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# 1

## Introduction: A Cosmology of Contingency

*Angela Dalle Vacche*

Originally conceived as an international symposium at the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, during the month of March 2009, the purpose of this anthology is to look at the relation of film studies and art history and to ask: what do these two fields have to offer each other and why? Historically, movement has been both problematic and fascinating for artists and art historians who, in the plastic arts, produce and study mostly static objects. To be sure, the nineteenth-century invention of photography, a medium unconcerned with the human hand, paradoxically both deepened and bridged the gulf between the fine arts and popular media, thanks to the spreading of mechanical reproduction. By adding movement, the turn-of-the-century invention of the cinema combined illusion with the impression of reality, frail shadows with the speed of modern life. As a form of mummified change, or embalmed duration,<sup>1</sup> the cinema and the museum have respectively specialized in the perception of time passing and in the display of past traces. The widespread use of digital media in the twenty-first century has brought down the walls of the museum by opening up this eighteenth-century institution to marginalized areas of society. It is perhaps to slow down this new concept of the museum as a database of images accessible anywhere and anytime, that major institutions such as the Louvre, the Hermitage, and the Musée d'Orsay have started producing feature films, asking prominent directors to develop their own views about the space and the mission of the museum.

The topic of the museum in film can be invoked by pointing to some of its architectural features. For instance, the museum is a space of silent objects, guided tours, and red velvet ropes keeping the public away from precious pieces. There are also major differences between the cinema and the museum: the former is about voyeurism, while

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1 the latter depends on exhibition. Yet this contrast does not prevent  
2 a beneficial exchange between two new partners. By siding with the  
3 art museum, mainstream cinema gains status and legitimacy, and by  
4 siding with fictional cinema, the museum becomes intriguing thanks  
5 to the unique vision of a strong director. Whereas the museum requires  
6 an ambulatory situation and encourages a mixture of distraction and  
7 concentration, the cinema still means sitting down in the darkness and  
8 paying attention to only one big luminous screen, with no educational  
9 labels on the side. In comparison to recent digital applications, such as  
10 cell-phone cinema or DVDs watched on small computer screens, the  
11 museum auditorium guarantees a cinema of atmosphere, ritual, and  
12 careful programming. With small movie theaters awash in financial dif-  
13 ficulties, the museum is the new temple of cinephilia.

14 Ironically, the medium of the ephemeral and the fugitive moment,  
15 the cinema, has now become convenient for the museum in order to  
16 retrain its public to a certain degree of steady attention and respect-  
17 ful expectation. On one hand, the museum is keen on new media as  
18 a tool to penetrate into the deepest recesses of the public sphere; on  
19 the other, it also seems that the museum has been turning to talented  
20 directors—such as Alexander Sokurov for *Russian Ark* (2002), Olivier  
21 Assayas for *Summer Hours* (2008), and Hou Hsiao-Hsien for *Flight of the*  
22 *Red Balloon* (2008)—in order to explore death and memory, the story-  
23 telling power of objects, and the shaping force of human creativity.  
24 Indeed, editing and camera-work in these directors' fictional narratives  
25 enable the museum to break free from a pedantic and elitist reputa-  
26 tion, while the filmic image soars to new heights of complexity. All of a  
27 sudden, knowledge and meaning handed from the top down surrender  
28 in front of a new perceptual approach where everything is in process.  
29 This sense of wonder involves Hou Hsiao-Hsien's child seeing his red  
30 balloon as art for the first time, Assayas's hesitant adults wondering  
31 about the life of objects, and Sokurov's invisible visitor questioning the  
32 odd authority of a French guide in a Russian museum.

33 Despite their diverse intellectual sensibilities, the film specialists and  
34 the art historians featured in this anthology share a common agenda:  
35 to explore the intricate and overlapping relations among photography,  
36 film, and new media; to question the opposition between the  
37 old-fashioned art documentary and the international art cinema  
38 of the postwar period; to interrogate theories of art and the history  
39 of film theory from the early days to the present in regard to Sergei  
40 Eisenstein's and André Bazin's oppositional paradigms of montage and  
41 the long take.

1 To guide the reader, I have structured the contents of the volume  
2 into sections which are updated and adapted from the original pan-  
3 els for the Clark Symposium. Although the topic of cinema and the  
4 museum was included, I have enlarged it in such a way to make it  
5 even more central in the title of the anthology itself, which is based on  
6 the English translation of Malraux's "imaginary museum"—where the  
7 French word *imaginaire* is not directly about the elimination of walls.  
8 In this regard, Dudley Andrew's essay on the "cultural aesthetics" of  
9 André Malraux, Walter Benjamin, and André Bazin can be considered  
10 the centerpiece of the anthology as a whole. In fact, Andrew does not  
11 only discuss Malraux and the museum in comparison to Bazin and  
12 Benjamin on art and photography, but he also argues that the cinema  
13 moves beyond its roots in art, popular culture, and technology. Thus,  
14 the cinema becomes a cosmology of contingency, as I shall explain at  
15 the end of this introduction by looking at *Summer Hours*.

16 Dudley Andrew writes:

17  
18 By taking unto themselves the flesh and blood of earthly existence,  
19 these inventions released painting to pursue its loftier spiritual  
20 mission. Bazin leapt past the more traditional Malraux, for whom  
21 art was a voice from beyond the earth. In place of the voice, Bazin  
22 believed in the trace, the remnants of something real recorded by  
23 photography and cinema. Fruit of science and popular culture, these  
24 technologies affect art certainly, and may be used in artistic creation,  
25 but their uses go well *beyond* it, or, if you prefer, slip *beneath* it.<sup>2</sup>  
26

27 Despite their different sensibilities, Malraux, Benjamin, and Bazin shared  
28 a democratizing vision of culture which they developed from the early  
29 1930s to the late 60s. It is puzzling to note that their hopes and ambi-  
30 tions for an intelligent and responsible mass culture regrettably remain  
31 unfulfilled even to this day. This goes to show that technological changes  
32 alone are not enough to develop solutions, because a popular education  
33 in the guise of an audiovisual literacy of different kinds of moving images  
34 is still in the making and is urgently necessary.

35 This anthology includes 15 original contributions and is divided into  
36 five sections. The first two sections are grafted on key areas in film  
37 studies: such as early cinema; Soviet film theory; and the phenom-  
38 enological approach put forth by André Bazin from 1945 onward. The  
39 third section of the anthology deals with two case studies involving the  
40 tropes of landscape and the face in art history, visual studies, and film.  
41 Here I am using the term *visual studies* because Noa Steimatsky brings

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1 autistic perception to her discussion about the reticence of the face  
2 in the cinema of Robert Bresson. Steimatsky's turn to neurology is no  
3 biographical argument about the French director. On the contrary, by  
4 reading autistic perception in Bresson's image, the author was inspired  
5 by the successful alliance between Roman Jakobson's study of aphasia  
6 and the disjunctive features of postwar, modernist filmmaking.

7 The fourth section of the anthology is structured around two semi-  
8 nal figures: Paul Cézanne and Francis Bacon, not to mention all the  
9 subsequent literary, biographical, and filmic exploration that these two  
10 painters have triggered beyond their own efforts. The reader may wonder  
11 about the absence of Andy Warhol, or Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire*  
12 *du Cinéma*—not to mention the exclusion of video art. While these are  
13 certainly regretful lacunae, I am ready to put all the blame on myself  
14 and my decade-long obsession with Paul Cézanne in comparison to any  
15 other topic. Likewise Susan Felleman had a long-standing interest in  
16 Francis Bacon, so the make-up of this anthology is genuine enough to  
17 reflect the contributors' intellectual passions. There is also a completely  
18 different way in which the key topics in the title of this anthology  
19 could have been organized and presented. I am thinking, here, of Peter  
20 Greenaway's multimedia installations and films. Indeed, Greenaway's  
21 work explores stillness as much as movement, while it neither isolates  
22 nor fuses different media. As Brigitte Peucker explains in her Foreword,  
23 Greenaway seems to invite us to explore a new kind of constantly  
24 changing theatrical space where the viewers become actors of a more  
25 eccentric history of images, because each visitor can develop a unique  
26 sensorial experience which is no longer public and institutional but  
27 exploratory and playful.

28 Finally, the last section of the anthology is about cinema and the  
29 museum. And, despite my own optimistic reaction to a recent crop  
30 of fictional films about specific museums, my contributors' balance  
31 sheet is by far more cautious. There seems to be a general consensus  
32 that whenever the image is moving, there is still a big problem, for  
33 neither the museum nor the history of art can fully endorse it. The  
34 recent acceptance of more live performance art inside and outside  
35 the museum walls may be one of the ways in which the museum is  
36 rethinking its own curatorial categories and aesthetic priorities. Indeed,  
37 one wonders whether the flourishing of more and more live perform-  
38 ance art is related in any way to the increasing frequency of digital art in  
39 the world of art galleries. There, multimedia installations, many of them  
40 about the history of the cinema, have been highly successful through  
41 this second turn-of-the-century. Unfortunately, although digital art is at

1 home in the less canonical space of the gallery, the art museum tends  
2 to confine new media to the education department, perhaps prudently  
3 waiting for these new technologies to unravel their full potential and  
4 find their own vocation.

## 6 Image and movement

8 The first group of essays is devoted to the early period because the  
9 turn-of-the-century marks the birth of art history as an academic disci-  
10 pline, together with the technological invention of the cinema.<sup>3</sup> This  
11 is not to say that the aesthetic systems of art history always fit the  
12 problems of the cinema. Sometimes they do, sometimes they do not.  
13 In my essay on Alberti, Kepler, and the cinema, titled “Cinema and Art  
14 History: Film has Two Eyes” (2008,) I offer an example of an integrated  
15 approach between the two fields.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the phenomenon  
16 of color, which is already subjective and incredibly complicated, works  
17 in different ways in art and in film. And, of course, movement, which  
18 means staging as well as randomness, is missing. And yet, the analysis  
19 of the face, landscape, and objects in film benefits from readings about  
20 portraiture, landscape painting, and still-life. Art history, as a practice  
21 of bringing images to life, can help film specialists to look at intangible  
22 details and describe visual situations based on atmosphere. Conversely,  
23 film studies has been broadening art historians’ grasp of modernity and  
24 modernism, since the cinema bypasses what art is about. At any rate,  
25 Brigitte Peucker’s metaphor in the title of her book *Incorporating Images*  
26 (1995)<sup>5</sup> offers a good description of what cinema does with images from  
27 other media, in comparison to the incarnation process based on the  
28 indexical and contingent relation triggered by natural light between  
29 photographic imprint and its object referent.

30 Nell Andrew’s essay is an invitation to think of dance as one of the  
31 sources of cinema and as one of the fundamental, yet neglected media  
32 of modernity which is so much about motion. For critics Clement  
33 Greenberg and Michael Fried, Modernist abstract art is about spatial,  
34 motionless, and self-absorbed or framed objects. By contrast, Nell  
35 Andrew argues that there was an alternative development of Modernist  
36 abstraction, one that included time and motion and whose agenda was  
37 not the separation of painting and dance, but rather the prolonging of  
38 vision in relation to an ever-changing and, therefore, temporally based  
39 way of seeing.

40 In line with Nell Andrew’s call for a more integrated history, Dalle  
41 Vacche’s comparison between the Lumière Brothers’ short film *Partie*

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1 *d'Écarté* (1896) and Cézanne's *The Card Players* (1890–96) is a re-reading  
2 of the origins of modernity. She discusses Cézanne's role in taking on  
3 a contradictory stance, split between painting and photography, image  
4 and movement, subjectivity in space and objectivity in time.

5 Some of Dalle Vacche's points in her essay on Cézanne and the  
6 Lumières resonate in Sally Shafto's theme of a special "encounter"  
7 between Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub with the famous painter.  
8 Shafto's method of analysis is quite unique, focusing on the exact tem-  
9 poral length of shots within a "carefully juxtaposed" parataxis of ten  
10 paintings, three film clips, three photographs of the painter—always  
11 outdoors—and several filmed images of contemporary rural and urban  
12 locations in Provence and in Paris. After noting that the first painting,  
13 in a series of ten, fills the first half hour of the film, Shafto informs us,  
14 later on, that the two filmmakers treat us to a generous "two-minute  
15 shot" in relation to another element of their parataxis. By specifying  
16 for how many minutes different shots go on, Shafto invokes the days  
17 of early cinema when the duration of a single, static view matched  
18 the length of filmstrip available inside a heavy and not easily movable  
19 apparatus that was used for both shooting and projecting.

20 The tension between the stable pictorial image and the movement  
21 of cinema is the topic of Lynda Nead's essay, which examines the trope  
22 of "the artist in his studio." By dividing her essay in two parts, one on  
23 Clouzot's innovative art documentary *The Mystery of Picasso* (1956) and  
24 the other on Robert W. Paul's early silent-era films, Nead demonstrates  
25 how the cinema belittles the painter's skills, parodies the myth of  
26 artistic creativity, and even claims to be superior to painting by virtue of  
27 its ability to set in motion static images. This continues to be the case in  
28 Clouzot's film, which does not explain the artist's secret technique but  
29 plainly displays Picasso's creativity as if his hand were comparable to a  
30 self-moving force tracing the contours of ever-changing figures.

31 In my view, by making the painter's hand invisible behind a special  
32 screen which can only register visual traces, Clouzot makes a film about  
33 the impact of an autonomous and automatic force. The sexualized body  
34 of the famous artist remains so much behind the screen that painting  
35 begins to look like an uncanny process imprinting itself on a white,  
36 flat surface. Put another way, movement itself steals the show, because  
37 Picasso's art looks like the nonhuman tracing of a *photographic recording*  
38 set in motion by the sheer energy of mysteriously self-propelled lines  
39 and patches of color.

40 Nead's dichotomy of high art and low culture in early cinema is  
41 all the more useful as soon as it is set in stark opposition to the same

1 problem in Soviet film theory, where it quickly disappears for the sake  
2 of a new social structure without class differences. After the Bolshevik  
3 Revolution of 1917, the key challenge for artists and filmmakers alike  
4 was to find a scientific way to implement revolutionary ideals. With  
5 great attention to the interplay between individual personalities and  
6 collective aspirations, John MacKay charts Alexander Rodchenko's  
7 modular solutions in designing objects, while he also comments on  
8 Dziga Vertov's contradictory stance in regard to propaganda.

9 Sergei Eisenstein's ways of handling both words and images on the  
10 printed page and on the filmic screen are as worthy of examination as  
11 Dziga Vertov's passion for nonfiction and political cinema. By examin-  
12 ing the tension between the art-historical image and filmic movement  
13 in the light of the problem of quotation from the screen of cinema to  
14 the page of a book, Trond Lundemo revisits a topic first explored by  
15 Raymond Bellour.

16 For Eisenstein, intellectual montage is the last stage of an art-historical  
17 tendency moving toward the cinema, while his favorite method for  
18 quotation is the static shot of a work of art in close-up or a frame  
19 enlargement of a book page. For Vertov, instead, there is no difference  
20 between the movements inside the shot and the movements between  
21 the frames. Thus, his way of quoting is neither visual nor analogical, but  
22 can be, instead, strictly numerical. This is the case because Vertov is not  
23 interested in iconography, but only in the number of running frames  
24 for each shot in order to accurately quantify the variations in length  
25 which are the intervals between two shots.

26 On one hand, Lundemo dwells on some similarities between Vertov's  
27 use of numerical charts or tables, and the computational mentality of  
28 today's digital surveillance systems based on automated, numerical  
29 recognition patterns. On the other hand, Lundemo argues that Vertov's  
30 goal is the dispersion of film's energy into the social sphere, as if cinema  
31 could spin its own movement into some kind of gas-like entity generat-  
32 ing enthusiasm, productivity, and cohesion among citizens for the sake  
33 of a new, socialist utopia.

34 Whereas, in Lundemo's essay, Eisenstein's kind of cinema emerges as  
35 more conservative in comparison to Vertov's, nevertheless Eisenstein—  
36 the brilliant inventor of intellectual montage—turns out to be a crucial  
37 influence in the work of Francis Bacon, as examined by Susan Felleman.  
38 She charts the influence of Buñuel's and Dalí's Surrealism on the British  
39 painter, so that the open mouths and the desperate screams of the  
40 victims in Eisenstein's *Odessa steps* travel into Bacon's deformed and  
41 highly emotional portraits.

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1 In ways comparable to Sally Shafto's attention to clusters of filmic,  
2 pictorial, and literary texts at the heart of Straub and Huillet's method,  
3 Felleman is not only interested in Bacon and the cinema, but in how  
4 this powerful and controversial artist has unleashed a creative impulse  
5 involving such provocative figures as Kenneth Anger and David Lynch.

6 If Cézanne shifted the history of art from a focus on optical percep-  
7 tion to bodily sensations, Bacon continued to move in the same visceral  
8 direction, but with an increased sense of physical pain and mental  
9 anguish. Abjection, nightmare, masochism, and horror are pervasive,  
10 while Bacon's interest in sensation is still pertinent today in response to  
11 the numbing overload of synthetic images in our digital society.

12 To be sure, the face and landscape are not only crucial art historical  
13 tropes, but key areas of inquiry among film theorists. The Hungarian  
14 writer/critic Béla Balázs argued that the face is a sort of microscopic  
15 landscape, while, in the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze,  
16 the neologism "faciality" is the symptom of an increasing interest in  
17 surface and materiality. By taking an approach completely different  
18 from Béla Balázs's interest in the intensity of the face, Noa Steimatsky's  
19 essay discusses Bresson's de-facing filmic technique or "work in the  
20 negative," through which she proposes an alternative model of subject/  
21 object relations based on child autism.

22 The reader may wonder how autistic withdrawal and confusion in  
23 perceiving the mother's face would compare to Felleman's Surrealist  
24 equivalence among mouth, anus, and other corporeal openings in  
25 her essay on Bacon. By citing from Bresson's *Notes on Cinematography*,  
26 Steimatsky suggests that the use of the face in Bresson's cinema, and  
27 especially in *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), veers away from address, con-  
28 sciousness, and agency, while it taps into a primal and opaque overlap  
29 between the animal and the human spheres.

30 The allure of a primitive, a-historical subtext can also be detected in  
31 Alessandro Blasetti's *Terra Madre* (1931), a fascist film advocating rural  
32 and timeless values against the city, industrialization, and foreign influ-  
33 ences. Lara Pucci's research tracks all the pictorial sources and artistic  
34 discourses presiding over the transformation of the landscape into an  
35 ideological and historical palimpsest, so layered and mediated that its  
36 artifice is suffocating. She pays a special degree of attention to the work  
37 of caricaturist Mino Maccari, in charge of *Il Selvaggio* (*The Wild One*)—  
38 a journal of the ruralist *Strapaese* movement. *Il Selvaggio* was in compe-  
39 tition with *Novecento* (1900s), founded by Massimo Bontempelli, the  
40 official spokesperson for the *Stracittà* side of the Fascist cultural industry  
41 in favor of urban values.



1 Steimatsky's autistic model finds an echo in Simon Dixon's reference  
2 to neurologist Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* in  
3 his essay on Victor Erice's unconventional art documentary about painting  
4 a tree in real time. In Sacks' case study, Dixon explains, a patient was  
5 asked to paint a tree. The patient reached out to cover the object itself  
6 with paint. By contrast, Victor Erice rejects the unknowingly aesthetic  
7 solution proposed by Sacks' patient, because the Spanish artist limits  
8 himself to marking the leaves and the quinces of his own tree with a  
9 minimum of white paint to track change in real time. These modest  
10 markings make even more explicit the temporal discrepancy between  
11 Erice as an artist and his competitor, namely nature as the artist.

### 12 13 **Cinema and museum**

14  
15 In his essay on Victor Erice's *El Sol del Membrillo/Dream of Light* (1992),  
16 Simon Dixon unpacks the Spanish title of the film, by addressing the  
17 issue of temporal disjuncture between an object in the world and its  
18 representation on canvas:

19  
20 [Victor Erice] wants to do more than capture an instant; he wants  
21 to capture a particular time of year, called in Spain "the sun of the  
22 quince tree" ... a time of seasonal change for trees, but metaphori-  
23 cally a time of reflection for those entering life's autumn.<sup>6</sup>

24  
25 This metaphorical expression from the Spanish language finds an  
26 equivalent in the title of Olivier Assayas' recent film for the Musée  
27 d'Orsay on the relation between cinema and the museum and titled  
28 in French *L'Heure d'été* (*Summer Hours*, 2008). This French idiom refers  
29 to the longer summer days when the sun rises earlier and sets later,  
30 so that there is a lot more room for an active life in daylight. But  
31 the astronomical interpretation of the title is not enough. In fact, the  
32 lengthening of the day is comparable to the afterlife of objects in the  
33 museum.

34 Despite all the recent collaborations between the cinema and the  
35 museum, Ian Christie does not settle on the museum's good faith  
36 toward the cinema. For the British scholar, the only relative exception is  
37 the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which opened its first depart-  
38 ment of film in the 1930s. Although MoMA's film department was never  
39 fully integrated with the curatorial branches of the rest of the museum,  
40 it constitutes a rare acknowledgment of cinema as the major protago-  
41 nist of the twentieth century.

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1 Furthermore, Christie's assessment of Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*  
2 as an elegy to a traditional notion of high art echoes Jeremi Szaniawski's  
3 similar conclusion in his essay on the same topic. Floating on the  
4 waves of history and inside the Hermitage museum, Sokurov's dreamy  
5 long take unravels layers of Russian history. Notwithstanding the  
6 lyrical quality of many episodes in *Russian Ark*, Christie and Szaniawski  
7 disapprove of its monumental and nostalgic stance.

8 In contrast to Christie's sense that the screening of a film is likely to  
9 be a disturbing presence inside a museum exhibition, Gavin Hogben at  
10 first sight may seem optimistic about digitalization throwing down the  
11 museum walls. He celebrates how these new media can engage the fugi-  
12 tive moment inside and outside the no-longer solid and monumental  
13 art museum.

14 As Hogben explains, the exemplary narrative of this liberating process  
15 seems to be the subject of an art documentary titled *Exit Through the Gift*  
16 *Shop* (2010), which brings together Thierry Guetta, a French-born com-  
17 pulsive filmmaker from Los Angeles, and Banksy, an elusive and poised  
18 British performance artist whose public interventions hover among the  
19 surreal apparition, the humorous prank, and guerrilla tactics.

20 It turns out that Thierry can shoot but cannot edit, whereas Banksy,  
21 after staging an amazing art opening, is eager to step behind the camera  
22 and shoot Thierry's very first and personal art opening. This swap-  
23 ping of positions in front and behind the camera, however, does not  
24 evolve into a new way of thinking about the cinema or in an innova-  
25 tive approach to art-making. Instead of a true reversal and exchange  
26 in power relations, the flip-flop between Thierry's inexhaustible image  
27 production and Banksy's hooded, secretive authorial persona turns  
28 out to be one more consumer-oriented manifestation of the culture  
29 industry. Thus Hogben decries the return of walls brought about by the  
30 arrival of the cinema in the museum, where the auditorium is now used  
31 as the new movie theater:

32  
33 Museums have film series these days, so it is likely that *Exit Through*  
34 *the Gift Shop* will make an appearance within their walls. But when  
35 this happens, and notwithstanding the panel discussion that will  
36 likely be tied into the event, will the museum have become just one  
37 more cinema—with Banksy's name on the marquee?<sup>7</sup>

38  
39 Hogben's concern about the acceptance of the cinema displacing the  
40 celebration of the digital inside the museum, is very well founded, and  
41 this pecking order is probably due to the fact that the cinema is an older

1 medium than the digital, which is still mired in issues of piracy, privacy,  
2 security, and integrity.

3 At the same time, the ending of François Penz's essay suggests that  
4 the fall of the museum walls need not be an architectural and literal  
5 debunking, but it can also take place through innovative curatorial  
6 practices, and through the alliance of art and science by blurring the  
7 boundaries between the art museum and the natural history museum.  
8 Penz describes his visit to the new natural history or ethnographic  
9 museum of Paris, the Musée du Quai Branly, where architect Jean  
10 Nouvel's transformation of this museum-space into a cinema-like site  
11 brings to fruition Malraux's dream of the imaginary museum as a  
12 place of experimentation, rather than just a site of preservation and  
13 celebration of canonized objects and timeless values out of touch with  
14 competing histories and lived experience.

#### 16 **Photographic parthenogenesis, contingency, the long take**

18 At the very end of this introduction about essays dealing with film, art,  
19 and new media, something must be said about the difference between a  
20 photographic and a digital image in light of the contrast between natu-  
21 ral, biological and artificial or electronic reproduction. As Lev Manovich  
22 explains in *The Language of New Media*,<sup>8</sup> digital images are spatial, hap-  
23 tic, and, I would add, comparable to clones. This is the case because  
24 they are based on binary codes made of ones and zeros in computers  
25 programmed with algorithms inside these images' pixels. This means  
26 that the digital image is a synthetic product of numbers whose visual  
27 appearance is referential whenever it looks like its origin, but it does not  
28 spontaneously constitute itself through a living source, because it relies  
29 on microprocessors and scanning devices. By contrast, photographs are  
30 natural, automatic, physio-chemical phenomena triggered by the light  
31 hitting a sensitive surface, and autonomously taking place between  
32 energy and matter. Neither digital images nor photographs tell the  
33 truth, but with photography, regardless of how we interpret what we  
34 see, we can be sure of at least one thing: something staged or random  
35 ought to have been there at a particular moment in time and space,  
36 otherwise the light has nothing to contour and cannot leave its imprint.  
37 Highly malleable, digital images raise ethical issues in regard to whom  
38 or what was there, which become especially prominent in relation to  
39 history, memory, and, of course, the museum.

40 A good example of how digital aesthetics give way to historical eth-  
41 ics is the Israeli animation *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). This film narrates

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1 the amnesia of two soldiers, as they come to terms with the haunting  
2 aftermath of a genocide. Significantly, this digital animation ends with  
3 the photographic shot of a massacre. In contrast to the black-and-white  
4 animation, the final image of mangled bodies is so blurry that it can  
5 hardly be interpreted or read, but it is there, at the very end of the film,  
6 simply to call attention to the *de facto* documentary status of photog-  
7 raphy, in comparison to prototype-based drawings from the rest of the  
8 film. In *Waltz with Bashir*, water can be shown only as a thick black line  
9 and there is no fluid play of natural light and shade.

10 How does the encounter between cinema and the museum in  
11 recent films comment on the ethics of visual culture and art, since  
12 both photography and the museum are devoted to the preservation  
13 of memory after death? Unlike air and water, nothing is volatile or  
14 evaporates in the museum, where each object is solid and has its place  
15 in a temperature-controlled narrative that guarantees reassuring connec-  
16 tions across idealistic categories of art, truth, beauty, and authenticity.

17 In his famous essay written between 1943 and 1945, "The Ontology  
18 of the Photographic Image," André Bazin remarks: "photography actually  
19 contributes something to the order of natural creation *instead* of pro-  
20 viding a substitute for it."<sup>9</sup> With this sentence, Bazin is telling us that  
21 photographic reproduction is about a natural performing act triggered  
22 by randomness, with no involvement of the human hand. Light  
23 involves chance, so that its photo-writing has no intentional design and  
24 can range from a few dead leaves to some seeds scattered on the ground.  
25 Molded on these accidental objects, a photographic impression is born  
26 as something new each time, in the moment, out of energy bouncing off  
27 matter. Performance is appropriate here, because photography involves  
28 contingency. By bearing witness to something that was indeed there in  
29 the past, photography is also about a birthing process into the new, and  
30 as such it is a natural image that exists inside a sort of future anterior.<sup>10</sup>  
31 Were we to look for a comparison in nonhuman biology, photography  
32 comes close to a form of self-reproduction called *parthenogenesis*. The  
33 word parthenogenesis comes from the Greek *Parthenon* or "virgin,"  
34 because no male is involved.

35 Parthenogenesis was a topic dear to Jean Rostand, a prominent  
36 French scientist whose research was explored by the writer and docu-  
37 mentary filmmaker Nicole Védres in her films *Life Begins Tomorrow*  
38 (1952) and *At the Frontiers of Man* (1953). Likewise parthenogenesis was  
39 discussed in Jean Painlevé's scientific surrealist documentaries about  
40 minuscule organisms living under 10 mm of water. Painlevé was also  
41 in charge of the film and science section in the newly opened Palais

1 de la Découverte during the 1937 International Paris Exposition. At  
2 this point in time, André Bazin was about to finish his training at the  
3 École Normale d'Instituteurs in La Rochelle, France, before return-  
4 ing for more coursework in Paris. By 1943, after a solid education in  
5 science and mathematics, literature, philosophy, and the arts, Bazin  
6 was well aware of the role played by contingency in photography, and  
7 he greatly admired Painlevé's films from the 1920s onward. To be sure,  
8 Painlevé's paper archive includes several references to parthenogenesis,  
9 but also to chance in relation to genetics.<sup>11</sup> In 1947 André Bazin wrote  
10 a famous review of Painlevé's cinema entitled "Science Film: Accidental  
11 Beauty," where in a sort of surrealist way, randomness breeds aesthetics.  
12 In order to celebrate the cinema as a technology and a popular medium  
13 in dialogue, but also separately from the other arts all linked to a human  
14 element, Bazin was especially keen on how parthenogenesis or photo-  
15 graphic self-birth can refer to an anti-anthropocentric and scientific  
16 kind of creativity.<sup>12</sup>

17 In Roland Barthes' words, photography is a message without a code,  
18 namely the automatic incarnation<sup>13</sup> of invisible time in clear antithesis  
19 with the digital image, which is all about measuring space, design, control.  
20 Just as with any natural event, every single photograph is new and diffe-  
21 rent, since every single moment accounts for this difference, or virginal  
22 quality. Unlike the media of engraving and lithography, which are com-  
23 parable to printing and devoted to the diffusion in black-and-white  
24 of handmade images, photography is not an additional expanded stage  
25 of these techniques, but a radical rupture in the history of mechanical  
26 reproduction across the centuries.<sup>14</sup> However, photographic partheno-  
27 genesis alone is not enough to account for the cinema as a medium.  
28 The reproductive cycle leading to the public, mass institution of  
29 the cinema is not over yet because it requires the development and  
30 circulation of photographic shots as copies; it is only at this later stage  
31 that all the different photographic shots as copies and all the different  
32 photographic prints are equal among themselves. This final stage of  
33 mechanical reproduction corresponds to the mummy-like statuettes  
34 mentioned by Bazin in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"  
35 (p. 9), when he discusses the possibility of thieves accessing the pyramid  
36 and stealing the real mummy or original negative.

37 Just as in parthenogenesis with no male involved, photography is a  
38 virginal fleshing-out of energy, characterized by the complete absence  
39 of the human hand. This absence of the hand is in clear contrast with  
40 what happens during the execution of a painting, a drawing, or a digital  
41 animation. In these anthropocentric manual and computational media,

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1 the artist/designer *incorporates* or matches the mental image of a previous  
2 sign. Photography, by contrast, *incarnates* a nonhuman, contingent  
3 source of light through the tracing of an object.<sup>15</sup> The digital designer is  
4 closer to a traditional artist than to photographic parthenogenesis.

5 Finally, were we to translate Bazin's biological subtext in his own  
6 words, photography is, by definition, pointing to "the natural image of  
7 a world that we neither know nor can see."<sup>16</sup> This unknowable world is  
8 the real, the flow of natural time, or the spatiotemporal continuum that  
9 we are made of, namely death. Within this context, only the continuous  
10 camera movement of the long take, in contrast to montage, can tune  
11 us into an illusory and temporary material duration, a "being-in-time."  
12 Through this particular way of filming, not only are we free to try out  
13 relationships among all the elements contained in a mobile frame with  
14 penetrable borders, but corrosive time itself turns into a volumetric  
15 cross-section of uncharted experience whose facets in space are as rich  
16 as our own sense of living interiority and competing moral choices.<sup>17</sup>  
17 In the wake of Dudley Andrew's essay which underlines how cinema  
18 slips "beyond" and "beneath" art, I would argue that the long take is  
19 an open-ended stylistic choice meant to suggest intricate webs of self-  
20 delusion, free will, and chance in the lives of Assayas's characters.

21 It is this heuristic definition of the cinema that subtends Assayas's  
22 use of long takes at the beginning and at the end of his film about the  
23 museum, *Summer Hours*. Briefly, the plot: an elderly mother, H el ene  
24 Berthier (Edith Scob), asks Fr ed eric (Charles Berling), her eldest son, to  
25 supervise the transmission of her art collection to the Mus ee d'Orsay.  
26 The family country house with the collection is very special to H el ene  
27 because it represents the memories of her life with Paul Berthier, a rea-  
28 sonably well-known artist. More specifically, Berthier has left behind  
29 two paintings by Corot, one Art Deco armoire, one Art Nouveau writ-  
30 ing desk, two large panels by Odilon Redon, and many sketchbooks. In  
31 antithesis to his carefully assembled art pieces, Berthier's own paintings  
32 are scattered across many individuals and places. Thus, we begin to  
33 understand that there are two sets of children living side-by-side in this  
34 film: the object-children and the human children. As long as H el ene is  
35 alive, the art objects are all in one place: the family country home; on  
36 the contrary, just like Paul's own paintings, Edith's three adult children  
37 have all flown the nest to disperse themselves in different countries and  
38 professions.

39 Within the category of the object-children, there are also some art  
40 pieces whose official historical value is a small thing in comparison to  
41 strong personal and family memories. For instance, an airplane toy hides

1 inside a precious Art Deco armoire; at the bottom of a wooden and glass  
2 display cabinet, there is a grocery bag containing the pieces of a statuette  
3 by Degas which H el ene’s two sons broke by accident. Besides art objects,  
4 the film sets up additional categories that have to do with aesthetically  
5 valueless, but utilitarian or emotionally charged objects due to genera-  
6 tional difference, personal attachment, or conflict in lifestyle. Assayas’  
7 exploration of the cinema and the museum through objects points back  
8 to Bazin’s photographic ontology as “objectivity in time,”<sup>18</sup> where the  
9 word “objectivity” has nothing to do with the truth.

10 For the French theorist, the recording camera-eye, unlike the human  
11 eye imbued with subjective biases, is an indifferent one. Thus, it levels  
12 all things in favor of either a fresh perception or unexpected parallels  
13 questioning worn-out value judgments. The camera-eye expands the  
14 photographic way of seeing into the virginal stance of parthenogen-  
15 esis, so that the world viewed through the cinema offers a sense of  
16 anti-anthropocentric and indifferent being there, without a pre-set  
17 utilitarian aim.

18 This world viewed through the cinema is so aloof and self-sufficient  
19 that it puts into crisis our trust in knowledge over perception. For  
20 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, perception of things as they appear during  
21 their immediate manifestation has primacy over analytical knowledge  
22 of what is really going on.<sup>19</sup> Although indebted to Merleau-Ponty’s  
23 for his phenomenology in the present tense, where the act of seeing  
24 always happens anew or for the first time, the French film critic and  
25 the philosopher also differ. On one hand, by embodying his subject,  
26 Merleau-Ponty went against Descartes’ body-less thinking self with  
27 no sensations. On the other, by embracing Bergson’s duration and life  
28 as constant motion, Bazin could not accept any longer the classical  
29 humanist subject depicted by Leonardo with his Vitruvian man. In fact,  
30 eager to develop a new kind of humanism open to the Other, Bazin’s  
31 view of the cinema is rooted in an anti-anthropocentric, kinetic outlook  
32 that relies on an automatic image of the world or on an image that  
33 needs no human hand to take place and come into being.

34 The point of this de-centering of the subject through cinema’s move-  
35 ment, is to make us understand how previous knowledge can prevent  
36 us from seeing things in a new way. For Bazin, this is the great promise  
37 of cinema: the possibility to see according to human perception, but  
38 in a nonhuman way through the fresh eye of the camera. Through the  
39 close-up where the very far and very small can look like the very  
40 near and the very large, film’s technology reminds us of its ances-  
41 tors in the telescope and the microscope, two instruments through

1 which the human eye can look at both stars and bacteria. Yet, with  
2 Bazin, these two nonhuman ways of seeing never become superhuman or  
3 godlike, because, despite his de-centering of the subject, Bazin still  
4 believes in man's fundamental ability to learn, change, and relate to  
5 that which is different or new. Whenever this anti-anthropocentric way  
6 of seeing takes place, cinema enables us to give birth to a new inner  
7 self out of a parthenogenesis based on the contingency of an encounter  
8 with something profoundly other whose difference is possible to love.

9 The purpose of this rebirth of the inner self is a shared duality, or  
10 Merleau-Ponty's "chiasmus" between mind and body, the human and  
11 the nonhuman, us and the world that contains us. Within this anti-  
12 anthropocentric framework, the long take is a crucial stylistic strategy  
13 to position us in a broader world that shapes itself according to material  
14 spatial coordinates that we can experience and interrogate, but, accord-  
15 ing to Bazin, not alter or reconfigure for the sake of an intellectual  
16 agenda or a particular thesis that would rule out uncharted possibilities  
17 of encounter within that very same space.

18 Interestingly enough, the décor of *Summer Hours* is without family  
19 photographs, except for one picture depicting Héléne and Paul Berthier  
20 eating with friends and family *en plein air*. This very same picture  
21 belongs to an illustrated book, which is a museum catalogue for a  
22 traveling exhibition about Paul Berthier. In addition to this glimpse of  
23 private life, there is another quick hint about photography. This sec-  
24 ond, but absolutely crucial photographic reference is placed at the very  
25 beginning of the film and picked up again at the very end. It involves  
26 Frédéric's oldest daughter who remains marginal in *Summer Hours'*  
27 narrative. And the young woman's peripheral placement until the end  
28 of the film, is comparable to the way photography has truly shifted  
29 to the periphery of visual culture in our digital age. Regardless of this  
30 apparent marginalization of youth and photography, *Summer Hours*  
31 opens and closes with two extended long takes of young people running  
32 freely through the landscape. And photography is always a new-born,  
33 natural event.

34 Photography first comes up at the beginning of the film. This is  
35 when the Berthier children are involved in a treasure hunt among the  
36 trees, but their map leading to the riches looks like a white page. The  
37 map-drawing has been done in invisible ink. Just like the traces of  
38 a photographic negative, this chemical substance needs the heat of  
39 a flame to surface on the page in order to become visible. There is also a  
40 second long take that stylistically and thematically rhymes with the first  
41 one. At the end of *Summer Hours*, Héléne's grand-daughter, Sylvie (Alice



1 de Lencquesaing), shares with her boyfriend her memories of a painting  
2 of a young H el ene picking cherries by Berthier which the family no  
3 longer owns. The problem is that, due to the absence of both painting  
4 and photographs in regard to this episode, granddaughter Sylvie cannot  
5 remember the position of the old house in relation to H el ene. Yet this  
6 blind spot points to the limited strength of personal knowledge. And  
7 it is precisely within these areas of amnesia or loss where the museum  
8 strives to play a role.

9 Assayas' film is soft-spoken and profound, a quasi-documentary essay  
10 about legal, financial, fiscal, and funeral arrangements, and a fiction  
11 that involves the actual specialists and administrators of the Mus e  
12 d'Orsay. In *Summer Hours*, the museum appears only at the end, when  
13 Fr ed eric and his wife Lisa (Dominique Reymond) look at their family  
14 collection in a new context, next to unknown objects and gazed upon  
15 by anonymous tourists. The result is an uncanny sense of displacement.  
16 By now, their old family country house has become a mummy-like body  
17 without organs. On the contrary, the museum has all its restored objects  
18 in place, but there is no flame to warm up with love its highly control-  
19 led public space and to kindle new perceptions of people and things.  
20 Fr ed eric feels that H el ene's objects sit inside an invisible cage, but it  
21 is also true that the museum restoration specialists have repaired the  
22 Degas statuette he and his brother damaged during their childhood.

23 It would be too one-sided to say that Assayas proposes a negative  
24 view of the museum, but it is also true that in his film, art restoration is  
25 comparable to plastic surgery over an already dead patient for the sake  
26 of good appearances. The only object from H el ene's country home that  
27 goes on living is a green vase the family housekeeper takes to her own  
28 modest home. Ironically, this vase is not the same one H el ene thought  
29 her housekeeper would have liked to have. On one hand, this discrep-  
30 ancancy calls attention to how anecdotes from daily life are subjective, and  
31 therefore, eloquent about misperceptions. On the other, we do not even  
32 need to see the green vase in its new setting, the housekeeper's personal  
33 home. Although this very same green vase could be lost or broken in the  
34 future, we are already sure that this object will be alive and loved more  
35 than anything else in the museum. By contrast, its companion-objects  
36 in the museum experience a less personal kind of love, even though  
37 they are so safely guarded, labeled, and accurately displayed.

38 Something vital is missing in Assayas' Mus e d'Orsay, while Fr ed eric  
39 does indulge in negative nostalgia. Yet his wife, Lisa, reminds him of the  
40 weekend party that their children, Sylvie and Pierre, have organized in  
41 their old country home now on sale. She persuades her husband that

1 their youthful presence alone will bring the old place back to life. As  
2 they reminisce about their own young romance through an affectionate  
3 laughter of complicity, they know that new loves will be born during  
4 this new gathering in H el ene's home. If the museum represents the  
5 public scene in contrast to a private family scenario, Sylvie's and Pierre's  
6 generation of iPods, laptops, multicultural ties, and freewheeling  
7 experimentation is a third scene well outside the constraints of personal  
8 history and official culture, family duties, and museum rules alike.  
9 Sylvie and Pierre are the most recent generation, one that neither goes  
10 to the cinema nor to the museum, because their access to everything is  
11 totally digital, anywhere anytime. The break with the previous media,  
12 however, is not so extreme that amnesia or indifference has settled  
13 in. There are still powerful linking memories across relationships and  
14 technologies which Assayas unravels through his final long take, by  
15 following Sylvie and Pierre into the open countryside. Like her grand-  
16 mother H el ene, Sylvie knows how to bring people together and foster  
17 a whole culture of leisure, art-making, and self-interrogation. Together  
18 with her boyfriend, the young woman jumps over a brick wall, so that  
19 the two leave the past behind and disappear into a thick forest nearby.  
20 Meanwhile their two figures look microscopic, inside an enveloping  
21 countryside shown from above through an aerial shot continuously  
22 developed out of an ongoing long take.

23 Why do Sylvie and Pierre disappear into nature? Is Assayas' film in  
24 favor of art-historical tradition or of the digital future? The digital thrives  
25 next to the pictorial in *Summer Hours* because they are both anthropo-  
26 centric media in opposition to the anti-anthropocentric filmic element.  
27 The latter is steeped in the nonhuman realm of contingency and in an  
28 outward-bound force that has to do with the constant changes going on  
29 outside the museum, either in the street or in nature. During the final  
30 museum sequence of Assayas' film, one anonymous young character  
31 answers his cell phone: he plans to go to the movies after the guided  
32 tour around H el ene's and Paul's art objects. The links between these  
33 objects and their former owners are forever lost, while a new centrifugal  
34 spin begins by taking one person inside the museum away from the  
35 history of art back to the cinema. In the end, the museum saves objects,  
36 but erases personal stories about relationships. By contrast, the cinema  
37 is always about beginnings and outward-bound spins of energy originat-  
38 ing from absent objects, but forming new bonds.

39 Institutionally, the digital is not the enemy of photographic cinema,  
40 but only another medium and another phase with ethical consequences  
41 for the twenty-first century that are still unknown. Indeed, there are

1 unavoidable ontological differences between these two technologies.  
 2 Along with the leisure culture of Impressionist painting and early  
 3 cinema, small hints about photography loom large in *Summer Hours*.  
 4 Unlike previous and future media, cinema is quite unique because—  
 5 with its mixture of stillness and movement, illusion and tracing,  
 6 absence and presence—it can take us in and out of atmospheres and  
 7 rhythms which are so profound and yet ephemeral that both art and  
 8 science would be at a loss in producing them with the same intensity or  
 9 explaining them with equal clarity. André Bazin was the first theorist to  
 10 fully understand the ethical and aesthetic implications of this definition  
 11 of the cinema as a cosmology of contingency rooted in daily life and in  
 12 human perception. Considering the analogy between the photographic  
 13 phenomenon and parthenogenesis in the natural world, one wonders  
 14 whether new directions for the traditional art museum might be found  
 15 in dialogues with the natural history museum, the curiosity cabinet,  
 16 and the philosophy of science. In my view, it would be desirable to see  
 17 digital imaging and new media of all kinds take the lead in bridging  
 18 the gap between art and science through the cinema. Yet, considering  
 19 that photography as a natural image is unique and is always new, it is  
 20 unlikely that we shall stop studying it, especially because it is a special  
 21 lens through which to look at the twentieth century on film. And what  
 22 a century it was: the century of the cinema!

## 23 Notes

- 27 1. On cinema and the museum, the best book is P. Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 28
- 29 2. D. Andrew, see Chapter 7, p. 126, this volume.
- 30 3. On these two overlapping fields, see my edited collection: *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
- 31
- 32 4. A. Dalle Vacche, "Cinema and Art History: Film Has Two Eyes," in *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies*, ed. J. Donald and M. Renov (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2008, pp. 180–98).
- 33
- 34 5. B. Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- 35
- 36 6. S. Dixon, see Chapter 8, p. 144, this volume.
- 37 7. G. Hogben, see Chapter 16, p. 315, this volume.
- 38 8. L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
- 39
- 40 9. A. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What is Cinema?* trans. H. Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967, vol. 1, p. 15).
- 41

## 20 Introduction

- 1 10. For this concept of time, I am indebted to D. Torlasco, *The Time of Crime: Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Italian Film* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- 2
- 3 11. I wish to thank Brigitte Berg for sharing her personal archive about Jean Painlevé with me. I am also grateful to Fox Harrell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for his comments on the difference between the digital and the photographic.
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 12. On the theme of an anti-anthropocentric scientific creativity, see my “The Difference of Cinema in the System of the Arts,” in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, eds D. Andrew and H. Joubert-Laurencin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 142–52).
- 8
- 9
- 10 13. R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).
- 11
- 12 14. In regard to lithography and engraving, see W. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 219).
- 13
- 14 15. On photography and incarnation, see D. Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin’s Quest and Its Charge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. R. Franses (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- 15
- 16
- 17 16. A. Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” p. 15.
- 18 17. H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).
- 19
- 20 18. A. Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” p. 14: “Viewed in this perspective, the cinema is objectivity in time.”
- 21
- 22 19. M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) (New York: Routledge, 2011).
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