Persona (Ingmar Bergman, 1966)
If ever I say to a fleeting moment: “Stay, beautiful moment, don’t pass away!” then you can throw me in chains, then I’ll gladly perish.

Goethe, *Faust*  
(Faust to Mephistopheles)

It would have been so nice to have a few good photographs (taken at the very moment it happens) of Joshua bringing the sun to a stop, for example.

Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, *L’Eve Future*  
(Thomas Alva Edison)

There is one category of time not considered by Gilles Deleuze in his dynamic taxonomy of images: the interruption of movement, the often unique, fugitive, yet perhaps decisive instant when cinema seems to be fighting against its very principle, if this is defined as the movement-image. Still, we need to distinguish between the two sides of movement. First, there is the movement produced inside the image itself, which seems to reproduce at any given moment the conditions of natural perception. In Creative Evolution (1907), Bergson takes this for false movement, in which he sees only a succession of immobile images (photograms) directed toward the production of an abstract time (the défilement). In its earliest stages, says Deleuze, cinema had not yet invented its own time, as it would soon do through editing, the mobile camera and the advent of multiple takes. So Bergson cannot discern in this the movement-image, whose terms he laid out ten years earlier in Matter and Memory: an image that goes beyond both the illusion of divisible space and that of abstract time in order to make of real movement, and thereby of each instant, indivisible in itself, a mobile slice [coupe] of a perpetually open and changing entity; that is, the expression of “duration itself, in that this duration continually changes.” Such is the second side of movement, which authenticates

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the first and allows Deleuze to bring Bergson into his attempt to define cinema.

But what happens when the instant, this “immobile slice [coupe] of movement,” sets itself apart through an interruption of movement—the movement in the image as well as the movement of the image itself (unless this is an interruption of the défilement which never stops)? Isn’t there a contradiction in terms here, a flaw in their circularity? One could reply that such instants always derive from a sort of internal editing; they’re still caught in the duration, they’re caught in the film as a whole—of which they remain mobile slices [coupes]. Of course. But how can their difference be effaced, how can they be collapsed into the very thing from which they derive their difference? Rather, isn’t it possible to pull or to lure the film, cinema, toward the point they designate? This leads to bringing the second side of movement back around to the first, which has now become immobile movement. It amounts to modifying the terms used in defining film; or, shifting from movement to time. This is what Peter Wollen does in his discussion of Chris Marker’s La Jetée (1964) where precisely the opposite happens: a single real movement—the woman half-opening her eyes—breaks the series of photographs. He thus concludes that “movement is not a necessary feature of film,” that “in fact, the impression of movement can be created by the jump-cutting of still images.”

But isn’t this what Deleuze does in his admirable description of the shift from the movement-image to the time-image, the shift from an indirect image of time expressed through movement to the expression of time itself that characterizes modern cinema? Yes and no. Yes, because through this he accounts for the major shift in perspective, which permits Peter Wollen, for example, to redefine cinema around La Jetée, and which allows La Jetée to exist. No, because in his overall schema of time he is nevertheless conscious of the breach that has been opened by the presence of immobile matter and the interruption of movement. To set up this perspective I will begin with an idea that was already known but was reintroduced by Deleuze to describe cinema as movement-image: the notion of any-instant-whatever. Cinema “is the system which reproduces movement as a function of any-instant-whatever; that is, as a function of equidistant instants selected so as to create an impression of continuity.” He immediately remarks, however, that this hasn’t stopped cinema from thriving on privileged instants, which Eisentein aptly called “pathetic.” But these privileged instants are in no way poses or postures, general or transcendent, comparable for example to those that characterize the image of a horse’s gallop in antiquity. Rather, like Marey and Muybridge’s equidistant snapshots, these instants are points immanent to movement;
they cannot help but be remarkable or singular (as opposed to ordinary and regular) while nonetheless remaining any-instant-whatever. Then isn’t the freeze-frame (or the freeze inside the image)—with its specific ambiguity that interrupts the apparent movement without breaking up the movement of the défilement—one privileged instant among many, that is to say, any-instant-whatever? Or, could it be a privileged instant that would no longer really be any-instant-whatever?

I don’t think that there is one set answer to this question. The analysis can only be historical (the history of the freeze-frame remains to be written) or singular (it would then depend on the work or film). The very most one can do is trace the lines of a genealogy. It is obviously very difficult to conceive of the freeze-frame in primitive cinema, which was more concerned with the movement of bodies. Conversely, the development of silent film added the freeze-frame to the list of possible tropes. One sees this in Vertov, perhaps the first to use it on a large scale, in *The Man With The Movie Camera* (1929), and in René Clair’s famous *Paris qui dort* (*The Crazy Ray*, 1924). These images strike us today because half a century of film has gone by in the meantime. Yet, it seems that the freeze-frame was at the time only one way among many to manage a film-time that was obsessed with conquering its movements. One can see it as a form, admittedly extreme, yet similar to other processes such as slow and fast motion, reverse motion, and so on. Speaking of the decompositions of movement in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Every Man for Himself*, 1980), Godard pinpointed the possibility, unique to silent film, of varying the speed of the apparent movement of the film. Despite his desire for “other speeds,” Godard himself can only slow down the movement and freeze it, whereas cinema, because it was silent and new, was free to vary it.

In sound cinema, where representation is subjected to the homogenizing effects of speech and sound, time unwinds in a more or less linear manner. The freeze-frame is (virtually) foreign to “classical” cinema which has other ways of managing what fascinates in immobility. At the other end of the spectrum, in advertising, in music videos (and in films that use them as models), in the era of video-transactions and images of synthesis, the stilled image is one form of exchange between images, as vague as it is general, and whose nature remains to be specified. But in the meantime, the stilled image has acted and still does act as a support to the relentless search for another time, for a break in time into which modern cinema (this cinema of time that came into being after and because of the war, as Deleuze so clearly saw, through neorealism and the Nouvelle Vague) has perhaps fallen while searching for its most intimate secret. Serge Daney remarked along these lines that “Truffaut has a great idea when he ends
his first film, *Les Quatre Cent Coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959), with a freeze-frame of Jean-Pierre Léaud facing the sea... It is a way of returning the film to its skeleton of fixed images, like a corpse to the ashes that in any case it is ('ashes to ashes, frames to frames'). For film theory, among other things, the time opened up here becomes that of film analysis and the question of the photogram (two ways of stopping the film); a time that is also joined with that of photography, to which many have wanted either to compare or contrast film. It is striking to note that in his description of movement Deleuze has only one idea about photography: as one of the decisive factors in the birth of film, he designates "not merely the photo, but the snapshot (the long-exposure photo [*photo de pose*] belongs to the other lineage)." By "other lineage" he is referring to the "poses" or the "general postures" that, in the ancient and classical view of the world, were used to recompose movement "from formal transcendent elements" (once again the example of the horse's gallop...). So, historically, but also formally, the long-exposure photograph would be opposed to that of the snapshot which was to become the essential material of cinema. Roland Barthes, for whom every photograph is in the final analysis a pose, thought the very same thing.

The contrast between Barthes's view and Deleuze's theorization is worth reflecting upon. In the chapter from *The Time-Image* that takes up and expands the opening theses of *The Movement-Image*, Deleuze is opposed to anything that tends to immobilize the film. He singles out in particular the semiological gaze that, in likening the film image to an utterance, works like a suspension of movement. More fundamentally, he explains that "a direct presentation of time does not imply the stopping of movement, but rather the promotion of aberrant movement." By this he means a very autonomous movement, one that testifies directly to a time anterior "to all normal movement defined by motivity [*motricité*]." He adds that the movement-image already contains within itself this aberrant movement that is brought to light and worked by modern cinema. In short, Deleuze develops the idea of a flawless meshing of movement and time, where discontinuities and ruptures are integrated into a continuous expansion. He speaks of a modulation, an act of the Real which excludes any interruption, any overly privileged instant and any instance that might risk being fixed on transcendent elements.

For his part, Barthes tried to focus on an aberrant movement of another type in film: "the third meaning" (which he compares to the "aberration" that obliged Saussure to hear the enigmatic voice of the anagram in Latin verse). This "obtuse meaning" comes from
Barthes's encounter with several photograms taken from a film by Eisenstein. Opposed to the “obvious meaning,” where signification originates, is the fragmentary, exact, unpredictable and deliberately subjective “obtuse meaning” whose aim is primarily to be indifferent to and even contradict film movement, in its déroulement as well as its défilement. It seems that one can reach the obtuse meaning only through the image that is brought to a standstill, even scattered (like the shuffling of cards). And yet the “third meaning” may be said to constitute what Barthes calls the “filmic”: a kind of utopic virtuality caught in the very movement of the film, but against the grain. Neither photography nor painting can bring this out because they lack the elements of diegesis. This shows to what extent Barthes is seeking a paradoxical object: a meaning prior to all signification, irreducible to articulated language which is nonetheless its vehicle and to which it is opposed. Barthes leaves open the contradiction that initially led him to seek the “third meaning” outside of film in order then to exhume it from inside: at any rate, in this oscillation film movement divides onto itself and is thus absolutely contrary to the unitary movement of the whole proposed by Deleuze.

In *Camera Lucida,* Barthes reformulates a similar opposition, this time concerning photography. Here, the *studium* and the *punctum* take over from the “obvious meaning” and the “obtuse meaning”: the first leans toward the meaning of the photograph, its theme, its visible signifieds; the second designates the irrational, unnameable fragment that fascinates. This essentially scattered affect nevertheless comes together and finally can be said to assume its full meaning in the presence/absence of a single image: that of his dead mother. At this point, ultimate because it is unique to him, Barthes discovers in the singularity of his experience what he had earlier expressed as the fundamental rupture photography introduces into representational arts: a reversal of time that turns it into the tool of the “it has been.” The very free and powerful affect elicited by the photograph lies then in its intimacy with death. The snapshot turns back into a pose, a pause of time. The moment it captured, no matter how ordinary, thus takes on an extreme singularity—a transcendence?—that comes from stopping movement, from this interruption of time. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes goes back to his familiar opposition—well prior to his conception of the “third meaning”—between film and photography: one a simple supplier of illusion, the other inviting a quest for hallucination. This opposition was fundamental for Barthes. It makes it difficult to relate the freeze-frame, producer of the “third meaning,” to the more fundamental stop produced by the photograph itself in relation to film.
It seems to me that one might nonetheless be tempted, in light of these possible formulations, to put forward the idea of film as photography, that is, as grasped through the specter of photography.

My question could then be reformulated: what happens to film when the snapshot becomes both the pose and the pause of film? Isn’t it the unique privilege of the freeze-frame to make reappear, in the film’s movement (in the movement of certain films), the photographic, the photogrammic? Even better: the photogrammic as photographic? Not the photogram pulled out of the film, or utopically doubling what the film tells, as Barthes saw it, but the photogram surging up from photography, the overwhelming proof of the photographic immersed in the film, forcing itself into the meaning and the thread of its story. This also means asking: what kinds of instants does the interruption of movement imply? To what kinds of instants is it related?

I.

Let’s start with a little known film by Rossellini, *La Macchina ammazzacattivi* (*The Machine for Killing Bad People*, 1948), less poignant yet in a way much more surprising than *Roma, Città Aperta* (*Open City*, 1945) or *Viaggio in Italia* (*Journey to Italy*, 1953). Above all, the film invites reconsideration because it sketches a kind of counter-proof: it opens up to cinema the perspective of divided time, rather than that of time as a unifying principle in creation, an idea which André Bazin helped to establish.

Though it seems to have been a minor film for Rossellini (he didn’t even finish the shooting), it has no less resonance for his subsequent reflections on cinema.16

The decor is literally produced by the hand of artifice, emphatically theatrical, serious yet playful, so that one knows what to expect, as if to foil in advance the too great credit given to any belief in reality, given to anything that leads to cinema being taken for real life.
The action takes place in a small fishing village, deep in the heart of Sicily, where the Americans landed during the war. The mayor, backed up by an Italian-American who returned there a few years earlier, has real estate plans: he would like to use a possible ministerial endowment to buy the “castle” overlooking the sea, and turn it into a tourist complex. The project is not well received by the people of the village: everyone has different plans for the money. As for Donna Maria, owner of the castle, she wants to give her money to the poor. The castle also serves as a place of worship: the ashes of the dead are stored there after a brief stay at the cemetery, which is too small to accommodate them.

Into this situation comes a strange old man who asks the photographer Celestino for a night’s lodgings. Celestino is the (living) memory of the village; linked with Donna Maria, he is conservative, pious, superstitious. He shows the old man “the photos of two generations” that cover the walls of his studio and rails against Agostino, the policeman, who tried to stop him from photographing the procession honoring Saint Andrea, patron saint of the village. The old man asks: “Do you have a picture of him? We’re going to make sure he rests in peace.” Celestino pins the photograph to the wall, and the old man adds: “You have to photograph this picture.” Celestino does just this and the old man concludes: “My goal is to destroy the wicked.” We immediately hear noises, murmuring. Celestino runs outside: he sees Agostino on a terrace, his arm raised in the fascist salute, in exactly the same position as in the photograph. When they touch him, he falls dead to the ground. Celestino returns to his studio. The old man is gone. He takes down the photo, hides it; and finding on the ground a negative of the photograph he had taken of Saint Andrea during the procession the day before, he recognizes the old man and cries out: “Jesus! It was him! I’ve seen Saint Andrea!”

This strange principle of rephotographing the photograph permeates the film. First, Celestino experiments with a donkey, surreptitiously photographed, in order to assure himself of his new power. As conflict stirs up the community, he “kills” four people in succession. Giving in to the madness that overcomes the village, he gets ready to photograph everybody and anybody as he comes across them in his archives and prepares himself for an unheard of form of suicide. Still, he wants first to destroy the one who gave him this fatal power. But, when he tacks the photograph to the wall, the old man reappears; and when Celestino presses the shutter, Saint Andrea turns into the Devil. A modern devil, unarmed and playful, one who can leisurely bring his victims back to life and turn back into the false saint that he was. But this return of the “real” signals the end of the film: the giant hand
seen at the beginning returns and places its cardboard characters into a miniature set before disappearing into the clouds from which it emerged to tell this story.

So, rephotographing a photograph stops the movement of the shot. This reproduces the effect of a freeze-frame, but focused on a detail from the shot (for example at the funeral of one of the victims, a man comes to a standstill, transfixed by the effect, his two hands in the pockets of his vest, while behind him the funeral procession files by and disappears). The exact position of the bodies in the photograph is also repeated in the stilled image (until it is taken to the absurd when the mayor is caught in a pose as he was photographed as a child, nude on a fur rug). The paradox is that this effect does "stop" the film and even brings to mind the physical gesture of stopping the film on an editing table. But it can't be captured by bringing the film to a standstill, because it vanishes. One has the feeling that something impossible is trying to be articulated. A photograph that would appear as an instant, a moment of the shot, or as a photogram. This photogram is virtual, but its effect is nonetheless real: it inscribes in the depth and duration of the shot an equivalent of what would be its almost zero value as an immobile image, impossible to grasp in the défilement of the film.

Transformed into fragments of film-images, these photographs produce an effect where the long-exposure photograph and the snapshot alternate. Themselves images in images on which the camera lingers for a varying amount of time, they already oscillate from one to the other: the subject in general is treated like a pose (Agostino making the fascist salute, Donna Maria reigning like a smug middle-class bride) rather than being caught in the dialectic between any-instant-whatever and the decisive instant. As a result of being incorporated into the image, of which they become an aberrant motif (in spite of the fable that justifies them), these photos attack that much more the unicity of the film movement based on the linking and the equal distance between the snapshots. Agostino's burial produces this effect in an ironic way: one side of the coffin is shaped to accommodate the dead man's implacably outstretched arm. The photographic body is thus displaced in the body of the film and causes it to vacillate.

One could say that when film is penetrated by photography these moments become its meaningful instants. For Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the meaningful instant [l'instant prégant, the pregnant moment] in painting is the significant instant, the one that supposedly represents both the average and the acme of a dramatic action, thus expressing the painting in its entirety. In a painting the meaningful instant doesn't refer to anything real, it is a fiction, a kind of image of synthesis.
the contrary, the photographic instant—no matter how poignant or close to the pose, as Barthes thought—is always by the force of circumstance a "decisive instant" torn from reality. It can only be called meaningful in relation to the reversal of time and the generality of death of which it is the trace and the trauma, the secret subject that doubles the apparent one. Otherwise, it is at best the sublimated but immanent form of any-instant-whatever. So there wouldn't be in the literal sense a meaningful instant in cinema because, as one can see, its privileged instant can only spring from any-instant-whatever, from the photograph reduced, in terms of its movement, to its quality as pure snapshot. Yet where does my desire to qualify these instants as meaningful come from, these instants that suspend the time of movement and open up, inside of time, another time? First, it is because they make cinema lean in the direction of photography, toward its power to inscribe death. All the more so when they are directly supported, as in Rossellini's film, by a re-representation of photography, and when the significant effect of the stilled image is stipulated by the scenario or its theme. But perhaps, above all, it is because these instants possess a quality of abstraction and of irreality that seems to introduce a kind of paralysis—comparable to one that strikes (in) painting—into film. Of course, these instants are basically fugitive, while the painting's meaningful instant occupies the entirety of its time, if you will, since it is conceived so as to give to space the feeling of time. But in another way, the instant that stills the film bears a relation to the film as a whole. It goes way beyond its purely material inscription, reverting the film back onto itself, capturing its singular drama, emphasizing the fact that it cannot be reduced to the overly natural time of illusion, inducing a time-space at the juncture of the visible and the invisible. The characterization of film's meaningful instant, linked to the overall conditions of each particular film, is thus found to be both broad and limited, diffuse and precise. But it always echos, in a time that is by definition spread out, the unsettling of perception, the tingling of the unreal that the eye experiences at the sight of the fictive movements of bodies in painting.

Let us take as a (magnifying) example Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. The anamorphic death's head, in which the painting's meaning is completed and which gives logic and significance to the pose of the two men, this skull is only clearly visible if a certain course is followed: it assumes a spectator who is, at first, at an angle to the painting, identifying the skull and beginning already to make out the bodies and the objects that he or she will plainly see when facing the canvas. From this position in front of the painting, the floating object at the bottom of the picture appears unrecognizable but remains nevertheless
knowable because of his/her memory of it. This model helped Pascal Bonitzer show that if painting moves more than is believed, cinema likewise might move less than one would expect, and so the relation between the two would be much closer than it might appear. But above all, the example of Holbein has the advantage of showing us, in the extreme, what really happens in front of any painting: an unsettling of perception in relation to itself, a superimposition of images which remains in the background between the power of the instant that is sought and the verisimilitude of the intended representation. Such is the visual (mental) process that is displaced, fractured, modified by the film, but which constitutes the basic process: the projection of one image onto another, of one state of the image onto another. And so of a movement (of emotion or of the intellect) produced in immobility. This is the reason why the freeze-frame has an effect that is, in varying degrees, close to painting, but also why today so many paintings seem to be freeze-frames.

This wavering between fixity and movement, which is at the heart of *The Machine for Killing Bad People*, is inscribed in the narrative in such a way that it puts into play all of the dualities on which the film thrives: tradition and modernism, the good and the wicked, good and evil, heaven and hell, God and the Devil, the light that creates and the one that destroys, life and death (Celestino, the hero of these transitions, of this confusion, says in fact: “I don’t know anymore if I’m dead or alive.”) Without ever being able to reduce film or photography to corresponding strictly to one or the other of these opposing terms, without organizing all of the terms themselves into a flawless credo, it is clear that photography holds the power of death throughout the film. Celestino photographs, then photographs again, killing animals, men, women; and in doing this he attacks the very movement of the film. He can do this because Saint Andrea, protector of the village and representative of God, is also the Devil. So film can be a gift from heaven (as is the case with this hand that pierces the clouds) only on condition that its intimacy with death is recognized, an intimacy that threatens its movement—what one believed was the plenitude of its movement. Here, death is a figure of both the real and of style: that is, playing as much on the idea of real death as on the idea of putting to death the art of the real and of style; playing as much on the idea of real death as on the idea of putting to death the art (or one of the dimensions of the art) that chooses to make this its subject.

Let us remember that in *Journey to Italy* a distraught couple arrives in front of an excavation site in Pompeii from which, after an injection of plaster, there emerges the form of a couple clasped in an embrace, as a picture appears in developer. Thus, a photograph is formed from
the real itself. This embrace (stopping only in death) becomes the necessary passage to the kiss, until then impossible, which is finally exchanged by the husband and wife in the middle of the procession where they seem—with a mad, sudden movement—to come to a standstill in the image. This deeply moving privileged moment was made possible because earlier, as always, an image came to a standstill for them, an image that becomes for the film a meaningful instant as much because it contains in itself the entire film as because it creates movement and affinities between some of these moments.

This image of immobile embrace condenses the two great series of images which before that moment had caught the heroine’s eye: on the one hand, meaningful instants of art and of the cult of the dead (museum sculptures, a wall of skulls and bones in the church); on the other hand, the pregnant women she follows with her gaze. Three terms and three times are thus linked in a single instant: pleasure, birth and death.

II.

There is a famous image in Persona (Bergman, 1966): a bare-chested youth reaches out, as if in vain, to touch a woman’s face. What is singular about this face, whose features seen in an extreme close-up barely stand out from a milky white background, is that it appears at the same time very close and very far away, still and yet animated with a type of movement that is difficult to pinpoint. It finally changes, as if this wasn’t really the same woman that the youth was trying to reach at the beginning and at the end of the shot. A closer look, one that anticipates the rest of the film, will discern that the film’s two heroines are presented here one after the other, both chosen because of a latent similarity in their features. Most likely, there are two photographs or photograms kept under glass, which would explain the effect of fixity. But a very slow dissolve assures the passage from one image to the other, producing a near-movement, accentuated by the variations from blurred to focus. All of this ascribes the strange impression of fixed movement to the only subject who really does move in the image, and thus to its spectator.

It is easy to see in this image an illustration (but it is obviously the theory that illustrates the film) of Jean-Louis Baudry’s interpretation of the ultimate power of the cinematic apparatus. Its effect comes from the fact that it produces a representation that oscillates between hallucination and perception; and, as in dreams (whose desires are renewed in film) this representation reproduces for the child the pleasure
of satisfaction (but also the drama of its loss) experienced in the relation with the maternal body (in particular in the activity of nursing, where the “dream screen” turned into a film screen reproduces the image).19

This would not mean much (or would mean very little) if this shot did not come at the end of a particularly striking set of pre-credits, which have no apparent relation to the film and are composed of an extremely rapid series of obsessional representations, themselves centered for the most part on a physical and historical decomposition of the apparatus of cinema. It concerns the mechanisms of a (or several) projection(s), as well as the mechanisms of the images that compose them. They are characterized by two important features. On one hand, an oscillation between a moving and a stilled image: whether it is a simple matter of a petrified representation, or a real freeze-frame (as in this inverted shot of a cartoon image that comes from the early days of film). There is, on the other hand, a very lively thematization of death: for example, the chase scenes from a sketch in “primitive” film. But at any rate, neither life nor death are sure, no more so than the immobile (or immobilized) picture and the moving-picture are sure. Let us take for example the close-up of an inverted head of a woman whose closed eyes open, for a fraction of a second, fixing the spectator, making perception tip just that much more into hallucination. From all of this it becomes clear that the shot of the child of the women [l’enfant aux femmes] (as one says La Vierge aux Rochers [The Virgin...
of the Rocks) is in fact the living synthesis of a cinematic apparatus that is haunted by death, and in particular by its own death.

Again this would not be enough if the fantasy-child were not projected throughout the narrative (from which he is physically absent) in the form best fitted to dealing with his appearance: a photograph torn to pieces by his mother, which launches the multiple-entry fantasy that is developed throughout the film. This becomes clear in the end when the two women, face to face, play the same scene twice, and once again their faces intermingle, and the two halves of the ripped-apart photograph are joined. This fantasy implies that the mother has a pent-up desire for her son that she cannot accept, either during her pregnancy or after his birth. This hampered desire then echoes the child's impossible desire for the mother and the woman, symbolized in the film's opening. This alternation between the two women affects the second heroine as well. The long story told by Bibi Andersson to Liv Ullmann is centered around two instants-images that are both dispersed and elided: her sexual pleasure (in the little orgy on the beach and with her fiancé) and her abortion. Between these two desires that intersect through the massive use of improbable images, the subject's desire (director and spectator) for the work is formed: the divided,
fractured, torn apart film, tormented by its nature, its history and its prehistory.

For there is a second photograph in the film: the image (an emblematic and very well-known one) of a Jewish child with a hunted look, his hands raised, alone in the crowd on a platform in a train station. The photograph is detailed, fragmented and endlessly worked by a camera looking for a secret impossible to pinpoint. This horror is comparable to the television image transmitted live, showing a Buddhist monk who sacrifices himself by fire, an image that grips the speechless heroine in her hospital room. Between these two pictures cinema burns and is reborn (at the very beginning of the pre-credits light surges forth between the two carbons of an electric arc); it becomes post-war cinema, where movement is not guaranteed any more than is speech, subject to a paralysis that can at any moment condemn them to come to a standstill.

III.

Curiously enough, it is in relation to *Numéro Deux* (1975), a film that has practically no still images, that Serge Daney defined the vanishing point of “Godardian pedagogy.” This pedagogy “has as horizon, as limit, enigma of all enigmas, the Sphinx of still photography: that which defies intelligence but cannot be exhausted by it, that which holds the eye and the sense, that which immobilizes the scopic drive: (self)restraint in action.”

From *Les Carabiniers* (*The Riflemen*, 1963) to *Photo et cie* (the tenth episode of *Sur et sous la communication*, 1976), via *Comment ça va* (1976), Godard gave a literal and dizzying rundown of the state of photography in the contemporary world, as well as in film. But it is in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Every Man for Himself*) and *Je vous salue Marie* (*Hail Mary*, 1985) that the questions opened up by Rossellini and Bergman re-emerge in a more direct fashion, as an interruption of movement and a search for the instant.

The cascading decompositions of movement in *Every Man for Himself*, as those before in *France/Tour/Détour/Deux/Enfants* (1978), are just so many freeze-frames that never really stop because they re-compose a movement. It is another kind of movement, another kind of speed, which attacks the *défilement*, yet it is no more able than the freeze-frame to escape it. So at first glance cinema indeed remains, as Deleuze says, “the system that reproduces movement in terms of any-instant-whatever”; but this is no longer “in terms of equidistant instants selected so as to create an impression of continuity.” To the
contrary, the moments of the shot subjected to the effect of decomposition are selected so as to produce an impression of discontinuity, or a continuity of another nature. For Deleuze, they turn into mobile, as well as immobile, slices [coupes] of movement (but remain visible as such). So can one really say that they are conceived in terms of any-instant-whatever, or rather, only in terms of any-instant-whatever? And, conversely, what would be the exceptional instant, the modern equivalent of the pose or of the transcendent posture, in relation to which the moments of the shot would be isolated as over-privileged instants?

I can begin to answer by saying (like Daney): the photograph. No longer the photograph in its facticity, its materiality, its unicity. But instead, the photograph as an absolute limit, the inner body that by its very difference virtually constitutes and reconstitutes the film. And so the photograph is again profiled as an impossible photogram, yet in a way that differs from Rossellini’s apologue. These stilled moments (which nevertheless leave the impression that they are welded together) designate a vanishing point: this point comes from the unique way in which space can be divided whenever the continuity and the illusion of its “natural” movement is called into question. In a sense, this divisibility goes well beyond the photogram because it implies that there is a space “in between” the photograms—even though this divisibility finds its material limit in the photogram—on the condition that one goes outside of the film and the time of its projection. When one remains inside the film it becomes a sort of mental, virtual photogram which is then projected, an image of an image left to the spectator, even though each and every second of it has been programmed by the film.

But this is not enough. One cannot limit oneself to the abstract form of these moments; what they designate must also be considered. Paradoxically, the strength of these moments lies in having been extracted from something neutral, from run-of-the-mill life and time, and in being any-instant-whatever. And yet at the same time, they designate a space impossible to isolate: the moment of contact between bodies, between the sexes, in love (and in the violence that is its flip side) — in the scenes between Paul and Denise, and when the anonymous man and woman brush lightly against each other in the street (during the scene between Isabelle and Mr. Nobody), as well as when Paul runs into his ex-wife and his daughter at the very moment of his hypothetical death, which is suspended and made unreal precisely by this stop-action that is never stopped, the sign of a film that would never be stilled, because it has broken the pact that links its movement to the spectator. A virtual kiss also comes to mind. Projected, predicted and
yet never exchanged (between Isabelle and the business executive), it serves as an instant-act asymptotic to the long porn scene where Godard outlines, with a cruel stroke, the fate of the apparatus of cinema. So he has no need to go back to the decomposition of the image because he has literally put it into action in the continuity of the representation that is internally crippled by the impossibility of the bodies ever coming together. So the "neutral" moments of the decomposition are related, if only through the work of the gaze that they require, to the privileged instants when this decomposition is thematized around certain gestures and around certain moments (in the same way that a scattered gaze refocuses on whatever catches its attention). Everything is crystalized in this manner around two instants that have become unrepresentable from the moment that film can no longer avoid bringing them together as such, in their pure value as interruption: the instant of sexual pleasure (of which the film kiss has always been the image) and the instant of death.21

It is to these (meaningful) instants that Every Man for Himself refers. They cannot be defined except by default, but they are nonetheless projected and reprojected over and over and endlessly made virtual. This is where Passion (1982) takes over: this time involving painting directly, assuming the paradoxical task of representing shots from film as tableaux vivants, thus stealing meaningful moments from high art, and showing that this way of redirecting them is a (new) concern in film.

One comes across these meaningful instants again in Hail Mary. Here they have a purer vocation as present-absent instants, shedding light on the course of film, shaping the spectator’s mental journey. This time it is about the relation between two instants. On one hand there is the instant as it took place, but off screen and outside of the film, an immaterial, transcendent instant if ever there was one: the moment of an elided pleasure (it is miraculous that Mary, the unique one, full of grace, was impregnated by God). On the other hand, there is the instant that cannot come to pass, the instant when Joseph would touch Mary, when this touch would equal the gaze of God. The leitmotif runs throughout the film ("I want to kiss you," "Let me touch you," and so on).

The famous sequence where Joseph tries to touch Mary is a direct sequel to the scenes of embrace and combat in Every Man for Himself.22 There is no need for Godard to resort to the decomposition of movement and time to close in on an image impossible to reach, because the act takes place within the content of the shot, in the gestures of the characters. Similarly, he no longer needs painting, no longer needs to reconstitute this exemplary meaningful instant that is the Annun-
citation in a (fake) painting, because it is integrated into the story of his new narrative. Joseph’s hand reaches out toward Mary’s stomach and at the same moment he says the words this gesture implies: “I love you.” Mary cries “no” when for the first and only time the hand does touch her, “no” again when the hand reaches forward once again. She says “yes” as soon as the hand pulls back, until the moment when Joseph can almost touch her stomach. Everything is in this “almost”—beginning with the withdrawal she has imposed which moves to the rhythm of this new kind of “fort und da.” This repetition of retreat, which symbolizes the forbidden (of incest, as Alain Bergala insists), imitates a decomposition of time defined by the impossible image of the Immaculate Conception. It designates (Philippe Dubois saw this very clearly) the utopia of a virgin image, an image yet to be exposed that would permit the gaze to touch in all innocence the body of a woman. Just an image, says Godard, one that would at last become a just image. But what does “just an image” really mean? Couldn’t this just as well be a photogram, a photograph, a detachable fragment, unique, ideal, pointing to an instant already past, yet always virtual, and from which it derives what it can reveal? This image was used on the poster for the film, for example, where it is no longer clear if Joseph’s hand is going to touch Mary’s stomach, has already touched it, or will never touch it. Any-instant-whatever, the privileged or decisive instant and the meaningful instant have perhaps never been confused to this extent—the meaningful instant that has never so rightly deserved its name (“the pregnant moment”). The confusion between them, at a point that is both designated and dispersed, is the subject or rather the motif of the film.

This motif was already outlined in The Marquise of O (1976). Following Kleist to the letter, Rohmer was confronted with an ellipse-instant that held the secret of the narrative: the rape of the marquise by the Russian officer, her savior. This elided act takes place between two shots. The first follows the marquise’s point of view as she is threatened by the abusive soldiers. She sees the count—dressed all in white, surrounded by an aura of almost superhuman brightness—as if he were falling from the sky and flinging himself at her (this is the shot referred to in the final words: “You wouldn’t have seemed like a devil to me if I hadn’t taken you for an angel when you first appeared!”). The second shot shows the sleeping marquise, being attacked by this “devil” that the spectator obviously doesn’t see. Rohmer introduces an image that is not in the novella, which imitates a famous painting by Füssli. He took care to leave out the demon(s) that suggest(s) the highly elusive significance [prénance] of the nightmare that wavers between the desire for love and the fear of death. He does this
because the film’s dramatic climax—haunted by the plasticity of painting, the ability of the frame to capture gestures that, by holding back time, express the pathos and the depth of the drama—this climactic moment is situated in between the two shots I have just mentioned, within their alternation. The film prolongs the effect of this alternation until the final embrace of the husband and wife who are at long last reunited, capturing and interiorizing this invisible image that streaks through the film like a bolt of lightning, and around which time—one day—came to a standstill for them, in reality as in a dream.24

As for time itself, the instant as such, it was Rohmer who in a very Rossellinian way, gave us the shivers. There are two ways of going about it, in the same way that there are (at least) two Rossellinis: one, dear to Bazin, used reality as a unifying principle; the other was one of the first to consider its discontinuity. The green ray (in the film of the same name [Le Rayon Vert, released as Summer, 1986]) and the blue hour (in the first story of The Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle, 1988) present unique and rare moments when time is suspended in an event that the characters and the camera would like to fix in the present, in order not to be left with only its virtuality or its memory. This is, no doubt, why these moments are so rarely present on Rohmer’s screen, ever faithful to the obligations of reality, even in its ellipses. They are much more obvious and meaningful in the text (in the dialogue) than in the image. And so even when one watches the sun as it sets on the ocean, or the day as it breaks, one has the feeling that these are freeze-frames, that they don’t really take place, because the appearance of reality has not been undermined. But at the same time, one cannot quite grasp this moment for what it is—as a photograph that would last, a photogram spread out in time—because this extraordinarily beautiful instant cannot be stilled.

I was about to finish this text when I saw L’ami de mon amie (Girlfriends and Boyfriends, 1987). Here, everything seemed so simple, so clear, smooth and continuous. The obsession with the instant seemed to have been reduced to a pure algebra of feelings that counted on the film’s ending to solve all of its equations. For just one moment in the forest, Blanche’s (one of the heroines of this four-sided story) fragile state of mind let a Murnau-like affect hang over the scene, as in Reinette and Mirabelle. And suddenly the ending comes in the lakeside restaurant where the couples are reconciled. Alexandre and Léa walk off into the background to the right; Blanche and Fabien, framed in a medium shot, turn to watch them leave. And without warning the image comes to a standstill, as in so many films where this has no (real) consequence. I’ve seldom experienced such a feeling of brutality at the sight of a shot: the characters—so concrete a fraction of a second
before—seemed dislocated, pinned down like butterflies. While nothing
had hinted at this (save a certain difficulty Rohmer has in filming and,
perhaps, in believing in his film), one finds oneself thrown back thirty
years, facing the prophetic image at the end of *The 400 Blows* an-
nouncing that it was over, that never again could cinema be filmed as
before. For, the overly still image, the far too visible suspension of
time, leads irremediably to loss and death.

This is the lesson of *La Jetée*. If there are so many stilled images
composing an entire film, even a short one, it is because they all come
together around a single image, the image of the main character’s
death. To bring this out, a decomposed series of images is needed
which makes this single image virtually indiscernable (as in the ending
of *Every Man for Himself*), yet one recognizes it by its unique type of
movement. Peter Wollen saw how this photograph reproduces a fa-
mous snapshot by Capa turned into, as he says, a “meaningful moment,
as defined by Diderot or Greuze” (so the images have varying desti-
And the text isolates this moment, in order to capture its violence as a decisive instant. ("He understood that one doesn’t escape Time, and that this moment that he been shown in his childhood, which had continued to haunt him ever since, was the moment of his own death.") In the journey that takes place in this way between all of the photos that tell this story and the photo, La Jetée alone seems to cover the entire breach opened up in cinema from its beginnings (if not from its origin) by the immobile presence of the photograph (both as body and as idea). The photograph has always designated, as in Feyder’s eloquently titled film L’Image (The Image 1923–1925, dedicated to the image-woman), the object of the strongest desire, the sign of the most poignant reality.

It might be asked what I wanted to say by using a few privileged films to link these variable figures: the freeze-frame and the freeze in the image, the presence and treatment of the photograph, such and such an instant, this or that gesture. One can see that this concerns diverse forms that interrupt movement: the image or the body that comes to a stop, the gesture that stops in mid air or touches without touching, the already immobile photograph. It is clear, then, that these forms are related to acts, to exceptional or fundamental moments: the green ray, the blue hour, birth, death, the kiss, sexual pleasure, incest, the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception, the shot (photographic and cinematic). It could be argued that acts such as these (most of them at least) occur every day in films and are not dealt with in such a formal way. Of course. But the opposite is not true, at least not in the films I have been talking about, every one of which testifies to a certain state of film that is historical and at the same time always contemporary. Here, the forms that immobilize movement are related precisely to these acts and moments (even if their range happens to be much larger, with multiple perspectives, as in Every Man for Himself or La Jetée).

The connection between these forms and these moments, which one can see are very diverse yet are also repeated time and again, seems to me to be very strong and worth emphasizing. It forms a constellation that is, I believe, only the most visible part of dealing with the immobility of this art of movement that is cinema: this is something that has not yet been considered carefully enough, in its various aspects: stylistic, esthetic, psychological, historical.

It will no doubt be asked why Deleuze was brought into this debate, given that he’s unaware of it, even puts it aside, and develops in completely different terms the aspects of the time-image that could be connected to the ones I have spoken of here. It is because suddenly his work was there, and it took over the field with a power that no
other has had for a long time. Because he took up these difficult
questions of movement and time at their very foundations, he spoke
better than anyone else of the formal and historical breaks that little
by little composed a cinema of visible time and one particular destiny
of modern and contemporary film. He does this in a language and
from a philosophical point of view that are extremely autonomous
and are also strikingly new, inventing (as in all of his other books)
both a mode and a world of thought.  
Deleuze both borrows from others in his two books on film, and
draws them in to his way of thinking. Some are currently divided
between the view he offers them and the one that until then had
supported their approach to film: either an ideological view (today
very quickly buried in the rubble of History), or more profoundly, a
view that can be called psychoanalytic in the broad sense of the term,
Freudian, Lacanian. It is clear that Deleuze's conception dissolves the
footholds (explicit or not) implied by a psychoanalytic perspective. Let
us briefly describe film in the following way: a psychological subject,
a spectator defined in relation to an apparatus, a putting into play of
sexual difference, and above all the vision of time connected to it. This
vision of time is anchored at points which are characterized essentially
by their anteriority, their fixity, and the possibility of reversal that they
produce; whence in this perspective, the existence of the privileged
instants, privileged by what must be called a kind of transcendence,
because if they don't master time they orient it by means of their very
existence. But above all they make it vectorial (pointing from the
present toward the past, from the graspable to the ungraspable), and
this vector itself creates a tonality that is somewhere between nostalgia
and melancholy. Deleuze's thought opposes all of this to a Time that
is unitary and global, even though it is infinitely stratified and dispersed.
A time both material and abstract, on which neither the future of any
utopia nor the past of any regression has a hold. A time in which the
film never comes to a standstill, is oblivious to the mirages of the
instant, the points of emptiness and lack, the trace of the negative and
the specter of photography. One finds oneself faced with two opposing
conceptions of time and of memory: on one hand, Freud and everything
linked to him; on the other hand, Bergson revisited.

If I had to give a film-image of this disparity, I would gladly project
it onto the difference between two films by Michael Snow. The first
would be *The Central Region* (1971), with its endlessly turning move-
ment, open like a pure and limitless positivity, unrolling on an unin-
habited terrain a point of view outside of all interiority. In the second,
*Wavelength* (1966–67), a forward movement, both continuous and
discontinuous, takes shape through repeated pulsations of sound and
light, and travels through enigmatic events, for example a man's death. It ends up at the point that has oriented it, without our knowing it, from the beginning: on a wall, a photograph of the ocean, animated by immobile waves, into which the camera enters and freezes.

But one must also consider this photograph as do those who see photography as a capturing and a reversal of time; in the same way that I was only able to bring to the films that "stopped" me a gaze captivated by the strength of their desire to interrupt. There is for example in the "angelism" of contemporary movies—whether heaven is named Hollywood (again Godard, *Soft and Hard*, 1985), the nineteenth century (*The Marquise of O*), a woman's face (*Persona*) or the Christian Western world (*Hail Mary*)—of which Rossellini's film seems to have been a forerunner, a mix of desperate utopia and regression that makes it difficult for me to see them in any other perspective besides that of a divided time. A time that can be related to the instants that ground it: as points of transcendence, known, repeated in the ellipses, decompositions and immobilizations that run through it.

For a long time now, this is what Deleuze's thought—his extraordinary ability to construct, his exclusion of the very terms that seemed to me to be the most fitting for translating my impression—has helped me in the face of certain moments and certain films to see more clearly. Beyond this, a moment arrives in thought, which can just as well be called the affect, where it is no longer so much a question of truth but of temperament, and of what such a temperament is or is not capable of producing (whether one prefers one's own or someone else's). There is then, on one hand, Deleuze's energetic, objectivizing view (with everything that it excludes). And on the other, there is a subjectivizing, nostalgic, melancholy view (with everything that it perpetuates). Benjamin, for example, is divided between the projection of a return of the aura and his tendency to repeat tirelessly "Joshua's gesture." Then there is Barthes's double gesture, placing his trust in the utopia of the photogram only to surrender univocally to the fascination of the photograph.

Translated by Alison Rowe with Elisabeth Lyon

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NOTES

1. For more information, see Gilles Deleuze, "Theses on Movement, First Commentary on Bergson," *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh


4. Deleuze 11.


6. Deleuze 5.

7. As is finally being done in the United States in a recent book on the flashback by Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York: Routledge, 1989); and one in progress on the train in film by Lynne Kirby. Philippe Dubois gave a paper along these lines at the colloquium at Chantilly, *Cinéma et peinture* (June 1986) titled “Ralenti et Arrêt sur image” on the freeze-frame in three films: *The Man with the Movie Camera, The Night Visitors,* and *Every Man for Himself.*

8. See Annette Michelson, “*The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist,*” *Artforum* (February 1971). In this article she establishes a connection between Clair and Vertov.

9. *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Editions Cahiers du cinéma, 1986) 461–465. Perhaps this is the same thing that Vertov made us aware of, prophetically, in *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934): the stop in movement and the slide toward immobility that shape the film are not only the inner figures of the mourning that starts with the death of Lenin (and of the Revolution), but are already the figures of the initial “death” of cinema.


11. Peter Wollen quite rightly emphasized this point in “Fire and Ice.”


21. For more information on this articulation between the different stop-action moments in *Every Man for Himself* and the rest of the film, see Raymond Bellour, “‘I Am an Image’,” *Camera Obscura* 8-9-10 (Fall 1982): 117–123.

22. The repercussions of this for the future of filmmaking and of film were analysed very well by Alain Bergala and Philippe Dubois. See Alain Bergala, “Si près du secret,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 367 (January 1985); “Qu’est-ce que faire un plan pour Jean-Luc Godard,” paper given at the colloquium *Jean-Luc Godard, le cinéma*, Brussels, April 1986 (published in the expanded edition of the special issue on Godard of *Revue belge du cinéma*; Philippe Dubois, “La Passion, la douleur et la grâce,” *L’Époque, la mode, la morale, la passion* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987).


24. It’s interesting to recall that Barthes initially wanted to use the short story by Kleist as the tutor text for his great attempt at stop action, *S/Z*, before finally replacing it with Balzac’s *Sarrasine*. Likewise, just to tie up loose ends, we might add that the motif of incest (brother/sister, mother/son), which runs throughout Balzac’s narrative, is also at the center of Kleist’s (in the form of an excessive bond between the father and the daughter at the moment when the father grants forgiveness, a bond which the film has more difficulty showing than the text has saying,) This same motif of incest (father/daughter) runs just beneath the surface in *Every Man for Himself*, and haunts Godard to such an extent that its counterpart (mother/son incest) can be seen as a displacement of it, via a return to the great figure of origins, in *Hail Mary* (Bergala has pursued this, particularly in the Godard/Sollers video interview by J. P. Fargier, *Le Trou de la Vierge*.)

25. Wollen 119.

26. This prompted Michel Foucault, trying to gauge the effect of this new thought, to write: “Perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian.” (“Theatrum Philosophicum,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. and ed. Donald Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) 165.

27. As Pierre Missac clearly showed in one of the chapters of *Passages de Benjamin* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).