

## David Company

### Introduction//When to be Fast? When to be Slow?

The encounter between two disciplines doesn't take place when one begins to reflect on another, but when one discipline realizes that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to one confronted by the other.

– Gilles Deleuze<sup>1</sup>

Film and photography have had perhaps the richest and strangest of relationships among the arts. Their connections run so deep at times that we can barely distinguish between them. Yet, there also seem to be so many strikingly obvious differences. What makes matters even more complex is that across the twentieth century, film and photography have remained significant for each other not just technically but aesthetically and artistically. Each has borrowed from and lent to the other. Each has envied the qualities of the other. And at key moments each has relied upon the other for its self-definition.

The advanced photography and film of the first half of the twentieth century was shaped profoundly by the modern idea of speed. To be contemporary and progressive was to make use of the latest media and be reactive, instantaneous, *fast*. That impulse motivated the kaleidoscopic city films of Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929) and Walter Ruttmann (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, 1927), the dynamic cutting between shots in avant-garde cinema (see the essay by Sergei Eisenstein) and photography's pursuit of the rapid snapshot. If the speed of modernity was experienced as a series of switches in tempo and shocks to perceptual habits, then progressive art was obliged to match and parry with switches and shocks of its own. In the 1920s the *photo-eye* and the *kino-eye* (film-eye) were the driving metaphors for a new and dynamic intimacy between 'man' and optical machine. Old culture, old media, old seeing and old time were to be swept up into an often contradictory mix of technological, social and artistic idealism.

After the Second World War, European and North American culture began to be dominated by the ideologies of mainstream cinema, television, lifestyle culture, saturation advertising and mass distraction. In this new situation speed lost much of its critical edge and most of its artistic credentials. To be radical in this new situation was to be *slow*. A stubborn resistance to the pace of spectacle and money-driven modernization seemed the only creative option and it came to characterize the landmarks of art and film in the latter decades of the last century. Slowness has structured the cinema of Vittorio de Sica, Roberto

Rossellini, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Chantal Akerman, Andrei Tarkovsky, Wim Wenders, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Aleksandr Sokhurov, Bela Tarr, and many others. A drop in tempo was a way to hold on to the decreasing opportunities for serious artistic reflection. Cinema's potential for the uninterrupted long take was cherished for its slowness and its honesty. The slowed look it offered was also a means of meditation on the fraught relationship between the appearance of the world and its meanings. As Wim Wenders once put it: 'When people think they've seen enough of something, but there's more, and no change of shot, then they react in a curiously livid way'.<sup>2</sup>

Resistance to speed was also at the heart of the experimental films of Andy Warhol, Michael Snow, Stan Brakhage, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, Hollis Frampton and others, all of whom took cinema into direct dialogue with the stillness of the photographic image. More recently contemporary video art has shown a compulsion to return to the origins of cinema (in what has been called a 'Lumière drive'). The long shot has become a characteristic of the work of artists such as Bill Viola, Mark Lewis, David Claerbout, Fiona Tan, Gillian Wearing, Fischli and Weiss, Sam Taylor Wood, Shirin Neshat, Victor Burgin, Steve McQueen, Stan Douglas, and others. Much of this too has been lured by the base quality of photographic stillness embedded in the moving image (see the essays by Michael Tarantino and Susanne Gaensheimer).

With the films of the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière cinema started out as what we might call the depiction of ongoing moments. Their locked off, single reel views stared at the world unfolding or passing before the camera. Their first film to be screened in public, *Workers Leaving a Factory* (1895) was, in effect, a *moving photograph* of a fixed building out of which flowed the people. Soon after, editing or *montage*, so vital to the development of both cinema and photography, opened new possibilities for the construction of a more synthetic time and space. Right from the start the fixity of the still photograph presented challenges – technical and aesthetic – for the depiction of time. Should the medium avoid moving subjects altogether? Should movement be arrested by a quick shutter, as it was in the work of 'chronophotographers' of the late nineteenth century such as Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, and then the reportage photographers of the twentieth century? (see the texts by Carlo Rim, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Tom Gunning.) Should movement flow through a long exposure and leave its traces? (see Anton Giulio Bragaglia's writings on Photodynamism.) Does photography have one fundamental relation to time or many? (see Thierry de Duve.) In the introduction to his book *The Decisive Moment* (1952) Cartier-Bresson wrote of the potential of the well-timed snapshot to fuse an elegance of geometry with a poetics of subject matter.

Conjuring epiphanies out of the almost-nothing of the everyday, his photography embodied all that was nimble, quick, light, mobile and reactive about photography. He spoke openly of his debt to movies. Indeed the whole turn towards instantaneous photography in the 1920s and 30s can be seen as a response to the dominance of cinema. Moving images transformed the nature of the photographic image, turning its stillness into *arrestedness*. Where cinema exploited movement, photography could exploit stillness. For several decades the quick snapshot became the basis of amateurism and reportage, defining for mass audiences what was thought essential in the medium. I outline in my own essay reprinted here how in more recent times this idea has been somewhat eclipsed. Few art photographers adhere to its credo, preferring large formats, tripods, preconception and slow deliberation. Meanwhile reportage photography has ceded the role of bearing news to television and the internet. It has all but given up the instantaneous in the process. Instead it has assumed important functions as a second wave of slower representation made after the world's events have happened. Once the epitome of all that was modern, photography now finds itself a relatively simple and primitive medium. Certainly it takes its place as a component in the hybrid stream of contemporary imagery but where it singles itself out – as it does most clearly in contemporary art – it embraces not the moment but slower rhythms of observation and premeditation.

How has cinema understood photography? Raymond Bellour has spoken of the way the cinematic spectator is made *pensive* by the appearance on screen of the still image. Whether it takes the form of a freeze frame or a filmed photograph, the still is a pause in the flow. In such pauses our relation to the image and cinematic time is released from the momentum of movement but restructured by other means. So frequent are the appearances of the still image in cinema that it begs the question of whether film might in fact be fascinated by, or need something from the photograph. Perhaps film sees photography as something it had to give up in order to become what it did. Is it the photograph's stillness that film finds so compelling? Its clarity? Its uncertainty? Its privileged status as record or memory? Its stoicism? Its inscrutibility? Certainly these are the qualities of photography to which filmmakers, both mainstream and avant-garde, have been drawn most often. They are also the qualities that much film theory has focused upon. In her essay Constance Penley makes clear the way influential writers such as Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin understood cinema as inescapably rooted in the real by way of the indexical status of the photographic image as a trace of its referent in the world. Similarly Roland Barthes, who always preferred the still image to the movies (at least in his writings), made that indexical connection the basis of his views on photography. When he did write about film imagery in the essay 'The Third Meaning',

published in *Artforum* in 1973, it was to consider that aspect of film that does not move: the individual film frame. Barthes' study of stills from the films of Sergei Eisenstein has much in common with Kracauer and Bazin but he proposed something much more unsettling. Photographs, when projected twenty-four frames per second, and structured by the conventions of narrative, captions and sound, 'behave' correctly. Deprive a frame of its place in that order and any amount of latent signification is made manifest. The extracted photograph is anarchic, untamed with a surfeit of radically open meanings. Cinema, Barthes implies, domesticates the essential wildness of photography.

In its assembly of shots, cinematic montage emphasized the partial, fragmentary nature of the single image. And while the single shot is the basis of photography, that singularity was also a problem photography sought to overcome if it was to articulate more complex ideas. Away from the poetic epiphanies of the decisive moment, photography of the inter-war years evolved as an art of assembly, usually on the pages of magazines and books. Most of photography's significant artistic achievements in the twentieth century were not single images but orchestrations of numbers of images. They were serial, sequential or at least rooted in the editing and ordering of parts. We may think of landmark projects such as László Moholy-Nagy's *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925), Germaine Krull's *Métal* (1928), August Sander's *The Face of Our Time* (1929), Albert Renger Patzsch's *The World is Beautiful* (1928), Bill Brandt's *The English at Home* (1936), Walker Evans' *American Photographs* (1938), Alexey Brodovitch's *Ballet* (1945), William Klein's *New York* (1955), Roy de Carava and Langston Hughes' *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955), Ed van der Elsken's *Love on the Left Bank* (1956), Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958/9), Danny Lyon's *The Bikeriders* (1968), Daido Moriyama's *Bye Bye Photography* (1972), Duane Michals' photo sequence publications or Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986). Most of these were projects conceived as books or magazine spreads, rather than gallery or museum exhibits. Their various forms were in general organized as a 'para-cinema' of the page. Many photographers and magazine editors were influenced directly by cinema's assembly of images and its articulation of time and space. For Moholy-Nagy there was 'no more surprising, yet, in its naturalness and organic sequence, simpler form than the photographic series'. It was for him 'the logical culmination of photography – vision in motion'.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Blake Stimson points out, the real potential of the photo-sequence lay as much in its difference from narrative cinema. The intrinsic gaps and ruptures between still elements allow the photo-sequence to be allusive and tangential. Indeed, telling a straightforward story with a sequence of stills is notoriously difficult, despite the popularity of cinematic spin-offs such as the photonovel. Static photographs *show* far more than they

tell, so the photo essay relies as much on ellipsis and association as coherent argument or story.

In recent decades, largely through the influence of photographic artists such as Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall, photography has evolved a new articulation of time very different from the decisive snap and the photo-sequence. Taking its cue from cinema's frames and film stills, a narrative staged photography emerged in art at the end of the 1970s. Blending performance, sculpture, theatre and cinema, the narrative photographic tableau has become one of art photography's most widespread forms and one of its most accomplished characteristics (see the texts by Régis Durand, Catherine David and Jeff Wall). Sherman's references to cinema were explicit, particularly in her still influential series the *Untitled Film Stills*. She blended filmic acting with photographic posing to recast herself in a range of stock femininities familiar from cinema. In one sense her medium was photography but it was also film and her own body. Wall's photographs rarely have the look of cinema or film stills. Nevertheless he grasped early on that all cinematic images are basically photographic and that the collaborative and preparatory image construction typical of narrative cinema could be put at the service of photography.

In the years since art has forced photographic time to fold in on itself. This is most evident where images work allegorically. When allegory returned to photographic art in the 1970s and 1980s it took the form of overt appropriation and quotation (think of the subversive re-photography of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, or the semi-cinematic photo-texts of Victor Burgin). It is still present but is now discernible in the diverse ways in which image-makers are in dialogue with different pictorial genres. Few genres are unique to the medium (street photography may be the only one) so working generically inevitably means connecting with painting, cinema, theatre and literature. For example, in their gestures and enactments the photographs of Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Hannah Starkey and Gregory Crewdson forge hybrid visual tableaux from a range of sources. Their references are rarely explicit, rather the images draw from a storehouse of popular imagery past and present. There is a commitment to social description here but in the mixing of artifice and realism the sense of the present is revealed as an accumulation of past experiences.

Binary oppositions are at their most illuminating when they begin to break down. It is then that they reveal to us our motivations for wanting to keep things apart in the first place. Certainly there is a great deal to be gained from thinking in terms of the differences between film and photography. For example Christian Metz's suggestive essay 'Photography and Fetish' shows just how much can be gleaned from a careful and perceptive contrast of the two. Twenty years after it was written Metz's writing still fascinates but now it points us equally towards

the overlaps and commonalities. Is film really a medium of the present while photography is always oriented to the past? Is a film, now that you can buy it and do as you wish with it, any less of an object than a photograph? Is filmic movement implicitly narrative? Is the stasis of the still photograph implicitly anti-narrative? Is the gaze of photography essentially fetishistic while film's is essentially voyeuristic?

In their exchange of enthusiasms and anxieties, the filmmaker Mike Figgis and photographer Jeff Wall discuss the shifting relationship between art and cinema. There are moments when it appears the two are in some kind of stand-off, compelled to signal their differences even while they inform each other. At other moments the boundaries seem to disappear in the fluidity of the dialogue. Wall and others construct images that may involve months or a year of work and great expense. Meanwhile Figgis is one among many directors to take advantage of lightweight digital video to cut budgets, cut crew and cut pre-production in pursuit of more spontaneous and 'independent' ways to make movies. A photographic art shoot may resemble a film set. A film shoot may be almost as invisible as a street photographer. Yet both camps keep their options open. Although there is no correspondence between cost of production and artistic merit, certain images can be achieved cheaply while others require money.

Chris Marker's short film *La Jetée* (1962) has become a touchstone for many reflections on film and photography (see the texts by Agnès Varda, Peter Wollen, Uriel Orlow and Marker himself). Comprised almost entirely of stills this short film subverts all the received oppositions between the two. Half science fiction, half love story, it moves between past, present and future, between fantasy and reality, between lived time and the time of the imagination. Marker draws almost unlimited potential from the apparent restrictions of the simple photographic sequence and voice-over. However what has made *La Jetée* compelling for so many image makers and writers has as much to do with its themes as its form. It is one of cinema's (and one of photography's) most profound reflections on the trauma of loss, the status of history, the enigma of desire and the place of images in the making and unmaking of our sense of self. As questions of time and memory have come to dominate discussions of visual culture, Marker's short film occupies a unique place.

Laura Mulvey discusses the ways in which the history of cinema is being reconfigured by new viewing. In many ways all media are historicized through newer technologies. Modern art history was made possible firstly by the displacement and assembly implicit in the museum, then by photographic reproduction and publication. Similarly, cinema studies got going in the 1970s when academics gained access to tabletop Steenbeck viewers. No longer was it necessary to sit in the dark and take in everything in one viewing. The field

blossomed soon after in the era of seminar room video playback. Movies could be stopped, started, forwarded, reversed and repeated at will. For a while cinema studies preserved the fantasy of the integral film (because that was how the general public still encountered film) even while it took them apart and analysed them bit by bit. But that position is now untenable, such is the extent to which the new methods of viewing are reshaping the old objects. Cinema is now atomized not just by specialists but in its general consumption via domestic video and DVD. At the same time film and photography are aligning themselves like never before as they come increasingly to share the same technological base. Most new digital cameras shoot photos and movies which hybridize in our experience of the computer screen and internet.

For nearly a century film was identified with a particular mode of viewing: *the cinema*. It had a big screen, dimmed lighting, rows of seats and a characteristic means of cultural and economic organization. Photography, on the other hand, was always much more dispersed. It spread rapidly through a multitude of forms – books, albums, archives, magazines, postcards, posters and all the rest. Today however the cinema is only one among many contexts in which films are viewed. The large auditorium takes its place alongside television, computer screens, in-flight entertainment, lobbies, shop windows, galleries and mobile phones. Together they form what Victor Burgin calls in his essay a ‘cinematic heterotopia’ – a network of separate but overlapping interfaces and viewing habits. In this environment films are as likely to be viewed in fragments as whole, across a spectrum of attention that runs from the indifferent absorption of bits and pieces to highly specialized and active ‘reading’ of films. Burgin proposes we think of memory in terms of short ‘sequence-images’ composed according to the displacements and condensations typical of dream logic. For all Hollywood’s obsession with narrative and perfect endings, films are not remembered that way. They intersect with the complexities of our lived experience through unconscious processes governed by the *psychical* rather than the *physical* laws of time and space. Belonging neither to the chronology of film narrative nor the arrest of the photographic still, Burgin’s concept points us beyond one of the great myths of our time, that photography is somehow intrinsically closer to the processes of memory than film.

With all the recent revolutions in the making and viewing of film and photography it is not unreasonable to think that we are in a period of unprecedented change. Nevertheless unprecedented change has been the very nature of modernity, which has taken film and photography as its defining modes of expression. Nearly every history of film and photography, whether written in the 1920s or last year, has ended with a prediction of great change to come. Sound, colour, television, video, digitization, the internet, along with the

turns in economic and political climate, have all brought crises and renewal. It is the nature of these media, if we can call them that, to remain permanently unsettled. The essays gathered here are a testament and a guide to that restlessness.

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, ‘The Brain is the Screen. An interview with Gilles Deleuze’, in Gregory Flaxman, ed., *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 2 Wim Wenders, ‘Time Sequences: Continuity of Movement’ (1971), reprinted in this volume, 88–90.
- 3 László Moholy-Nagy, ‘Image sequences; series’ (1946), reprinted in this volume, 83.