

# 2 THE INSTANT AND THE DARK

## Cinema's *Momentum*

We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristic of the reality, we only have to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself...we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside ourselves.

—Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*<sup>1</sup>

And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out, for she could not remember ever having seen such a thing.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*<sup>2</sup>

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Cinematograph. One still image appears on the screen, a more or less faithful photographic record or reference of some past instant, but before this luminous projection has time to become visible as such, as *still*, it disappears. Masked in darkness for a brief interval, it is replaced by another instantaneous photograph, which also vanishes before being seen for what it is. Repeated for some time, this process produces the “moving” image of film. The difference between each still frame and its predecessor—a temporal distance, as it were—implies a continuity of movement between them, but relies on one’s ability to see movement in

<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Holt, 1911), 306.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Penguin/Signet Classics, 1960), 24.

a succession of intermittent snapshots, or as Henri Bergson famously called them, “immobilities.” As such, the film image does not simply appear; its movement appears by disappearing into those unphotographed moments, or intervals, between successive photographic instants. The image disappears in order to appear, pushing the logic of appearance beyond its logical limits. To see movement in the film image is to *see* the failure of a certain vision’s rationale: an image that gains visibility only by slipping perpetually out of sight, into the dark.

It is, in a manner of speaking, common knowledge: a spectator sits in the dark for about forty percent of a film’s time. This dark time is significantly reduced compared with film’s early days, when the projector’s shutter was closed for about half the time; technical refinements have all but eliminated the visible flicker so intimately linked with early cinema’s hypnotic effect. If every casual spectator is also an expert, as Walter Benjamin once suggested—that is, if everyone knows how the apparatus works—then what everyone *knows* is that what everyone sees is precisely what never appears up there on the screen. Those “empty” intervals between frames, far from empty, carry all of the film’s movement. To be made into an image, movement remains uncaptured, unwritten, and thus, photographically speaking, illegible. The (a)visuality invoked by the film image cannot be located in the light; “knowledge,” defined as a moment of illumination, is improper to the cinema. Illumination and enlightenment find their logical limit as instantaneous snapshots which bracket, but can never simply visualize, cinema’s moving image.

In order to make light of cinema’s dark interval without, properly speaking, shedding any light on it, this article places the concept of Bergsonian duration alongside what might be considered its definitive antagonist, the photographic instant. “Duration” names one kind of time: a definition inherently tied to an ability to think *over time*, for extended periods of time—the quiet, undisturbed, meditative time so valued by the classical philosopher. But it is an expression of time which mourns a certain lost space, its nostalgic tone just barely perceptible beneath the ahistorical and universalizing posture of Bergson’s prose. His eloquent argumentation rides on extensive, sustained strings of oppositional logic, defying easy summary; his writing endures and demands enduring attention—vigilance, a willingness to keep one’s eyes open. It defies the kind of brevity emblemized by the instantaneous photograph and mobilized by the rapidly blinking shutter of the *cinématographe*. Bergson favors the *long* time. He disdains the *short* time, that is, any conception of time that allows for the disruption of duration’s flow. Bergson cannot accommodate

any time other than *the* time, uninterrupted duration, though ironically the (photographic) instant, having gained visibility and a sort of factual *status* in the photograph, must have been one of the necessary material conditions of his philosophy. If time's visibility is a particularly urgent subject at the beginning of the twentieth century, Bergson remains dark about its timeliness.

Unlike Bergson's writing technique, the technique of the *cinématographe* calls for gaps; it necessitates blinking. For the moment, we can draft cinema's temporal formula, all-too abstractly, as such: an instant in the light plus a moment in the dark, or in other words, successively captured views of visible space intertwined with unseen moments of duration, change. This time in the dark is never captured, never graphically bound, and thus boundless: pure now. Cinema's eloquent claim on contingency rests *here, in the dark*, not up there on the screen in any of its constituent snapshots. In order to be shown something, we are asked not to see the projector's bursts of darkness; by recognizing them, we get a glimpse of cinema's time(s), its invisible moment, movement, *momentum*.

### Immobility.

The film image could not spring into motion until the ability to produce photographic "immobilities" had been established. As Bergson puts it, cinema's technique is "to take a series of snapshots...and to throw these instantaneous views on the screen, so that they replace each other very rapidly."<sup>3</sup> In his most explicit model of human perception and thought, "we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside ourselves."<sup>4</sup> We misunderstand time, he insists, when we insist on treating it the way the cinematic apparatus treats movement. His concept of duration is meant as a corrective, suturing the idealist standpoint (concept of time derived from the idea of succession, itself derived from an originary succession of ideas) and the realist, mechanistic approach (time as figure, component of the physical universe, reducible to numerical terms), both of which make the fundamental error of *spatializing* time. Bergson argues that time cannot be fully understood in mechanistic terms because number and succession are inherently spatial categories.<sup>5</sup>

In his two volumes on cinema, Gilles Deleuze revives Bergson to articulate a uniquely modern philosophy. In Deleuze's terms, ancient philosophy attempts to think the eternal by way of an ancient illusion about reality: time defined according to movement composed of "ideal poses." By contrast, the project of modern philosophy must be to think the new by way of a mod-

<sup>3</sup> Bergson, *C.E.*, 306.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Bergson begins developing this argument as early as 1889, in his essay *Time and Free Will*, and continues to develop it most extensively in his 1896 publication, *Matter and Memory*.



<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Bergson, *C.E.*, 272.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> This term, *pousée*, seems directly from the language of turn-of-the-century psychology, most specifically Freud. Bergson makes clear that “memory” should not be reduced to conscious memory: “Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse [*poussée*].” *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* For the complete version of the argument on memory, see Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, chaps. 2 and 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. (Italics in the original).

ern illusion, one which constitutes movement of “immobile sections” or “any-moment-whatevers”:

When one relates movement to any-moment-whatevers, one must be capable of thinking the production of the new, that is, of the remarkable and the singular, at any one of these moments: it is a complete conversion of philosophy. It is what Bergson ultimately aims to do: to give modern science the metaphysic which corresponds to it, which it lacks as one half lacks the other.<sup>6</sup>

Thought is best understood not as interior, but rather as *continuous* with the “aggregate of images” that makes up a Bergsonian reality (or rather Deleuze’s Bergsonian reality, that is). Concrete duration names a time which is neither entirely interior nor exterior, and strives to treat it in non-spatial terms: qualitatively, not quantitatively. Bergson himself defines his work as a “philosophy which sees in duration the very stuff [*l’etoffe*] of reality.”<sup>7</sup>

There is, moreover, no stuff more resistant nor more substantial. For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances.<sup>8</sup>

Bergson considers memory to be the operation by which duration is made possible: “as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation.”<sup>9</sup> Memory holds our whole past at every moment in the present, but cannot be regarded as “the faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer, or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer; there is not even, properly speaking, a faculty, for a faculty works intermittently, when it will or when it can, whilst the piling up of the past goes on without relaxation.”<sup>10</sup> For practical purposes, we make use of memory by suppressing most of our past and allowing only the bits of it that are useful now, in the present, to be thought, but Bergson insists that we function at all times with the “impulse” [*poussée*]<sup>11</sup> of our entire past. The present contains a thrust, a push from the past which is *continually* creating it. Memory does not function like a series of diary entries—available for reference when needed—because such a function logically implies a distinction between the present and the past. In Bergson’s metaphysics, the present is no more than the fattening up of the past; memory is always working, always present.<sup>12</sup>

Bergson goes on to explain that although the past is not inscribed as memory, memory does need to be accompanied by a certain kind of perpetual recording: “*Wherever anything lives, there is,*

*open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed.*"<sup>13</sup> And this "registering" of time is meant to be taken literally, for to treat it as a metaphor (which, Bergson claims, is what mechanistic thinking does) is to deny time its effective reality. Deleuze's theory of film, of the possibility of a movement-image and a pure time-image, stems almost entirely from the suggestion of this register's openness. But how are we to understand this register? Is it a kind of writing? Bergson treats it as a fundamental component of life: the living being "manifests a search for individuality, as if it strove to constitute systems naturally isolated, naturally closed."<sup>14</sup> He contrasts this "natural" tendency, the qualitative process of organic life, with activities of the quantitative kind: "all that our perception or our science isolates or closes artificially."<sup>15</sup> The kind of inscription Bergson wants to articulate is one which remains open, one which changes in every moment, engaged in an organic process in which the only stasis (or closure) to speak of is the perpetual impossibility of stasis. If memory's registering is a form of writing, it is one that disappears as it is written: an inscription that depends, in order to be registered at all, on its propensity to change continually into what it is to be next, to remain ever unfixed. A register implies a precision and diligence that writing does not necessarily demand. Living is perpetual motion; stasis and immobility are incompatible with life. Although time cannot simply be reduced to space, it nonetheless may be granted the status of inscription and of *stuff*, because the living being endures. Time's registration depends on the organism's duration: one has to *endure* in order for change to be registered. It is essential to keep in mind that for Bergson the term "change" does not apply to inanimate objects by themselves. Objects in space only change, move, or age if some living, ever *vigilant* being endures through the change.

Bergson's term "organic memory"<sup>16</sup> lends weight to duration and offers a corrective for abstract time. "There is no instant immediately before another instant; there could not be, any more than there could be one mathematical point touching another."<sup>17</sup> By implication, empty intervals would have to exist between such abstract instants; these suffice for the mathematician and the clock, but in order to endure, the living being needs a "connecting link" by which to traverse them. "In other words, to know a living being or a *natural system* is to get at the very interval of duration, while the knowledge of an artificial or mathematical system applies only to the extremity."<sup>18</sup> Concrete time passes during the interval between "extremities," those points that divide spatialized time. Duration fills the interval between instants.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22-23.



<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 305.

The problem of time's peculiar materiality finds a particularly strong articulation, again around the question of the instant, in the fourth and final chapter of *Creative Evolution*, where Bergson introduces his analogy with cinema. By the time of *Creative Evolution*'s publication, the *cinématographe* had already been in existence and public use for over a decade. As Bergson understands, its technique is "to take a series of snapshots...and to throw these instantaneous views on the screen, so that they replace each other very rapidly."<sup>19</sup> The problem with the cinematic apparatus is that it appears to make movement, impossibly, out of immobilities. Bergson locates the mistake in the intermittent mechanism that drives the camera and projector, and makes a cohesive case for the generic quality of the moving image. However, Bergson's critique has a conspicuous blind spot, leaving out the problem of the snapshot itself. The very technology which first freezes the instant in order to build time in cinematic terms falls out of Bergson's discussion of the cinematic apparatus.

In reconciling Bergson with the cinematic apparatus, Deleuze claims that films allow us to think in a new way, and moreover that films can think for us, *before* our eyes and in active continuity with perception and thought. Deleuze finds it easy enough to embrace the snapshot, since he sees an enormous potential in building (perfectly continuous) duration out of "any-moment-whatevers." Bergson does not find it so easy. Instantaneous photography presents a formidable challenge to his philosophy of duration because it seems, very persuasively, to have concretized the abstract time of the instant, thus further dematerializing duration. Of course, what the snapshot records is not in fact abstract instantaneity, but rather a kind of time—brief time—which undermines the philosopher's contemplative duration.

### Exposure time.

On a somewhat more pragmatic level, the invention of instantaneous photography dramatically expanded the purview of the photographic technique in general. Having been limited to long exposure times until the late 1870s, many early photographers felt they had been working with a technology that had not quite been invented yet. Phillip Prodger, in his recent publication on Eadweard Muybridge, has shed much needed light on the subject. He maintains that instantaneous photography emerged from a concerted "movement" within photographic circles, spurred by a shared aspiration to freeze the motion of life, to capture and archive unimaginably minute instants in time.<sup>20</sup> As Prodger points out, William Henry Fox Talbot expressed such a desire very early on, in 1839:

<sup>20</sup> Phillip Prodger, *Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography of Movement* (Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA: Oxford University Press with the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford University, 2003), 25.

The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our “natural magic,” and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy.<sup>21</sup>

Despite having named his process “photogenic drawing” only two months earlier, here Fox Talbot dreams of capturing shadows, not light; to be precise, however, this shadow has less to do with darkness than with the action of light. It is the shadow’s ephemerality, its status as the shape of light’s momentary absence,<sup>22</sup> which makes it the ideal emblem for the ultimate aim of photogenic drawing and photography. Just as the shadow indexes the material body which temporarily *blocks* light, the photograph indexes the body which momentarily *reflects* some part of the visible spectrum of light. In the latter case, however, the sign remains fixed, “fettered,” arrested as image, and thus becomes legible. The technology of photogenic drawing, then, aims for a paradoxical quarry: that which reflects light while simultaneously acting like a “shadow.” To the inventor of this “natural magic,” nature could no longer be addressed merely as visible material, but as material in passing, and to make nature into a picture meant evacuating its transience, removing it from its definitive temporality.

But Fox Talbot writes of fixing the “single instant” somewhat prematurely. At that time, his chemicals’ limited photosensitivity dictated long exposure times. It would be at least three decades before any photographer could successfully fetter the most fleeting plays of light and shadow—but not for a lack of desire to do so. In an 1840 report on the Daguerrotype to the French senate, scientist Jean-Baptiste Dumas applies the word *instantanée* to a photograph, perhaps for the first time, though he allows for a “twelve- to fifteen-minute exposure.” The Daguerrotype’s biggest selling points, as a competitor for Fox Talbot’s method, were the relative permanence of its image—the Daguerrotype would not fade in the light—and its shorter exposure time, which was a short-lived selling point, since the Talbotype would soon outdo it by far. Neither technique, however, would ever be capable of freezing the most “fleeting and transitory” of things.

In 1869, still without a practical solution to the problem of instantaneity, Sir John Herschel coins the term “snapshot” to describe what he calls a “dream”: the photographic representation of “any transaction of real life.”<sup>23</sup> By 1871, Stephen

<sup>21</sup> William Henry Fox Talbot, “Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing,” *London and Edinburgh Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* 14 (March 1839); reprinted in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 41.

<sup>22</sup> Sir Walter Scott uses “shadow” in this sense in his April 17, 1828 journal entry, not coincidentally linking the ephemerality of shadows with the effect of a pre-cinematic horror show: “In this phantasmagorical place [London] the objects of the day come and depart like shadows.” Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 2. (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1890), 160.).

<sup>23</sup> Sir John F.W. Herschel, “Instantaneous Photography,” *Photographic News* 4 (May 1860); cited in Procter, 2003.



24 Stephen Thompson, "Instantaneity," *Photographic News* 15 (March 3, 1871), 102-3; cited in Prodger, 2003.

25 Only a year after Thompson wrote his plea for instantaneity, Eadweard Muybridge began harnessing the bright California sunlight to make what were arguably the first instantaneous photographs. Because he was after one specific and elusive instant, Muybridge's technique employed a line-up of twelve cameras; the result was not only the first snapshot, but also the first "protocinematic" series of snapshots.

26 Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," trans. P. Patton, *Artforum*, vol. 15, Feb. 1977, reprinted in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 202.

27 *Ibid.*, 204.

Thompson finds the words to express the "latent desire running through the minds of most photographers" for a practical solution to the problem of instantaneous photography:

At present we are confined, in great measure, to one aspect of nature only—nature in repose. The peaceful landscape, the stately ruin, on which time feeds like slow fire upon a hoary brand, are ours; but life, motion, and all its poetry; nature—living, warm, breathing, pulsating nature...not only her outward form, but her beating heart—lies just beyond our domain.<sup>24</sup>

Feeling "confined," frustrated, limited to making pictures of static, dead subjects, Herschel and Thompson aptly represent what Prodger calls the "movement" to capture the instant. Photography seems destined to be able to arrest that "aspect of nature" that involves action. To take Herschel's term, *transaction*—perceptible movement across framed space—articulates "real life."<sup>25</sup>

Such a definition of life differs significantly from the one traced by Walter Benjamin in his "Short History of Photography." Looking back at portrait photography from the first few decades of photography's existence, Benjamin feels a loss; he sees something that disappeared upon the appearance of instantaneous photography. Long-exposure photographs possess what he recognizes as a "breathy aura" derived directly from the time of exposure—that unique period of time during which the photographer leaves the camera's lens uncovered to soak in the light reflecting from a specific place. Though carefully composed, such photographs compel the viewer to look for "the tiny spark of accident, the here and now," because the duration of exposure has made itself part of the image:

In such a picture, that spark has, as it were, burned through the person in the image with reality, finding the indiscernible place in the condition of that long past minute where the future is nesting, even today, so eloquently that we looking back can discover it.<sup>26</sup>

No matter how meticulous the photographer may have been, a degree of pure and voluntary presence shows through. There is something magical, Benjamin suggests, in the resulting picture: it preserves a *moment*, a unique duration in space and time, never repeated, but still alive as a piece of time full of all the possibilities of the here and now, where "the future is nesting." He continues:

The lower sensitivity to light of the early plates made necessary a long period of exposure in the open. This, on the other hand, made it desirable to station the model as well as possible in a place where nothing stood in the way of quiet exposure...The procedure itself caused the models to live, not *out of* the instant,



but *into* it; during the long exposure they grew, as it were, into the image.<sup>27</sup>

It does not satisfy Benjamin to say that these pictures merely re-present some period of time; rather, they effectively *preserve* some of that time as present; it has never completely disappeared. An instant passes only once, but can *wait around*, provided that the patient photographic apparatus takes the time to let it burn through the subject. Writing in 1931, Benjamin may be channeling an older definition of the “instant”—pre-snapshot, pre-cinema—for here, it seems able to last some time. In the picture, an instant passes only once, but can leave itself behind as material, substantive, a section of duration that *waits around* because the photographic plate persuaded it to.

Benjamin is not alone in his appreciation for long exposure times. Writing in 1874 of her portraits of great men like Tennyson, Darwin, Browning, and the above-mentioned Herschel, British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron insists on the goal of capturing something immaterial:

When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavored to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man.

The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer.<sup>28</sup>

Cameron does not use “prayer” figuratively; she writes of a time spent in quiet awe: “When I have had such men before my camera.” Her camera opens its shutter to receive light, an emanation from the subject. Between the uncovering and re-covering of the camera’s lens, the photosensitive plate records not only the external, superficial image of the man’s “features,” but also the man’s interior “greatness.” It is the intimate duration of exposure, the time of a prayer, which allows the man’s soul to burn itself into the picture—photograph as *a substantial period of time*. In other words, time passes and something profound takes place, and that place can be called a photograph. One might also call it a momentous occasion, as the relatively long duration of the exposure constitutes a *moment*, not an instant. One of the important ironies involved in capturing time this way is that the model does not move. Ideally, nothing moves. The long exposure photograph depends on the deathlike stillness of its subject in order to picture duration.

Cameron makes it clear that not all early photographers considered long exposure times a mere limitation. For Cameron, as for Benjamin, that time represents photography’s link to the soul, the source of the picture’s “aura.” Benjamin sees early photography’s

28 Julia Margaret Cameron, “Annals of my Glass House” (unfinished book), in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 184.



<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, "A Short History," 204.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 204.

obsolete material conditions ("the lower sensitivity to light of the early plates") as the secret to its "magical" ability, and he draws a correspondence between those conditions and their historical moment. The long-exposure photographs of the 1840s, by their unique ability to endure and, effectively, *to picture duration*, "can be sharply contrasted to the snapshot";<sup>29</sup> they recall an age that has passed and a certain kind of person "whose disappearance was certainly one of the most precise symptoms of what happened to society in the second half of the century—even the folds that a garment takes in these images persists longer."<sup>30</sup> Instantaneous photography would come along to emblemize and reflect what was new about the second half of the nineteenth century. The snapshot "corresponds to the changed environment"<sup>31</sup> in which time would be characterized by the fraction of a second rather than the quiet, carefully composed, and eminently *lived* time of duration. The people in those early portraits have disappeared, not only because they have passed away, and not only because their era has come to an end, but also because of the *fact* of the pictures themselves. The obsolete technique of long-exposure portraiture makes visible the obsolescence of the world it

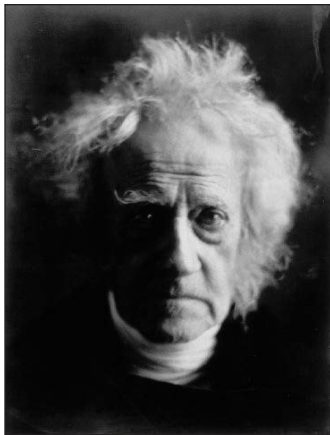


Fig. 1: Portrait of Sir John Herschel by J. M. Cameron Henning.



Fig. 2: Hill and Adamson's calotype of John Henning.

captured. In a sense, the function of these photographs amounts to the production of obsolescence, the final passing away of duration itself: that “long period of exposure in the open” that cannot be found in modern life but *can be seen to have passed*.

By “in the open,” of course, Benjamin means outside, in the sun, “where nothing stood in the way of quiet exposure.” It is noteworthy that he chooses to look at the famous calotypes by Scottish painter David Octavius Hill and his partner Robert Adamson (fig. 2)—pictures taken in a cemetery: “quiet exposure” made possible in a place where time can be felt passing in the quietest of ways, where duration takes on its eternal quality. The “open,” exterior space of the cemetery serves to articulate the abstraction that Bergsonian “duration” secretly performs on time—for Benjamin, as for Bergson, the ability to grasp duration requires a quiet space where undistracted contemplation and *stillness* can take place.

What these two writers share most strongly is their concern over what Leo Charney has called the “hollow presence” of modernity, a presence which disdains and thus devalues the intervals between cinema’s instantaneous snapshots. Analyzing the significance of “the moment” in modern thought, Charney echoes the nostalgia that permeates Benjamin and Bergson alike:

Modernity’s empty, invisible present expanded into a new art [cinema] composed of a series of empty, invisible presents. These moments were stitched into continuity by the viewer’s activity, itself interior and invisible inside the viewer’s body.<sup>32</sup>

Charney locates the film image’s movement, perhaps correctly, within the spectator, as affect or “moving experience.”<sup>33</sup> However, to characterize the present as “hollow” and to consider the intervals between film frames “empty” misses the definitive *exteriority* of cinematographic vision. As I will argue, it amounts to a failure to recognize the disappearance, up there on the film screen, of movement as such.

Characteristically, Benjamin displays a certain degree of ambivalence over the seemingly vacated present emblemized by cinema. While he mourns the loss of the “long time,” that is, quiet exposure time, he also sees that its disappearance accompanies the demise of a certain technological/aesthetic elitism and the corresponding rise of the crowd, of the masses. “Uniqueness and duration are as closely entwined in [the original work of art] as transience and reproducibility in [the reproduction].”<sup>34</sup> Those old photographic plates get their aura from the “unique appearance of a distance, however close at hand,”<sup>35</sup> which they make possible.

I would contrast the “appearance of a distance” with the

<sup>32</sup> Leo Charney, “In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity,” in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 292.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, “A Short History,” 209.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

appearance of the instant, and correspondingly, the disappearance of duration. In a manner of speaking, distance has started to vanish, or at least, the ability to imagine a distance between the observer and the visible world. As Benjamin suggests, this disappearance marks the beginning of the end of a Quattrocento regime of vision, of linear perspective's ability to picture stillness: the distance of the vanishing point as an argument for the immutability of space through the passage of time. The snapshot, if it engenders a new way of seeing, replaces enduring distance with transient instants.

### **Instantaneity and *momentum*.**

The instant is unsettled, impatient, nervous. The Latin root *instare* suggests a degree of urgency: to stand upon, press upon, urge; to be present, at hand. As a noun, "instant" refers to a single point in time, "an infinitesimal space of time" (*Merriam-Webster*, 11th edition), that is, a non-expanse of time, time with no duration. The instant can only be figured in spatial terms, but at the same time it defies spatial categorization because an infinitesimal space is no space at all, an abstraction from the idea of space. The instant presents itself as that which has to go. It appears by having disappeared all too quickly, and only in its passing can one say it has arrived—that is, until the appearance of the snapshot.

In the long history of the concept of instantaneity, a surprisingly "cinematic" definition of duration comes from John Locke, fully two centuries before the snapshot or the cinema. Locke posits that we get our understanding of duration from the succession of our ideas that is, primarily from the perpetual "train" of ideas that appear and vanish in our minds, and only supplementally from our direct perception of movement and change before our eyes. In Locke's formulation, the idea takes on the character of the snapshot or the single frame of film. He puts forth a definition of the instant, clearly inspired by the military technology which makes a certain kind of perception possible:

Let a cannon-bullet pass through a room, and in its way take with it any limb, or fleshy parts of a man, it is as clear as any demonstration can be, that it must strike successively the two sides of the room: it is also evident that it must touch one part of the flesh first, and another after, and so in succession: and yet, I believe, nobody who ever felt the pain of such a shot, or heard the blow against the two distant walls, could perceive any succession either in the pain or sound of so swift a stroke. Such a part of duration as this, wherein we perceive no succession, is that which we call an instant, and is that which takes up the time of only one idea in our minds, without the succession of another.

<sup>36</sup> John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XIV: "Of Duration," #10 (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 26.

er; wherein, therefore, we perceive no succession at all.<sup>36</sup>

Locke's instant describes the time of the idea, the time of the *shot*, suggesting a lineage from the cannon shot to the snapshot. It resembles the photographic instant because both depend on the relative speed of successive events. A succession occurs, and thus a certain length of time passes, but because perception cannot distinguish between the events, they constitute but a single idea and they are perceived as instantaneous. The same is true in photography: if the exposure time is short enough not to let duration show in the picture, one can call the picture instantaneous.

Locke's time is built of a constant succession of such ideas or instants, which are bridged together by certain processes of the mind. In the end, his logical conclusion reveals one of measurable time's ideological conclusions; it is an argument designed to leave room for the existence of God. The claim that our perception of motion comes from our idea of succession (from the inside rather than the outside) serves the claim that the ideal is more real than matter. The material conditions of perception are subordinated to something higher. Materiality itself loses substance in this logic, producing a kind of space that assimilates and homogenizes time so that it cannot disturb the eternal changelessness of the divine. It is the ability to stand at a remove, a distance, and simultaneously to abstract time by placing spaces between instants, which allows one to experience Locke's time.

In light of Locke's ideal duration, Bergson's organic duration represents a clearly radical corrective for classic philosophy. According to Bergson's logic, the unbridged gaps Locke leaves between instants make the passage of time implausible. "Moment" helps emphasize time's *quality*. The moment, as opposed to the instant, offers an articulation of presence without violently abstracting the now from the flow of duration.

Etymologically, "moment" and "movement" are indistinguishable. The Latin *momentum* signifies a period of time—usually brief, always finite, never infinitely small—during which something happens: movement, impulse, a decisive stage. The moment suggests a now that is in flux, in movement. For Bergson, it describes a present that swells with the past that it *continually* becomes.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the instant, the moment endures long enough for movement to happen. But is the moment recognizable "in the moment"? Does it gain visibility during its time, or does it remain obscure until appearing in retrospect, in memory, as history? "The moment is dark," says Ernst Bloch. It can never be recognized during its time. "Only when the now has just passed or

<sup>37</sup> For further reading on the moment and *momentum*, see Heidrun Freise's introduction to *The Moment: Time and Rupture in Modern Thought* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 1-15. Also see Leo Charney, "In a Moment" (cited above), 279-294. Neither writer insists on distinguishing between "moment" and "instant," an oversight which the present argument endeavors to avoid.

<sup>38</sup> These passages from Bloch are translated by Freise and appear in *The Moment*, 11; orig. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, in *Werkausgabe*, V:2 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), 1154.



when, and as long as, it is being expected, it is not only lived (*gelebt*) but also experienced (*erlebt*). As long as it is immediately being, it lies in the darkness of the moment.”<sup>38</sup> In Bloch’s estimation, the moment serves as a unit of measure for the now—a now conceived as a certain length of time in the dark, a duration ended by its own illumination. As visual and visible, it takes on the character of the *event*, either pre-conceived or retroactively defined; but more profoundly, this event passes unseen.

To be clear, the problem of the moment, of presence, is not merely a matter of distinguishing the immediacy of sensory data and the retroactive application of cognition or understanding. The now begs the question of *life*. One finds the definition of presence stumbling into foreign territory, where the act of definition has no place; presence is the property of duration, which defies the innate discretion of language and other means of figuring. Even with the shockingly present image projected by the Lumières’ *cinématographe*, presence becomes comprehensible, perceptible, visible, only in its immediate illegibility. Of course, it is necessary that cinema’s constituent images, a plurality of snapshots, be made visible, but these do not become cinematically visible until they also disappear.

### The most patient spectator.

In the film image, the moment inhabits the darkened interval between frames—it disappears. By contrast, each individual frame of film, each instantaneous snapshot, stands in for the instant. Though it is a tentative formulation, we can begin to see the “empty” interval as the film’s *momentum*, where the movement happens, materializing Ernst Bloch’s now, which is to say, darkness. The cinematograph makes use of its persuasively concrete “instants” to bracket the unseen moment/movement that passes between them. Added together (very rapidly), these two components produce the moving picture.

Contemporary photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto resurrects the art of the long exposure photograph to solicit a remarkably productive conversation between the photographic image and the film image. For his photographs of movie palace interiors and drive-in theatres (both of which stand for a vanished architecture), he situates the camera in the back row, just beneath the projection booth, and leaves the shutter open for the duration of a film screening. Centered in the image (e.g., fig. 3), the film screen appears as a pure white rectangle; beyond its edges, the details of the theatre’s décor appear, exposed by the countless bursts of light that have bounced, intermittently, off of the

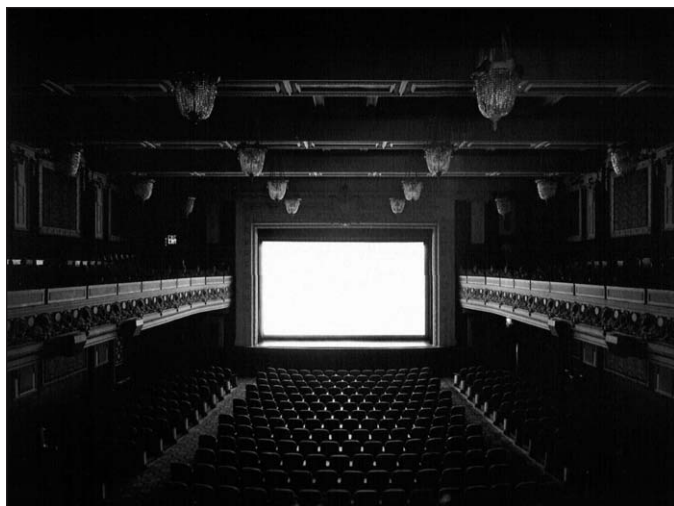


Fig. 3: Hiroshi Sugimoto, "Regency, San Francisco, 1992."

screen. Sugimoto's still camera, the most patient of spectators, has watched the movie. Its memory seems perfect, as if it has recorded faithfully the film's cumulative content, that is, the film's *light*.

A question emerges, however: what has happened to the intervals between frames? Where have they gone? The light captured by Sugimoto's camera represents only about sixty percent of the film's *time*. The rest of the time, unilluminated, does not appear in the picture. Of course, light is what acts on a photosensitive surface. It is photography's metaphysics: light arrives and inscribes itself, irreversibly, while shadow is passive, already there; darkness remains only as negative space left unexposed in the event of light's absence.

Is the spectator indistinguishable from Sugimoto's camera, sensitive only to the light? Do those unlit moments, the intervals which bear the film's undeniable *momentum*, add up to anything? They most certainly make an appearance, but cinema's fundamental illusion depends on our incapacity to see them (or our capacity to *not* see them, as it were). And yet, there they are, smuggling along with them all of the unseen movement, pure contingency, that constitutes the cinematograph's eloquent claim on time.

What happens in the dark? According to Deleuze's Bergson, the interval is the stuff of subjectivity. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson names two facets of human activity: perception, which is the "master of space," and action, the "master of time"; but he posits a third kind of activity, which accounts for the gap between the



<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema* 1, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>42</sup> Bergson, *C.E.*, 16. (Italics in the original).

other two: affection, which should not be considered subordinate to either perception or action. Deleuze's philosophy of cinema derives much of its thrust from this formulation, the proposition that there is an interval between perception and action, that they are non-contiguous participants in a continuum bridged by affection. "There is an in-between. Affection is what occupies the interval, what occupies it without filling it in or filling it up."<sup>39</sup> That the interval remains unfilled does not mean it is empty, but rather *open*. Affection, or the "affection-image," represents the absolute possibility always ready to be activated between one's ability to sense and one's ability to respond (or not). Affection "surges in the centre of indetermination, that is to say in the subject, between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action. It is a coincidence of subject and object, or the way in which the subject perceives itself, or rather experiences itself or feels itself 'from the inside.'"<sup>40</sup> If nothing else, one has the interval. Confronted with something "troubling," the subject can hesitate. The subject, a central point within an always-open, always changing continuum of images—perception-image, affection-image, and action-image—which Deleuze comes to articulate as a periphery or a horizon. The subject exposes itself to this world in perceptions and actions—perception, mechanically emulated by photography, and action, that desideratum of so many early photographers. But the subject also keeps something aside or "inside," in the dark: this cache of "affection," for when perception and action prove inadequate. The maintenance of oneself, as a "centre of indeterminacy," relies on the indeterminacy or openness of the interval. Cinema, for Deleuze (for Deleuze's Bergson), works according to the same rule, "because the mobility of its centres and the variability of its framings always lead it to restore vast acentred and deframed zones."<sup>41</sup> The spectator: a subject come to life in the interval, held together in the dark.

Back to Bergson: "*Wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed.*"<sup>42</sup> The darkened interval inserts itself somewhere (or sometime) between visible instants so that cinema's register remains continually open. The mechanism requires discontinuity not merely to fool the eye, but to take advantage of the darkness of the now. Again, what happens is that the image disappears to the viewer, becoming visible only after having appeared upon the screen. It makes its invisible mark and marks a shift from seeing what is *there*, illuminated and at a distance, to seeing what is *here*, in the dark.

