Hindsight: The Moving image and the post-photographic

John Aäsp

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HINDSIGHT: THE MOVING IMAGE
AND THE POST-PHOTOGRAPHIC

BY

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THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art in Imaging Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere gratitude to my thesis chair, Therese Mulligan, for her continual support in the development of my thesis, for her engaging discussions and references, and for including me in many other rewarding projects over the course of my graduate study.

Many thanks go to my advisory committee: Elliott Rubenstein for his lucid exchange of ideas and for allowing me to guest lecture in his History & Aesthetics of Photography course, Timothy Engström for his dense philosophical engagement and challenging my concepts beyond the surface, and Jessica Lieberman for helping ground my ideas into a finished product.

Several people helped shape my progress who I wish to acknowledge: Jeanne Verhulst, Anthony L’Abbate, and Jeff Stoiber at the George Eastman House; Patti Ambrogi and her enthusiasm for the moving image within a photographic framework; Patricia Turner, John Vinklarek and Craig Adcock for pushing me early on; Aki Miyoshi, Evan Selinger, Alex Miokovic, and Chip Sheffield for their keen knowledge and respect of the process; and Jeff Weiss, a true inspiration and motivation for any student who had the pleasure of working with him.

I also wish to thank Robert Baker and El Kaigler at the Dyer Arts Center for the experience and support during my study at RIT.

I am greatly indebted to my family and friends for their undying support of my ideas and survival in Rochester. This work is dedicated to them.

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December 2006
HINDSIGHT: THE MOVING IMAGE AND THE POST-PHOTOGRAPHIC

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ABSTRACT

My recent video work employs a chronophotographic template to play on the idea of extracting knowledge from a fragmented visual sequence. Rather than freezing separate frames as instances of motion (as seen in a Muybridge sequence), motion is left within the sequence—looping continuously to create a paradox of stasis and dynamism. Using found footage from an older film era or clips from modern television, sequences are recaptured and reorganized to create a media-hybridized moment standing in a new temporal flow.

Influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson, this work explores a gray area between cinema and photography, motion and stillness, linearity and repetition. A shift in spectatorship occurs in between the conventions of cinema and photography that reveals a dense and challenging area of visual art. My work is about the gesture of reviewing an already recorded world—one that exists as a living body or historical archive of imagery that communicates and informs contemporary visual culture.

Though images are appropriated from cinema and television, the final pieces are not meant to be received as either. A more thoughtful apprehension of moving imagery within the context of photography can emerge if temporal expectations are set aside, and more careful articulation will help elucidate moving image work in the post-photographic age—not by dancing on photography’s grave—but as a reconstructive practice addressing a larger, living body of camera/screen-based imaging.
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Hindsight: The Moving Image and the Post-Photographic

In a recent interview with contemporary photographer Jeff Wall, Jan Estep asked “what is your take on art video?” to which Wall responded “It is cinema and ought to be treated as cinema.” Wall further elaborated his point by saying “I think what we call the fine arts or the visual arts are essentially about still pictures and objects... and that cinema, as motion pictures, is another kind of art altogether.”¹ While cinema may indeed be its own island of aesthetics, placing all moving pictures under the umbrella of cinema is a misjudgment of cinematic versus photographic work. It also uses the moving/still dichotomy as misplaced criteria for judging whether visual art should be received as either.

In my own work I attempt to play in precisely this gray area that Wall seems to refuse. My images are about a tension between stillness and movement, photographic and cinematic viewing, repetition and linearity. All of these terms come to bear on the demarcation between cinema and “fine art”, and our critical investigations of moving image work can be greatly improved by hashing them out more carefully. There is plenty of room to work in between where Wall has drawn an aesthetic line; generalizing only serves to hold us back from receiving and interpreting an extremely dense area of contemporary visual art.

In one of my images entitled Imitation, a man is shown in profile sitting in a chair, moving and reacting to what appears to be a film of a moving landscape projected onto him. The overall image is split into five windows, and the sequence is slightly delayed
between each frame. At a certain moment, a flash cuts across the sequence, restoring the figure to an initial state of rest, only to begin the sequence of motion again. Several things are happening—one, the original image is appropriated from a silent film outtake. Secondly, the original outtake is already a kind of conscious play with the illusion of cinema. Thirdly, the sequence is split into five windows, evoking a kind of chronophotographic template; in other words, if one were to pause the sequence at any given moment, the viewer might think they were looking at a piece from Muybridge's locomotion studies. Fourth, the piece is intended to repeat endlessly in the space it is shown. There is no show-time, no designated movie theatre, just a static object (a screen) on which this moving picture (or pictures) can be seen in repetition. And finally, the piece shows evidence not only of early cinema and film-like specificity, but also textures of video scan lines and digital aliasing that one can only attribute to more contemporary imaging technologies.

In these details the issues of stillness versus motion and photographic versus cinematic are compounded. No longer can it be said for sure if this piece is cinema or photography, but it certainly is about cinema and photography. My work calls up the images of the past but also calls up the mediums that held those images, while questioning the conventions attached to both.
Chronophotography and the Representation of Time

Of greater interest to me than cinema is one of its immediate precursors—chronophotography—primarily because of the associations it has with scientific validity. The ocular template employed most often by Eadweard Muybridge serves as a kind of iconography for visual empiricism (a fossil fuel for Enlightenment aspirations) and a renewed epistemology of vision not seen since the Renaissance. The thumbnail-like images in a Muybridge sequence break up the steady stream of motion into measurable fragments imperceptible to the naked eye. Historian Marta Braun adds more about Muybridge:

That his work has long been seen as scientific testifies in equal measure to the power of our response to the ‘scientific’-looking clues in his photographs and to our beliefs about the sequential structure that governs his depictions of locomotion. Misled by the apparently scientific apparatus shown in the pictures—the grid against which Muybridge posed his figures and the chalked off area in which they move—which in fact give us no way to measure anything real, we have misread his photographs. They are in fact not scientific depictions of movement, but fictions.²

Braun’s extensive research on Muybridge illustrates the artistic inclinations of the legendary chronophotographer and how his work as a result of a casual bet became so heavily ingrained in public consciousness as scientific work. The significance of his “settling the bet” about a
disagreement regarding horses’ legs in motion accentuates the camera’s ability to capture an instantaneous representation invisible to the eye, yet when it comes down to being a visual explanation of time, per se, the argument gets trickier to sustain. And even while Etienne Jules Marey’s inclinations were to use chronophotography strictly as scientific measurement, the result was something that today is as aesthetically pleasing as it is empirically informative.

Nevertheless, the chronophotographers did make clear that a single image can represent multiple moments (Marey) and the multiple images can represent one single event (Muybridge). But the point of sequences like Muybridge’s *Human and Animal Locomotion* is that they are frozen moments representing spatial relationships at particular stops of time. They did not aim to represent any inherent truths about time other than that time could be visually halted.

Henri Bergson, a French philosopher and contemporary of Muybridge and Marey, succinctly addressed the visualization of time and movement in his book *Matter and Memory*. While he never referenced the chronophotographers directly, one of his statements is of particular importance: “we must not confound the data of the senses, which perceive the movement, with the artifice of the mind, which recomposes it.” As Braun describes, “movement, according to Bergson, is reality itself. It is continuous
change, and undivided fact, a passage from rest to rest, and is absolutely indivisible.\textsuperscript{4}

The artifice of the mind is extended by the camera, and the chronophotographs, for Bergson, would be "only so many imaginary halts."\textsuperscript{5}

It is Bergson’s argument coupled with the contradictions surrounding chronophotography that serve as root influences in my recent work. While use of Muybridge’s ocular template implies the study of motion, I see leaving motion within the chronophotograph as potentially more engaging if not more suitable to the problems of visualizing time (via Bergson). The paradox of my work is that while the images "move", the moments depicted can be characterized as frozen even if they will not stand still. My work attempts to move beyond the empirical limitations of the still photograph of motion, and contribute to a more conceptual body of time-based imaging. A piece from \textit{Kinesics} (\textit{kinesic.1}) serves this line of thought. In a similar fashion to \textit{Imitation}, a hurdler is depicted in five separate windows, stuck in each small interval of movement. The separation of individual still frames is altered by their overlapping and superimposition—bleeding each interval of movement into one another. Suggesting that motion is not entirely separable, it begins to assert another complication of time other than moments blending together.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kinesic.1.png}
\caption{John Aasp, Still from \textit{kinesic.1}, 2006}
\end{figure}
The piece illuminates new contradictions—rather than measurements—that stem from chronophotography. Much like a chronophotograph, the full progression of the jump is represented, but no one window shows the entire movement. Movement is not halted, but is continuous—not in its original passage, but in its frozen repetition. The piece is further compounded by the use of found footage from Dziga Vertov’s *Man With the Movie Camera* (1929).

Vertov was aware of the curious difference between the continuum of cinema and the static moment of the photograph. In Vertov’s original footage, subjects like hurdlers are moving when they suddenly freeze. After a moment of stillness, the subject(s) continue their progression over the obstacle, back into the continuum of movement. In *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* Laura Mulvey elaborates:

> This is not simply a matter of movement and stillness, but of the single image as opposed to the filmstrip, the instant rather than the continuum. The reality recorded by the photograph relates exclusively to its moment of registration; that is, it represents a moment extracted from the continuity of historical time. However historical the moving image might be, it is bound into an order of continuity and pattern, literally unfolding into an aesthetic structure that (almost always) has a temporal dynamic imposed on it ultimately by editing. The still photograph represents an unattached instant, unequivocally grounded in its indexical relation to the moment of registration. The moving image, on the contrary, cannot escape from duration, or from beginnings and ends, or from the patterns that lie between them.⁶

She goes on to say that Vertov’s freezing of frames during the continuum of the film sequence “asserts the moment at which that one frame was recorded, even as it is
duplicated to create a freeze effect. But the sequence continues and explores the single frame's place in the sequence rather than in isolation.” Kinesic.2 explores Vertov's "single frame" within the sequence, depicting Vertov's hurdler sequence as one original image multiplied upon itself—resulting in a composite structure of movement and stillness. The blended duplication becomes a superimposed, structural cycle. The freeze frame rendered by Vertov is compounded by a staggered delay in each of the duplicated images, creating a syncopated composition of one overall movement.

The work from Kinesics then not only refers back to chronophotography and the dawn of cinema, but attempts to play in between the two—in that gray area between the moment of photographic registration and the continuous duration of cinematic flow. Whether the subject is sitting in a chair or jumping over hurdles, a recurring theme in the work is the lighthearted gesture of seeming to move but never getting anywhere, adding to the idea that any representation of time, whether moving or still, remains fictitious. Moreover, an oversimplification of stillness as fine art and cinema as "another kind of art altogether" simply fails to account for the intricacy that lies between photography and cinema, and is precisely what my work is about.
Spectatorship and the Cinematic Commitment

Instead of limiting our understanding to separate encounters of time, Mulvey refers to a spectator “with a heightened consciousness of the blending of two kinds of time.” Spectatorship is another way to approach the vague classifications of cinema, photography and fine art. It can be a recurring frustration to peruse through a gallery space, come upon a darkened room with an apparent moving image piece inside, and be subject to watching a movie. While there are many splendid varieties of cinema in the world today, theatre-style movie watching, as I have found it, is not often pleasantly compatible with the gallery mode of viewing visual art. So while the movie in the darkened room may be worth viewing, it is often what might be characterized as “anti-spectacle” or a downright bore. In many cases this is due to the fact that the viewer is engaged in a window-shop rhythm that is not easily accompanied by the commitment of cinematic viewing. In other cases, the work purposefully challenges the comfortable conventions of cinema such as Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1962-4, which incited audiences to anger) or Stan Brakhage’s *Dog Star Man* (1961-4, that takes the silent film into abstract, lengthy variations). The idea of enduring a work of cinema that is ontologically aggravating or so lengthy and quiet it seems to move nowhere—directly relates to the disassociation with experimental cinema and the common reception of cinema as a comfortable, entertaining escape into formulaic narrative.

To be exposed to what I call the “cinematic commitment” is to understand that a viewer will sit in a darkened room and stay with the linear progression of images until the
end, at which point the viewer is then capable of commenting on the piece as a whole. This is very different from walking into MOMA or a local art gallery to peruse pictures. In a gallery space one is free to roam the room, to approach whatever seems attractive, to stare as long as one feels comfortable. There is no demand of the viewer to strap in for the ride, only a proposal: that the piece might be visually appealing and if so, its ability to maintain interest can then be scrutinized. Cinema could be discussed in much the same way—in its ability to maintain interest—but one has not “seen” the work unless it has been received in its entirety. The cinematic commitment is not the actual length of time one sits with a movie, but the very insinuation that a prescribed length of time is necessary to apprehend the movie as a whole. With gallery art, there is no prescribed length of time, only the hours in which the space is open to viewers.

In addition, the cinematic commitment is inherently linear in form. A movie can be watched over and over again, but it still remains a series of images leading toward one final image: the last one. When the movie is over, the screen goes black. The credits roll. One does not enter a photograph mid-way through. A photograph hangs perpetually, always available to the viewer to return to again and again—the same instant, the same composition is fixed for any viewer at any given moment. It grasps a kind of wholeness akin to an old argument of art historian Michael Fried—that if a work contained a theatrical (perhaps cinematic) element, it was not related to the fine arts, but more akin to theatre. And it may be this argument that Jeff Wall is trying to revive. But while cinema and gallery art are very different in their durational commitments, we know now that every experience is temporal, every encounter with art is of some duration, and that even a very static object can take time to fully process in a viewer’s mind, whether it is
seconds or years. The point here is that the linear progression of cinema requires a certain durational commitment, but photographs, sculptures and objects of all kinds may also require duration to process. There may be a difference between theatricality in performance and duration in static viewing, but as I have been arguing, there is no instantaneous grasp of either kind of work. There is no individual "frame" in which we can declare a work understood—there is only an indivisible amount of time in which a work may continue to have an effect. Every time one calls up a work they have seen in the past (whether a photograph or cinematic work), the work is part of its own continuous duration, its potential for burning itself in the memory of a viewer. The key to cinema is not that the images are moving, but that the viewer must experiences a prescribed length of "moving images" in order to make sense of the work as a whole.

**Cinematic versus Photographic Viewing**

Laura Mulvey writes elegantly in *Death 24x a Second* on the differences between photographic and cinematic viewing modes. In her chapter dealing with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Mulvey argues that the acclaimed director understood the relationship between stillness (as it relates to a Barthes-like notion of death) and motion as it referred to life. Her argument is extensive and succinct that Hitchcock, much like Vertov, understood the arresting moments when a motion sequence becomes motionless. While Vertov works with this knowledge in a cinema vérité style, Hitchcock utilizes it within a mysterious narrative. Yet *Psycho* is meant for theatrical viewing and rightfully so. If one intends to see *Psycho*, one is normally expecting the commitment of linear progression Hitchcock has composed. If one sees Douglas Gordon’s *24-Hour Psycho* the
discussion takes a turn. Gordon has taken Hitchcock’s masterpiece and slowed down its pace, so that the film creeps by frame by frame, extended to last a full twenty-four hours. Gordon has utilized found footage from an already literate and accomplished artist (Hitchcock) who had a thorough understanding of the moving/still dichotomy. Using Hitchcock as found footage is a bold and somewhat risky move, but what Gordon ends up doing is adding to a larger dialogue about cinema, video, and photography. Gordon extends the film into a slow succession of still frames, allowing the viewer to apprehend each frame as if it were a still photograph. *Psycho* is transformed via video from a motion picture into a slideshow. This interruption of cinematic flow emphasizes a photographic contemplation of each frame, rather than a cinematic progression through narrative. Mulvey sheds more light:

Gordon’s own discovery of another dimension to the film image, as he slowed his machine to examine a highly self-reflexive moment of voyeurism, can stand symbolically for this shift in spectatorship. *24-Hour Psycho* may represent an elegiac moment for the cinema, but it also marks a new dawn, the beginning of an ‘expanded cinema’, which will grow in possibility as electronic technologies are replaced by digital ones.11

As *Psycho* is still viewed in theatres and home movie screens, *24-hour Psycho* would be rather tortuous to view in the same way. The slower
pace would drive any viewer expecting a cinematic flow mad—therefore the spectatorship is shifted into a more photographic, aesthetic contemplation. Gordon’s work is more suited to the photographic mode of viewing and should not be classified as cinema, even though it is about cinema, and in fact takes directly from it.

**Appropriation of Cinema: Film as Found Object**

Digital video has made cinema an easily found object that can be appropriated, chopped up, and manipulated as to render it wholly historical. Artist and writer Peter Weibel explains:

> What we have (with found film) are media-oriented observations of a second order, in which visual culture as a whole is exposed as a ready-made object for analysis. Consequently observation of the world gives way to the observation of communication. The uncommon character of the visual code becomes evident in a kind of symptomatic reading.

Mulvey adds:

> At the end of the twentieth century new technologies opened up new perceptual possibilities, new ways of looking, not at the world, but at the internal world of cinema. The century had accumulated a recorded film world, like a parallel universe, that can now be halted or slowed or fragmented.

The terms post-photographic and post-cinematic are discussed not because cinema and photography no longer exist or remain effective in some way, but because technology has enabled us to move on from it—to see it in hindsight—as a medium of visualization from the past that brings with it its own history. The motion picture is then not a category of cinema—cinema is a category of the motion picture. (Just as one could say the picture is
not a category of photography. It is the reverse.) Because cinema and photography carry histories of their own that can be reinterpreted, they represent only a fraction in the history of the picture-making. And what arrive after are the post-cinematic, and post-photographic—new kinds of pictures. Gene Youngblood, author of *Expanded Cinema* wrote “…in every case when we refer to the phenomenology of the moving image, we call it cinema. For us it is important to separate cinema from its medium.”

Digital cinema will take over movie theatres within the next few years, leaving film behind as an ontological tie to cinema. Thus, a cinematic experience need not be film, nor does the motion picture need be a cinematic experience.

Found footage is a lucid strategy of challenging conventional uses of film and video by recontextualizing content originally intended for cinematic delivery—thereby engaging a viewer in the reevaluation of past visual cultures that inform our present one. Film appropriation utilizes existing imagery in much the same way as collage artists use existing imagery, or how Andy Warhol used found photographs. The selection and remediation of objects and images in the world is a practice inherent to photography. All photographs are representations of found objects and images—all photography is a selection and arrangement of things already in the world. Using existing imagery in video is a migration of photographic practice from the appropriation of the “reality” we find outside of us to the “realities” being beamed at us from the archives of television, cinema and web content. It is also a migration of cinematic practice from a tradition of artists and filmmakers “subverting narrative structure, manipulating the ‘official story’ and questioning the controlling elements of our world through media.”

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15. [Citation needed]
Whether approaching the discourse from a cinematic or photographic background, all who are engaged in the use of found footage share a pursuit of what Catherine Russell calls “an aesthetic of ruins.” Here Russell us to redefine our encounters with moving imagery—the digital platform demands that our interpretations become more sophisticated. The idea of post-photography (and cinema) might be supported by what W.T.J. Mitchell refers to as the pictorial turn:

...not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories or representation...it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that spectatorship... may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading.

Mitchell’s observation beside Mulvey’s “shift in spectatorship” can perhaps address why artists see found footage as a new window into understanding culture past and present, as well as indicate that the seemingly simple divide between cinema, photography and fine art is much more complex.

Language of the “Moving Image”

Douglas Gordon’s work is a vivid example of the intricacies between moving and stillness, photographic and cinematic. But he is not the first to play with the assumptions of cinema in such a vivid way. Andy Warhol’s work with

Andy Warhol, Empire (film still), 1964.
film was a direct challenge to the conventions of cinema and his work is largely to credit for constituting a new moving image language. *Empire* is a continuous eight-hour shot of the static Empire State Building in New York City. In this piece the identification of what it is that is moving starts to complicate the issue, as well as how the film should be viewed. If it is a film, does it automatically prescribe a movie theatre? Or does the content of the piece prescribe the way it is to be viewed? Warhol himself addresses spectatorship of his films by saying a viewer could “…look away and then look back and they’d still be there.”

*La Jetée* is a film by Chris Marker that shows a succession of black and white still images to tell a linear narrative, only to have one small instant where a subject moves with continuous animation, leaving the viewer with an unsettling sense of the “now-ness” of the moving image with the “then-ness” of the photograph. While the film is a succession of stills, there is a cinematic flow to the work, one that leads a viewer in a linear progression towards an end. Warhol’s piece is a continuous shot, but there is no narrative on the surface, just an image with dull time passing by—a static view trapped in duration. Gerard Malanga observes another Warhol piece: “…I remember
holding up to the light a clip from Sleep and taking notice how each frame was exactly the same; each frame was static because the film was static in its actual projection.18 So while Marker uses a succession of still frames to move viewers through a narrative, Warhol uses the motion picture to show viewers stillness. Gordon shows us a succession of still frames from an existing film to interrupt cinematic flow with photographic reflection. How, after seeing these works, can we still be classifying still images and objects as fine art and motion pictures as cinema? How can we prescribe a mode of spectatorship based on the medium or motion itself?

If we can agree that mediums in themselves are not tied to preconceived notions of delivery and reception, we then should deal with the tendency to generalize motion in images as “moving images.” While we may refer to all images that seem to move “moving images” in a general sense, several factors may contribute to the sense of animation. Drawing these details out will not only help us articulate a more succinct language of the motion picture, but also help clarify the context in which the piece is best shown and understood.

Articulating a moving image language is sped along by identifying what it is that contributes to the sense of movement. What is it that seems to move? In Warhol’s Empire, nothing really seems to move except the material blemishes in the film itself (a reference to the actual movement of the film reel—absent but referred to by material specificity.) In Marker’s La Jetée, the movement is achieved by still images passing by in sequence, and for one instant the subject “comes to life” by blinking—a second order of movement within the slide-show movement. In an earlier piece from my series of stances of, a horse and rider enter the scene only to fall violently to the ground. The image is split
into six windows, again slightly delayed in a chronophotographic format. Obviously the subject(s) are part of the movement, but there is also a noticeable flow of film scratches, color tinting and shadows that play across the sequence. Properties of the image itself seem to contribute to the sense of movement, along with the moving subject. Those image properties then also become the subject even though they are differentiated for purposes of identification. Furthermore, one can imagine the camera itself to move, showing yet another portrayal of movement. A camera operator can be standing in an otherwise motionless room, spin the camera around, and the resulting image will be what most of us call “a moving image.” Yet what is being drawn out here is that we cannot simply classify all images that seem to move “moving images” without articulating where the movement is occurring—with the subject, the camera and/or visual properties of the image itself. (What if I were to hold up a photograph and shake it, or let it blow in the wind; would that be a moving image?) All have unique qualities that can be set apart, but also seen as components of a single sequence of movement. The articulation of what it is that moves instantly provides insight on how to read the work.
Stance I: fall (from grace) is a meditation on chronophotographic form, but is also a play on subsequent motion picture technologies. The horse is an obvious play on Muybridge, yet instead of graceful freeze-frames, the viewer sees the horse fall, ejecting its rider and then quickly rising to its feet, leaving each frame in delayed sequence.

Instead of being a visual contemplation of space within particular stops of time, the aesthetic is one of continuous delayed motion, repetition, and succumbing to the faults of gravity. The rejection from the regal stance of the horse, the alarming red color wash, and the parting of the horse from its rider all hint at the frustration of repetition, continuing in the face of failure, and the urge to see the action in replay—an urge manifested by abilities of contemporary technologies that allow for modification of content that was previously inaccessible (other than passive escape at the mercy of movie theatres or broadcast schedules).

Along with determining what is contributing to the sense of movement—the subject, the camera, or properties of the image itself, etc.—there is also the identification of those medium-specific traces that add to our sense of the image’s provenance. These play a large part in the appearance of my work. If one can recognize the difference between televisual and digital pixels, video scan lines and film grain, then one can appreciate the simultaneity in which they appear. This is further explored in stance IV (gravity in stereo). The subject maintains a struggle of rising off and returning to the ground between the two split windows. Evidence of film scratches, videotape warp, television scan lines and digital pixellation contribute to the sense of movement in the image, but also indicate stages of our moving image history. The appropriated clip from an early silent film has been mediated through several generations and the process never
includes contact with the original film. Yet the materiality of the original film survives in those medium-specific textures—or indexes—that refer to the image’s “then-ness”. A hint as to what the image used to be a part of or referred to has become a new translation, a media-hybridized moment standing in a new temporal flow.

Stance IV (gravity in stereo) implies the nineteenth-century stereographic view but also counteracts it by the alternating stance of the subject. The piece continues to oscillate in frame-by-frame delay as the subject, who has been thrown off the horse, must now face the repeated impulse to rise from the ground. The slower pace suggests the human subject’s dilemma in a more contemplative way. Her swift, violent fall from the horse is now a painfully slow attempt to get up again while being tempted once more to succumb to the grounding effects of gravity. Riding and being thrown off or getting up and falling down add to the sense of movement without resolve, a continuous struggle in exploring our negotiation with natural and technological forces.

While these video works have hints of cinematic action and extractable metaphors, the medium-specific properties are interacting in the image, bringing a further dimension to the table, so to speak—not only is action being portrayed in the image, but
the action of the image itself is portraying something as well. Margaret Morse adds to the discussion:

I have come to think of this possibility for repetition, contrast, and migrations of images across a shape as a poetic dimension of video installation; that is, it is a practice that de-emphasizes the content of images in favor of such properties of line, color, and vectors of motion, with content of their own to convey. The choreography of these properties is another kinesthetic dimension of transformation.\(^{19}\)

The formal transference of the original film image through generations of media adds a historical but also poetic dimension to the work and Morse’s comment helps expound the point. My work is about nostalgic traces hacked out of image history and repossessed by new technologies. Alleviated from their original context and reborn as post-photographic specimens, they are caught ultimately between the urge for photographic stasis and the dynamic flow of cinema.

**Repetition and the Expectation of Narrative Resolution**

In between the photographic and cinematic one will usually find repetition, which is significant in a theoretical as well as formal sense. No one especially likes listening to a compact disc skipping over the same two notes, and few enjoy a DVD that skips, halts, or interrupts the expected linear flow of a movie. There is an inherent frustration in repetition that can be downright aggravating, yet many of us go about our days in a very repetitive routine. Repetition seems at once a frustrating but also very comforting idea. Contemporary artist Paul Pfeiffer sees the repetitive image as
...inherently mesmerizing, like watching a cave fire in a fireplace, or like a moth to the flame. I’m interested in what might account for this tendency in the wiring of the mind’s eye. It’s like a visual addiction, something pleasurable that’s hard to resist. The eye gravitates toward incessant repetition, as if it wants to lose itself in it. For me the temporality of the loop implies a kind of escape, as well as a kind of imprisonment.  

Muybridge’s locomotion studies used repetition of single, static frames to visualize an imprisoned movement, while Warhol employed the repeating filmstrip (normally thought of as a field for narrative escape) to visualize stillness. Warhol’s silk-screens visualized repetition as a method of visualizing reality, and his use of repetition—whether in his photographic silk-screens or in his “static” motion pictures—serves as an interesting comparison to Muybridge’s motion studies. Warhol’s visualization of repetition within time evolved with works like Empire and Screen-Tests. Warhol not only helped visualize the complex nature of the motion picture but also of motion itself—by using the motion picture to represent a motionless subject (Empire), or to utilize the human subject’s subtle motions to reveal what the still photographic portrait leaves out (Screen-Tests). The notion of the still photograph being able to capture a moment is challenged by Warhol’s repetitive statement that there are infinite captures to make. Repetition then not only obstructs the flow of narrative resolution, it also illuminates a cultural fascination with instant replay, habitual behavior, pop-culture production and reproduction.
If the still photograph can be seen as an entombed instant, then the motion picture is as many instances entombed—waiting for the charge of technology to be set in motion. The motion picture takes us away from our aesthetic contemplation of an inanimate moment and into the pattern of moments. The two are quite different versions of seeing and experiencing time, and repetitive video work lies somewhere between them. Mulvey speaks of these differences in spectatorship and the “discovery of a new dimension to the film image.” She again references Douglas Gordon, denoting:

The reverie triggered by 24-Hour Psycho must be affected by the presence of death that pervades it, hovering somewhere between the stillness of the photograph and the movement of cinema. In Douglas Gordon’s reworking, in Psycho itself and in Hitchcock’s film more generally, stories, images and themes of death accumulate on different levels, leading like threads back to the cinema, to reflect on its deathly connotations as a medium and ultimately its own mortality.²¹

This dichotomy of frustration and seduction in repetition coupled with the extrapolation of a Barthes-like reflection on the photograph as a mummification of time fuels Mulvey’s point—remediating cinema not only brings back the entombed motion of the past, but with it the delivery system it employed, signifying cinema’s own entombment.

**Morality of the Moving Image: damnation**

As spectators, expectations of moving imagery to lead somewhere—to establish linear progress and thus narrative resolution—leads our experiences of time and movement into what could be called a morality of the moving image. The frustration of repetition, the plight of being damned to repeat one’s action for eternity is the undertone of the series damnation, which is the locus of my thesis exhibition. The original content
is already dealing with notions of frustration and seduction, and the restructuring of that content aims to lure the viewer into oscillating between the two. *Damnation I* is a head shot of a nun (or more specifically an actress portraying a nun) split into three windows. As the flickering image progresses, her face(s) subtly shifts from casual delightful grins to more wickedly possessed expressions. In certain moments a material texture flashes across the three windows, illuminating a cut in the delayed sequence. She continues to change expression while a variety of medium-specific events (film blemishes, video scan lines, camera cuts) cascade or interrupt the flow of her shot.

![Still from Damnation I](image)

On the one hand there seem to be layers to the subject—a woman, an actress, a nun. On the other, there seem to be layers to the image—film, videotape, television, digital video. The subject’s expression almost seems to interact with these formal events, triggering her expressions—her overall uneasy confusion over whether she is respectfully mummified in a photographic moment or eternally damned to her cinematic action. Knowing the difference in viewing modes (photographic vs. cinematic), one can read the sequence in either way, even with the embedded connotations of religious symbolism.

In *Damnation IV (radial device)* a crude torture device (what looks like an industrial crown of thorns) is hand-held in front of the camera for investigative display.
The image is repeated and delayed in a sixteen-screen grid. As the hand shifts to show us more of the object, a vignette (an event occurring in the original film) cascades across the grid in sequence. The aesthetic investigation of the original film and its remediation—the aesthetic rhythm that seems to emphasize the dazzle of the object’s display—renders the representation seductive and serene. This piece brings another dimension to the supposed damnation—the curiosity and/or shame felt by staring at something that is at once aesthetically desirable but practically objectionable.

 Damnation II shows a dark, ritualistic scene of a robed, bearded figure holding a book above his head, caught in a fiery windstorm. The four-window image can be easily taken for Moses on Mount Sinai, when in fact it is a clip from the silent film Faust. The confusion is a fitting characteristic. The rather opposing stories—a mythical man invoking the devil in order to find relief for his unbearable losses, and another mythical (but historically valid, to be sure) man invoking the God of the Old Testament to guide
him through a perilous journey—are symbolically paralleled in a similar moment of representation. Regardless if the specific connection is made, the character is frozen in his furious plea for a supernatural spirit to intervene in his tragedy. The piece portrays his doom as a constant appeal to the paranormal, and the viewer may too feel imprisoned by his repeated action. But while the work deals with spiritual longings and desires in the face of momentous loss and opposition; it also suggests the ongoing struggle of images to cling to a material support. Film blemishes and video scan lines add to the stormy sense of movement surrounding the subject, further emphasizing the superimposition of multiple image supports. The figure appears to be not only struggling with the originally intended drama of his scene, but also with the very survival of his image. Here the balance of eternal damnation versus eternal preservation seems to sway in the blur between cyclic and linear time, photographic and cinematic experience, motion and stillness.

It may be simply that “video and digital media have opened up new ways of seeing old movies.” Or perhaps,

...video art’s time has finally arrived: plasma screens make galleries of our living rooms; our tendency to flit between the computer and the TV makes split-screen-viewing less strange; the advent of webcams, screensavers and MTV has diminished the importance we attach to linear narrative.

My belief is that as our culture continues to become more visual—relying heavily on images as a primary means to know and access the world—our ability to maintain a language for its articulation becomes more challenging. The pace of visual culture outruns our theoretical framing of it, and a picture takes much longer to explain than to see. My work is not only about re-visioning the image world of the past, but about the gesture of reviewing that world. Our desire for the bird’s eye view that is magnified, enhanced and seduced by photography and cinema is again emphasized in the post-photographic framing of pre-existing images.

In much contemporary video work including my own, not only are the assumptions about cinema and photography played upon via appropriation, but the very aesthetic nature of movement and stillness becomes harder to define—leaving tidy demarcations between cinema, photography and fine art severely limiting. Photography has always provided us with hindsight, with a myopic view of the past. Now cinema joins photography in that hindsight—as historical mediums—embedded in the same space as its subject and, in its turn, becomes the subject itself. The use of digital media does not necessarily negate or transcend mediums of the past, but “will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced.” When that gray area between motion and stillness, photographic and
cinematic are explored, a new dense world of visual representation opens up. Not only will further articulation enhance readings of contemporary video and animated works, it will also assist in reviewing and forming a history of video art as it relates to the rich histories of art, cinema, and photography.

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4 Braun 278.

5 Bergson 190.


7 Mulvey 15.

8 Mulvey 16.


11 Mulvey 102.


13 Mulvey 181.


16 Yeo 25.

17 Warhol Mirror 92.

18 Warhol Mirror 195.


20 "Paul Pfeiffer and John Baldessari in Conversation." In *Paul Pfeiffer*. Exhibition Catalogue. Published in conjunction with exhibition curated by Dominic Molon and Jane Farver. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2003) 34.

21 Mulvey 102.

22 Mulvey 8.

23 Sandhu.

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