape of cinema.⁵⁴

Schechner locates selective inattention in the realm of live performance, as a mode of reception that manifested in American postwar avant-garde theater and music while also reflecting this particular sphere’s absorption of influences from South Asia and other parts of the world.⁵⁵ The circadian cinema of Tsai and Apichatpong demonstrates the viability of this mode of reception in contemporary global cinema and moving-image art, another sphere in which the coalescence of regionally specific and avant-garde practices has engendered novel experimental approaches. Their embrace of selective inattention in the context of moving-image exhibition can be tied to a growing recognition at the turn of this century of cinema itself as a performance, defined by immeasurable contingencies as much as by predictable mechanical reproduction, constituted by the doings and undos of the viewer as much as by invariable structures.⁵⁶ The postcinematic era, in which so little of what cinema is can be taken for granted, paves the way for a sharper understanding of public spectatorship as more than merely the synchronized perception of prerecorded sounds and images. What is shared by the audiences of the works discussed above is not exactly the “experience of the work” in this strict sense, but rather what Schechner terms “the experience of experiencing it.”⁵⁷ Circadian cinema realizes an open-ended idea of spectatorship, unfolding in an expanse of time that serves as a capacious container for a panoply of states of attention, doing, and being. Transpiring concurrently with the projection, these become intrinsic elements of the unreplicable experience of experiencing it.

In the circadian cinema, an audience comes together in order to come apart. Held together tightly in a space and time, viewers are simultaneously pulled in different directions by their specific wavelengths and rhythms, each one following their own drift. With sleep comes the insight that the scene of collective reception is structured less like Epstein’s funnel than like a sieve—gathering together and dispersing in the same gesture, much like sleep itself. The sieve describes a loose, uneven web that knits the audience together in a relational matrix of proximities, gaps, and asynchronies. As essential as the “finely judged proximities” that constitute the shared experience of cinema are the “irreducible distances” that splinter this experience into a multitude of contingencies.⁵⁸ Sleep is uniquely capable of

conveying this form of experience insofar as it evokes detachment and participation, radical solitude and radical mutuality, in equal measures. As much as the act of sleep entails a withdrawal from one's self and surroundings, as Emmanuel Levinas observes, it also involves a seeking after and reestablishment of contact; "sleep always proceeds from . . . from the preexisting 'relationship' with a base, a place."⁵⁹ It consists in a closing that is also an opening, a detachment that is also a reattachment, and, for this reason, folds the social into the solitary, always implying a relation to a place and to other people. The audience that sleeps together thus captures the sense of a permeable whole, of a plurality that adheres in its anonymity, internal differences, and checkerboard inconsistency, within a space that feels both private and public. It is at the edges of sleep where cinema's collective takes shape.

As the momentum of technological transformation reaches new thresholds, concerns about the loss and disappearance of a beloved object compound. At the turn of the third decade of the twenty-first century, these concerns were compounded by the closure of movie theaters, along with other public spaces of gathering, during the lockdowns precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For some independent exhibitors, like the ArcLight Cinemas in Los Angeles and the Castro Theatre in San Francisco, the financial strain of this temporary interruption of regular programming led to more permanent closures. If the business model of the movie theater has long confronted threats from the conveniences of home viewing, from television to video recordings to streaming platforms, the pandemic situation has entailed a sudden acceleration that brings into clear view that which awaits on the other side of imminent disappearance: a future of wholly privatized consumption wherein movies, data, and material goods circulate freely while the most privileged consumers rarely leave their homes. Perhaps more than ever, the category of spectatorship falls under the shadow of what Hansen terms "cynical celebrations of corporate communication" (see, e.g., the technology journalist Kara Swisher's op-ed entitled, "Sorry, We Aren't Going Back to the Movies").⁶⁰ And cinema is pulled ever closer to the brink of the irretrievable loss of its core character as a mass medium, one that involves "the audience as collective, the theater as public space, part of a social horizon of experience."⁶¹

But even as cinema keeps changing, we can still hope for its survival, Casetti insists, as long as the need for the experience of cinema endures.⁶² Tsai and Api-chatpong's circadian cinema makes a bid for the survival of cinema as a communal experience, refusing the future heralded by the triumph of the 24/7 digital economy, and it does so without prescribing in advance the relational forms this experience can assume, in full recognition of the ephemerality and unpredictability threading through the social horizon of spectatorship. The audience that sleeps together embodies cinema's potential as a shared activity with a public dimension—that is, as a potential rather than a secured reality, or as a capacity promised, wished for, and yet to be completely realized or exhausted. In its porous collectivity, this audience exposes the speculative character of the filmgoing

public, which is at once known and unknown, to borrow Jasmine Trice's formulation, "both imagined and empirical, an object of contemplation and imagination."⁶³ Sleep carves out a way forward in the face of uncertainty, and it conserves an assurance that something will remain to answer to the need for experience. Closing our eyes, we place our trust in the film and in cinema, resting in the conviction that it will still be there when we awaken.