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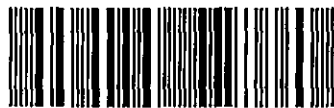
**Moving image – still life  
(Project Report)**

**Kiki Petratou**

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MOVING IMAGE – STILL LIFE

KIKI PETRATOU

MA PROJECT REPORT

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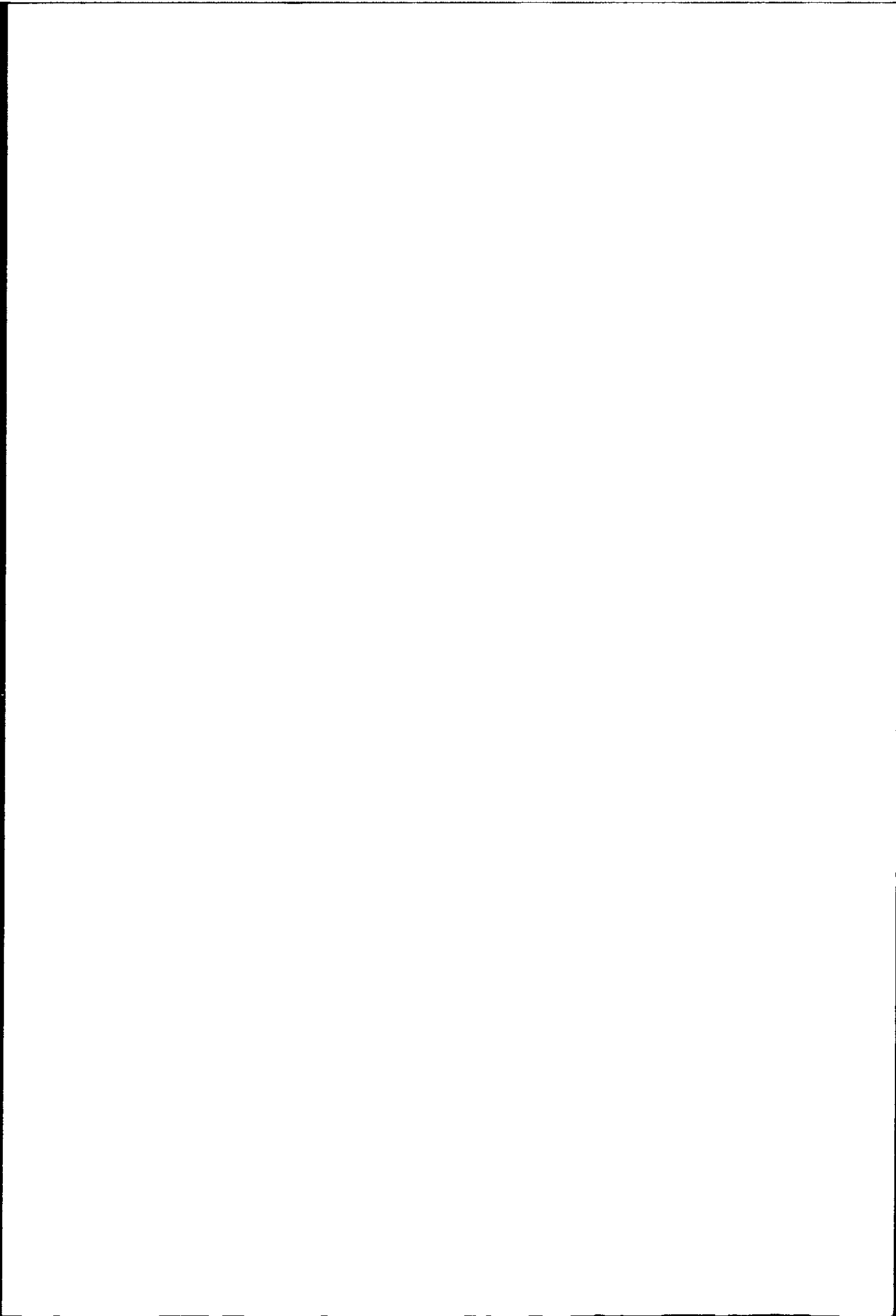
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*Acknowledgements to Frans-Willem Korsten, Steve Rushton and Robert Suermond*

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## MOVEMENT AND TIME

“Stasis was defined according to Schrader as the form that links the everyday in something unified and permanent”.<sup>1</sup>

Central to my research is the aim to create a still-life image from filmed scenes documenting the everyday actions in my living environment. In some cases however the scenes being staged function as allegories of the states and situations of daily life. I decided to mix staged and ‘real’ scenes because I did not want to create a documentary about the activities in my environment but to transform everydayness, as I perceive it, into the permanent and unified quality of the still-life genre. Since I work with video and the moving image it is important to examine structures of movement and time and see in which ways movement once disconnected from time may confront a stasis.

Gilles Deleuze’s ideas about the movement-image and the time-image will provide my theoretical framework with particular reference to the notions of movement and time in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*.

Deleuze defines three levels of analysis of movement and time: “(1) the sets or closed systems, which are defined by discernible objects or distinct parts; (2) the movement of translation, which is established between these objects and modifies their respective positions; (3) the duration of the whole, a spiritual reality, which constantly changes according to its own relations”.<sup>2</sup>

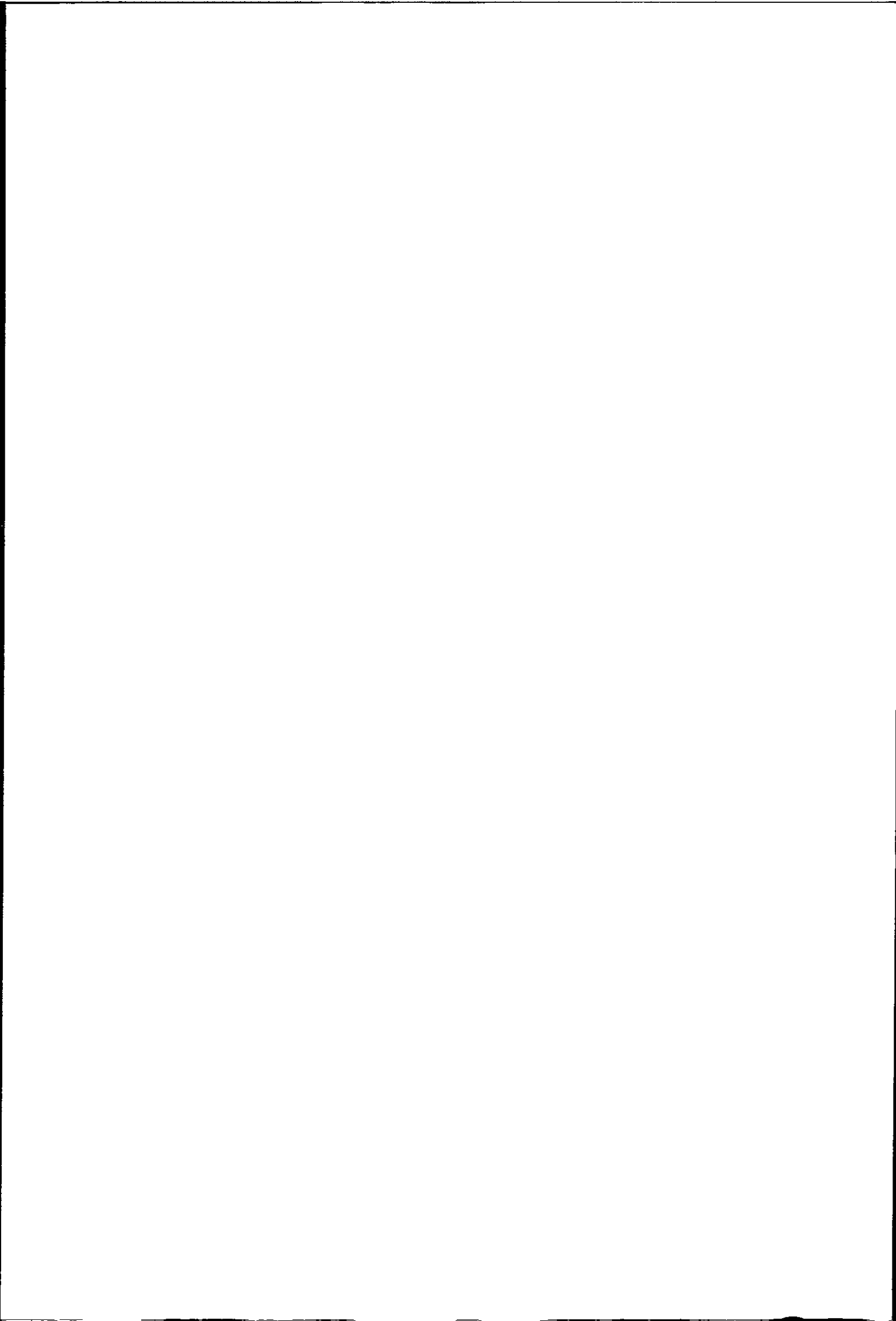
From these levels derive the two aspects of movement: that which happens between objects or parts; and that which expresses the duration of a whole. Deleuze explains it as follows: “we can consider the objects or parts of a set as immobile sections; but movement is established between these sections, and relates the objects or parts to the duration of a whole which changes, and thus expresses the changing of the whole in relation to the objects and it is itself a mobile section of duration”.<sup>3</sup>

In relation to the cinematographic concepts, Deleuze maintains that what determines the whole and produces movement is montage, by means of continuities, cutting and false

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 17

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 1, The Movement-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 11

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 11



continuities. Through montage and the movement of the camera the shot can express both the relationship between objects or parts and at the same time the state of the whole.

### *The movement-image*

When movements of characters or objects are related through montage to a center that acts and reacts then the result is a *movement-image*. This center can be either a character or an idea, and it is defined as the point from which, or towards which, all movements or shots are linked together. The existence of a center links characters and objects through patterns of actions and reactions or 'sensory-motor schemata', as Deleuze calls them. The sensory-motor schemata makes it possible for every shot to be linked to the previous shot and to the next, in such a way that the viewer gets to see only what is related to the characters and the proceeding action.

The characters themselves react to the situations they are caught in, and even when one of them *found himself reduced to helplessness, bound and gagged*, it is always a matter of the ups and downs of the action. Subsequently the viewer takes part in the action to a greater or lesser degree by identification with the characters.

In the case of the movement-image, time is represented indirectly as a succession of moments that measure movement, because time flows from the montage which links one movement-image to another. Thus time is subordinated to movement.

To what extent a movement can be related to a center is based, according to Deleuze, on our human sensibilities. There are three ways or modes of connecting a movement to a center or *grasping the whole*: through action, perception and affection (which are also the different ways in which time is subordinated to movement). These three modes generate the three sub-types of the movement-image: the perception-, affection, and action-image. The perception-image stands for the long-shot, through which we get to see the scene from the camera's, or the character's, point of view. Here we get a subjective perspective of the 'world'. The action-image stands for the medium-shot, this gives us the objective perspective through the relations or reactions between characters, or between characters and elements. Finally, the affection-image is introduced by means of the close-up, here

we are presented to the *perception of self by self*, we get close to the character's emotional or psychological situations, and how this is affected by particular developments within the story. A film is not made up of a single kind of image but the *inter-assemblage* of perception-images, affection-images and action-images, however there is a dominant type of image in each film. The three varieties of the movement-image reveal three types of montage so that "one can speak of an active, perceptive or affective montage".<sup>4</sup>

This form or type of image seems to 'facilitate' the viewer in a certain respect: everything is set towards a center from which all meaning is derived and everything serves to highlight this meaning. The whole is given to the viewer through the patterns of actions and reactions of its parts and in this way it is made possible for the viewer to *perceive the moving body*.

What happens when such a center gives way and the elements or parts of the whole no longer move towards a center but seem to obtain importance in them selves? How is the viewer then supposed to gain access to the reading of the image? Before I go on to answer these questions, and introduce a new type of image that is appropriate to my new work and research project, I would like to briefly discuss my previous video work "Unsuspected Time" (2003). I make reference to this work for three reasons: (1) In "Unsuspected Time" I was looking for the tension between the still and moving images; (2) I became more conscious of the decisions I was making in my work (which I previously made intuitively or instinctively) (3) some of the observations mentioned above seem appropriate to "Unsuspected Time". I do not mean that I am going to illustrate Deleuze's ideas in my work but these ideas helped me to conceptualize my work and will help me to put into words what I am dealing with in my current practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 70











*Unsuspected Time*

Two parallel projections run (for 3 min. 23 sec.) on an opaque screen. They cannot be seen simultaneously. One first sees the face of a woman, moving constantly in slow motion. At times she points stubbornly at something we cannot see, at other times she looks straight through the camera and meets the viewer's eye.

Finally the figure fades away and the white screen illuminates the whole space. The structure reveals to the viewer that there is something else projected on the other side of the screen. Then s/he has to turn around and watch some night action: a walking man with a blinking light on his chest dissolves into the scene of an arrest, then to a group of people ready to get into a car, some policemen and finally to the lines of the road that dissolve into white, which illuminates the space once again.

My concerns were to explore the space in which the work was exhibited so that it would become an integral part of it, and to develop the viewing positions so that the viewer would also become a character in the work. This was made possible through montage which works in two levels: (1) first there is the montage in each of the projections - the face of the woman is a close-up which suggests a feeling of suspense or fear; every shot in the street scenes tends to have a life in itself and although the dissolves suggest passages from one scene to the other there is no real continuity that could provide an explanation of these actions. I would rather say that these scenes appear like bits of memories of events that someone had witnessed and spliced back into a random order. In this sense there is no real center that links all these shots together, they simply coexist and claim the same importance to each other. Some shots of course appear to be visually stronger than others, like the shot of the arrest, which might remind the viewer of a crucifixion, but it nevertheless remains at the same level as its 'fellow' scenes; (2) there is the montage in space - the viewer turning to the other side of the screen, the illumination of the room where the viewer confronts him/herself standing in an art space where everything is visible: the walls, the hanging screen, all confront the viewer with the fact that s/he has come to view a work. In this sense montage links the two projections together as two parts of a whole. The opaque screen functions as the center from which everything is derived, literarily and conceptually. It brings together the gaze as an action

on the one side of the screen with the captured instants of the other side. It taps the relation of 'who sees' with 'what is seen'. The viewer then acts, pushed by the different elements the work provides, but s/he is the one who decides the time in which the story unfolds. The matter is not how long it will take for the story to be told but how the viewer, through the process of interpretation, will make the connections in order to proceed to the resolution of the story.

Time here is represented indirectly. Time appears in the viewing moment and is comprehended by the spectator who must find their way into real time and space in order to 'grasp the whole'. But of course this is not obvious and one might miss the connections. Indeed, one of the comments in reaction to the piece suggested that the two projections were two different works. However this apparent disconnection turned out to be a challenge to me that led to my decision to work again with the scheme of the diptych, but this time as a projection with the two screens side by side. For my final project I want to focus on developing the space within the work, and to concentrate on the construction of an image through the direct interaction of the images on both screens. In "Unsuspected Time" I combined still and moving images which, due to the lighting and composition, resembled a painterly approach – the scene of the arrest is reminiscent of the quality found in Carravaggio's paintings, the slow-motioned face of the woman seems to be a moving painting. I want to explore this aspect further in my new work, concerning not only the aesthetic connotation to painting but also its functional possibility to make an object static.

### *The time-image*

In order for the movement-image to be produced the movement has to be normal. This presupposes the existence of centers, which are capable of acting and reacting. When movement ceases to be related to such centers then it becomes *abnormal, aberrant*. It is in this sense that a reversal occurs: time is no longer presented indirectly as subordination to movement but movement is subordinated to time so that time is

presented directly. What aberrant movement does is revealing time as a whole, as *infinite opening*.

Deleuze asserts: “if normal movement subordinates the time of which it gives us an indirect representation, aberrant movement speaks up for an anteriority of time that it presents to us directly, on the basis of the disproportion of scales, the dissipation of centers and the false continuities of the images themselves”.<sup>5</sup>

Considering time as a whole we no longer speak of simple succession of moments but of time as coexistence of past, present and future. It is, as Deleuze argues, characteristic of cinema *to seize past and future that coexist with the present image*.

Thus aberrant movement and the direct representation of time imply a new type of image, the *time-image*.

Let us consider in which ways modern cinema implies a ‘beyond’ of movement and moves towards the construction of the image of time. French new-wave directors – Godard, Rivette –, Italian neo-realists – Fellini, Visconti, Antonioni, De Sica –, and Ozu in Japan, take everyday and ordinary situations as the subject of their work. For example, the art of Antonioni evolves “an astonishing development of the idle periods of everyday banality”. As for Fellini “it is not simply the spectacle which tends to overflow the real, it is the everyday which continually organizes itself into a traveling spectacle”. Their visual space is fragmented and disconnected, which correspond to what Deleuze calls “any-space-whatever”. The action is transformed into optical and sound descriptions. The characters appear in daily situations to simply stroll or wander around in *events that hardly concern those they happen to*, instead of being part of a story with a beginning and an end, as in the movement-image; they find themselves in situations to which *they have no response or reaction*. They are no longer *agents*; they become a kind of *seer* capable of seeing and showing. They invest the settings and the objects with their senses and with their eyes so that “objects and settings take on an autonomous material reality which gives them an importance in themselves”<sup>6</sup>. Deleuze quotes the example given by Bazin of the young maid in De Sica’s “Umberto D”: “the young maid going into the kitchen, in the morning, making a series of mechanical, weary gestures, cleaning a bit, driving the ants

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 37

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 2-5

away from the water fountain, picking up the coffee grinder, stretching out her foot to close the door with her toe..."<sup>7</sup> In short these directors create situations where the characters are empowered with audio-visual sensations, which Deleuze calls *purely optical and sound situations*. In this way they achieve the breaking of the sensory-motor connection, which, as we saw in the movement-image, is "a setting which is already specified and presupposes an action which discloses it, or prompts a reaction which adapts to or modifies it".<sup>8</sup> Purely optical and sound situations give rise to aberrant movements, movements that no longer provide us with a clear progression of events, no longer center. Subsequently movement does not provide us with an experience of time because it becomes unclear how one movement links the next. Deleuze holds that in this case time appears directly as a flow of internal thoughts and experiences.

The stroll or wonderment of the characters, the stumbling from one situation to another, the events that hardly concern anyone, thus the disconnection of space and establishment of purely optical and sound situations, are specified through the use of the camera, which is usually fixed, and through montage. The camera becomes an agent of abstraction in the sense that it does not always follow the characters but undertakes autonomous movements, as in the case of empty spaces or still-lives of Ozu. Even when the camera depicts the characters transforms them into *displacements of figures in space*, as in the style of Antonioni or Fellini. Deleuze speaks of a camera-consciousness or autonomy, which becomes "questioning, responding, objecting, provoking, theorematizing, hypothesizing, experimenting".<sup>9</sup>

Montage - the so-called *determination of the whole* - links the images or shots directly by means of the simple cut. But now montage has changed its meaning and takes on a new function: it does not link movement-images to a center through patterns of actions and reactions, from which it extracts the indirect representation of time, but it deals with aberrant movements which reveal the form or force of time in the image. "It no longer asks 'how images are linked', but 'what does the image show'?"<sup>10</sup> In this sense montage exists already in the image. Subsequently, Deleuze argues, the whole or duration in the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 41-42

time-image is not given to us like in the movement-image, instead it can be found in the image itself, which must be read. We have to make mental relations or relations of thought and spirit with the image (shot) and find the whole there first before we find the whole in general. The purely optical and sound situations, the fixed camera and the montage-cut create movements that not only reveal time in its direct form but also *subordinate the description of a space to the function of thought*. Thus the time-image identifies with the *readable-image* and the *thinking-image*.<sup>11</sup>

The reflection by Thomas Poel on Godard's *Une Femme est Une Femme* (1961) is a good example of films that fall under the regime of the time-image: "the main characters do not seem to have a clear purpose. They do some housework, walk around the streets and then suddenly they start to dance. As viewers Godard constantly reminds us that we are watching a film. He employs various methods to achieve this: intricate tracking shots, handheld cameras, jump cuts, and bombastic music cues that grow sporadically at seemingly inappropriate times. We are not supposed to lose ourselves in the narrative, but the objective is to make us think and develop new ways of seeing."<sup>12</sup>

#### *Still life: the direct image of time*

Still-lives and empty spaces constitute purely optical (and sound) situations. Although a still life and an empty space is not the same thing, their functions can overlap in the sense that they can be seen as two aspects of contemplation. For Donald Richie they are *still lifes*, for Paul Schrader *cases of stasis*. Both give rise to the state of *any-space-whatever* and reveal idle periods, which in the course of the film disturb the equilibrium of the sequence that presupposes an action. They become *false continuities*, which take an autonomy and importance in them selves. "They reach the absolute, as instances of pure contemplation, and immediately bring about the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>12</sup> Poel, T., *Movement and Time in Cinema*, in Bloois De, J., Houppermans, S., and Korsten, F-W, (eds.), *Discern (e) ments: Deleuze and Aesthetics*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2004, (in press)

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 16

If purely optical and sound situations are the components of the time-image, still life is the direct time-image, Deleuze holds. Giving examples of still life used in films by Ozu – as in *Late Spring: the vase is interposed between the daughter's half smile and the beginning of her tears*, or the bicycle in *A Story of Floating Weeds* – he observes that the still life is *a little time in its pure state: a direct time-image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced*. The light that falls on the still life of the vase or the bicycle indicates the state of change from night to day or the reverse. Each is time under different conditions. The bicycle, for instance, as long as it is motionless, represents time as the unchanging form of that which moves. Time becomes *the visual reserve of events in their appropriateness*.

In this way the still life, as any other pure optical and sound situation, signifies the interaction between image and viewer and brings *the emancipated senses* in direct relation with time and thought. It extends, in Deleuze's words, *to make time and thought perceptible, to make them visible and of sound*.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Still Life Painting*

“The appeal and power of still life...lie not only in its comprehensible scale, but in the fact that extraneous details are stripped away and what is left speaks to the responsive eye, simply and directly, of matters large and small. Of what do still lifes speak? Of relationships-connections, reflections, support, power, balance; of cause and effect; of things that have happened and will happen; of taste, touch and smell; of man and nature; of markets and appetites and genetics and diet; of time, mortality, and regeneration. If we are to understand what a still life signifies, we must attend closely”.<sup>15</sup>

As the still life and pure optical situations in film constitute the direct time-image and image of thought equally the still life painting can be part of this category. The still life painting has many functions and serves various purposes but above all it is a visual space,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 16-18

<sup>15</sup> Prown, J., D., quoted in Lowenthal, A., W., (ed.) *The object as subject: studies in the interpretation of still life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1996, 3



which calls for contemplation: The depiction of ordinary objects in common use makes us stand in astonished admiration of their shapes, colors, composition, unlike we would have done with the 'real' objects. Nobody for instance contemplates an arrangement of food on the kitchen table, no matter how appealing it might be. It is not in terms of reality as representation of the real thing that still life becomes important, it is through depicting the real thing, as an apple or a pair of shoes will always be, that brings it to another level or condition. Still life uses the all too familiar objects as its starting point but it is capable of discovering the power of art to use its objects for its own functions and purposes. The still life of Caravaggio and Cézanne are characteristic, these demonstrate what art can do when it comes to play with everyday reality. They both use the banal and the contingent as points of departure for bringing their personal vision to the world. In Cézanne's *Still Life With Apples*, for example, we are confronted with a situation that departs from the routines of the kitchen table. His still life brings the relation of the artist and his studio, which reveals his personal artistic preoccupations. It is evident that he is rather interested in asserting relations between shapes and colors than depicting the actual proportions of the real object. His painting becomes an exploration into lines and light and signifies the conquering of a visual, purely aesthetic, space that associates more closely with the theatre than a domestic space.

As Norman Bryson observes: "Caravaggio and Cézanne, in very different ways, are fully prepared to sacrifice the actuality of what they portray in order to show something else, the power of art to ennoble and elevate even a humble basket of fruit, or the capacity of art to embody and dramatize the detailed workings of aesthetic consciousness".<sup>16</sup>

In a different context still life can function as metaphors, allegories or agents of disguised symbolism.

Vincent Van Gogh's *A Pair of Wooden Shoes*, which was painted in the small town of Arles, away from the 'intriguing' life of Paris, subscribes firstly to an autobiographical aspect once it can be seen as a reference to his modest way of life in Arles. In a broader association it may refer to a certain way of life in general. As seen by Petra Ten-Doesshate Chu "the shoe still lifes may sum up Vincent's physical as well as spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> Bryson, N., *Looking at the overlooked: Four essays on still life painting*, Reaction Books, London, 1990, 86

wandering, and, more generically still, they can stand for the entire concept of a walk, or way of life".<sup>17</sup>

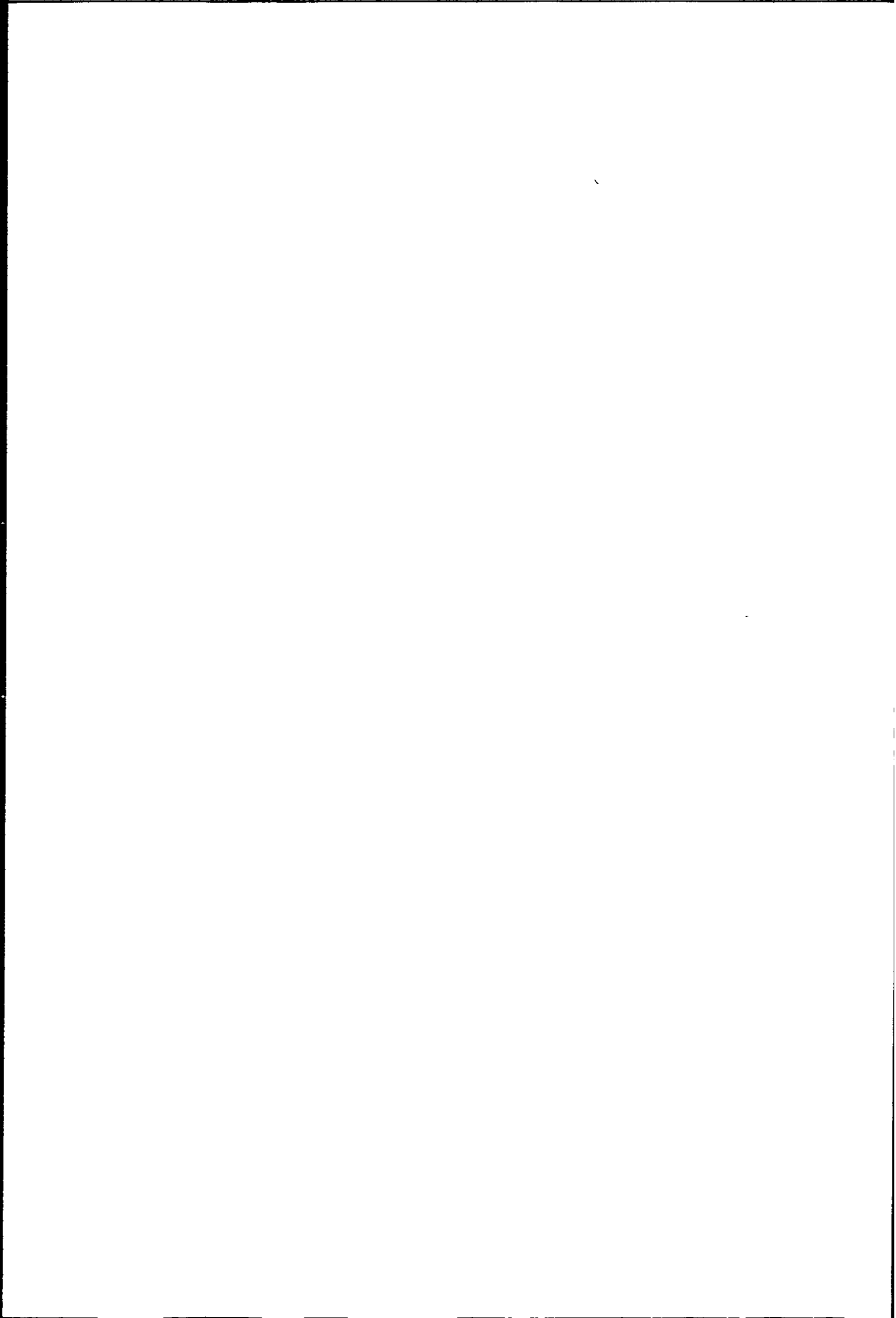
If we look at Dutch still life paintings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, our associations wander beyond the depicted instant. Uneaten meals or floral combinations, all banal in nature, with their specific light, space and composition, function somewhat like a memento-mori, reminding us of life's fragility and brevity. Dutch still life paintings are primarily portrayals of the abundance and consumption of a society that produces them and demands them, but this does not stop them evoking messages incorporated with the objects they are depicting. They often take a didactic dimension over human limitation as in the case of floral arrangements, which "when combined with the feeling of seasonality, the feeling of locality points to human frailty, and the boundaries of space and time that frame human life".<sup>18</sup>

In all these cases, what is at stake is still life's identity to make the ephemeral, the contingent, the daily still, permanent; and at the same time its capacity to create movements, which extend the depicted instant, to make time and thought perceptible. And of course because the still life is still, it does not itself move, all the movements occur in the brain of the viewer, who can use the image to open up to new realities or new fantasies.

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<sup>17</sup> Ten-Doesshate Chu, P., in Lowenthal, A., W., (ed.) *The object as subject: studies in the interpretation of still life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1996, 88-89

<sup>18</sup> Bryson, N., *Looking at the overlooked: Four essays on still life painting*, Reaction Books, London, 1990, 105



## FROM STASIS TO MOVEMENT

*Crows*: a dream by Akira Kurosawa

Akira Kurosawa is considered to be the *most Western*<sup>19</sup> of the Japanese filmmakers. His influences taken from the Western world can be found in his adaptations of literary material by Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and Gorky in films like *Ran* (1985), *The Idiot* (1951) and *Donzoko* (1957). In Kurosawa's earlier studies in painting Vincent Van Gogh was an influential source, which might explain his preference for wide screen landscapes in films, such as in *Dreams* (1990).

*Dreams* (*Yume* in Japanese) was made of eight short-film versions of dreams, all on various subjects. A painterly approach is evident throughout the film and the set, colors and composition make it seem as if it was made from a sequence of paintings.

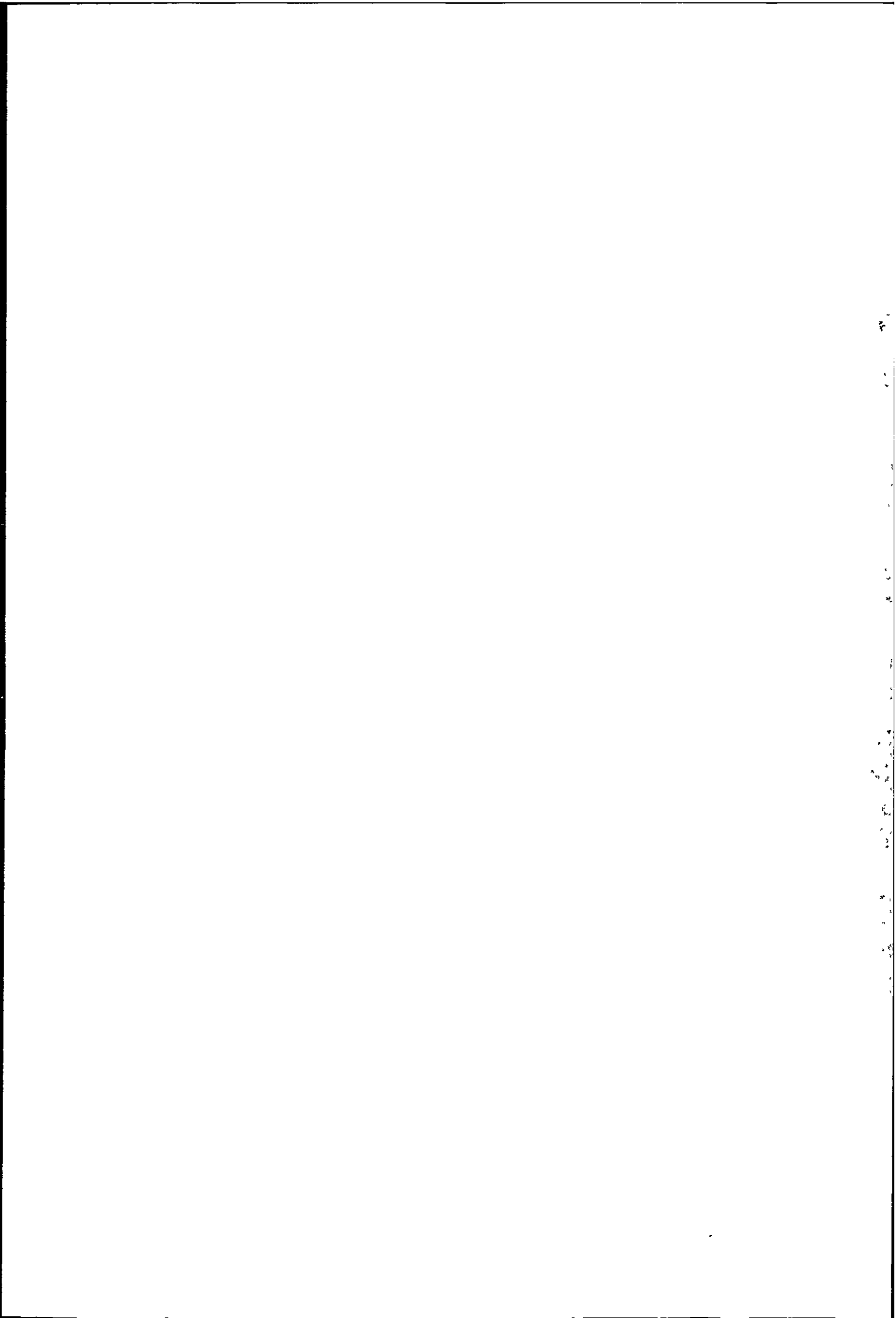
*Crows*, one of the episodes in the film, is a fantasy in which the character enters a series of Van Gogh paintings. The scene opens in a museum where a Japanese man is walking past Van Gogh's pictures: *Self-portrait*, *Sunflowers*, and *Crows Above a Wheatfield*. The character takes a distance, sitting on the bench, his eyes traveling across the wall. Then he stands up, picking up his canvas and tripod, and walks parallel to the paintings *Artist's Bedroom in Arles*, *Vincent's Chair* and *Bridge of Langlois*.

The situation prompts all the 'givens': the character in the museum, the paintings on the wall. What could happen? The character seems puzzled as if a question enters his brain: how have all these masterpieces been born? After this point the situation passes into action.

The screen is filled with a close-up of *Bridge of Langlois*, it freezes for a moment and then constant movements take place in every part of the image. We are not in the space of the museum any longer, but in an imaginary space that resembles the painting. The character approaches the women washing their clothes on the riverside. He asks them where he can find Van Gogh and he receives the answer between bursts of laughter that comment on Van Gogh's craziness. He leaves the scene and after crossing the bridge he

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<sup>19</sup> Prince, S., *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, 12



travels through a series of landscapes, all of them proxies of Van Gogh's paintings. He jump-cuts his way through paths and fields, colors and light.

A long shot reveals Van Gogh from the back, a small spot standing in the middle of a wide yellowish landscape. The scene feels monumental and seems to have absorbed the painter. When the character approaches Van Gogh (played by Martin Scorsese) confirms this: "To me this scene is unbelievable...when natural beauty is there I just lose myself". The character seems desperate to understand the painter but his confusion and uncertainty make him shift his attention from the painter to the landscape and back. His eyes look hungry, all the more full of questions as Van Gogh continues: "Scenes that look like a painting doesn't make a painting". He tries to get a grip of Van Gogh's words: "...and then, as in a dream, the scene just paints itself for me. Yes, I consume its natural setting, I devour completely the whole, and then when I'm through, the picture appears before me complete."

The director plays not only with the knowledge of the painting's potential to create associations but he also uses the image as a vehicle to bring to the world the singularity of his artistic vision, when the image to be translated takes the pace of a dream, fantasy or hallucination. It activates all the 'whys' and 'hows' and reveals mental or spiritual connections. Kurosawa literally draws his character into the image in order to figure out its powers, to learn its secrets. He makes him 'move' by that which is static, hanging on the wall.

In my opinion, the film engages in a powerful questioning of the world and the things that constitute it, a profound investigation of our needs and values. It is not enough to assume something is beautiful, it is not enough to just identify with one's vision, it is necessary to go deep down into ourselves first and discover all the limits before we pull out our personal drama; we first need to question. This seems to be Kurosawa's thinking. He imposes the question, which subordinates all the 'givens' after which the question transports itself into action. Action which takes place in the space of the dream because the dream is an unconfined space that, as such, challenges. Deleuze holds that "this is Kurosawa's oneirism, such that the hallucinatory visions are not merely subjective

images, but rather figures of thought which discovers the givens of a transcendent question, in so far as they belong to the world".<sup>20</sup>

Kurosawa mouths Van Gogh with truths that he spits out in a kind of tattle: "It is so difficult to hold it inside", the passion, the need to paint.

The character keeps his question simple: "Then, what do you do?"

"I work like a slave, I drive myself like a locomotive".

Kurosawa breaks the peaceful atmosphere of the landscape by inserting different footage, a black and white image of a locomotive moving furiously, competing with the frenetic rhythms, which Van Gogh now undertakes in order to complete his painting. The sound of the locomotive's high whistle adds to the mounting tension; the tension on Van Gogh's side to paint a masterpiece, the tension on the man's side to understand.

The locomotive has to be rendered with the image of what it is, a locomotive. But it breaks the sequence, disturbing the man's dream and making us forget the point of departure. The insertion of black and white affirms not the character's reality or dream, but the director's signature and reminds us that we are watching a spectacle, his spectacle. It functions as a device that moves us in and out of the reality of the film and our reality as viewers.

We gain access to the character's fantasy once again, he is curious about Van Gogh's physical appearance: "Are you alright? You appear injured".

"This?" Van Gogh replies, showing his bandaged ear, "Yesterday I tried to complete a self-portrait. I just couldn't get the ear right, so I cut it off".

After this point the story takes a serious turn whereby the parting words of Van Gogh seem to contain the most profound answer to the question that have been posed throughout the film.

"The sun." he says, pointing at the bright sky, "It compels me to paint. I can't stand here wasting my time talking to you".

The role and importance of the sun and the light in general and the relations they prompt with the objects has been fundamental throughout the history of painting. Pierre Francastel in his writing about the painter Robert Delaunay asserts: "If light destroys objective forms, what it brings with it is its order and movement...it is then that Delaunay

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<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 1, The Movement-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 190

discovers that the movements which enliven light are different depending on whether the sun or the moon is more prominent<sup>21</sup>. This thesis about Delaunay was adopted by various French new-wave filmmakers principally Rivette, who extensively explored the play of the sun and the moon in relation to his settings and characters.

In yet another context, in a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh refers to the light, which falls on certain objects and how this affects him:

“Through one single glass pane, the light falls on an empty color box, on a bundle of wornout brushes, in short it is so curiously melancholy that fortunately it also has a comical aspect, enough to make one weep over it but to take it gaily. For all that, it is very disproportionate to my plans, very disproportionate to the seriousness of my work – so here is an end of the gaiety”<sup>22</sup>.

Moving back to the story we meet the character, now alone, looking at the sun, which at a certain moment fills the whole screen. It shifts to a painted fire-like sun and in a succession of long and medium-shots we follow the character’s trip into Vincent Van Gogh’s world of ‘fine’ lines. The paintings become real scale landscapes (or the character becomes a miniature) and the lines and strokes that the brush left on the canvas become paths, which take him from one painting to another, one landscape to another.

Some time later he jumps again to a wheat field symmetrically divided by a pathway, at the far end of which his eyes meet Van Gogh for the last time, and as Van Gogh disappears from view *crows fly above the wheat field*. The scene freezes for a while and then opens to reveal the character standing in front of the painting in the museum. This is the end of his journey and the beginning of a mutation. As he takes off his hat he nods at the image, as if he was confirming that he had learnt to see. First he slips into a chronology of facts, which by making them events (in his imagination), he tries to demystify them. Then he slips out of this chronology by following the order of things such as the last painting from which he detaches himself from reality again, it is actually the last painting that Vincent Van Gogh ever made.

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<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 282

<sup>22</sup> Van Gogh, V., quoted in Ten-Doesshate Ghu, P., in Lowenthal, A., W., (ed.) *The object as subject: studies in the interpretation of still life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1996, 91



The film is divided into three parts: first we have the reality in the film – the still lifes and landscapes fixed on the walls, the character standing in the museum – then we enter the dream, and finally we get back to reality and the space of the museum. Kurosawa structures his film under a casual narrative relationship, or creates the whole through patterns of actions and reactions. He presents us with all the givens: the character, the still lifes, the situation and the question that rises from the situation, and then transports all these elements into action. The static image becomes the center of the work, which links all movements and brings them back to it. The purely optical image does not itself extend into movement but links up with the mental image – the dream – and forms a circuit with it. The film starts with the painting, it ends with it. The dream comes as a wish fulfillment in the Freudian sense and it is the result of the character's strong affinity for the painting. For it is evident that the character wishes to know the secrets of the good picture – we actually never see him painting but we do see him carrying around his tools. Since the fulfillment of a wish is its only purpose, the appropriation of the dream becomes prominent. And it is quite convenient how the dream is capable of arranging matters. The centralization of the painting is not its only task. It also becomes the perception-image (once it comes into contact with the character), which actualizes the mental-image and the two together pass into the action-image. The linkage of the perception- with the mental- or virtual images, as Deleuze calls them, brings up a new types of relations: the real and the imaginary, the physical and the mental, the objective and the subjective, description and narration, the actual and the virtual<sup>23</sup>. It is interesting to see in Kurosawa's work how the alternation of these states induces the aspects of time. Time appears through a succession of times, different times, which are held by their separate objects: first we have the time in the still life – the direct image of time -, then the time in the mental image – the dream itself carries a spiritual as well as temporal mode -, and consistently the time of the whole, which flows from the montage and which gives us an indirect representation of time. It can be said that the film is a hybrid of the time-image with the movement-image.

Kurosawa uses the static image to make a movement. Linking the static image with the mental image creates spiritual relations per se, which bring the senses in relation to time

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<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, G., *Cinema 2, The Time-Image*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000, 46





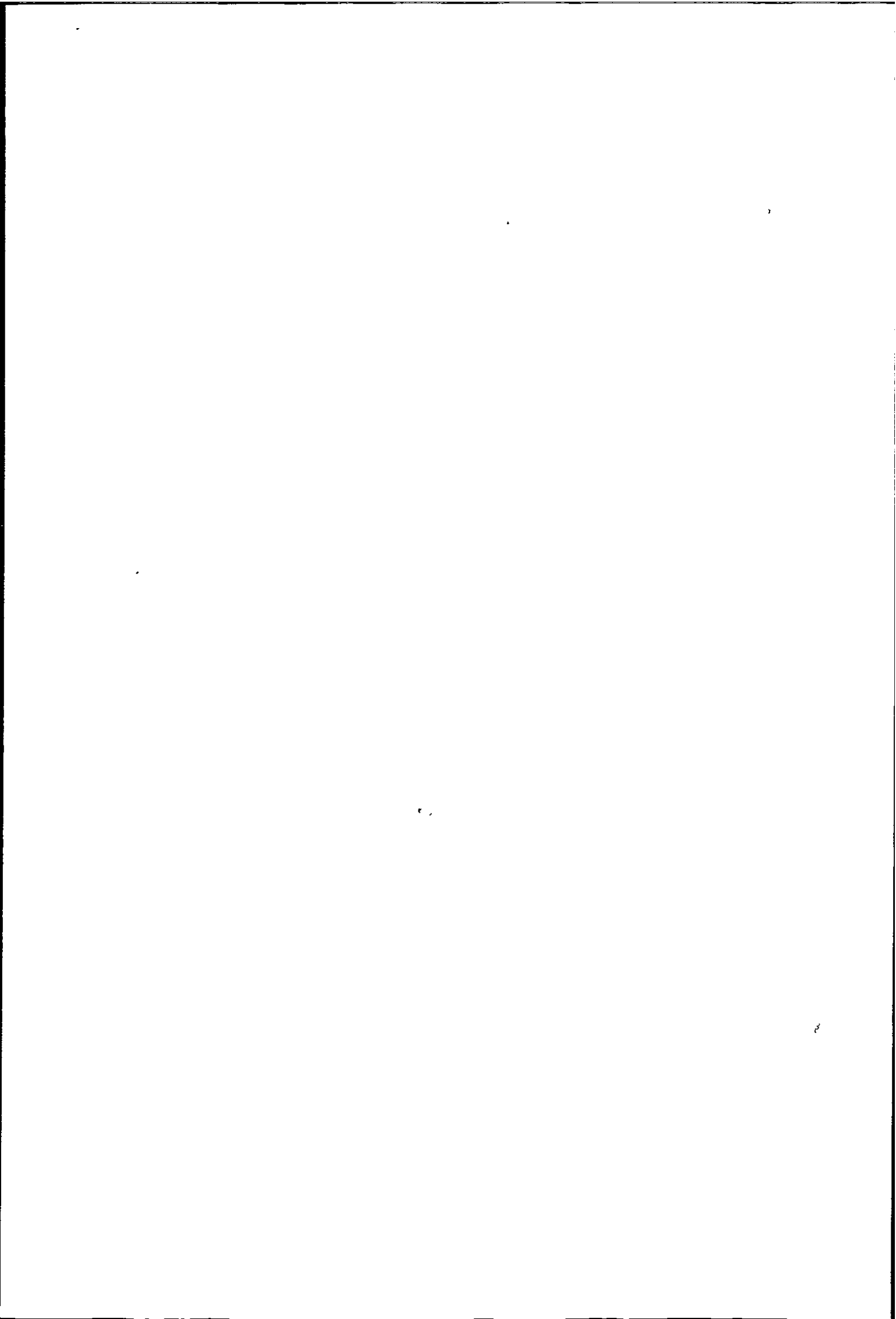
## FROM MOVEMENT TO STASIS

*Theory of Achievement*: a short film by Hal Hartley

Hartley locates *Theory of Achievement*, (1991), in Brooklyn where his characters, the middle-class slackers – “young, middle-class, college educated, unskilled” – equate with the peculiar type of the artistic wannabe. *Theory of Achievement* is about just this: theory where practice is not an object.

The film starts in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where one of the main characters persuades people to join his plan of creating an artistic movement, *the new art capital...city of light. New York, Soho, that's all in the past. An art capital needs to be a place people can afford to live.*

Later on we find a group of unqualified but ‘ambitious’ writers and musicians sitting around in an apartment proclaiming their artistic intentions, eloquently intellectualizing their non-existent careers. They have dreams: *I want to write songs, love songs, really timeless beautiful love songs but I can't sing and I don't know music.* And they are concerned: *why do we struggle? – ‘Cause we want things – What do we want?* But it is of evidence that they have no desire to do anything about it. Between the struggle for something and its realization there is a big distance and here it is restricted to the level of a statement. In fact, it would seem, these people are only capable of making statements and asking questions that they cannot be bothered to find the answers to. Their statements have an apophthegmatic character: *to know we can die is to be dead already – Love is a form of knowledge – Meaning is differential.* They stumble among fragments that they retrieve from books and try to construct a character for them selves: *He who understands himself will never mistake another man's work for his own but will recognize the value of his own work as being appropriate outcome of his temperament and his needs.* All these ‘hallucinations’ are at once contradicted by this jump to reality: *I am broke.* But of course it takes too much effort to do anything about it, so it is enough to just move around or not bother to move at all. The characters use their lack of qualifications as an excuse to keep the situation still. The thought that they could get any job just to make a living makes them react as if work was a dreadful virus, they must *reject all unprofitable thoughts and*



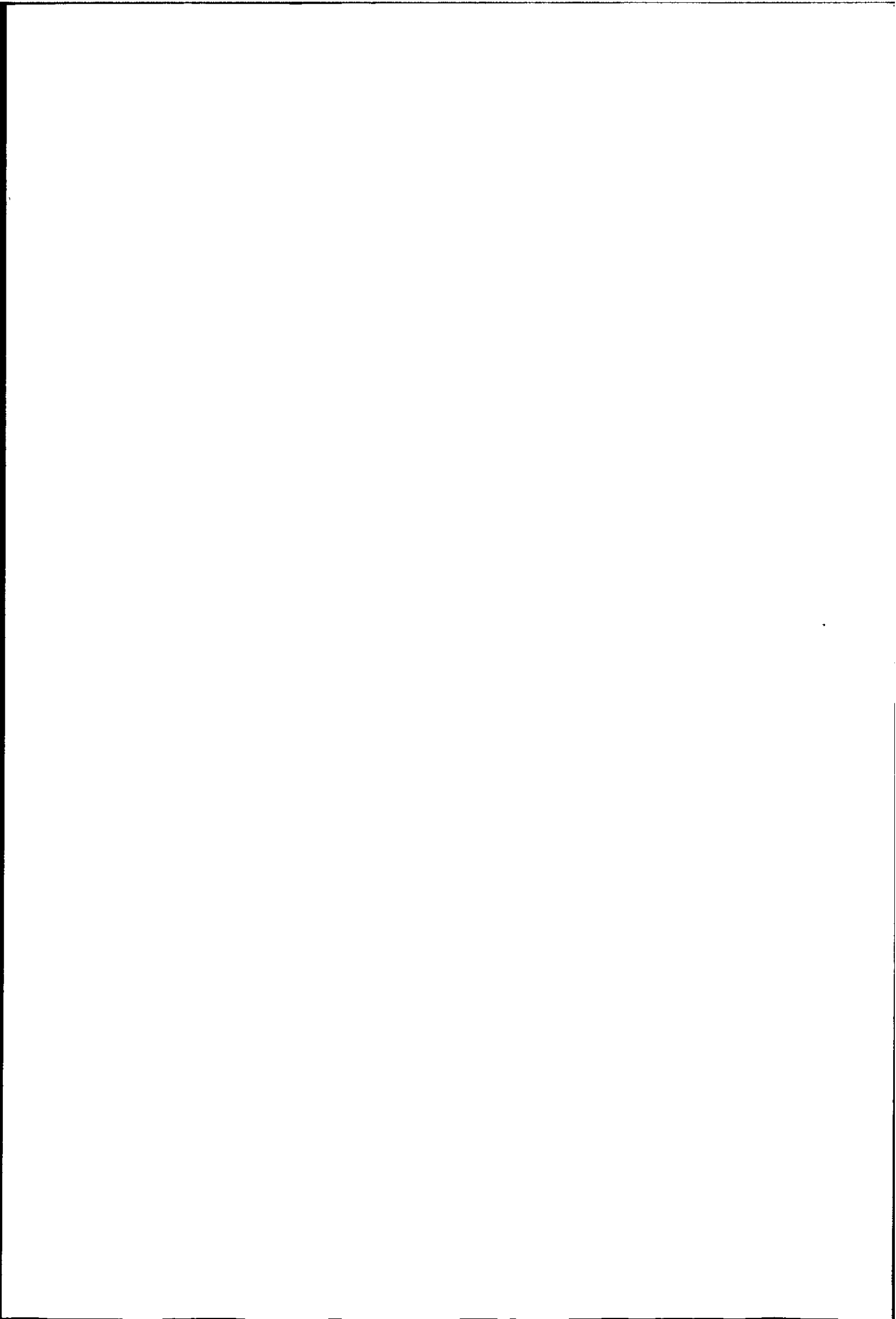
*prepositions. We must love our work or our labor will devour us whole.* And because they are far from what they aspire to be, the only thing they find appropriate to do is to sit around and talk about their grand aspirations; and because there is no place for them to go they constantly 're-schedule' their future, calculating how to achieve everything without actually doing anything.

Even the accordion player's song longs for instant success with no expenditure of effort. He sings in a rather careless tone about how much he wishes to win the lottery and get rid of his problems...*I spent my time to put cash on line...please Lord let it be me...let me win lotto tonight...*

The way Hartley uses the camera – framing his shots with a posed stillness, creating a 'tableaux vivant' with the characters – reflects their apathetic condition beautifully. Hartley constructs purely visual images of what a character is and sound images of what a character says. The sound track confirms emphatically the state of aphasia in which the characters are caught. The fragmentary and hyperbolic, manner of speaking fits very well with the fragmentary vignette-like treatment of the image which is made in such a way that directly reflects the inaction of the characters.

The fixed camera depicts the characters in evidently posed compositional settings and through the artificiality of the postures it takes away their human substance. It actually freezes them and transforms them into mere objects or tableaux-vivant – a woman locked in the bathroom, posing next to the light that casts a pool of light on the wall is reminiscent of Vermeer's paintings; the group of characters standing between the doors like living sculptures. I cannot help being reminded of Godard's *Passion*, the postures of people as tableaux- vivant and the reproductions of famous paintings are settings in the movie that one of the main characters is working on. In relation to the story they do not influence the attitudes of the other characters but their static quality contradicts the emotional explosions of the heroes and heroines. In Hartley the assumption of the characters into tableaux-vivant settings reflects their own situation directly, their state of inertia.

The juxtaposition of objects next to the characters reinforces their static situation – the fruit still life between two of them; the painting of Matisse hanging on the wall behind









## MODERN STILL LIFES

### My Experiments with Movement and Time

“The modern work of art is anything it may seem; it is even its very property of being whatever we like, of having the overdetermination of whatever we like, from the moment ‘it works’: the modern work of art is a machine and functions as such”.<sup>24</sup>

My work began taking shape before I even made the first shot. It all started from the moment I was observing events that were taking place outside my flat. I realized that I was witnessing a series of day-to-day things which all had a common element, appearances that repeat themselves constantly so that they become a single image in my brain. For instance, every time I look outside of my window I can be certain of seeing the police force in every form and shape patrolling the neighborhood on foot, in police trucks, vans, motorcycles, bicycles or on horse back. I decided to take pictures every day from more or less the same place (a collection which now includes more than one thousand images). I felt that a single picture would not capture the routine of ‘ensuring the safety’. Looking at all these images I realized that they become a kind of kinetic scope, they animate the constant movement.

The kind of ‘obsession’ that I had with the police became the inspiration for my previous work *Unsuspected Time*, in which I put in context the game of the gaze with what it was witnessed, as I discussed earlier in this report. From this point on I became interested in concentrating on daily events that are not extraordinary in them selves but which reveal an interesting relation between people and space. People appear like figures that define the space they are caught in. It does not matter to me who they are, in much the same way that it did not matter who those policemen were because what stays in the memory is the image of the police in general. It only matters what they do. And this is the constant configuration of character with space. People become components of space; they become an integral part of it.

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, G., quoted in Poel, T., *Movement and Time in Cinema*, in Bloois De, J., Houppermans, S., and Korsten, F-W, (eds.), *Discern(e)ments: Deleuze and Aesthetics*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2004, (in press)

My new video work *Standing Still* (2004) is made of a series of events, small blocks of movement that I film in my neighborhood. It presents people in exterior environments and people and spaces in interior environments side by side, like a clash of two everyday realities. I understand them to be fragmentary depictions – sketches of a whole, of an ordinary and banal nature. My intention so far is to refocus the documentary attitude of the viewer. The viewer is not supposed to think of these scenes as ‘real’ but as arrangements of objects – not real lives but still lives.

Most of the scenes, especially the exterior takes, are extracted without the permission of the subjects. What they have in common is the objectification of the characters due to their postures and an ambiguity of whether these scenes are staged or not. While I was experimenting with the images by juxtaposing them (interiors – exteriors) in a split screen I found it challenging to strengthen this ambiguity by actually staging some situations and mixing them with the ‘real’ ones. In this way the matter becomes matter not only through observation but primarily and most importantly out of experience and thought.

I create situations, which reflect the way I perceive what happens around me and I am willing to take things as far as it is necessary in order to make them ‘work’. When I look at people I feel that everybody slips into their own world, at once connected and disconnected from what is happening next to them. When I look outside of my window I have a double perspective of the ‘world’: the people outdoors endure just as people indoors endure through their routines that require no interaction between them. In my work I want to establish this point of view – a double perspective and create an interaction between the two different ‘worlds’. Therefore I present the exteriors and interiors as two interconnected yet distinct images, so I separate them, as in a diptych, on two different screens. I create fragmented objects, which can be seen, individually (shot by shot) and simultaneously as the whole, or as object by object, as in a painting. Each of them displays the same thing: the everyday in all its forms and all its shapes. And of course we do not speak of everyday reality or the whole thing as real because reality exists only in the image and subsequently reality can be signified only through the image.





*Standing Still* shows the decomposition of everyday banality into its separate elements, visual and audio. It is organized in a diptych and is constructed according to the movements of the moon and the sun. The light leads to a circular structure, so that the morning succeeds the evening, and in effect the sun appears again at the end of the film.

Let us look at the objects or elements that compose the first screen. There are four different situations, in which five characters appear in their domestic spaces. There are four rooms; each room is prevailed by a different color.

Starting in daylight we are presented to the first character: an opera singer rehearsing her piece – fragments from *Il pleure dans mon Coeur* by Claude Debussy. The shot gives way to the image of a disorderly room, which contradicts the peaceful and calculated voice of the singer whilst it is evident that we stand in her space. This image sequences a different space wherein another character appears quietly smoking a cigarette. The image is slow and mesmerizing, inducing a state of trance. The sequences interchange from the singer to the smoker, domestic spaces and still lifes. This is the first part of the film. A black image comes next, a black break, which brings with it only two sounds: the voice of the singer and the voice of a man (which belongs to the second screen showing the exteriors). The sound recalls the preceding images and in this way it also becomes an image. After this the light changes indicating the passage from day to night. We are in a room with basic furniture: a bed, a shelf on the wall, a table on which some playing cards are lying. Then we pass in a small box-like space where two characters are caught in a rather playful static pose. Their bodies occupy the whole space in such a way that their movements seem to be restricted, their bodies intertwine horizontally against the walls. Now the singer rehearses her song in the kitchen; the empty room becomes inhabited by another character who constructs towers with the playing cards we have previously seen, she is so absorbed by this that it seems to be the most important thing in the world; the smoker continues smoking. All these scenes interchange for a second time with each character's action changing slightly.

Events simultaneously unfold on the second screen. Unlike the interior scenes, which interchange from one character to the other, each scene of the exteriors is seen only once. The succession from day to night is simultaneous and the quality of the situations and the actions of the characters are similar. They all define the space they are caught in; they

invest it, conquer it while they seem to be absorbed by it or stuck inside it. The first shot shows a flower salesman who seems to be so satisfied with the rituals that he keeps everybody informed about: 'yioupi a ye, yioupi a yo', his voice dominates the whole space. Several characters appear absolutely inactive, standing in front of walls, shades, and front doors whilst people crisscross the street. Here the treatment of the image is different from the rest. In all the preceding images, and the ones that follow, the camera is static and depicts the movement that occurs within the frame. In this last case the camera is also static but the constant routine of crossing the street is shown through instant frames, which dissolve into each other. In this way movement follows from the changing positions of the characters in each frame. In the night scenes we meet characters, their profiles silhouetted against the night sky, empty spaces, and finally the only scene that holds some action: a group of people lighting fireworks across the pavement, once they go off the action is over. At the end the image of the sun creates some ambiguity as to whether it is the sun or the moon, but in time it passes through the thick clouds and reveals all its power.

My choice of combining the interior and exterior scenes side by side is based on the content, the pace, the colors and the composition of the images. For example the scene of the two characters in the box-like space, with its blue and orange colors, is juxtaposed with the image of a façade of a house where a woman stands in one of the windows and where the full moon hangs in the blue sky. In this case the domestic space is shown as inside and outside; the singer is juxtaposed with the flower salesman due to the similarity of their actions; the image of the smoking girl comes next to the one of the fireworks. Smoke and fire here are both redolent of time, in the first case the act of smoking is routine whilst in the other the fireworks affirm the celebration of a special moment and the breaking of a routine.

Let us examine how time appears in the image and how the use of montage affects the representation of time.

Montage works in two ways: first it interconnects and juxtaposes the images on the two screens, then it works directly in each of them by linking shot by shot together. It creates











Because we are not dealing with a casual narrative related work, we do not need to wait until the end of the film in order to feel time. Time exists in every image and appears as its own boss. Time plays with the image not only in its short term, that is: the actual time of the shot, but most importantly in relation to what is shown in the image. Time plays with the still lifes, the empty spaces and the characters. I have already discussed in this paper how time appears in relation to still lifes and empty spaces. In my work this is also at stake. The still life brings the relation of time to thought, as do the empty spaces. Both signify the absence of people but also emphasize their presence, they tell us a lot about the people who are absent from them. The disorderly room, for instance, transcends the human absence and demands the human touch to at least clean it up. In a sense people become present through their absence. My characters hold a similar attitude. They act, they are occupied but they are disconnected and they do not react. They are present and absent at the same time. The way they are depicted not only forces time on them but also thought on us. It forces us to think. The bodily attitudes and postures include the series of time, time as the coexistence of past, present and future. The singer rehearses her piece, this reveals her identity as a singer, which is grounded in the past, but while rehearsing she does not yet reach perfection, she needs practice; the smoking girl in a trance-like state, the character that makes towers with the playing cards, the people standing in the street, the strollers, all of them deal with time, they all carry time through the act of standing, waiting, practicing, depression, fatigue, expectation, everything has a temporal mode. But while time travels along the body, it touches it, it affects it, it exhausts it and simultaneously freezes it, presents it in a way that it would not change. All the actions have a time limit but in the film we never get to a progression. It is as if all these characters were trapped in their own time and space, reduced only to their bodily attitudes. The passage from day to night and the final image of the sun confirms the same thing and as the film is looped we pass into the same situation all over again. In this way people will appear in their spaces, absorbed by their rituals, rejecting any movement beyond their microcosm, making us forget that they might have any of the same needs or struggles that 'real' lives do; they make us forget that they lead 'real' lives at all, they become still lives.





## EPILOGUE

Looking back at the works of Kurosawa and Hartley I would say that the way they treat their images remind us of their background as painters. They both play with time and movement, still life and film. Where Kurosawa uses the still life to create a movement, Hartley uses moving life to make it still.

Kurosawa's work is a typical narrative film, which uses the still life as a narrative device and it is constructed around cause and effect. In Hartley's work the relation to still life and painting is directly parallel to it and allegoric. There is a story but no plot. His film is narration and denarrativation at the same time. He locates his characters in Brooklyn in the context of an artistic milieu, so it becomes clear to where he is referring but the fragmented vignette-like images break the line of the story.

In my work I was interested in experimenting with the static and moving qualities as these directors, but unlike them I did not want to tell a story. I opted to create a solid object, a purely optical image, which would display the paradox of stasis through movement. I realized that I had touched one more paradox: movement stops through movement, constant movement, and repetitive movement.

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