Untitled (*After Cinema*)

Work by Stefan Abrams and Edward R. O'Neill
Afterword by Mary Ann Doane

Edited by Aaron Levy

SLOUGHT NETWORKS

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Slought Books, Philadelphia
Emerging Artists Series

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Consultant: Sylvia Vance. Editorial Assistance: Alexi Kukuljevic, Andrew Zitcer. We gratefully acknowledge Osvaldo Romberg, who introduced Aaron Levy and Stefan Abrams, and the participation and guidance of the aforementioned individuals in realizing this publication through to its conclusion.

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.
Set in 9pt Arial Narrow.

Design by Sinder Design & Consulting, Philadelphia (http://sinder.org)

For further information, http://slought.net/books/

SLOUGHT NETWORKS
4017 Walnut Street
Philadelphia PA, 19104

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Abrams, Stefan.
Untitled (After Cinema) : Work / by Stefan Abrams and Edward R. O'Neill ; edited by Aaron Levy.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9714848-1-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Photography, Artistic. 2. Stills (Motion pictures) 3. Video recordings--Pictorial works. 4. Photography of interiors. 5. Photographic criticism. 6. Abrams, Stefan. I. O'Neill, Edward R. (Edward Robert), 1962- II. Levy, Aaron, 1977-
TR654 .A226 2001
770--dc21

2001005883

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Introducing Slought
Aaron Levy

This book, the first in the Slought Networks Emerging Artists Series, joins photographs by Stefan Abrams with texts by Edward O'Neill, Mary Ann Doane, and Aaron Levy.

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4017 Walnut Street, Philadelphia

To Look, At Nothing, With Longing

Aaron Levy

We often desire to be entertained the way a film entertains us, making ourselves the residual of cinematic life. We become our own audience and our own spectacle until cinematic life diminishes or events require that we depart.

In Woody Allen's "The Purple Rose of Cairo," cinema itself succumbs to the aforementioned desire. In the film, the beautiful if despondent Cecilia lures her suitor, Tom Baxter, off the screen. Although he ascribes his motivation to escape from cinema to his love for her, her love for him is dependant upon his inaccessibility. The movie closes with Cecilia fixated on the image of Fred Astaire, who is dancing on the screen. Her eyes glaze over, presumably with the affection and longing once reserved for Tom Baxter. Will Fred Astaire also escape the screen, submitting to Cecilia's provincial grandeur?

Photographer Stefan Abrams is more cautious in his relationships to cinematic life. In his Untitled (*After...*) series, he chooses cinematic figures that are neither easily imagined nor identified with. They appear forlorn to us, melancholic, and even unreal. Their heads are often turned away from ours; their eyes do not return our gaze. By choosing to avoid portraiture, he

forecloses familiarity: there is little possibility of seeing ourselves reflected in these photographs, whether framed by or superimposed on another figure. We end up as voyeurs, oddly detached from the photographs and distanced from ourselves.

Recall Christian Metz on voyeurism in cinema:

> It is even essential… that the actor should behave as though he were not seen (and therefore as though he did not see his voyeur), that he should go about his ordinary business and pursue his existence as foreseen by the fiction of the film, that he should carry on with his antics in a closed room, taking the utmost care not to notice that a glass rectangle has been set into one of the walls, and that he lives in a kind of aquarium.

Voyeurism requires an actor's indifference, his feigned naïveté. At times, this appears so genuine and real that we believe the actor should escape the screen, cinematic life encompass reality. In the movie, Baxter escapes so as to fulfill Cecilia's desire for intimacy. Sadly, he mistakes Cecilia's voyeurism as love for him.

In Untitled (*After…*), Stefan Abrams insures that such an escape does not take place. He uses architecture to hamper intimacy. The sparse architectural backdrop common to all his photographs underscores the loss of specificity, and our inability to find ourselves in them. And by freezing the moving image on the television screen, Stefan Abrams bypasses the commercial function: we are now dealing with the moving image only materially, because it has been made still. With this relationship severed, the character is left impotent. Unlike Tom Baxter, who can escape the screen, the characters in Stefan Abram's photographs cannot communicate with the viewer except as images stripped of identity.

We acknowledge these images as part of a domestic interior. Stefan Abrams uses his own living room as the backdrop for these profoundly detached photographs. Although a house can be construed as a theatre and a living room as a stage, these images perform for no one. They are playing to an empty house, a place stripped of intimacy. The interplay that ensues is between the inside and the outside, the familiar and the unfamiliar.

That there are no mirrors here, and that the window has been shuttered, suggests the many obstacles preventing the subject and object from simply exchanging places, from looking back at one another, from reversing roles. Even if nobody is looking through us or at us, one senses from all sides a compelling and ever-present gaze.

Theorist Beatriz Colomina has suggested, in regard to work by Adolf Loos, that architecture forms the grounds for our subjectivity. She writes: "Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant." Remarkable about Stefan Abrams' photographs is that the domestic interior produces a dynamic frame that draws us near the film still. By placing the frame within the photograph, by making the photograph the actual frame, we address the photographs and the still images as voyeurs. But the images have been made in part impotent; we can no longer entertain voyeurism in the same way that Cecilia once did with Tom Baxter.

If Stefan Abrams's photographs do not affect us as voyeurs, it is because they truly affect us as mourners. Film theorist Edward R. O'Neill suggests we are compelled by these photographs not on account of our recognition of or love for the figures these stories support, but on account of our observing in them the processes of memory and mourning. In "Anyway, It's My Journey to the End of Cinema," Edward O'Neill writes:

> If the power of Abrams's images do not depend upon our memories of the films whose single frames they mobilize, it is because rather than something being remembered in Abrams's series--like one remembers the steps of a dance--something is being interrogated *as a memory*, as something that will not live again in our bodies: cinema and photography as they were and may never be again.

Photographs register not just our lived experiences, but our absence from the experiences of others. What emerges from photographs of the past is what once took place, but what once took place may never be given to us again in the present. We are left with a haunting of presence, a sense of amnesia. At times, our only memory is of not remembering anything in particular.

Consider this statement: "I remember or I imagine and this hesitation irritates me." Here I articulate an inability to distinguish one memory from another, alongside fear of disowning the memory I never knew. But what if there is no clear difference between one memory and another? Just as one dreams each night to see again what has disappeared from life, to verify permanence, so too can photographs cover the absences in memory.

The historical tendency in photography to document the particular confronts work that abstracts the particular, notably Abrams's Untitled (*After…*) series. According to O'Neill, the process of abstraction is an aesthetic process:

> It was not enough that the photograph's social and historical referent was indisputably what it was: the photographic subject had to *look like* what it was. […] A President must look like a president, a bar of soap must look like a bar of soap. The particular had to be signified as general in order to be recognized and readable.

The history of photography struggles to accommodate abstraction, while the history of cinema struggles to accommodate both abstraction and expressivity. Should cinema strive for memorable, and therefore reproducible, images? Or should cinema resist this aesthetic fixation through its reticence? For O'Neill, the Untitled (*After…*) series resides within this divide:

> With this series a decisive break can be discerned in photography: no longer defining itself against but rather with cinema and video; no longer turned towards the novelty but towards history; no longer legible because closed in on itself but readable in the combinatorial of an open system; no longer a reaction but now a thought and a memory.

The Homeric verb *therkesthatai* - "to look, at nothing, with longing" - suggests nostalgia for a subject or object that no longer exists. Mourning becomes nostalgic when it imagines the past as incomplete yet present, when it overlooks particularities, fetishizing loss. Incomplete mourning, O'Neill reminds us, refuses to consign the image of the beloved to "a memory that will never be called to act."

Stefan Abrams's photographs are not nostalgic for the simple reason that they present us with forlorn figures that are not welcoming. By resisting our participation and our voyeurism, they close in on themselves. These photographs have acknowledged the past as past. *May we mourn these photographs completely....*

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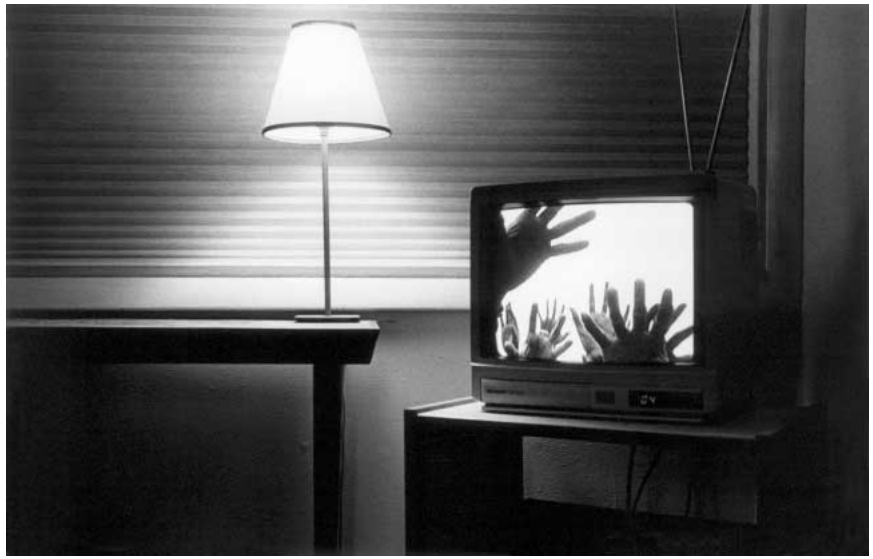
Untitled (After *The Diary of a Country Priest*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 in, 2001

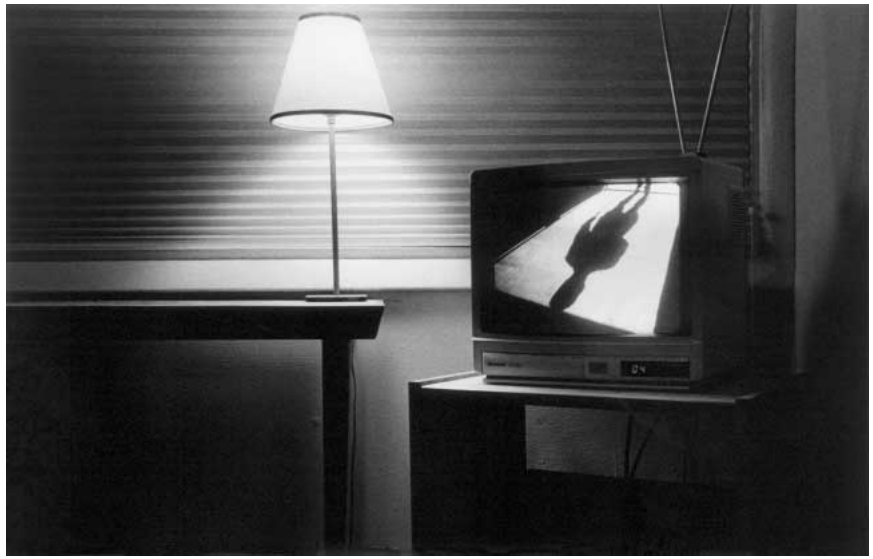


Untitled (After *Strike*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Battleship Potemkin*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Alphaville*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Strike*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001



Untitled (After *Hangmen Also Die*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Alphaville*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Battleship Potemkin*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *La Dolce Vita*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Masculin-Féminin*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Vivre sa Vie*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

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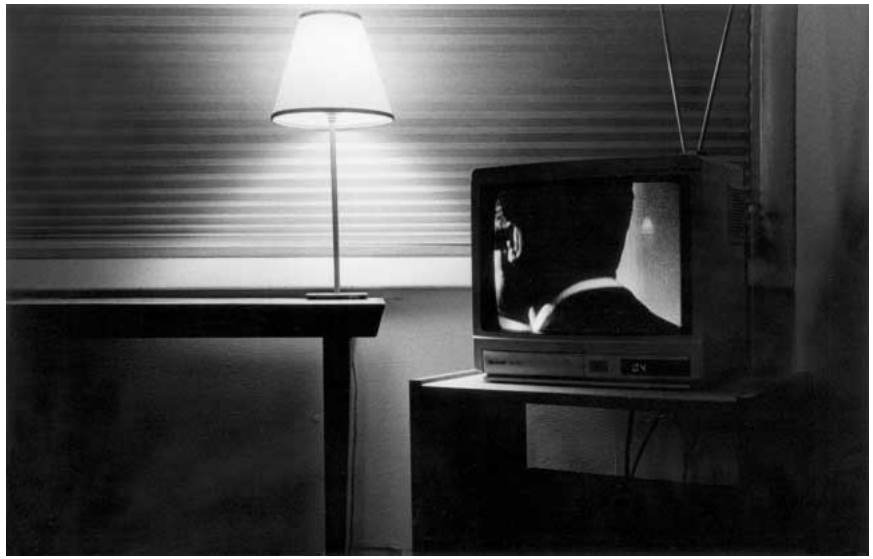

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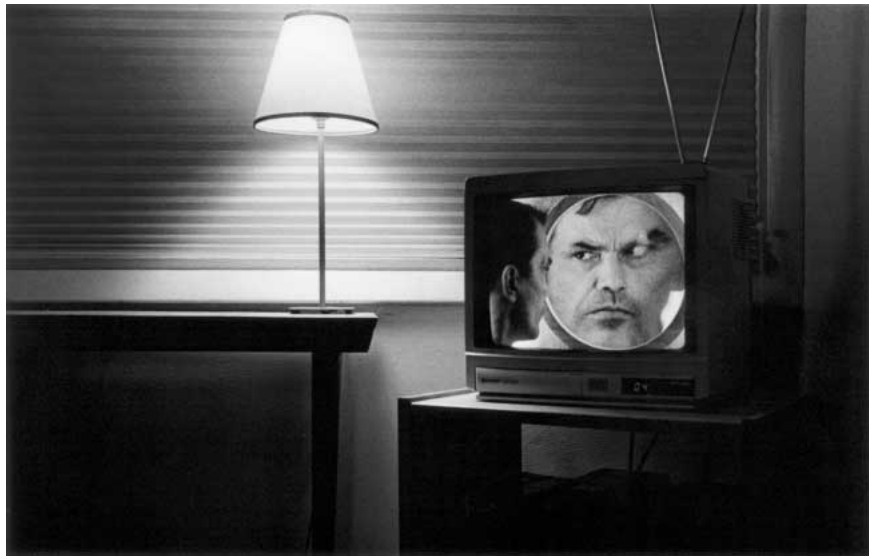

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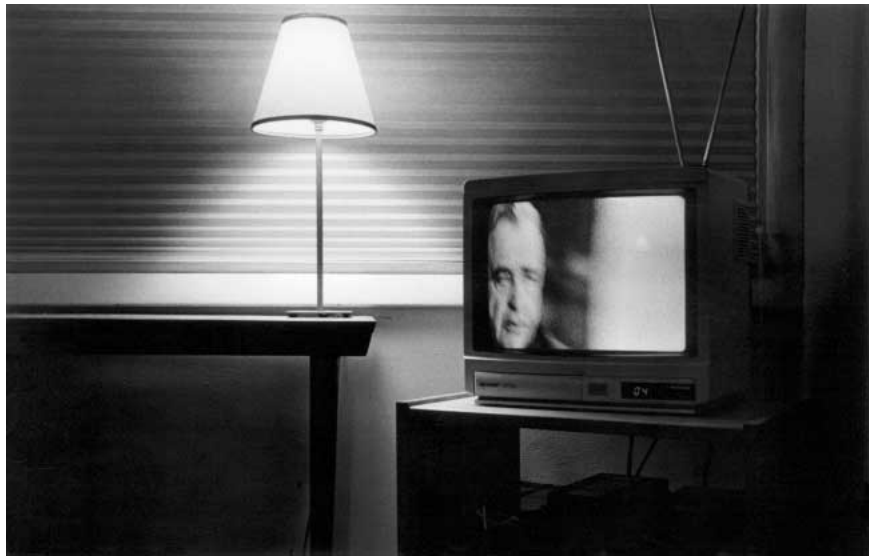

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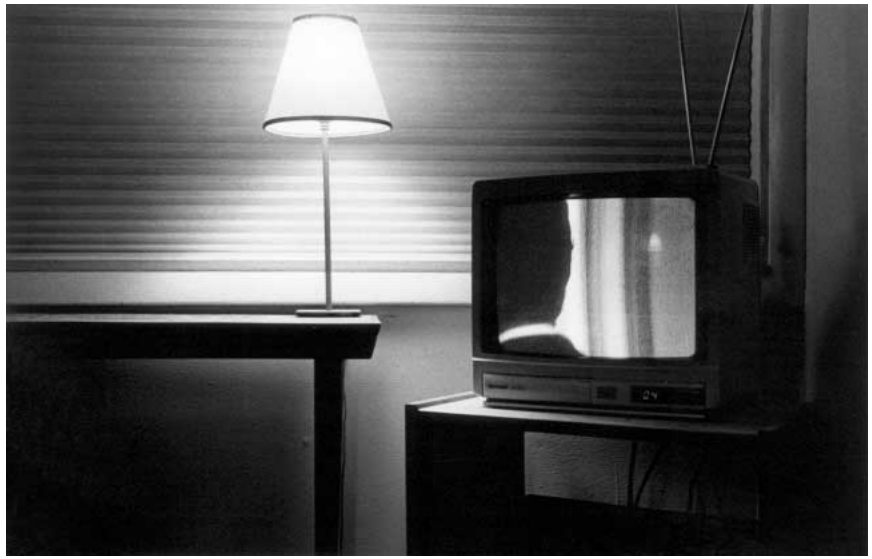


Untitled (After *La Dolce Vita*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

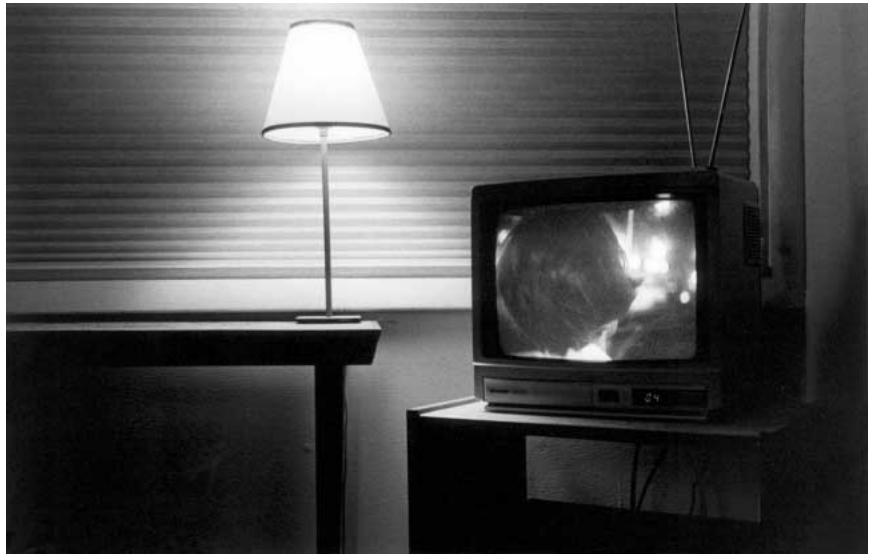
Untitled (After *The Diary of a Country Priest*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Vivre sa Vie*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Vivre sa Vie*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Vivre sa Vie*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Alphaville*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001



Untitled (After *Alphaville*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Battleship Potemkin*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *La Dolce Vita*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Alphaville*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

Untitled (After *Battleship Potemkin*)
Gelatin Silver Print, 4.5 x 7 inches, 2001

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La Dolce Vita, 1961, Frederico Fellini
Hangmen Also Die, 1943, Fritz Lang
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Battleship Potemkin, 1925, Sergi Eisenstein
Strike, 1925, Sergi Eisenstein
Diary of a Country Priest, 1950, Robert Bresson

It is not difficult to describe either this particular series of photographs by Stefan Abrams or how the photographs were made. These images do not at first beggar description.

Yet, what this description allows us to grasp is the way these images disrupt the ways we have understood photographs in the past: as an autonomous medium that documents frozen faces and events we recognize, while allowing us in a flash to perceive their meanings as clearly as if they had already been written in words.

We can easily enough recognize what we see in these photographs: we see a small segment of a room--part of a wall, part of a window. To the right, a television bearing an antenna rests on a low table. To the left, a lamp rests on a somewhat higher table. Where the lamp does not illuminate falls into partial obscurity. Behind the television and the lamp, blinds seal the window. It could be day or night --we don't know because the blinds are drawn.

After Cinema

Edward R. O'Neill

The fact that the study of film is undergoing a sea change at the historical moment when the digitalization of the moving image has dramatically transformed the production, storage, manipulation and dissemination of moving images cannot be accidental. These and other novel ways of using images cannot but affect the way we think about the image and its beholding, both in the cinema and more broadly in visual culture, and these technologies will force us to retrospectively re-think the study of cinema itself as a way of using images, a practice of cultural consumption. Whether our paradigms for analyzing films will be

The physical characteristics of the photographs are identical. Each is printed on 8" x 10" photographic paper. This is not a matter of economy but of choice: Abrams feels the images would be fundamentally different if they were larger. They are meant to be seen up close and not from a distance. The feeling is intimate not grand. The prints are not matted. Rather, an unexposed area of the photographic paper itself serves as a kind of matte that is part of the photographic print itself. The edges of the negative, sometimes included within the photographic print as a testament to the actuality of the composition as a product of shooting rather than printing, is omitted. (The prints have been minimally cropped so as to emphasize their visual similarities.)

Indeed, each individual photograph is, at first glance, nearly identical to the others. The differences seem marginal. The positions of the television and the lamp vary slightly, as does the amount of light and thus the degree of obscurity. Sometimes we can see more of the walls or under the tables, sometimes less.

Begun in September of 2000, these photographs were all shot under similar technical conditions. Instead of using the kind of 35mm single-lens reflex camera or a wide format camera typically used for studio photography under such controlled conditions, Abrams uses a small 35mm camera. This kind of camera does not have through-the-lens viewing and is typically used to capture fleeting moments from social life, whether family or strangers on the street. Due to the slow shutter speed, this typically hand-held mechanism for recording instantaneous

superannuated or whether they hold clues to new forms that criticism might take when aesthetics has confronted information will depend on the extent to which we re-think art as a way of knowing after information models have transformed the way we perceive images.

The sea change of which I speak centers on the shifts in emphasis from film studies to what has come to be called cultural studies. In the paradigm that at least partially dominated the former field of study, the structure of the cinematic apparatus and the form of the cinematic

images is used on a tripod. A relatively wide aperture (f/5.6) limits the depth of field of the space, while the relatively long shutter speed (1/8th of a second) captures three or four tracings of the same image as it is projected onto the television screen at 30 fields per second. The long shutter speed yields a greater intensity of light on the television screen than the surrounding room and erases any scan lines from the video image-lines which would be disclosed by a shutter speed of 1/30th of a second. (Shorter shutter speeds capture only a partial tracing of a single video field.)

Abrams pauses a videotape player to retain only a single video field. The camera's shutter does not select one instant from an ongoing duration. Rather, the mechanism of the videocassette player performs the operation of stopping one duration--the flow of the moving image--to creating another--the duration of the television tube's repeated re-tracing of the single video field. What seems to be an instant thus itself contains a duration: multiple tracings of a beam of electrons across the phosphors of the television screen.

From the flow of the movie's time, Abrams captures the smallest recordable segment of this duration: a still image which is not itself a part of the cinematic experience, even if it is familiar outside the screening room from the paratextual apparatus that surrounds cinema, such as publicity, academic analysis, cinephilia.

text were understood as codes that dominated the viewer. Cultural studies, by contrast, gives greater power to the text's consumer and subordinates the codes that control meaning to the uses to which texts are put. Such a shift is fundamentally consonant with the way information technologies present themselves not as meanings to be interpreted but tools to be used.

In confronting a potentially ungovernable multiplicity of uses while lacking the dominating power of a paradigm of beholding or the coercion of the individual by a shared code,

In each photograph a different image is being traced upon the television's screen, but differences amongst the individual photographs, small and great, do not yield any simple chronological or ideational sequence or tell any story. Nor does this series have precise borders. Sometimes it includes another still from Eisenstein, sometimes another from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. Other times one or another may be missing. Nor is the series finished. Abrams may re-shoot certain images, zeroing in on a certain short passage from Godard's *Alphaville* and shooting every single video frame of that segment. Or he may extend the series to include new films, new filmmakers, new images.

The images may be familiar or not. There are faces--some famous and recognizable, some not, some brightly lit, others cast into shadows--and, harder to recognize, backs of heads. There are hands, eyes, legs. There are landscapes. Some moments are so well known as to be iconic: Eisenstein's raised revolutionary hands, victims of oppression, sailors; Anna Karina's face in *Vivre sa vie* or *Masculin/feminine*; Marcello Mastroanni's face (or half of it) or Anita Ekberg in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*; Bresson's titular pickpocket or country priest. Others are more obscure but easily recognizable to the specialist or cinephile in the context of other stills from the same films: the back of Anna Karina's head or her shadowy profile; the back of Mastroanni's neck; a distorted vision of Lang's Dr. Mabuse; Bresson's titular Mouchette. Other images are further deprived of identifying features: tranquil, shimmering water (from *Potemkin*); a body in a forest, reduced to a blur, its gender even unrecognizable, rolling down a hill (from *Mouchette*).

cultural studies have tended towards a descriptive ethnography that is not burdened with excessive theoretical armature. But in its desire to replace the paradigm of textual analysis in film studies with ethnographic description, cultural studies has missed the possibility of discerning clues to where the future of the study of film might lie by examining textual analysis as itself a practice of consumption and a way of structuring data.

If cultural studies would take credit for acknowledging the freedom of the cultural consumer,

All of these images are brighter and more alive than the dim and bleakly minimal decor of that familiar but here depopulated and anonymous American domestic landscape, where the time of watching unfolds as its own private practice.

In all events, Abrams provides the titles of the films even when they provide no clue as to the story or meaning of the images: Untitled (After *La Dolce Vita*), Untitled (After *Mouchette*), Untitled (After *Potemkin*), etc. The titles of the films are strangely irrelevant, since the images exercise a strange power over us. Whether figures are depicted or not, whether figures look away from us or towards us, the power of these images is distinct from a knowledge of or ability to remember the story which these images support when the film unspools before us. Recognizing what we see or knowing its name is not intrinsic to how we are compelled by these images.

If the power of Abrams's images do not depend upon our memories of the films whose single frames they mobilize, it is because rather than something being remembered in Abrams's series--like one remembers the steps of a dance--something is being interrogated *as a memory*, as something that will not live again in our bodies: cinema and photography as they were and may never be again.

this mantle could only be assumed by ignoring the fact that this theoretical movement was initiated within an earlier paradigm. Namely, it was Roland Barthes's shift from the concept of work to that of a text that gestured towards the possibility of the negotiated liberty which cultural studies has not ceased to promote even when that liberty does not throw into question the concept of the code and the social coordination which that code betokens.

For Barthes, the work is an achieved entity, whereas the text is the result of work, the work

of codes whose play produces and is produced by the movement of the text. While the author finished the work, the text makes and unmakes itself and is perpetually unfinished. But if the codes whose play constitutes the movement of the text are no longer the same kind of codes which guarantee the text's meanings, the significance of the difference evaporates when one no longer grants theoretical weight to the concept of the code. Even if Barthes's language makes the text the agent of this act of production, the possibility is already there for giving agency to another entity, the consumer, and for producing an ethnography of the uses

part 2.

of a text, much as Barthes did in his descriptions of his own processes of reading. But when agency passes to the reader, the concept of a shared code which could support communication was displaced in a fashion whose theoretical consequences cannot be drawn when theory has been abandoned in favor of description. Barthes himself repeatedly appealed to distinctions which would permit the specification of the reader's part in the production of meaning, even when this specification derails his semiological project.

Given that Abrams is allergic to most of the chemicals used in photographic processing, the move back to photography after painting for several years could hardly have been a whim. Abrams's turn away from photography signals a rejection of most of the values inherent in the traditions of art photography, and his turn back to the camera by way of cinema and the video screen similarly signals an attempt to contest not only photographic traditions but also certain aspects of cinema.

Although carefully composed and of great formal beauty, Abrams's work bears little resemblance to dominant trends in art photography. This lack of resemblance is confirmed by the two key differences. One the one hand, there is little sense that we are beholding a documentation whose composition adds a formal grace, a purity of which resembles that of a theorem, even while hinting at a narrative which may be half obscure but is nevertheless capable of being rendered in words without much difficulty.

Abrams does not document sociohistorical *milieux* like Eugène Atget, August Sander, Dorothea Lange. Although carefully controlled and precise, the series does not make of its subjects the kind of pure forms Edward Weston wrests from a pepper or a cabbage leaf. Nor do we find the kind of formalized intersection of specific worlds and symbolic meanings that one sees in the France of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, and Robert Doisneau, or the New York City of Weegee.

First, in Barthes's synthesis of semiological concepts emerging from structuralist literary poetics, the contrast between the shared code of a sociolect and the more peculiar, individualistic code of the idiolect played no great role, since, in the wake of French sociology and anthropology from Durkheim to Mauss to Levi-Strauss, the object of analysis could only be assured of objective status if it were shared. But as Barthes examined photographs, he came to grant an increasing role to that kind of reading which escaped the social pressure of shared codes and culture. Barthes' encounter with the photograph and,

On the other hand, Abrams's series does not turn to a social space that we easily recognize: neither to a street scene, nor towards the public sphere of well-known historical figures. If we recognize some of the faces from Abrams's series, they are not as social types but only because we have already encountered these very public faces at the cinema or in our own livingrooms. The faces encountered here are neither particular individuals nor social types but images already reproduced.

If it seems strange to us that photography should turn to cinema for inspiration, our own surprise depends on a conception of photography as autonomous, as distinct from and even antithetical to cinema. Abrams's movements away from and back to photography contests a division of labor which has defined photography in relation to painting on the one hand and cinema on the other. Our belief in the autonomy of photography as a medium and an art, despite the celluloid stratum it shares with cinema, seriously distorts the history of photography by occluding the process by which photography attained what was until quite recently the condition it held until Abrams's Untitled (*After…*) series.

According to a familiar narrative, photography, like other modern arts, achieves its identity when it breaks its ties to other arts--painting, for instance--and finds within itself the truth of its own medium. While this narrative has the virtue of reproducing a romantic myth of autonomous self-production, understanding artistic media as materially distinct has ceased to make sense to our contemporary world of interoperability and data translation.

more narrowly, the film still, marks exactly the limits of a certain critical project in which codes make it possible to name shared meanings rather than opening up a space of play which prevents the closure of meaning and begets a theory no longer predicated on interpretation.

Examining stills from Eisenstein films, Barthes theorized an obtuse "third" meaning. This was neither a literal denotation, nor a figurative connotation, nothing obvious or stable that could fall under the rubric of communication and signification. The third meaning is rather a

In retrospect, the appearance of photography's specificity was dependent upon its negotiated truces with both painting and cinema. Photography did not find itself so much by escaping painting as by accepting the figuration increasingly eschewed by modernist painting and with it a labor of documentation. It ceded duration to painting and cinema in favor of a conception of photography devolving on the temporal and informational characteristics of *instantaneity* and *novelty*: an originary series of impressions of a minimal segment of time.

Painting would relinquish to photography figuration through the capture of historical details, whether particular or general, instances or types. Instead of documenting history, painting would become the historical event itself. Modern paintings cease to be "about" history: they *are* history. They do not denote the world but make up a part of it and refer to themselves as such. Painting was also granted the power to encompass duration, since however narrow the slice of time denoted by a painting, the painting itself as an object in its own right always implies the duration of its making. Photography, by contrast, effaces the duration of its production except in the fetishization of its nuanced gradations, the perfection of its detail and the hours in the darkroom they bespeak. (That is, photography effaces duration except as time translates into money.)

Duration was relinquished both to the older art of painting and to the newer art of cinema so that photography could invest itself in a succession of *novel instants*. The apparent simplicity by which cinematography could record duration left to

meaningful point--not a meaning at all--whose "meaning" could not itself be named. This point of attachment "simply *designates* [or points to] what one loves, what one wants to defend: an emotion-value, an evaluation." (59) (Later, in *Camera Lucida* Barthes would find a similar but not identical contrast in photography between what he called the *studium* and the *punctum*.) It is not accidental that Barthes found such freedom in the still image, the photograph as an independent object or the celluloid emulsion as the material substrate of the cinematic moving image, since for Barthes the still image frees the reader from the constraint

photography the task of recording instants. (If there has never been a full-blown theory of the film still, it is because cinema avoided acknowledging its own dependency upon stasis.)

The conception of photography as instantaneous owes something to the fact that photographic technology could, with the emergence of more sensitive films and faster lenses, be produced by a reflex action that is at once mechanical and physiological, a reflex action which outpaces our ability to perceive. The decision of when to take a photograph is as fleeting as the moment of time the photograph captures.The photographic apparatus becomes one with the physiological reflexes that set it into motion: it plugs into the circuit between the photographer's eye and his hand. Henri Cartier-Bresson's search for "le moment décisif" implies in part precisely this combination of mechanical and perceptual-physiological reflexes.

The *novelty* of the photographic image, by contrast, depended upon the way the reproducibility of this image and its ontological status as a physical impression or trace of the physical world granted photography a documentary and commercial value for mass communication. The possibility of automatically producing ever more physical impressions and reproducing them widely made the photographic recording of instants at once necessary and essentially disposable. Every new recorded instant demanded to be replaced by another--to be made old.

of a screen time which is narrative, linear and logical: "The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time (which is only an operational time); it teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific[ally] filmic and which is the 'indescribable' meaning." (68)

The word that an ethnographic form of cultural analysis would skip over here is "indescribable." Why is the still image, whether torn from the flow of a film or from the pages

Hence, the quasi-mechanical, quasi-physiological instantaneity of the photograph, the minimal duration it staked out against both cinema and painting, together with its reproducibility, gave rise to a massive volume of images that imposed upon photography additional burdens. For it to be an art, photography was forced to accept what it could retain against cinema and painting, instantaneity and a documentary value, while resisting the disposability to which the possibility of and need for ever more photographs consigned it.

In addition to technical and mechanical considerations, photography as an art form emerged under a set of aesthetic and economic or institutional conditions which shaped it so thoroughly that it is still difficult to do anything with photography that does not fall within the same configuration. The aesthetic conditions were a formalism of abstract or 'pure' shapes, towards which photography could aspire against its mechanically-assured realistic tendencies, and the influence of surrealism, whose syntax and semantics could also help photography construct itself as more than mere documentation.

The imperative of the marketplace drafted photography to facilitate the mixed exchange of information and commodities, information about commodities and information as a commodity. Thus journalism could employ photography to document local social and historical worlds either for explicit political ends or under the pretense of journalistic neutrality. The fashion-advertising-publicity complex could employ photography in its work of not only documenting but also

of a magazine, *indescribable* at the very moment when it opens itself into the network of images into which I draw it--at the very moment, that is, that the image becomes *mine*? The answer lies in the system from which the film still comes and in which it no longer entirely participates. The film still's meaning is indescribable because the very ability to describe it and to ascribe meaning to it was conditioned by its being inscribed within the film as a closed textual system. When I remove the film still from this system, it ceases to be the operator of determinate functions that it was. The film still now takes on the movement of a

glamorizing commodities. Drafted into a promotion of the aesthetics of the commodity, photography could assist in the work of salesmanship: narrativizing commodities, attaching meanings to them, seducing beholders of them.

Photography in return acquired the capacities required by these functions, even while the scope of its possible capacities was being reduced. Specifically, the economic necessity of producing more documentation and promoting ever-new commodities imposed semantic restrictions upon photography. It was not enough that the photograph's social and historical referent was indisputably what it was: the photographic subject had to *look like* what it was. Whether as news, publicity or advertising, the photograph had to be *recognizable* and *legible*. The actual referent had to be encoded as a denotation through the deployment of cultural codes of connotation. A President must look like a president, a bar of soap must look like a bar of soap. The particular had to be signified as 'general' in order to be recognized and readable.

Whether it was a question of communicating a news item, persuading the viewer of a political necessity or enshrouding the commodity with an aura, a range of connotations had to be both deployed and narrowed to a limited polysemy. The result was a clarity of meaning in which particular instances are raised to the status of general types. The potential novelty of each individual photograph--the mechanical possibility of producing an endless number of new images--was thus constrained by the institutional necessity of the photograph's deciperability. The

system which is no longer that of its text of origin.

To what code or codes does this message now belong? The question is crucial insofar as messages require codes to be deciphered as pointing to shared understandings, yet messages do not carry their codes along with them. Torn from the film, the still becomes inscribed in a more private language of images which make it meaningful without giving it a meaning that is shared and thus nameable. Paradoxically, then, the cinema unfolds itself in

photographic image could never be *too* novel, since it always had to declare the identity of its subject and a narrow range of political, social and sexual meanings ascribed to that subject.

In this way, photography's job of documentation merged with an aesthetics of abstraction.

> The early projects of social documentation of Eugène Atget and August Sander record concrete sociohistorical realities by treating particular individuals as types.
>
> The work of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange for the Depression-era Farm Security Administration (FSA) documents particular historical individuals but in careful compositions and tonalities which make the individuals into emblems of their condition and the photographs into works of art.
>
> Edward Steichen, director of photography department at MOMA, moved from painterly portraits of the wealthy to assembling the infamous "Family of Man" exhibition, turning people into evidence of their "humanity."
>
> Cartier-Bresson's four impoverished and faceless figures of "Srinagar, Cashmere" (1948) take on the pose of a classical sculpture and so become abstract figures for poverty.
>
> For Richard Avedon's camera, the famous sitters and the anonymous ethnographic subjects are equally individuals and types, particular people and abstract images.

its specificity; it becomes "filmic," Barthes says, precisely when the force of the images' movement has been stopped. This rupture of a logical and operational time does not reduce the photograph to a static existence. Quite the contrary, the movement from cinema to photography allows photography to be opened to movement, duration and time. In Barthes's formulation, film becomes itself precisely when it turns elsewhere.

The strands of documentation, aesthetics and salesmanship that make for a useful analytical separation were nevertheless so seamlessly woven together in important photographers' professional careers and images that it is easy to forget how proximate these domains were.

> Most important Anglo-American photographers worked in photojournalism or in the promotion of celebrity and fashion: Alfred Eisenstaedt worked for *Life*, Horst P. Horst at *Vogue*, George Hoyningen-Huene for *Vogue* and then almost exclusively for *Harper's Bazaar*, and George Platt Lynes for *Vogue*.
>
> Walker Evans's work for the FSA was exhibited in a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1938--only a year after he finished the (federally-funded) work of documentation.
>
> After inhabiting the Berlin art world of the 20's, Braissaï could in the 30's as easily contribute to the surrealist journal *Minotaure* as work for Harper's *Bazaar*. Cecil Beaton could as easily document the famous as he could promote fashion. Doisneau worked for *Vogue* while being shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Philippe Halsman could work with Dali and for *Life*.

The combination of documentation, aestheticization and symbolic clarity is perhaps most perfect in Doisneau. "The Bride near Gégène" (1948) clenches her wedding dress below her midriff and clenches her face in ecstasy while elevated on one end of a see-saw. The eponymous hero of "Dreams of a Tattooed Man" (1952) lies recumbent on a bed surrounded by pin-ups and exhales a stream of cigarette smoke which makes his state of tumescence symbolically visible. These

Similarly surprising is the degree to which the cinema as a vehicle for the moving image has sought to escape duration and time, even when they were claimed to be its hallmarks. Since Gilles Deleuze's two volumes on cinema, it has been well known that Bergson rejected cinema as an image of movement because he found cinema's illusion of motion to be based on a mechanical version of the misunderstanding of movement and time that he believed characterized the West since the paradoxes of Zeno. Namely, if movement is inconceivable when one substitutes for it a series of fixed, static moments, this must imply that movement

images comment on social events and categories--the symbolics of defloration, masculinity--document a particular individual while turning the individual into a highly legible living symbol. There is nothing in the image which resists our attaching meaning to it, since the image comes to us with its meanings neatly laid out for us to find as if for ourselves, as if for the first time. The particularity becomes a convenient excuse for an abstraction: "people are really like that…."

Thus, once the early photographic pictorialism of Steichen had given way to the visual acuity of “straight” photography (Weston, Ansel Adams), the 20th century art photograph found its balance in this mix of documentation, aesthetics and sales-manship. Specific social worlds could be documented, as long as the images drawn from these surfaces combined formal beauty with the sense of a hieratic symbolic meaning drawn from surrealism; a seductive surface drawn from the rhetoric of salesmanship assures the image of the power to please. A little less formal beauty, a clearer meaning, and one ends up with photojournalism. Too much formal beauty and salesmanship and not enough social or symbolic meaning, and the result is fashion photography.

Within this configuration the photographic image could be assured of the formal consistency of a theory, the seductive symbolic meaning of a narrative, whether more emphatic as in advertising or more obscure as in surrealism, and the descriptive powers of photojournalism.

cannot be identified with the sum of a series of immobile points. Movement must rather be something altogether different.

For Deleuze, by contrast, the fact that the cinematic illusion of movement is produced by a series of still projected images makes little difference, since it is not the mechanical basis of this illusion which matters but rather the experience it produces and onto which it opens. Cinema may be composed of individual still frames, but we experience and think these

frames in time, as duration and eventually as memory. On this view, there is nothing about the experience of duration in cinema which necessitates the movement of the image. Cinema moves in time insofar as its images become a material for thinking in time, not because those images “move” in a physical or perceptual sense.

Yet, the reduction of movement to nothing other than an assembly of individual instants was difficult to expel both from the cinema itself and from the critical practices which operated on

cinema. The practices of freezing the cinematic moving image, of extracting from the cinema a series of well-composed photographs, of analyzing individual shots--these supported the conception of cinematic time as privileged instants between which motion hung slack like a telephone wire strung from one pole to another. From the flow of a film we draw not any haphazard image but only those which correspond already to our sense of “good form”: ordered compositions whose meanings seem to us most legible. In other words, we analyze what is easiest to analyze. Such images lend themselves to our analyses not only because

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they stand still long enough for us to describe (not our experience but) something (more) fixed, but also because still images lend themselves more readily to verbal description precisely when they have been composed not only to be meaningful but also to have precisely legible, describable meanings.

Those famous still frames and production stills which are reproduced on the covers of film textbooks, in the pages of cinema journals and for publicity purposes announce the work to

Photography as the production of novel and instantaneous images, images without duration and with little chance of survival, was forced to draw on existing cultural codes in order to perform the work asked of it, to be both recognizable and legible. And to achieve staying power despite its semi-automatic production and proliferation, photography had to aestheticize itself: by closing in on itself in both its compositions and its range of meanings, and by relying on existing codes to constrain the threat of its power to generate novelty. Almost no photograph could rupture these conditions, since the result would fail to be recognized as art, as news, as anything.

It is these conditions which Stefan Abrams's work contests: instantaneity against duration, the legibility guaranteed by a closure that is both formal and semantic, internal to the image and external in the codes which permit the image's legibility, and a recognition which obliterates both novelty and history. How could photography ever free itself from the projects of documentation and salesmanship via some route other than aestheticization? From the imperative of legibility, the formal closures of composition and meaning? Is it indeed a question of liberation? Towards what ends could this matrix be ruptured?

In a way that was probably unforeseeable, the digitalization of both moving and still images--not to mention sounds and every other imaginable form of writing--allows for just such a rupture. Now that both cinema and photography are being materially transformed by digitalization, each can reconsider not only their relation

viewers who have never seen it. They are like advertisements not only for the film but also for its putative meanings. Shots are composed in this way specifically to be reproduced, to be memorable, to be comprehensible. The cinema which best lent itself to this analysis was that cinema which sought to be most highly legible, the most polemical and political, and which sought to agitate and also to be understood. It is not surprising that Eisenstein's frames are so often reproduced, since they seek to make dialectical social tensions evident within the frame itself. The more a film seeks to fix meaning in its static compositions, the more it

to each other but also the division of labor which for so long allowed the two to seem distinct.

> Instead of appealing to existing codes which allow their meanings to be deciphered, photographs can instead appeal to a generalized interoperability of media--celluloid, video, digital.
>
> Instead of seeking a guarantor of their legibility against the threat of their novelty by recourse to cultural codes, photographs can refer to other messages (as paintings referred to themselves), hence displacing the question of legibility into an interrogation of their object.
>
> Instead of being relegated to a constrained, legible novelty, photography can at last address the past. Instead of producing new images, photography can become historical.
>
> Instead of consigning itself to instantaneity, photography can broach duration.
>
> Instead of raising historical particulars to abstract types, photography can make both itself and other media its particular and can think by means other than abstraction.

Photography's contract with cinema, that photography should be confined to instantaneity and cinema to duration, comes up for renegotiation. And so Abrams turns to cinema's past in order to think the past of photography and cinema, and photography's future.

lends itself to the extraction of individual frames and hence to a commentary which finds revolutionary dynamism within frozen images. (This link between politics and the still frame is what makes it so remarkable that Barthes should find a disquieting non-polemical meaning in Eisenstein stills. If anyone's compositions seem to aim to be translatable into political meanings, it is Eisenstein's.)

The direct subject of Abrams's Untitled (*After …*) series is precisely a struggle within cinema, one of cinema's debates with itself. Should cinema allow itself to speak in static compositions which have the virtue of being both memorable and reproducible? Or should cinema resist the fixation of its own movement but at the price of becoming locked within itself, untranslatable, nearly mute?

It was very soon recognized that cinema could create statements of great political, emotional and narrative power, but it took nearly fifty years to understand that this power came at the cost of undermining what was long understood as cinema's most essential feature--duration--since these powerful images were essentially still, not moving, frozen instants capable of being reproduced and remembered outside the cinema, compositions rather than movements. Cinema abdicated its privilege of recording images of duration to produce instead the same kind of highly legible privileged instants which photography had been compelled to produce because of its own historical necessities. Cinema could be returned to its calling in recording duration but only at the cost of losing the tremendous legibility and memorability it had achieved.

The trap of thinking time on the basis of instants rather than duration was not confined to cinema. In that other great modern reflection on time, the one that rivals Heidegger's and that has formed for Gilles Deleuze a veritable counter-tradition by which to think difference, Henri Bergson rejected all attempts to think time on the basis of instants. For Bergson, duration is a concrete reality which

Filmmakers who began as polemicists seem to retain a capacity for forming powerful cinematic messages but without the same possibility of these messages being reduced to a clear-cut meaning: Jean Renoir, Jean-Luc Godard, the later Joseph Losey, for example. By drifting away from a clear-cut politics and towards, for example, a more diffuse "humanism" (in the case of Renoir), these directors cease to make films that move from one tidy and meaningful composition to another. Apart from a few obviously symbolic compositions in Renoir, few still frames from these directors would tell us much about their films.

cannot be understood either by analyzing time into immanent instants like the points of a curve, or by synthesizing privileged instants like Platonic ideas. Duration is a whole which cannot be produced by adding smaller parts nor by dividing a whole into parts: as the ancient paradoxes of Zeno show, the flight of the arrow cannot be found in the sum of all the positions the arrow takes on its path, nor can those still positions be added to create the whole of that flight. Duration is its own reality, a whole without parts.

By turning to Bergson, Deleuze has been able to show that cinema itself has neglected this very fact of its own constitution: duration. Even if on the mechanical level cinema decomposes or analyzes movement into evenly distributed still points--what Deleuze calls any-instant-whatevers--for a long time cinema as an art made little use of these in-between instants and instead organized itself around memorable images: pictures which summarize in their shades and compositions the meanings and narratives they organize. Abrams interrogates these privileged instants which both support and are supported by cinematic narratives, and he also deprives these images of the narratives which would allow their meanings to be deciphered, as well as turning to those in-between images which fail to yield to legibility and recognition--any-instant-whatevers.

In this context, the amount of attention Abrams lavishes on Eisenstein is not surprising. Although more renowned for his montage, Eisenstein's compositions attempt to express in visual terms the necessity of revolution with the same

In short, cinema has long sought to construct itself as a series of privileged instants, carefully-ordered compositions crafted to be not only meaningful but legible, and we have obliged by analyzing cinema as if it were just that. While claiming the essence of cinema was movement, we have treated it as essentially a series of unmoving pictures.

The still frame, then, has been all too describable and (in Barthes's terms) not nearly "filmic" enough. The still lent itself to projects of description which sought to grasp the movement of

acuity. Eisenstein's writing is as identifiable with film theory as Eisenstein's still frames are iconic for cinema itself as an art form: in the massive anonymity of the horses and their riders in *Strike*, in the acute passion of the emblematic suffering women in *Potemkin*, in the headless sailors from *Potemkin*, in the replication of the mass by the individual, as when a single hand rises from a field of similar hands in *Strike*.

Eisenstein's propagandistic rhetoric reduces the individual to a figure for a social mass and so seeks to express a general and abstract concept--revolution--through concrete details. (Nor is this abstraction without its sexual investments. It is women whose faces contort to express the passion of political repression, and the square-jawed sailor whose mouth is partly open and whose face is dappled by circles of bright light who presents the proletariat as a male pin-up.)

The clarity of Eisenstein's rhetoric depends upon its redundancy, the replication of the whole in the part across multiple levels. But the redundancy which ensures the communication of the informational or rhetorical message by the synecdoche of part and whole can only function within a composition to the extent that the part can be isolated from the whole, and this isolation is precisely what, according to Bergson's conception of time, can never be the case for a duration. Indeed, if Roland Barthes found in a number of stills from Eisenstein's films a "touching" or "stupid" detail which failed to mirror and echo the meaning of the whole, this rupture of the rhetoric of Eisenstein's compositions is nevertheless equally

film as a movement of codes without necessarily understanding the movement of images in thought to which Barthes points and which Deleuze pursues. Even if, with the advent of textual analysis in film studies, stills became increasingly crucial for producing a visual map of the analytic structure that was disengaged by the work of analysis, the film still nevertheless retained a questionable status. The still frame was questionable theoretically because the text as a play of codes could only be conceptualized in terms of movement and thus did not lend itself to being captured by still images, no matter their number. As long as

characteristic of Eisenstein in other ways, since the disorienting detail points to a temporal dimension which ruptures the legibility of closed visual compositions just as revolution as a process must open outward from the dynamism contained within an existing social order.

The power of those great leftist cinemas which interest Abrams--the Soviet cinema of Eisenstein, the German Expressionism of Fritz Lang or Robert Weine--is inseparable from the power of their visual compositions. But the stasis that the composition of memorable images imposes on cinema and the bluntness of the visual rhetoric through which these images declare their meanings both came to seem problematic to filmmakers, whether religiously or politically oriented, like Robert Bresson and Jean-Luc Godard. In their modernist contestation, cinema's raised voice was lowered to near muteness, and time was allowed to flow in a way that did not submit to holding still to have its picture taken.

If Abrams seizes on more stills from Godard than anyone except Eisenstein, it is because Godard works both within a cinema of legibility and against it. Godard never made an ideal Brechtian, because his images cannot be reduced to slogans. If anything, Godard starts with slogans, formulae, clichés and the like, and then he tampers with them to the point of incoherence. It's the same for the human figure in the images from Godard's films to which Abrams draws our attention. While we might be able to discern every pore of Anna Karina's tear-stained face as she watches Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, that face may equally (in *Vivre sa Vie*) be turned

the film still remained a simulacrum of movement, there never was nor could be a theory of the film still--only a caution not to take the still seriously.

Taking a cue from Barthes, Raymond Bellour has repeatedly insisted on the gap between the written analysis or reproducible still image on the one hand and the totality and experience of the cinematic text on the other. In "The Unattainable Text" (1975), Bellour relegated "[t]he frozen frame and the still that reproduce it" to the level of "simulacra" (26), and he pointed to

away from us, half out of the frame or plunged into shadows. Or the human figure may be reduced to a mere blur when seen through translucent glass in a shot from *Masculin/Féminine*. These still frames still speak to us, but indistinctly. We hear the voice's texture if not its words. Bresson's theologically inspired visual style shares this obscurity with Godard's political agitations. Bresson's country priest and pickpocket are so barely visually characterized as to lose distinguishing characteristics, and his little Mouchette is not a type like Eisenstein's sailors. Indeed, the act of the hand of the country priest crossing out phrases from his diary enacts the defacement of legibility that Abrams seeks in Bresson.

Abrams not only inspects the extremes of the rhetoric of visual legibility (Eisenstein) and illegibility (Godard, Bresson), he also wrests from cinema moments which are neither privileged nor legible: those any-instant-whatevers that occur *between* the famous images and which lend themselves less readily to being recognized and translated. We glimpse a portion of Mastroanni's face or neck as he turns to leave a frame of *La Dolce Vita*. By escaping the tidiness of a composed image, these underprivileged instants point away from photography's instantaneity and towards forms of duration which are inscribed even in cinema's still frames.

Not only do such frames fail to cohere into an instantaneous composition which would bear the meanings of their narratives and the durations from which they are cut, but Abrams also selects from Bresson, Fellini and above all Godard frames

a "fatal flaw" of any existing form of cinematic analysis: "the text of the film is unattainable because it is an unquotable text." (22)

In retrospect this statement sounds remarkable because the technological conditions it assumes are no longer relevant. We can now as easily imagine 'sampling' a moving image as a word, a still image or a sound. These technologies are no longer confined to technical professionals. In other words, if the cinematic image remains unattainable, it will not be

which bear the trace of motion within a still frame in the blurring into illegibility of an object whose motion is recorded even as it escapes recording. We see the arrow's flight but not the arrow. Motion often escapes being frozen into a single frame.The cinematographic apparatus fails to freeze every action completely. When Bresson's Mouchette rolls down a hill, this motion may be sliced into 24 frames every second, but each frame may bear a trace of movement. Anita Ekberg tosses her hair or Mastroanni turns his head (both in *La Dolce Vita*), and their movement flees from the frame. Time crosses out being like a failed entry in a

journal, and the stasis of being smudges into becoming.

Certain images of the series underline the flow of time which would seem to transcend the still image. An image from one of Lang's three Mabuse films shows a watch whose hands tell us the time (a little before 4 o'clock). Abrams catches the jerking movement of a girl's head in the famous Odessa steps sequence of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, a movement which signals the onset of the repressive violence which will allow the opening of revolutionary consciousness and action. Not only does the blurring of the figure's motion signal the passage of time, but a single word, together with ellipses which signal its participation in a longer duration, appear as a subtitle on the frames, several of which Abrams captures: "Suddenly…."

because it is unquotable. When Bellour insists on the unquotability and hence unattainability of the cinematic text, he is no doubt thinking *both* of movement and duration as unquotable apart from another medium of moving images *and* of the movement of the textual codes--framing, looking, for instance--which make up the text as a theoretical object. The concept of a "play" or "movement" of codes here aligns with the movement ascribed to the cinematic image in order to proscribe the attainability of either.

More emblematically still, of three figures from *Vivre sa vie*, only the two smaller ones in the background are clearly defined. By way of cinema, Abrams casts a sidelong glance at the "street" photography tradition of Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, Weegee: the apparently random, yet therefore all the more meaningful and revealing moment, fails to congeal because the very movement that the still image would capture exceeds the powers of cinema. The social life of the street fails to yield meanings because it cannot be reduced to instantaneity.

Nevertheless, five years earlier (in 1970) in his commentary on Eisenstein, in calling for a veritable theory of the still, Barthes criticized the "common opinion" which rejected film stills on the grounds they were "a reduction of the work by the immobilization of what is taken to be the sacred essence of cinema--the movement of the images." (66) Already, in 1970 Barthes understood the movement of the cinematic image as something *other than a simple, unmediated or naive conception of movement.* Even if we distinguish that movement associated with the text as a theoretical object from the movement of the cinematic image,

even if this movement is not empirically demonstrable in the succession of still images thrown upon the screen (or even the retina or the mind's eye), the possibility remains that the idea of the text's "movement" only repeats and displaces the naïve conception of movement attributed to the cinematic experience.

Barthes's understanding of the "filmic" as emerging from the flow of images outside a textual system and into a more personal system for thinking with images already suggests a

transformation of the idea of the cinematic image's movement, a transformation which we may only now be ready to grasp.

Namely, Barthes urged that under specific conditions "the 'movement' regarded as the essence of film is not animation, flux, mobility, 'life,' copy, but simply the framework of a permutational unfolding." (66-67) That is, the film still can include time and duration insofar as it is part of a system, a "permutational unfolding" which is not limited by the bounds of the

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film's duration or narrative. The "movement" which Barthes describes in this "permutational unfolding" is no longer a perceived movement nor a play of codes in a closed system which could be described and reconstituted. Rather, the movement of this unfolding arises insofar as the text is quoted or sampled and enters into a network or database of new relationships, relationships with images that take the film still outside the closed form of film narrative. Film analysis as itself a practice of consumption thus points towards the theory that ethnographic description of cultural practices can only begin but cannot complete: cinema unfolds not from

The dynamism of these cinematic frames and the tension between expressivity and reticence are together made all the more dynamic by their placement within a decor which seems in its way as minimal as the unexposed photographic paper which surrounds it. Beyond its formal contrasts within Abrams's photographs, this decor is part of his historical investigation. Abrams constructs the American livingroom and its televisual hearth as a visual and spatial paradox. This box contains *more* than it should. Its images are outsized. Women, men, faces, bodies, horses, and landscapes appear vivid, detailed, bright, and almost three-dimensional, still bearing traces of movement. All of this could not contrast more sharply with a room which is small, nearly empty, drab, spare, dim, shallow, still.

The contrast was not always this sharp. Earlier versions showed a different window treatment (curtains, not blinds). There was more light on the television itself. We could see the room more clearly, and there were details that drew the eye away from the television's screen: a family picture (which we sometimes still glimpse) and a vase of flowers once decorated the table where the lamp now stands alone. The formal contrasts are not simply part of an empty reflexivity which makes the photographed a closed world. Rather, this formal closure of the photographs as systems of contrasting terms is echoed by the spatial construction of the livingroom as a closed space, while this same closure is ruptured by the contrast between the domestic and televisual spaces.

the specificity of a medium but rather in the movement of a thinking with images that links them together, *whether inside the bounds of a work or not.*

In the past, before the digital era, there was no theory of the film still because the still was assumed to be non-filmic--because non-moving. But now in the digital era, after cinema, a theory of the film still becomes both necessary and possible because we no longer reduce the film still to the cinematic codes which deny its very status as a reproduction and we

This is not the television as we know it today, a monitor for stored moving images, a receiver of satellite signals. Such would have been the case had Abrams continued to shoot the television the way he did in his early studies for the series: without an antenna. The lack of an antenna points to a different configuration of time, leisure and labor before movies could be called up on demand on cable or from the modern archive, the video store.

The antenna thus harkens back to an era when the video screen displayed images nearly simultaneous to their broadcast. In those days before the omnipresence of the VCR, beholding famous images from Eisenstein or *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* required either diligence or luck. Art films screened late at night or early in the morning, often on public television or channels with weaker signals. To be enraptured by Gene Tierney's glacial self-control as she hurled herself down the stairs in *Leave Her to Heaven* was a reward for a Saturday afternoon lethargy or a painstaking search through local listings. This television and its antenna thus refer to a fleeting quality that moving images had in the past when their use was less under our control. Can one even love cinema anymore when so much of its history is available on demand? Will cinema become devoid of interest when it can be had with so little effort?

The compositional paradoxes of Abrams's television are further underlined by the images Abrams selects. Instead of anyone being there to behold the television, it seems to behold us.

instead recognize the still's movement beyond the work and into the network.

Along these lines, Peter Wollen has contested the identification of cinema with physical movement with regard to Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (a film composed almost or perhaps entirely of still photographs): "movement is not a necessary feature of film," says Wollen. If cinema is no longer to be identified with an unreflected conception of physical or perceptual movement, then the logical consequence is that time is not out of bounds for photography. If

Bresson's pickpocket stares past us.

Anna Karina in *Vivre sa vie* sits before a window, her face cast into shadows, or in a movie theater watching Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, her face but dimly lit by the reflections from the unseen screen.

Bresson's Mouchette turns from the gray fog of her existence to look towards us yet also past us.

A giant eye from *Strike* or *Alphaville* studies us.

Anita Ekberg in *La Dolce Vita* looks at us, smiling vaguely. Or, reclining, her head on a pillow, she looks inquisitively past us.

The presence of windows in certain frames--Bresson's country priest looks in a window, a figure from Godard's *Masculin/feminin* is visible through a window darkly--draw attention to the room's window and its blinds, closed like an eye. If visual media in the past could treat images as windows, Abrams's series draws our attention to the way the television poses two incompatible models: the image as object and the image as screen. Abrams's photographs themselves as physical objects are small enough to hold in one's hands, and the fact of them making up a series makes each one like a screen or receiver for transient messages.

cinema were to give up constructing time on the basis of privileged instants, then photography might do the same. One can thus amplify Barthes's early insight. Photography can include movement insofar as photography moves beyond the single image and even the series and becomes a system, a "framework of permutational unfolding."

With the possibility of a theory of the film still, the status of the photograph itself aslo changes. Photography can cease to be understood as antithetical to the duration of a cinematic

unfolding when photography becomes a permutational system. This rapprochement can be achieved by drawing the consequences of serial methods of production both familiar in modern art and fundamental to photography as a mechanical process, but this shift has two consequences which are related and which demonstrate a new configuration of art, experience and information.

These serial methods undermine the closure and autonomy of the work of art such that the

work of art is no longer exhausted in its beholding, and the physical presence of the work as perceived can no longer stand in for a meaning or experience we grasp through and of that work. At the same time, the concept of a code changes its meaning such that the code no longer guarantees shared meanings and instead refers to an algorithm of choices to which the work testifies. As a series of choices, the outcome of a data architecture, the work of art can no longer be beheld or grasped as a totality within experience. It *must* instead be thought.

part 5.

Serial construction fits perhaps too cozily within a certain modern, formalist view of the work of art that considers the work as exploring specific parameters. Serial music from Schönberg to Cage to Stöckhausen takes this approach most strongly in actual works and not just theories, perhaps because in music the process of composition is so dependent upon a theoretical knowledge of musical relationships. In such schemes, musical materials such as pitch, volume and timbre are ordered according to specific schemes which can be repeated in various tonal and temporal directions--higher, lower, backwards, forwards, etc.

Removing the decor around the cinematic frames would change the series utterly. A comparison here is instructive. A 1978 photo by Colette Portal (Éditions GENDRE) frames a TV screen in a black space. Cinephiles have no trouble recognizing the image on the screen: Gene Tierney in the title role of *Laura*. She has a puzzled look on her face, eyes dazed, head cocked. She wears a rain bonnet. A French subtitle indicates we are watching the "version originale," the English-language version with subtitles. To one not familiar with the film, the subtitle is enigmatic: "A la campagne je ne lis pas les journaux." Laura, it seems, has been murdered. The detective on the case has become infatuated with her image and her story.

Falling asleep in Laura's apartment before her portrait, the detective awakens to find Laura there watching over him. It turns out she was not murdered: it was another woman. Laura herself was out of town at her country cottage. But the murder made headlines: surely Laura must have read about her "own" death. No she insists: when she's in the countryside, she doesn't read newspapers. The expression of puzzlement and the strange subtitle, "I don't read the newspapers in the countryside," fit together with the story. Laura must explain why she doesn't know she's dead.

This photograph has a camp quality to it. The rain bonnet, the blank expression, the vacant gaze (almost directly at the camera), the strange non-sequitor subtitle: all combine into an obtuse feeling. How can one not know one's own death? It's

But long before serial musical composition, mechanically reproduced work had already involved modes of serial production: printmaking, certain means of reproducing sculpture, photography, etc. Even if the seriality of the reproduction remained fundamentally and ideologically outside the bounds of individual work, the status of every such work, as Walter Benjamin has famously argued, was conditioned by the numerical condition of that work, a function of how many.

almost a little psychoanalytic joke, a twist on the dream Freud recounts in which the father dreams his dead son lives and speaks to him, "Father, can't you see I'm burning," while in the next room the son's corpse begins to be singed by a fallen candle. Son, why don't you know you're dead? So like a child not to know.

It all sounds too familiar: "I didn't know I was dead." But the framed video image in the void of a dark space and the *version originale* bespeak connoisseurship, fixation, subtlety. The distribution of the photograph as a post card, "It's a riot….I must send it to my friend David," contributes to the precious quality.

Abrams's images have nothing to do with this camp quality because camp presumes *another* narrative, one to which the communicants share privileged access and whose knowledge constitutes a mark of distinction, a subcultural parody of aristocracy. This semi-private narrative guarantees the legibility of the combination of image and words, while at the same time the distance between the two messages guarantees a certain comic, derisory openness: I both know what the message says and also see it as nonsense. (This is not so far from the deployment of surrealism by art photography: "I've read Freud, so I know why Doisneau's tattooed man is smoking, his bride laughing.")

Instead of pointing to such a narrative, Abrams takes away the narrative frame which would coordinate image and words. No doubt there is still an element of surrealism here but not one that is banally Freudian. Despite his selection of

But the consequences of such serial procedures in the work's production can easily pass unnoticed. Namely, in relating the work to a system, however idiomatic, the numerical unicity of the work is undermined. If the work is only one realization of a system, the implication is that there could be other versions of the work. The individual work becomes only one possible work, one possible achieved, finished solution. If there is one, there could be others.

acknowledged cinematic masterpieces--Eisenstein, Fellini, Bresson, Godard--Abrams's series has little to do with that insider-ish-ness which insists on achieving distinction through cultural knowledge. Abrams's series thus aims to relieve the photograph of the burden of legibility by refraining from imposing upon the photographic image those forms of closure which are effected by means of narrative and cultural codes. And the containment of the closed space of a cinema still by the closed space of the livingroom and the formal antitheses between the two point further to the paradoxes of thinking closure in an information age. Namely, the spatial and formal relations of Abrams's compositions underline the paradoxes inherent in thinking the self on a spatial model in an age when individuals are no longer defined by beholding at a distance and instead become defined as nodes in a data network, and when the formal closure of the work of art leaks out into the serial relations of a database.

If shared narratives or knowledge of cultural codes cease to guarantee the legibility of photographic (and other) images, then the fixed horizon of such closed systems gives way to open series which, even when made up of still images, nevertheless imply a movement amongst all the members of an open whole. Far from being random or merely motivated by individual taste, the images which make up Abrams's series flow like a series of (not always binary) choices. The frame may present:

Serial production implies that the work is neither autonomous nor the result of individual decision but is rather the result of a logical process or algorithm. The autonomous work can no longer render up its meaning through an experience of beholding or listening, since the series of alternatives which gave rise to the work only become comprehensible upon multiple performances or encounters, a distant point tantamount to mastery or boredom.

a landscape or a figure;
a man or a woman;
a star (like Anita Ekberg or Marcello Mastroanni) or a mere marionette for the director (like Bresson's actors);
a face, a body or just a body part (a hand, for instance);
a face whose expression is legible or one hidden in shadows;
an expression that is impassive or ecstatic;
a moment that is calm or violent;
an extreme close-up or a long shot;
bright light or shadows;
an expressive, stylized composition by Lang or Eisenstein, or a muted reticent image by Bresson or Godard.

When we can call up images at will, the individual is faced with new problems in self-definition. Confronted with a flood of media messages, every individual in a consumer society takes on the (romantic) labor of the artist: she must construct a self from a tradition by making and arranging choices.

Samuel Weber has compared the uncanniness of the television to a Trojan Horse: it smuggles the outside in, penetrating what we think of as private domains with untold elsewheres. To whom do those images which invade my home belong? Part of the uncanniness of the television, the way it pours others' images into a private domain, is the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of making images our own. Paradoxically, when we are presented with so many images made by others, the problem of how they can be *mine* becomes more grave: what is *my*

When the photographic image enters a system of "permutational unfolding," its aesthetic changes utterly. Serial music had already attacked this crucial assumption of romantic aesthetics that form should itself be perceptible. If a musical pattern were perfectly demonstrable on the page but not perceptible to listeners, the accessibility of the aesthetic form and its meaning to the senses came into question. If it were directly accessible through the senses, aesthetic form could serve as a guarantor of the translation between cognition to perception. Such was the burden of aesthetic theory at least since Kant.

journey and what is another's? If so much postmodern art would reduce itself to the level of a footnote or a commentary, Abrams's Untitled (*After …*) series is different because Abrams's series aligns the artist's problem with that of the anonymous and invisible livingroom dweller.

(This is the importance of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's study of anagrams in Latin verse: the signifier could be demonstrated to contain an order but whose reason and meaning could not be vouchsafed. Meaning could not be translated into experience, and experience could not be granted the shared meaning of a code accessible to others.)

If aesthetic form did not make meaning accessible to perception, then either meaning would remain inaccessible or the figures of perception could not be guaranteed to have meaning.

Subjectivity would in either case become isolated and Kant's work of synthesizing blind thought and dumb perception would remain permanently unfinished. But if the work of art is only one possible result of a process whose outcomes are variable, then the experience of the work can never give rise to a cognition of the work as a whole. Whether the category of experience can ever correlate to the structure of a "permutational unfolding" becomes the decisive question for the work of art in an era of changing technologies.

Formerly, one could describe the work and its experience, construct a formal theory that made it into a coherent system, inscribe it in narratives and first-person expressive utterances. Criticism could mobilize three interlocking language games, each devolving on a different regime of utterances: description, meta-statement or theory, and expression. As a matter of convenience, one could formalize each regime. Description might take the form “X has properties y, z, etc.” Meta-statement could mobilize forms such as “X means y,” “X should be interpreted as y,” etc. The systematization of such meta-statements forms the canons of

part 6.

a theory. And expression would have forms like “I feel, believe, dislike, approve of, etc.,” expressions which could then be mobilized in first-person narrative sequences. Description, theory and narrative thus intertwine in the mode of writing called criticism, a mode which was not without its intricacies. The form of the work could be woven into a history of forms. The history of forms became a narrative. Particular forms could express the artist’s unique identity or the critic’s favored thesis. The narratives of artist and critic could be spoken at once through a careful deployment of theories.

Even if the aesthetic form of each individual photograph in the series is closed, the multiple relations of a whole without fixed borders allows the photograph to escape from instantaneity in order to broach a duration and movement heretofore thought to be the privilege of cinema. Abrams's photographs do not poach on another's territory but rather renegotiate a century-old division of labor. Abrams turns to cinema thus not as a competitor, rival or antagonist, but as a mirror of photography's history and as a time machine to travel both into the past and the future. Such a database of images no longer centers on the body, the reflex arc which links perception and action, the photographer's eye, his finger and the shutter. Instead, the photographic image can now function within the brain and memory. Abrams's series is not beheld but thought. Their time is not an instant of action but a pause of reflection. The instantaneous moment of the individual frame extends itself into a duration.

We owe to Bergson a distinction between two conceptions of memory, including a conception which anticipates our digital era. Bergson distinguishes between a memory which *recalls* images to enter into the circuit of our body's actions and a memory which allows images to enter into circuits of their own separated from action. *Memory*, not recall. Memory itself is then understood as a function, as the possibility of storing and associating images in a network, whereas *recall* becomes an active process which only seeks to make memories present, to efface their pastness, to make them live again.

But even the criteria specific to each regime have become suspect almost at the instant that we have disentangled them. Descriptions are accurate or inaccurate, true or false, but only in relation to a specific vocabulary. Meta-statements are correct with respect to the various canons to which they adhere: they are well-formed or not. Expressions are honest or dishonest only with respect to this or that individual speaker or agency of enunciation. While it is tempting to identify beauty with formal correctness, this has not always been the case. Indeed, a not entirely useless exercise could be played in which the history of art would be

In reflecting on mourning, Freud drew a related distinction between incomplete and completed mourning. For Freud mourning begins with the realization that a memory image no longer exists outside of memory, and the work of mourning consists in detaching that image from the circuits which would link the image to actions. To think of a lost loved one or even, Freud insists, a beloved ideal which can no longer be realized, is only painful until we separate that image from our interactions with the world and consign the image to a special status: a memory that will never be called upon to act. The recall of incomplete mourning is nostalgic to the extent that nostalgia imagines the past not as past but as a form of the present: a past present, a possible or impossible present.

Abrams's Untitled (*After…*) series does not recall cinematic moments--privileged instants and any-instant-whatevers--in order to make them part of a bodily action. Rather, this series makes of cinema and photography as they were a memory. It might go too far to assert that Abrams's series testifies to the completion of the work of mourning for photography as a distinctive medium of novel and instantaneous images required to be recognizable and legible. But it can be argued that with this series a decisive break can be discerned in photography: no longer defining itself against but rather with cinema and video; no longer turned towards novelty but towards history; no longer legible because closed in on itself but readable in the combinatorial of an open system; no longer a reaction but now a thought and a memory. Abrams's series thinks the past of both cinema and photography not in order to recall the past as if it could be made present again but

abbreviated by marking out the shifting relations amongst the terms: when beauty was believed to be truth, when the beautiful ceased to be useful, when truth was mistaken for honesty, etc.

While an aesthetic concern with beauty may occupy a changing nodal point at the intersection of the three regimes, utilitarian concerns with usefulness escape this regulation. As Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued in *The Postmodern Condition,* utility entirely

rather in order to show what it is like to have cinema and photography in their former incarnations *as a memory*.

Abrams's work of historical memory allows us to acknowledge that duration and movement even escaped cinema. Movement escapes cinema's frames most when the movement of the camera is added on to the movement it shoots. The most extreme camera movement, a whip pan, blurs nearly every frame it records until nothing is left of what's moving except its movement. The whip pan makes of what it shoots an arrow's flight which is never here or there or there. In his movement beyond photography as it was, Abrams has photographed every frame of a single whip pan from Godard's *Alphaville,* a shot marked (in the English-language subtitled version) by the words "Anyway it's my journey to the end of night."

Here the words perform their typical function in cinema. They narrow the focus of the image's meaning by submitting it to narrative. But Abrams turns the signification of these words in a new direction. Evidently cut off from a stream of discourse by the transitional "anyway," the words no longer refer to a narrative--whose journey? what night?--and the "journey" becomes both the movement which flees the stillness of the image and Abrams's movement to claim that very flight as his and photography's own: it's *my* journey.

transcends the three regimes, since it concerns itself only with effectiveness and hence bypasses such criteria as accuracy, correctness and honesty. (The criteria of honesty, so crucial for the artist, was always more dangerous for the critic, since inaccurate statements can always be honestly proffered as long as the speaker deceives himself enough.) What is more certain is that when we have ceased to think about works as closed systems and begun to be able to think about databases as moving configurations, the concept of beauty as internal to a closed form will cease to be applicable. Description, theory and narratives of

Selected Filmography

Robert Bresson, *Diary of a Country Priest*, 1950.
Robert Bresson, *Mouchette*, 1966.
Robert Bresson, *Pickpocket*, 1959.
Sergei Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky*, 1938.
Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925.
Sergei Eisenstein, *Strike*, 1925.
Frederico Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*, 1961.
Jean-Luc Godard, *Alphaville*, 1965.
Jean-Luc Godard, *Masculin/Féminin*, 1966.
Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa Vie*, 1962.
Fritz Lang, *Hangmen Also Die*, 1943.
Chris Marker, La Jetée, 1962.
Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom, 1960.*
Alain Resnais, *Last Year at Marienbad/L'annee dernière à Marienbad*, 1961.

personal expression will no longer be combined in any of the ratios with which we're familiar.

We will have understood these interlocking regimes in the act of criticism when we have found ways of knitting the regimes together that are quite different from the modes of critical writing now common. These regimes will cease to be bound together in familiar ways because the construction of new databases of sensations, memories and texts will demand and enable new configurations of the regimes of utterances mobilized by these systems.

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As databases bring various forms of messages together--not just words but images and voices--they also make explicit the necessary practice of creating new languages for speaking not about other languages but about other messages, even when those messages have no code, as in the case of photographic utterances.

If modern aesthetics had sought to guarantee the perceptibility of meaning or the movement between perception and cognition, postmodern aesthetics distinguishes itself as the

invention of new language games, of new configurations of regimes of utterances, and new transitions amongst media, new linkages amongst images.

The film still, once apparently an orphan step-child with respect to both cinema and photography, now seems more like a harbinger of the way informational concepts allow thinking with images as they form new databases, while this strange image also points the critical enterprise beyond ethnography and towards novel forms of its own.

Afterward

Mary Ann Doane

The term "after" defines not only this afterward (as a series of comments, reflections upon what has come before) but the book itself, Untitled (*After Cinema)*, as well as the series of photographs by Stefan Abrams it contains (Untitled [After *Diary of a Country Priest*] I, Untitled [*After Alphaville*], IV, etc.). To specify that the text is "After Cinema" is to suggest the end of an era of representational possibilities as well as the advent of a new form--the digital--which promises (or threatens) this demise. For the digital is perceived as capable of annihilating all earlier modes of representation through their assimilation (commonly referred to as convergence). Yet, the digital is not the central subject of either Abrams's series or Edward O'Neill's ruminations on his work. The digital is a strong but *marginal* presence, coloring everything with its intimations of a future yet to be fully unveiled. Instead, the central focus here is a medium which comes not *after* cinema but *before* it (and, indeed, acts as the substrate of cinema)--photography. This convoluted temporality reveals the way in which an earlier technology of representation can both define and be defined by the technology which succeeds it. It is arguable that photography's stasis was not as visible before cinema (its power of likeness and indexicality outweighing the limitation of its fixity). Photography and cinema, taken together, force us to confront our usual assumptions about time, movement, and stasis.

However, "after" does not simply suggest a form of temporality, a subsequent moment. "After" also signifies a type of resemblance (usually familial), as in the phrase "takes after" ("She *takes after* her father."). On the one hand, this meaning of "after" points to a familial resemblance of disparate media: television takes after cinema which takes after photography (remembering that in Abrams's perverse temporality and genealogy it is photography which "takes after" cinema). Cinema and photography are both photographically based while, in this case, television simply contains or conveys cinema, framing it differently, situating it in the bland and spare recognizability of a domestic setting. On the other hand, this meaning of after (resemblance) evokes the entire problematic of recognition/recognizability which O'Neill describes so well with respect to photography. Photography's aspiration to perpetual novelty brings it to the verge of an illegibility which is institutionally intolerable. Hence, it must transform the particular into the general, the concrete into the abstract, appealing to cultural codes of recognizability ("A President must look like a president, a bar of soap must look like a bar of soap.") O'Neill clarifies the extent to which photography depends not only upon indexicality but upon iconicity as well. However, the striving after abstraction (formal, thematic, etc.) has generated all the historical dilemmas of art photography. A great part of the cultural fascination with photography, as demonstrated so well by critics from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes, has been its intimate alliance with contingency. As Benjamin has pointed out, the photograph is *seared* with contingency, producing an irresistible urge on the part of the viewer to seek the traces of a real outside of codification, system, or structure--to see an image which "takes after" nothing one has ever seen before.

Stefan Abrams's series of photographs would seem, at first glance, to annihilate the possibility of contingency. There is a generic quality to the minimalist room in which the television set is located--the nondescript lamp, the blinds, the purely functional tables all seem to signify the quality of

"roomness," obliterating all particularity. The television, with its box-like frame and antenna, could be an icon for a television. And the images on the television screen are images of images of well-known films. As O'Neill points out, little is left to chance insofar as the video image has been paused, disallowing the possibility of a random frame or a scan-line indicating the mechanism's tracing of a visual field. Nevertheless, I would venture to claim that O'Neill's analysis has captured a sense in which the photographs, paradoxically, work to *figure* contingency.

They do so by their choice of cinematic images which, as O'Neill points out, are "in-between" the exemplary meaning-saturated images we usually hold in memory. He contrasts these Deleuzian "any-instant-whatevers" to the highly legible, privileged moments frozen in stills which come to represent and condense the less graspable, experienced duration of a film (in the still, cinema aspires to be photography). Abrams's choices are usually the less recognizable frames from *Masculin/Feminin, Strike, Hangmen Also Die, Battleship Potemkin, Alphaville*, etc. But they are the kinds of frames which are indispensable to our sense of filmic movement, flow, and change. They point to the non-hierarchical leveling of moments characteristic of both the cinema (24 frames per second, any-frame-whatever) and, indeed, of modernity itself.

As Deleuze has pointed out, the true technological ancestor of the cinema is not photography itself but instantaneous photography. In the daguerreotype, "taking" a picture requires a duration, the body held rigidly in place to prevent movement. The daguerreotype was fully allied with the *pose*. Instantaneous photography, on the other hand, was designed to negate this requirement of stillness and, indeed, to deal directly with movement in its most imperceptible phases. Catching the human body in positions never seen before--frequently awkward, ungainly, unaesthetic positions, instantaneous photography made available those spaces/times "in-between" the only

"poses" of movement until then culturally recognized. O'Neill points out that the instantaneity of this photography is both mechanical and physiological, demanding the speed of a reflex action pushing the button, snapping the shot. It is certainly not surprising, from this point of view, that instantaneous photography was so quickly taken up in the service of physiology. It made possible the work of Eadward Muybridge and Jules Etienne Marey, who attempted to dissect human movements and gestures, to locate their smallest units, to reveal the secrets of a body in motion. Often referred to as predecessors of the cinema, Muybridge and Marey generated the analytical spacing and separation of photographs of various stages of movement which was crucial to the synthetic work of the cinema in producing an illusion of movement. Cinema depends not only on the points in-between poses cited by O'Neill, but on the points in-between those already in-between positions, on the periods of time/movement missed when the shutter is closed (guaranteeing the sharpness required for movement's legibility). This "lost time" underwrites the technological representation of movement, and its effects can perhaps best be seen in the compensatory insistence on "real time," which seems to be growing stronger and stronger in this digital age.

In both photography and cinema, the representation of movement depends upon stillness in order to insure legibility. Hence, the representation of movement demands movement's negation and an inevitable loss (the loss of the time in-between frames). The desire to transcend this technological limitation and *truly* represent time has coalesced, historically, in the blurred image. The Italian futurists, in their attempts to activate Marey's findings in quest of movement's adequate representation, frequently had recourse to the blurred image. In painting, the widely reproduced *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912) by Giacomo Balla is an example of this tendency and, in photography, Anton Bragaglia's photodynamism was an attempt to give full expression to movement, embracing dematerialization and distortion as crucial consequences of the mobility of bodies. The technique of

photodynamism involved a refusal of the factor of instantaneity in photography. Instead, the shutter was left open to record the blurred wake of a moving object in order to reproduce, in Bragaglia's words, the "inner, sensorial, cerebral and psychic emotions that we feel when an action leaves its superb, unbroken trace." For the Futurists, the pure signifier of speed and immobility was illegibility.

Almost a century later, O'Neill demonstrates how Abrams, in his series of "After Cinema" photographs, selects frames from Bresson, Fellini, and Godard which "bear the trace of motion within a still frame in the blurring into illegibility of the object whose motion is recorded, even as it escapes recording." Against the instantaneity of the pose, of the frozen gesture saturated with meaning, this "trace of motion" risks illegibility in order to get at something which flees, which by definition exceeds our grasp. This is something other than the blur as the highly conventionalized sign of speed and modernity which it has hardened into since the time of Futurism. Nevertheless, in this search for the truth of time and movement, despite the flirtation with indecipherability, there is something of a realism which has been stridently rejected in other realms of representation (including the modernism of a Godard or a Fellini). For Godard, in particular, it is not so much a question of being adequate to the phenomenological experience of time (as it might be for Deleuze, for instance), but of interrogating a lust for instantaneity which subtends the commodification of time or, as O'Neill adds, interrogating the very legibility/illegibility of the image (note, in this respect, Godard's query, "Is this a just image, or just an image?")

By constructing his work as a series, Abrams invokes another dimension of mobility and change and undermines our rigid and static conceptualization of "the work." From showing to showing, the work mutates, inscribing other films, other images, contesting our complacency and testing our memory. But the technique of the series is also a mimicking, or figuration, of cinema

and of the protocinematic techniques of Muybridge and Marey. There are minimal differences between each photograph: the obliqueness of the television angle in relation to the viewer changes more or less, the television is further or closer from the right edge of the frame, the horizontal angle of the camera on the scene changes. But the most striking difference between photographs of the series is, of course, the choice of the film frame visible on the screen of the television (which allows for the almost infinite openness of the series). As O'Neill points out, these frames are usually not the highly recognizable, symbolically laden ones that are chosen for cinema stills but the *other* images, those that make up the bulk of the film, the "in-between" images. They are, nevertheless, images that the cinéphile would often recognize and take pleasure in doing so. Cinéphilia is usually considered a somewhat marginalized, furtive, even illicit relation to the cinema rather than a theoretical attitude. It is the property of the film buff rather than the film theorist (although some theorists are motivated by cinéphilia). Cinéphilia, at its most basic, is love of the cinema, but it is a love which is attached to the detail, the moment, the trace, the gesture. It is continually on the look-out for the unscripted movement or gesture, the moment which resists codification and the tight control of structure. As such, it is wedded to the photographic base of the cinema, to its indexicality and its intimate alliance with contingency. O'Neill points to another dimension of this alliance with contingency--the cinéphile treasures the rarity of certain films, the difficulty of access, and the delight of the chance moment of finding a certain film, on television or in a movie theater. From the point of view of indexicality and inaccessibility, photography and cinema find a new alliance, which the development of videotape technology and the digital appears to threaten.

The mise-en-scène of Abrams's series is the mise-en-scène of a certain cinéphilia, the mise-en-scène of a certain relation to cinema which is already historical. The digital is not literally present in this scene but fully present in its historicity. As O'Neill writes, "Something is being interrogated as a

memory--cinema and photography as they were and may never be again." Abrams's series brings together photography, television, and cinema, evoking the digital phenomenon of convergence. The digital is usually understood as having the capacity to engage and assimilate all previous media--text, photography, film, video, radio, telephone. Yet, there is a more extreme sense in which the digital could be seen as the very annihilation of media. Insofar as all media "assimilated" by the digital are stored in the same uniform, homogeneous form, as numerical data, the specific medium becomes inconsequential or, at least, of secondary importance. This dematerialization is the source of the somewhat perilous fantasy of infinite reproducibility without loss. There is no second or third generation print or copy in the realm of the digital. The digital would be, after Abrams, "After Media." The outrageously utopian or dismally dystopian rhetoric surrounding technology is a symptom of this hope/fear of the obliteration of the material.

This logic of extremes which seems to characterize what many call our "postmodernity" is not so distant from the cultural logic of photography in the context of modernity. The digital presents itself as a clean break, a rupture with the past, while simultaneously incorporating within its own functioning all previous media. The ideology of modernity is, of course, that of the break, rupture, newness itself. And O'Neill astutely delineates photography's enslavement to novelty, to the demand for ever new images, a demand which insures the inherent disposability of each photograph as it faces its always newer replacement, and which generates the compensatory desire of an art photography lusting after the staying-power of the archive. However, while O'Neill argues that photography's relation to novelty persists at the expense of its relation to history (a situation Abrams's work counters), there is a sense in which the photograph has always been inhabited by history. Roland Barthes and others have argued that the photograph's relation to temporality, its tense, is that of a "that has been," a curious conflation of the "here" and "then." The object and the moment it depicts become

immediately historical. Siegfried Kracauer claims that on the one hand, photography's relation to history is that of an illegitimate historicism and, on the other hand, it has the potential to incarnate the "go-for-broke game of history." Abrams has constructed a scene which is already old, before the film has been exposed, before the camera's ratification of the moment as past tense. Old films shown on a television with an antenna are virtually a thing of the past. A history of a history, the series constitutes itself as a metahistory. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the series works to sublate the temporality of photography--to convince us that this is our present, this memory of a cinéphilia no longer available.

With their juxtaposition of the brightly illuminated and somewhat fantastic images on the television set with the drab, unexciting fixtures of a generic room, Abrams's photographs denaturalize the televisual cinematic image. The incongruity of the horses of *Strike* or the enormous human eye of *Alphaville* inhabiting the same space as the lamp and the blinds, emerging out of darkness into a bland domestic scene, underline the extent to which the image is an alien external entity. The heterogeneity of the two spaces is marked. In addition, there is no viewer visible within the frame. Viewerless, the images seem even more ethereal ("If a tree falls in the forest, with no one there to hear it, is there sound?") Is there an image?

It is tempting to wonder about the archival fate of Abrams's series, beyond the issue of its mutability, in an era which believes itself to be after photography, after cinema, after television. It is even more tempting, but difficult, to imagine how these photographs will age, since they speak so clearly to our present, a present haunted by the media-annihilating possibilities of the digital. But, we can deal only with our "now," a now in which the photographs are an eloquent testimonial to the crucial imbrication of temporality, memory, and history in the technologies of representation we think we know.

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US $14.00 / $21.25 CAN

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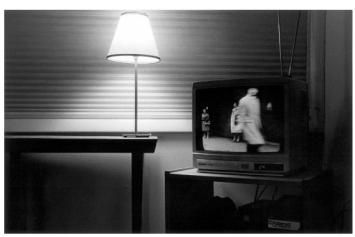
If the power of Abrams's images do not depend upon our memories of the films whose single frames they mobilize, it is because rather than something being remembered in Abrams's series--like one remembers the steps of a dance--something is being interrogated *as a memory*, as something that will not live again in our bodies: cinema and photography as they were and may never be again. -- *Edward R. O'Neill*

To avoid portraiture, [Stefan Abrams] forecloses familiarity: there is little possibility of seeing ourselves reflected in these photographs, whether framed by or superimposed on another figure. We end up as voyeurs, oddly detached from the photographs and distanced from ourselves.
-- *Aaron Levy*

Cover Images by Stefan Abrams, Untitled (*After...*) series, 2001

Emerging Artists Series



Slought Books, Philadelphia
A Division of Slought Networks

ISBN 0-9714848-1-3

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