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Has Time Become Space?

Mary Ann Doane

The photograph rigorously centers its object (Ill. 1). A shadowy dimness surrounds that center, drawing the gaze to the brilliance of the screen itself, which seems to collect and return all the luminance of the scene in a small, interior frame that is a reiteration of the larger frame of the photograph. Nevertheless, the surrounding environment is legible, decipherable as a rather standard theatrical space with curved and tiered rows of seats and an ornamental architecture encasing the screen, lending it a supplemental value. It is a cinema, seemingly without a movie, simply holding a surplus of light shining forth from the place where that movie should be. The light is all intense presence, without the proliferation of differences that would generate meaning. From the cinema screen, and the photograph in its entirety, are evacuated the movement and duration that we believe to be the special, most salient characteristics of film as a medium. But in reality, rather than the lack/loss of a movie, the spectator is witness to all of a movie, all at once.



Ill 1: Hiroshi Sugimoto, U.A Playhouse, New York, 1978; Gelatin silver print 20 x 24" (50.8 x 61 cm); Edition of 5. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery.

Thanks to Genie Brinkema and Liv Hausken for their valuable comments and suggestions.

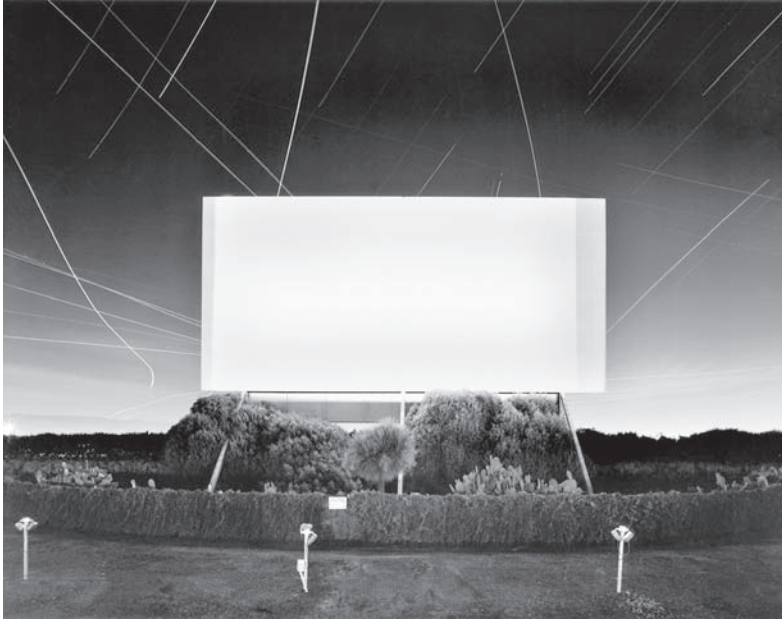
This 1978 photograph is entitled *U.A. Playhouse, New York* and is part of a series – *Theaters* – by Hiroshi Sugimoto, known for his technique of using an 8x10 large format camera and extremely long exposures.¹ In the series, spanning twenty years, Sugimoto chose a number of old American movie palaces, ornately decorated, as well as more austere outdoor drive-in screens, and left the shutter of his still camera open for the entire length of the movie (Ill. 2 and 3). According to Sugimoto, the series is a product of his own self-directed question, “Suppose you shot a whole movie in a single frame?,” the answer being, “You get a shining screen.”² What we are left with is an extreme condensation of time, its transformation into an overwhelming assault of radiance. The process seems to embody all the spectacle of cinema in a single instant. The frame, which is usually the condition of possibility of movement in film, becomes movement’s totalizing container.



Ill 2: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *U.A. Walker, New York, 1978*, gelatin silver print, 20 x 24” (50.8 x 61 cm). Edition of 25. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery.

1 Hiroshi Sugimoto, 2000, *Theaters*. Some images are also available in the portfolio on Sugimoto’s website, accessed March 18, 2009 <<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/portfolio.html>>. See also the discussion of Sugimoto’s *Theaters* series in Bruno, 2002.

2 Hiroshi Sugimoto, “Theaters,” SugimotoHiroshi.com [accessed March 18, 2009] <<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/theater.html>>.



Ill 3: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Union City Drive-In*, Union City, 1993, gelatin silver print 20 x 24" (50.8 x 61 cm). Edition of 25. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery.

A well-known shot of extremely long duration from Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) seems to work in multiple ways as a reverse-shot of Sugimoto's *Theater* photographs.³ From the point of view of the screen, we see a shot of the auditorium of the movie theater, empty save for the slow movements of a cleaning woman, making her rounds (this takes about three minutes). After she leaves the frame, the shot is held for almost another two and a half minutes. The shot is introduced by an abrupt cut after the final shot of the film that has been projected. The lights come on, but the auditorium is already vacated, populated only by row after row of empty seats (Ill. 4).

3 Although this is not the longest (in terms of duration) shot in the film, it is an extremely crucial one. The sense of duration is intensified by the static camera, the emptiness of the room save for the appearance (and disappearance) of the cleaning lady, and the status of this shot as a type of culminating moment given that the turning on of the lights marks an emergence from darkness that will never take place again in this particular theatre (since it has been targeted for demolition).



Ill 4: Tsai Ming Liang, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, 2003.

Goodbye, Dragon Inn is set in a dilapidated movie theater, on the verge of destruction, the attendance sparse on the final night, and the “narrative” a chronicle of missed sexual encounters. Present are two of the now older actors in the film that is being projected. Hence, the film is very much about pastness, memory, and nostalgia for a cinema that seemed to address a certain longing. Similarly, Sugimoto chose old movie palaces, reminiscent of a different era, and drive-ins, on the verge of cultural extinction, for his reduction of temporality to a static luminosity. However, the reverse shot, if it can be called that, constituted by the shot in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, is not head-on or centered, but somewhat awry, seemingly anchored by a canted point of view from the right half of the screen. The perspective of the shot seems skewed, the lights not quite in the right place, the seats somehow out of line, out of kilter. When the cleaning woman leaves the frame, this effect is intensified by the lack of movement, the usual marker of the passage of time in a film’s diegesis. There is *too much* time (in this case, to study or analyze the space and its apparent deficiencies), but in a different way than in Sugimoto’s *Theater* series, where the excess of time effects an ontological transformation (of time into light). Without the assistance of movement or sound (after the cleaning woman’s footsteps diminish in the distance), the shot in Tsai Ming-Liang’s film becomes *photograph-like* – it is very difficult to distinguish between it and a still image. One of the most important differences, of course, is that *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* dictates the duration of its own viewing while Sugimoto’s photographs cannot (the viewer can move on to the next exhibit when-

ever he/she desires). In the Theater series, time is absent but represented – it has a stand-in. In *Dragon Inn*, the experience of time is both intensified and abandoned. There is a sense in which both works translate time into space.⁴

I have dwelled on these two textual moments because both can be seen as responses to and instantiations of the recurrent theoretical and philosophical insistence upon the spatialization of time as a fundamental characteristic of modernity and postmodernity. Later in this essay, I will turn to what might seem to be a diametrically opposed and certainly more maligned form of representation – the cinematic trailer – that reduces time to space in an even more excessive or radical way, and argue that all three works participate in the same media system. From Henri Bergson to Fredric Jameson – two very different types of theorists – we can witness the chronicling of a loss in which the experience of time as duration, flow, historicity, is replaced by the quantification or mathematization of time and hence its transformation into a static, spatial, divisible entity. Ultimately, in Jameson, this becomes an argument about the contemporary investment in presence and instantaneity and a corresponding repression of history. Theorists of modernity generally link the spatialization of time to the processes of industrialization and its increasing technological sophistication – the development of train schedules, the need for a standardization of time, the conquering of space and time associated with imperialism, Taylorization and the relation between clock time and labor time. According to Henri Lefebvre, before modernity, time was embedded in space. It was experienced as the relation of the sun to the horizon, the position of stars in the sky, the passing of seasons, the temperature of the air, etc. However,

4 Although I treat these two works as part of a transnational mediatic system (discussed later in this essay in relation to the work of Fredric Jameson), I am cognizant of theories of East Asian cinema that link this cinema's spatio-temporal forms to a history of Chinese and Japanese painting, itself often associated with the non-Western philosophical systems of Buddhism and Taoism. The categories of space and time in non-Western works are inflected by different philosophical and ideological systems as well as a non-perspectival tradition of visual representation, a framelessness associated with the temporality of the scroll, etc. The issue is complicated by the immutable aspect ratio, framing, and Renaissance perspective "built in" to the cinematic apparatus as well as the complex question of the relation between cinema and painting. One of the most intelligent treatments of this problematic is *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, Linda C. Ehrlich and David Desser, 1994, (eds.), especially the essay by Ní Zhèn, "Classical Chinese Painting and Cinematic Signification." However, the assumption of this essay is that these two works, as well as others discussed later, must be read in relation to a network of other works produced in anticipation of a global reception – i.e. that their legibility is a function of this transnational mediatic system. In addition, these works are treated as alternative texts that grapple with issues of space and time in ways that contrast with the mainstream media. It should be noted that within East Asian cultures, these works are viewed as "alternative" as well.

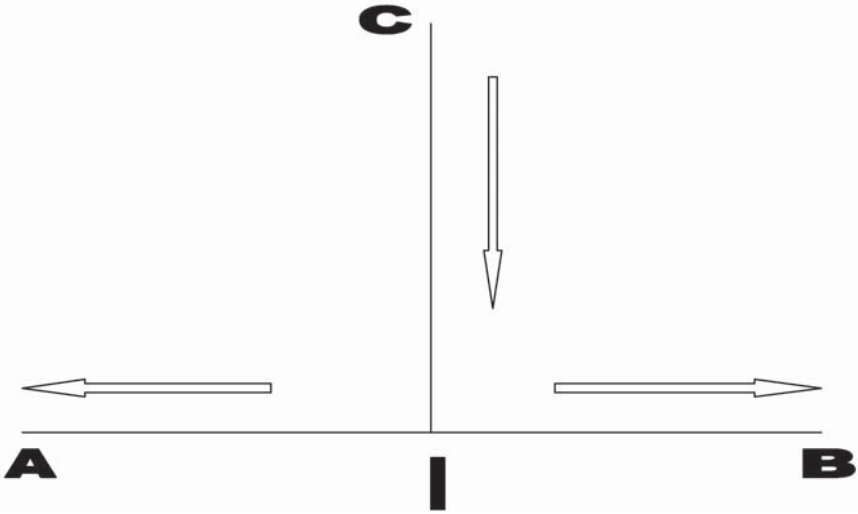
With the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are as isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself. Lived time loses its form and its social interest – with the exception, that is, of time spent working. Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power). The primacy of the economic and above all of the political implies the supremacy of space over time [...]. Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible [...]. This manifest expulsion of time is arguably one of the hallmarks of modernity (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 95-96).

In a Western context, time has been traditionally analyzed as continuity *par excellence* – indivisible, lived, homogeneous and therefore irredeemably qualitative. It has also been thought as inevitably subjective, something that it is impossible to objectify or externalize, an inescapable attribute of the individual. Urban space, industrialization, and the era of the machine have all conspired to steal time from the subject and return it as a commodity. Georg Lukacs, in *History and Class Consciousness*, claimed that in modernity, “Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing, nature. It freezes into an exactly delineated, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable things [...] in short, it becomes space” (1972, p. 90).

The ontological assumption undergirding this argument is that time is inherently indivisible while space is easily and efficiently divisible. Bergson was perhaps the first to explore and fully develop this idea, linking its necessity to the essential nature of time rather than the historical context of modernity. His philosophy locates the truth of time in its fluidity, its duration, its fullness and continuity. Yet, our everyday notion of time, its usefulness for us, results in “a sort of refracting of pure duration into space” (Bergson 1991, p. 185). Cinema, for Bergson, given its dissection of time into the static instants represented by frames whose movement through the projector only *appears* to represent real movement, is the technological incarnation of this false thinking about time. For Bergson, the basic unit demarcated here – the instant – is unthinkable, an impossibility. From his point of view, there is no real movement (or time) in the cinema. We can only generate the concept of the instant by translating time into space. In the case of movement as the most visible embodiment of time, the movement is confused with its trajectory through space, and it is by dividing that spatial trajectory into units that we arrive at the concept of the instant. But true movement is *between* static states and is not their simple accumulation. It, like time, is ungraspable, antithetical to divisibility. Hence, for Bergson, there is no such thing as the present: “*Practically, we perceive only the past*, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future” (Bergson 1991, p. 150).

The spatializing of time, for Bergson, is the effect of two urges that have their source in practicality or use-value: the desire to envisage time, like space, as

divisible, and the desire to conceptualize time (epitomized by memory) as storable, hence locatable in space. There is a predilection, according to Bergson, to perceive space as a container, faithfully preserving all of its objects in simultaneity. Time, on the other hand, vanishes as it passes, revealing a material instability and an existential frailty. The existence of space seems more assured precisely because it is external to the subject (consciousness); while time, because it is an internalized attribute of consciousness, is never quite as real. Bergson produces a diagram to explicate the forcefulness of this way of thinking (Ill. 5). The line AB represents all simultaneous objects in space, while CI contains successive recollections in time.



Ill 5: Bergson's Graph from Matter and Memory

Each of the lines is indefinitely extendable and therefore includes both actual and virtual perceptions of the subject. But the point I, on the line of time, is, according to Bergson, “the only one actually given to consciousness,” and therefore, the present is the only form of temporality to which we attribute reality, existence, while we readily assume that the objects in the line AB that are outside the range of our perception do have reality, even though we might not be able to see them (1991, p. 143). In other words, we accept virtuality in space more readily than virtuality in time. Bergson asserts that the threads of the confusion and denial in this understanding are difficult to disentangle.

In order to unmask the illusion entirely, we should have to seek its origin and follow through all its windings, the double movement by which we come to assume objective realities without relation to consciousness, and states of consciousness without objective reality – space

thus appearing to preserve indefinitely the *things* which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the *states* which succeed each other within it (Bergson 1991, p. 143).

Time disappears as it advances. This suggests an aporia in the thinking of a relation between time and storage and Bergson raises the question that also perplexed Freud – where are memories stored? Yet, for Freud the problem of storage had to do with the inevitable finitude and hence exhaustibility of the space of inscription of memories – a dilemma he solved by translating the question of space into one of time and its intermittency (in the “Mystic Writing Pad” essay) (Freud 1961, pp. 225-232). Bergson argues that the question of storage is from the outset a spatial one and cannot be applied to time and memory. Given the enormous influence of the spatial paradigm, we are inevitably led to assume that if the past is retained, it must be located somewhere. Bergson asserts that we mistakenly apply the spatial status of container and contained to the temporal phenomenon of memory.

Yet Bergson is ultimately interested, as the title of the book indicates, not in space and time but in matter and memory. And materiality, like time, is not divisible. Everything merges into everything else; there are no natural outlines or boundaries. According to Bergson, we deposit a divisible space beneath, and as a support for, the division of things and our action upon them. Because we tend to understand movement as only a variation of distance, space becomes primary and originary – it is thought to precede and lay the ground for motion. Divisibility for Bergson is merely a handy tool enabling human action. It has nothing to do with knowledge. True knowledge of time and matter would entail the acceptance of time as pure, indivisible duration, and matter as absolute continuity. Nevertheless, one gets the sense with Bergson that matter, due to its intimate relation with space, is inherently more subject to divisibility than time. The real epistemological crime is that against temporality.

For Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, temporality is significant primarily as historicity, and what is lost in postmodernity is precisely that sense of being *in* time and *in* history. Everything is presence, instantaneity, receiving technological assistance from – or perhaps produced by the technology of – computers, television, and cell phones. We are, as Jameson claims, “now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed” (1991, p. 413). Space is saturated and time can be represented, written, but it is no longer lived. For Jameson, the spatialization of time constitutes the “great transformation” of postmodernism: “the displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal – often registers its novelties by way of a sense of loss [. . .]. [W]hat is mourned is the memory of deep memory” (1991, p. 156). Ironically, he argues that this spatialization is especially characteristic of media that we usually think of as “time-based”: film, video, television.

For Jameson, there is a sense in which all of the media cannot refrain from absorbing and commenting on the other media. Mediation is not simply the insertion of a distance between subject and event, but the negotiation of relations between the various media, a form of reflexivity about the ontology of mediums. In the course of analyzing an installation by Robert Gober, *Untitled Door and Doorframe* (1987-1988), Jameson claims that “we may speak of spatialization here as the process whereby the traditional fine arts are *mediatized*: that is, they now come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system in which their own internal production also constitutes a symbolic message and the taking of a position on the status of the medium in question” (1991, p. 162). Rather than dealing with history or time and memory, media tend to situate themselves within a synchronic spatial network of other media, redeploying and recycling the products of these other media.

Sugimoto’s *Theater* series, in its exploitation and absorption of the cinema by photography, participates in this spatializing reflexivity. A film unrolling in time becomes the static concentration of a radiant light – light itself being in a sense the basic “material” of photography. What inevitably draws the eye in this series is a blank in the middle of the image, a nothingness that is the residue of the collapse of time into space. That blank also points to a forgetting that, according to Bergson, is crucial to the operation of memory, which only retains and activates that which is relevant to the present. Chris Marker, in *Sans Soleil* (1983), relates a story about a future race in which everyone remembers everything – there is no forgetting. But this absence of an absence entails the annihilation of memory and hence of time. Because everything is present, always, there is no past. Memory depends upon forgetting, loss. Perhaps we can understand the spatialization of time in relation to cinema not in terms of what is there and how it is represented but in terms of what is left out, absent: the off-screen time that is analogous to off-screen space. A temporal hiatus in film is made possible by editing, the operation of the cut – but not any cut, the cut that figures an ellipsis (and hence acts as a true cinematic trope). The cut does not necessarily signify a change in time; it may simply represent a variation in space that is characterized by simultaneity, rather than succession (in parallel editing, for instance, or through a change of angle within the same general space). However, a cut that does signal a change in time, or the loss of time, must almost always be accompanied by a change in space (indeed, it is difficult to imagine any other way of signifying that time has been lost when a straight cut rather than a dissolve or fade-out/fade-in is in question).⁵ Here, in the ellipsis, the cut conjoins the operations (or categories)

5 Assuming that the film adheres to the rules of the continuity editing system. Jump cuts within the same space can connote a loss of time.

of space and time. It is possible to see Sugimoto's *Theater* series as the meta-representation of this cut, the representation of that which enables lost time in the cinema. Time is here transformed into an illegible image, an empty diegetic space. And since an ellipsis in narrative is a condensation of time, the photograph is an extreme form of ellipsis, indeed hyperbolic, condensing all time to a moment.

We know ellipsis primarily as a grammatical operation of omission, an omission that is syntactical and hence linked to the temporal dimension of language.⁶ It is also often defined as producing a meaning that is unfinished or incomplete, but nevertheless implied, understood. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the grammatical definition of ellipsis is "the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense." Wikipedia defines a grammatical ellipsis as "a construction that lacks an element that is, nevertheless, recoverable or inferable from the context. The elliptical construction is a sequence of words in which some words have been omitted. Because of the logic or pattern of the entire sentence, it is easy to infer what the missing words are." A linguistic ellipsis is "meaning without form." Wikipedia also defines a narrative ellipsis as "the narrative device of omitting a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the reader to fill in the narrative gaps. An ellipsis in narrative leaves out a portion of the story. This can be used to condense time, or as a stylistic method to allow the reader to fill in the missing portions of the narrative with their [sic] imagination." In film, what is implied and understood by the ellipsis, is lost time. Often in the classical film, this time will be understood as inconsequential, trivial, a matter of transporting characters from one space to another, or as excluding "empty" time (sleeping, brushing teeth, etc.). In alternative cinemas, the question of empty and full time, what constitutes "significant time," becomes more complex (as in Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*). The only etymology provided for the term "ellipsis" in the OED is, interestingly, an etymology corresponding to a rare or obsolete usage of the term – a geometrical usage in which the ellipsis is a conical section. "Ellipsis" is derived from the Greek and means, concerning an action, "to come short." Short of words, short of time, but itself figurative, the etymology effectively turns time into distance, space.

The ellipsis allows time to be contracted, condensed and is the condition of the possibility of cinema's aspiration to package, to commodify temporality. Despite its alliance with "real time," with flow, with continuity, cinema still strives for the reduction of time and space consistent, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, with its understanding of the image in relation to the category

6 For Jacques Lacan, the ellipsis generates meaning in anticipation, inducing the listener/reader to fill in the gap. See Lacan, 2006, pp. 412-441.

of the point (see Doane 2002, pp. 214-218). And the cut is the most exemplary cinematic operation in this regard. For the cut is the haunting echo of the frame-line – its reiteration at a different level. The cut reasserts the instantaneity of the individual photogram. Time is subject to a miniaturization, a contraction. It becomes something that can be held or possessed in a metaphorical sense. This is why the cut as ellipsis is a crucial figure. Time becomes delimitable, commodifiable, object-like. The long take, in contrast, is a gaze at an autonomous, unfolding scene whose duration is a function of the duration and potential waywardness of events themselves. Its length situates it as an invitation to chance and unpredictability, an invitation that is abruptly canceled by the cut. The cut is the mechanism whereby temporality becomes a product of the apparatus, repudiating the role of cinema as a record of a time outside itself. If Bergson is correct in claiming that we tend to see space as “appearing to preserve indefinitely the *things* which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the *states* which succeed each other within it,” then the spatialization of time contributes to the “thingification,” the commodification of temporality (Bergson 1991, p. 143). Curiously, the representation of time as reproducible disavows any relation to temporality. A reproducible time pretends that it is liberated from temporality, from historicity.

This problematic is most strongly visible in a form of filmmaking that is generally maligned or disparaged, relegated to the margins of the cinema proper – the trailer. The trailer is, perhaps, the ultimate film about a film (even more so than “The Making of _____” genre), because it is composed primarily of shots from the film itself (as opposed to “behind the scenes” shots). In Jameson’s terms, it would be the epitome of reflexivity insofar as reflexivity implies an acknowledgement of positioning within a mediatic system. But its function, unlike that of the works of contemporary high art that Jameson discusses, is to elicit desire for another work, desire for the film itself. The trailer is a very strictly coded, rule-governed form, even genre. It has a fairly limited set of conventions, not all of which will be activated in any particular trailer. In trailers for recent movies – *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002), *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002), *Vantage Point* (Pete Travis, 2008), *I’m Not There* (Todd Haynes, 2007), the materials utilized include graphics, music, voice-over, dialog, dissolves as well as cuts, and shots from the object-film. The shots are generally particularly tense or heavily emotive moments of the narrative, for example, a shot in the *Spider-man* trailer chronicling a falling drop of blood that might betray the protagonist clinging to the roof or the anxiety-producing knife throwing scene in *Gangs of New York*. There is a strong work of identification (paralleling the name brand of the commodity form), beginning with the marked announcement of the name of the producer or distributor (Miramax, etc.) and continuing with the listing, either through graphics or voice-over or both, of the film’s stars/

director as lure. The fragmentation of the form is compensated for by an explanatory power that resides in the classic, heavy, and necessarily male voice-over (*Vantage Point*, *Gangs of New York*), or the narration of a character (*Spider-man*), or in graphics that are often redundant in relation to a voice-over, as though the extreme abbreviation of time mandated compulsive repetitiveness. A continuity that also works to counter the fragmentation is provided by dialog that often spans shots taken from different scenes (as in the five fingers and fist sequence from *Gangs of New York*). Shock value and spectacle are paramount.

Almost invariably, the first third or half of a trailer is devoted to a more or less coherent but highly condensed clarification of the narrative and introduction to the characters. It is in this section that devices to provide continuity and ward off the threat of meaninglessness are most in evidence (*Spider-man* seems to be most successful at this, perhaps because of its skeletal narrative or its origins in comics). But toward the end of the trailer, the speed of the editing is intensified and becomes a spectacle in its own right, often accompanied by dramatic music or choreographed sound effects. In the last section of the trailer for *Vantage Point*, there are seven shots in one second. Intelligibility is not the stake here; rather, what seems to be involved is a direct assault on the spectator's senses, particularly sight. *Vantage Point* self-reflexively refers to this visual barrage when both the graphics and voice-over proclaim, "If you think you've seen it all, look again," followed later by an extreme close-up of a pair of eyes (a shot so short that its perception is almost subliminal).

The trailer of the alternative/independent film, *I'm Not There*, counters this with a refusal – Cate Blanchett declaring "I can't watch this," seemingly referring to a huge pair of images of Lyndon Johnson but with hints of unwatchability and the failure of vision as a significant theme (Ill. 6). Despite its "independence," the *I'm Not There* trailer adheres fairly closely to the generic conventions of the trailer, activating graphics, music, and fast editing, and introducing its stars, but with the significant omissions of a deep male voice-over and any sense of a standard, conventional narrative. It also plays ironically with the conventions of the trailer (e.g., with the "Inspired by a true/false/authentic/exaggerated story" graphics). The concept of identity, so readily accepted and exploited in *Spider-man*, is problematized in *I'm Not There*.

These generic conventions of the trailer generate a rudimentary meaning, a sense of the film's narrative or theme. But what I am most interested in is the surplus, or excess over and beyond this meaning – the supplemental effect of the trailer. And this surplus/supplement resides ironically in the ellipsis – the intensification or magnification of the work of the ellipsis that defines these trailers.⁷

7 The trailer has, of course, been subject to historical change. Trailers of the 1950s and 1960s make much less use of the ellipsis than those of the 1980s and beyond.

Given the trailer’s tremendous temporal restrictions in relation to the length of the film it is advertising, its ellipses cannot carry meaning as the figure does in the film itself. For the elements that it bridges, that it is between, are undecidable. Meaning, usually seen as so easily inferred from or implied by the ellipsis – easy to “fill in,” “understood” – is not recuperable here. The gaps are too large, and the trailer too saturated by its accelerating series of ellipses. This ellipsis is rendered inoperative, disabled by its very proliferation – it becomes sheer form or device without content. Or, perhaps more accurately, its only content is absence, lost time no longer propped up by meaning, but vacated, naked, exposed as a failed figure, a tropological ghost.



Ill 6: *I'm Not There*, Todd Haynes, 2007. Screenshot from trailer.

The trailer is the strongly honed art of ellipsis, but it activates an ellipsis deprived of its semantic dimension and intensified as the carrier of loss. It perfects the labor of the absencing, elision, disappearance of time marked by the ellipsis. In the space of (and the phrase is telling here) two or three minutes, the trailer must condense or contract the time of a two hour film, suggesting its pleasures or thrills – but it does not communicate them, it *mimes* them. This is why most (but not all) trailers are characterized by extremely rapid editing, each shot a matter of mere seconds or less. The fascination of the trailer is, at least in part, the lure of speed, of instantaneity and immediacy. As a microcosm of the film itself, the trailer replicates its condensation of time, generating an experience of an experience of

temporality. What is omitted above all, and necessarily, is the ending, the narrative closure, precisely in order to leave open the question, the enigma that drives the film, to widen the tantalizing gap through which the spectator must fall.⁸ For Bergson, our thinking insists that space is open; time is closed. For space is extendable, seemingly infinitely, and we readily accept the idea that there are horizons of objects beyond the horizons that bind our current perception. Because we measure time as distance, the future becomes a space that opens up before us, with a distance that we cannot anticipate, but know is there. Our perception of space appears to us as a content that is always included within a vaster container, invisible to us but nevertheless posited as actuality (and the unseen objects within it acquire the characteristic of actuality as well). For Bergson, “while we feel ourselves to be dependent upon these material objects which we thus erect into present realities, our memories, on the contrary, inasmuch as they are past, are so much dead weight that we carry with us, and by which we prefer to imagine ourselves unencumbered. The same instinct, in virtue of which we open out space indefinitely before us, prompts us to shut off time behind us as it flows” (Bergson 1991, pp.144-145). Trailers spatialize time, transform it into an object, by condensing and commodifying it, yet simultaneously leaving it open. As commodity, the trailer is never quite enough to satisfy desire, and inserts itself within a chain of commodities leading not only to the film it advertises, but to the cinema itself and its continual generation of more objects of desire. The trailer – any trailer – is selling the cinema itself. The trailer works by foregrounding and insisting upon the gap, the absence, the ellipsis that is the condition of possibility of the condensation of time in the cinema. It is a syntax of ellipses, where absence far outweighs presence, but absolute presence is simulated.

But what does the form of the trailer have to do with either Sugimoto’s *Theater* series or Tsai Ming-Liang’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, especially since these works occupy different sides of the divide that is still with us, that between high and low culture? The relationships between time and space produced by these very different works are not the same, but they all address, in some way, shape, or form, modernity’s spatialization of time. In the trailer, time is spatialized to facilitate its commodification – what the trailer sells is a particular experience of time, that of the film. It heightens and exemplifies the condensation, i.e., the packaging, of time that characterizes most Hollywood films, especially today. In comparison with the trailer, Sugimoto’s photos are an even more extreme contraction of time (that of an entire film), into an instant, and an even more extreme transformation

8 In the case of *Spider-Man*, the omission of an ending in the trailer does, indeed, suggest the ending of the film in its insistent withholding of closure, leaving open the possibility (or necessity) of a sequel.

of time into space, in another medium. They effectively accomplish what the trailer only strives for as a goal. The film here is completely divorced from meaning, from intelligibility, and reduced to a rectangle of light – a sheer special effect, spectacular in its excessive luminosity. The translation of cinema into photography also effects an altered temporality, since photography always connotes, as Roland Barthes has demonstrated, a “that has been,” as opposed to the cinema’s adherence to an experience of presence. This is a cinema – the cinema of ornate picture palaces – that has largely vanished, just as the cinema in *Good-bye, Dragon Inn* is about to be demolished. But perhaps it is also cinema itself, in the face of new technologies of digital representation, whose disappearance is being heralded as a future past.



Ill 7: Jim Campbell, *Illuminated Averages #1: Hitchcock's Psycho, 2000*, averaged over 1 hour 50 minutes (entire film), 30 x 18 inches; Duratrans, lightbox; Photo credit: Sarah Christianson.

There is another artist who has collapsed the time of film into a single moment, a single image, working not in photochemically based photography, as Sugimoto does in the *Theater* series, but in digital photography. Four of the photographs in Jim Campbell's *Illuminated Average* series utilize the same technique. In “Illuminated Average #1: Hitchcock's *Psycho*,” Campbell scanned all of the frames in *Psycho* and then merged them all into a single image (Ill. 7).⁹ The concern

9 The *Illuminated Average* Series includes *Illuminated Average #3 Welles' Citizen Kane* (The Breakfast Table Sequence), 2000; *Illuminated Average #5 Fleming's The Wizard of Oz*, 2001;

here is not so much with light, as in Sugimoto's photographs, but with the accumulation of data – all of the visual data in *Psycho* is in the image, but its legibility is compromised. It is as if the image were an incarnation of Freud's Mystic Writing Pad, his technical apparatus for representing memory, without the mechanism of erasure, which for Freud was equivalent to conscious forgetting (but opened up the possibility of unconscious storage). It is a demonstration of the dependence of legible memory upon forgetting, loss. Time is again spatialized, but this is a new space, a virtual space, whose code is generative but not visible. Sugimoto's intense, annihilating luminosity is in the center of the image, but in the dark edges, objects are, to some extent, still recognizable – a lamp, for instance, on the right side of the frame (perhaps demonstrating the significance of centering the gaze in the Hollywood cinema). Campbell was influenced by the Italian Futurists, particularly Umberto Boccioni (one of the works in the series is entitled "Dynamism of a Cyclist 2001 [after Umberto Boccioni]") and their attempt in the practice of photodynamism to represent movement by leaving the shutter open and hence layering image over image. In Campbell's *Illuminated Average* series, vision is subject to a mathematics of averaging brightness and contrast, reducing all of the film's time to a moment understood as an average but deprived of narrative or temporal meaning. The series is, like Sugimoto's, an extreme instance of the spatialization of time, one that activates cinema, but shatters its representation of temporality.

In the shot of the empty auditorium from Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the film within the film is also annihilated by the turn away from it to the auditorium. Extreme duration characterizes not only this shot but all of the shots in the film and the long take is characteristic of both Tsai Ming-Liang's work and that of the new Taiwan cinema in general. The length of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* could easily match that of the film shown in the theater, with no ellipses whatsoever. In fact, the use of shots of great duration – which convey "real time" in its technical sense – constitutes a refusal of ellipsis and an insistence upon experienced rather than abbreviated, highly condensed time. In Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), the use of extremely long takes covering everyday actions like shopping, cleaning, and making meatloaf, upsets the classical hierarchy of "full time" over "empty time."¹⁰ This "real time" is not the same as

and *Dynamism of the News*, 2001. See Jim Campbell's website, <<http://www.jimcampbell.tv>>, [accessed January 21, 2010].

- 10 It should be noted that "empty time," in this sense, is a fully Western concept and that the notion of empty time conveys something quite different in a Chinese context (see Ní Zhèn, op. cit.) The ellipsis is itself a component of a Western narrative structure. But again, my argument is that this film cannot be viewed in isolation from a cinematic repertoire that, in both Western and non-Western regions, valorizes heavy editing and the use of the ellipsis to condense time.

the time of the television reality show, where the marker of the real is not a formal or technical one but one of contents – real people, real, unscripted situations. In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, however, we do not experience the real time of being a spectator, watching the film within the film. Instead, we are shown the activities and interactions that occupy the margins of the screen, its outside, everything except the film itself (which is shown only in glimpses) – spectators interacting through gazes or propped feet or seating choices, people wandering the hallways outside the auditorium or frequenting the toilets. The movement usually conveyed by editing or camera movement is transferred to the restless wandering of spectators who never quite make contact with each other. The space, however, is very intensely present. It is a space of exaggerated perspective, with long hallways leading back to a strongly marked vanishing point (Ill. 8-10). Perspective adamantly asserts, against all knowledge, the depth of the image. It is a marker of the very spatiality of space. Time is experienced as duration in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, but it becomes the time of a very intense sense of space.¹¹



Ill 8: Tsai Ming Liang, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, 2003.

11 For the spectator. For the characters within the film's narrative, time is also constituted by waiting, schedules and a work routine, and a general sense of life passing by.



Ill 9: Tsai Ming Liang, Goodbye, Dragon Inn, 2003.



Ill 10: Tsai Ming Liang, Goodbye, Dragon Inn, 2003.

Sugimoto's and Campbell's photographs as well as *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* cancel or collapse the work of ellipsis. All time is there, but illegible in the photographs; in the film, all time is there, but becomes only empty duration, a waiting for something to happen in a space whose spatiality is amplified. Trailers, on the other hand, hyperbolize the work of ellipsis, of lost time in the service of commodification. Yet, all of these works inhabit the same mediatic system, as Jameson would say, and refer to and reflect each other in myriad ways. The extended duration of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* can only be experienced and attended to in relation to the fast paced time of the Hollywood thriller and the trailer. Filmic time can be contained and cancelled by photographic time in Sugimoto's and Campbell's photographs and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is just as susceptible to Sugimoto's open shutter or Campbell's illuminating averages as any other film. Trailers achieve their spectacular impact through an implicit comparison with the long take and its temporality of boredom. The works inhabit the same mediatic system, but each occupies a different point in that system, some straining more than others to not only instantiate it but to disrupt it, to put pressure on its weakest points, to theorize it, in short. For Bergson, the spatialization of time is a product of everyday thinking but does violence to the essential nature of time. Time, in his philosophy, is not subject to historical pressure – modernity cannot touch it. For Jameson, the spatialization of time is a negative characteristic of postmodernity because it contributes to the inability to think history and historicity. Has time become space? The question is ultimately unanswerable because the very act of posing it takes place within the same mediatic system and, in addition, assumes that these categories could have completely separable identities. As Jameson has said, there is no question of time completely disappearing under the assault of space. Each era produces and posits its own relationship between space and time, and understanding that relationship is crucial to even begin to interrogate the systematicity of capital. But the mechanical and electronic representation of time has, along with other factors, made time subject to a form of representation – highly reproducible, easy to transmit globally – that has undeniably transformed its status and effects. It is not immediately clear how aesthetic practice can counter or resist this systematicity, or even whether these are the terms that should be invoked. But it can contribute to the analysis of this system, not through the promise of nostalgically returning us to a prior condition in which time was authentically experienced, but by inhabiting in an extreme way and putting pressure on the logic of a spatialization that strives to take time and return it as object. Perhaps the only thing that can be said is that this spatialization is, quite literally, taking place.

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