

SEANKELLY

Fowler, Catherine. "Obscurity and Stillness: Potentially in the Moving," *Art Journal*, Spring 2013.

art journal



David Claerbout, *Ruino, Boculschweg*, 1910, 1993, large-screen single-channel video installation, black and white, silent, 40 min, looped, installation view, Sammlung Goetz, Munich, Germany, 2001 (artwork © David Claerbout; photograph provided by Micheline Sowjcek, Yvon Lambert, and Hauser & Wirth)

Catherine Fowler

Obscurity and Stillness: Potentiality in the Moving Image

1. Some similar works are Jeron de Rijck and Willem de Rooj, *Bontor Geborg* (2000); Steve McQueen, *Blissful* (2001); Michael Snow, *Solar Breath* (Northern Cynoside) (2002); Paul Chan, *1st Light* (2002); Michal Rowner, *Fields of Fire* (2002); Sharon Lockhart, *Pine Flat* (2006) and *Double Tide* (2009); and Chantal Akerman, *Marluc Summer* (2009).

2. One online source defines the actuality as "a particular genre of film in early cinema history—usually used to describe films which showed real life events such as the [1895] *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*." Online at www.earlycinema.com/actual/, as of June 4, 2013. The term derives from the French *actualité*, coined by Auguste and Louis Lumière for their films in this genre.

3. Encarta World English Dictionary, North American edition, at www.bing.com/Dictionary/search?q=define+actuality&go=&q=ds&form=QB, as of May 20, 2013.

4. See Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

5. A rare instance is in Robert Bird's book on Andrei Tarkovsky. He uses "potentiality" to describe a specific instance in Tarkovsky's cinema when diegetic rain both inhibits and enhances our comprehension of a scene such that we are thrown back into our own time of imagination, into a kind of "pregnant time, of potentiality within time [which] cinema intensifies in human experience." Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 46.

6. For "imageness," see Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London, New York: Verso, 2007), 4.

7. For a longer discussion of the way in which Agamben "conceives of the existence of language as the existence of potentiality," see Daniel Heller-Roazen's introduction to Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 13.

8. Agamben, "On Potentiality," in *ibid.*, 177, 179, 179.

Artists using film and video today often confront us with moving images which test our perceptual capacities. Certain works by David Claerbout, Tacita Dean, and Anri Sala, for example, are dim, dazzling, shimmering, glaring, intense, dreamy, opaque, and abstract.¹ What is more, in their obsession with stillness they also test our patience, our attentiveness, and our time. Favoring the single shot and taking bare reality (rather than the constructed event) as a starting point, this work might be compared with early cinema's "actualities."² However, key preoccupations of each artist—staging the becoming and unbecoming of images (Claerbout), examining the unrevealed (Dean), and representing disappearance in progress (Sala)—position their images in relation less to early cinema actuality than to what we might call post-cinema potentiality.

As some of the first products of the cinematograph, actualities denoted real life filmed in real time with a minimum amount of intervention. Actualities can therefore be seen as axioms of indexicality. A more general dictionary definition of the term suggests some of the forks on the path that takes us from actuality to what we are interested in, potentiality. As "what in fact is," actuality suggests "something that is real, as opposed to what is expected, intended, or feared"; and as "everything that really exists or happens," actuality implies "everything that does or could exist or happen in real life."³ The first definition distinguishes the real time that early films framed from the cinematic time that soon replaced it. In her extensive study of the emergence of cinematic time, Mary Ann Doane charts the way in which "something that is real" was gradually evacuated from cinema's screens to be replaced by something that is expected (an event), intended (the director or cameraperson's framing and editing), or feared (anticipation and suspense set up by the former two elements). The reason for the evolution, she argues, is because of the "contingency" of actuality, since in filming everything early cinema risked meaninglessness.⁴

In contrast to this accepted application of the term "actuality," the term "potentiality" has not been taken up in relation to moving images.⁵ In doing so this essay aims to pose potentiality as offering a different way of designating shifts in "imageness" following cinema's digital passage.⁶ Accordingly I will argue that the passage of the moving image from an analogue through an electronic to a digital age can be thought of as entailing a conversion from actuality to potentiality.

In order to illustrate the usefulness of potentiality, we might draw on metaphysical debates from Aristotle to Giorgio Agamben.⁷ Agamben takes up Aristotle's dialectic from actuality to potentiality so as to focus on the problem posed by the verb "can" (*potere*). Essentially, to say "I can" requires a recognition of the possibility that "I cannot."⁸ "To have a faculty means to have a privation. And potentiality is not a logical hypostasis but the mode of existence of this privation." Agamben differentiates two forms of potentiality in Aristotle. The first form concerns something being possible and therefore able to happen in the future; he uses the example of a projection of the future for a child. This first is more like a possibility. The second form, which he says is what Aristotle is really interested in, concerns less of a possibility and more of an already proven capacity—as he puts it, "an existing potentiality."⁹ Once again the possibility of privation exists here, as to have a capacity, to be able or knowledgeable, still does not mean that one will necessarily act on that ability or knowledge. Daniel Heller-Roazen, editor of the

essays collected in Agamben's *Potentialities*, puts this idea more simply: "Unlike mere possibilities," he says, "which can be considered from a purely logical standpoint, potentialities or capacities present themselves above all as things that exist but that, at the same time, do not exist as actual things; they are present, yet they do not appear in the form of present things." Ultimately, Heller-Roazen concludes, "potentiality and actuality, what is capable and what is actual, what is possible and what is real, can no longer strictly be distinguished."⁹

Paraphrasing Agamben, we might say about the works in question by Claerbout, Dean, and Sala that moving images have always had the capacity to offer a time-based audiovisual experience. They may make us look and see (and hear) something; yet they may also make us look and see (and hear) nothing.¹⁰ They may move time on rapidly; yet they may also focus on moments and offer stillness. This capacity "not to pass into actuality" is revealed when Claerbout, Dean, and Sala produce images which operate through obscurity and inscribe in stillness.¹¹

David Claerbout: Images Staging Their Own Becoming

David Green writes of Claerbout's work that it takes place in a space of "undecidability" since it poses the possibility "of a photograph that unfolds in time (but is not a film) and a film that is stilled in time (but is not a photograph)."¹² On the one hand, Claerbout's work returns us to early moments in cinema, before event-centric cinematic time emerged; on the other, it develops a new sense of time in the moving image. This new sense of time reflects the digital passage of both photographic and cinematic images, and channels potentiality to produce what Rudi Laermans has incisively called "images staging their own becoming."¹³

For the first audiences of cinema, the wind in the trees produced more wonder than seeing living (eating, walking) people on screen. In many of Claerbout's early installations, it is the trees that move, often creating flickering shadows, while the human presence is frozen in a pose. In these tree works we find our first evidence of an instruction to look for something where it might seem that there is nothing: we are compelled to look harder. Following this debut Claerbout moves away from the tree as a dominating presence (centrally and monumentally framed) and instead uses the action of the wind blowing leaves as a way to suggest the passing of time in otherwise frozen scenes. Trees remain central elements in the black-and-white, silent video projections *Ruurlo*, *Bucurloschweg*, 1910 (1997), *Kindergarten Antonio Sant'Elia*, 1932 (1998), and *Untitled (Single-Channel View)* (1998–2000), as well as the color, silent video projection *Boom* (1996). The first pieces consist of digitally animated found photos, while *Boom* is a newly created video in which we observe in color (a rarity in Claerbout's oeuvre) a bushy tree, while leaves are blown by the wind and clouds move across the blue sky in the background. *Ruurlo* animates a photograph of a Dutch scene in which a massive leafy tree dominates the right hand side of the frame, while a windmill amid a settlement and a path with tiny figures, just visible, are squeezed into the left-hand side. The subtlety of the movement of the leaves purposefully introduces the undecidability that Green mentions. Looking quickly, we might overlook this motion, especially as the shadow visible on the ground below does not change and the windmill is also frozen. Indeed, it seems important that Claerbout

9. Heller-Roazen, 14, 18.

10. I do not deal with sound in this essay and, indeed, sound may be seen as a relatively unexplored area in relation to artists' gallery films. Its significance for the artists concerned varies. Claerbout's tree films are largely silent, but in other works soundtrack and music do occur. For example in *Villo Corthout* (2001) we hear birdsong and a guitar playing, while in *The Piano Player* (2002) pouring rain and a piano create a stark atmosphere. Dean also uses the sound of footsteps expressively in *Boots* (2003), while in *Polost* (2004) we hear the sound of traffic off-screen and occasional German conversations passing behind the camera. For Sala sound is important, and many of his installations use music and voices (*Mixed Behaviour*, 2003; *Invenisto*, 1998; *Likkist*, 2004; *Answer Me*, 2008).

11. Agamben, 180.

12. David Green, "The Visibility of Time," in *David Claerbout*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Walther König, 2004), 42.

13. Rudi Laermans, "The Process of Becoming an Image," in *David Claerbout: Video Works, Photographic Installations, Sound Installations, Drawings 1996–2002*, exh. cat. (Brussels: A Prior, 2002), 19.



David Claerbout, *Boon*, 1996, large-screen video installation, color, silent, 18-min., looped, installation view, Argos, Brussels, 1997 (artwork © David Claerbout; photograph provided by Michéline Sewajcer, Yvon Lambert, and Hauser & Wirth)

14. The phrase is from Georges Sadoul, *Histoire Générale du cinéma*, vol. 1: *L'invention du cinéma 1872-1897* (Paris: Denoël, 1948), 291, 294. I take this reference from Nico Baumbach, "Nature Caught in the Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema" *Comparative Critical Studies* 6, no. 3 (2009): 374.

15. Doane, 67.

16. Damian Sutton, *Photography Cinema Memory: The Crystal Image of Time* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xii.

chooses to animate nature rather than culture, as this distinction allows him to foreground imperceptible natural time rather than human (or cinematic) time.

Given the emphasis on a single image (that often mimics a photograph) and the recentering of early cinema's "trembling of the leaves through the action of the wind" over human presence, Claerbout can be said to reverse the hierarchies of film language that brought forth Doane's emergence of cinematic time.¹⁴ Early actualities by the Lumière brothers framed real time and showed real, everyday events such as people eating, working, and walking. Doane points out that once the "attractions" of the cinematograph had become commonplace, this "medium designed to record, without predilection, all the moments" was faced with the problem of "endowing the singular with significance"; it did so by "manufacturing an event."¹⁵ As Damian Sutton observes, "As a division of before and after that creates subjects and subjectivity [the event] is the essential notion through which we humanize time."¹⁶ With Doane and Sutton in mind, we might think of Claerbout's tree works as instances of time that flows without being humanized. Since they operate as if human presence has been extracted from them, we inevitably perceive these tree works differently. They may feel slower, but as Claerbout points out, this is simply because we are not used to looking at images in which movement, thought of as purposive change, is almost imperceptible:



David Claerbout, *Untitled (Single-Channel View)*, 1998–2000, large-screen video installation, black-and-white, silent, 30 min. looped, installation view (artwork © David Claerbout; photograph provided by Micheline Szawjcer, Yvon Lambert, and Hauser & Wirth)

Slow motion often makes time monumental and so pseudo-memorable that it results in dramatic effects that do not interest me. . . . Slowing time down is a different thing, but both depend on definitions that dictate the standard according to which they are slowing down. . . . In my work, the indicators to time flow (tree, sun . . .) evolve at a speed that is parallel to lived time. Perhaps the spectator who is not used to having natural references in a projected environment (such as the wind or the movement of the sun) to predict the movement of time may perceive the time flow as if it had been slowed down.¹⁷

As Claerbout's art develops, the presence of actual trees is withdrawn and replaced by shadows and silhouettes. While his early films ask us to look harder lest we overlook something happening, later work makes the visible hard to see by using composition to mix what we think we see with what we can actually see and what we could see if we looked harder. In *Untitled (Single-Channel View)*, we find potentiality lingering in visual and temporal elements; framed here is a classroom in which four rows of desks are visible. Perspective is slightly off-center.

17: "David Claerbout / Stephan Berg, A Conversation," trans. Suso Riveiro and Josephine Watson, in *David Claerbout*, exh. cat. (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 2003), 46.

On the right we see over-exposed windows through which streams sunlight that projects (there is no other word for it) squares on the classroom's back wall to the left. As white squares of light, these projections each contain the silhouette of a tree. Very subtly the edges of these silhouettes can be seen to move.

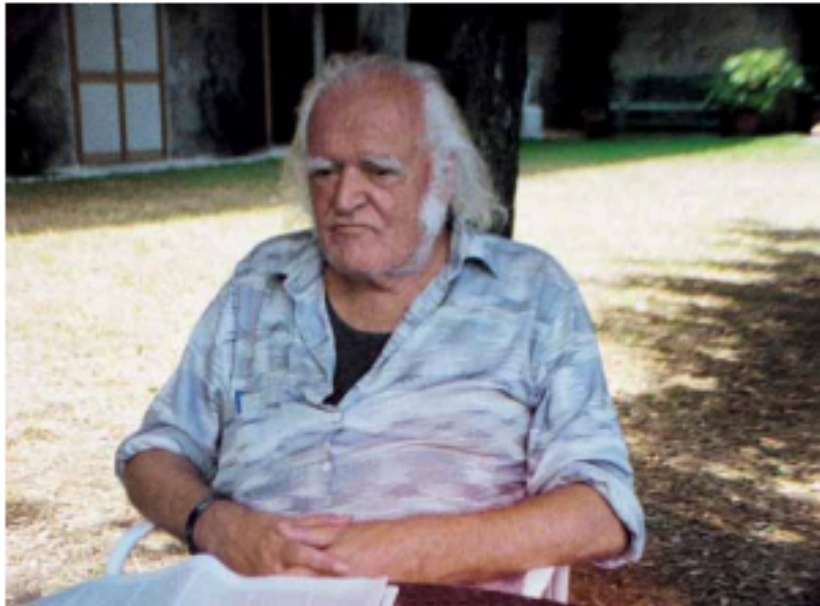
In an aesthetic move that recalls the reflexivity of structural materialist and modernist cinema, *Untitled (Single-ChanneView)* presents us with an image that seems to be an analogy for the cinematic apparatus. At the same time, this is achieved not through nonillusionism but through an image that achieves perceptual realism. We can read the image literally (as a classroom in which teaching is taking place), yet the composition of the image and in particular the silhouettes of trees projected on the back wall also introduce an imaginative dimension. For *Untitled (Single-ChanneView)* bears a haunting resemblance to representations of Plato's cave. The children, like the chained slaves, are trapped behind their desks looking forward. They look away from the silhouettes of the real trees that flicker on the back wall and exist in an artificial world that is nevertheless flooded with natural light. From the dazzling white light coming through the windows at the right, which also lights up (and hence washes out) the faces of those boys who sit closest to them or turn their faces toward them, and the silhouettes on the back wall, and finally to the much grayer tone of the boys closest to us (and farthest from the window), the visual qualities of the image range from opaque abstraction (the window), through shimmering visibility (the children), to shadowy presence (the trees).

What is of most interest, though (and something that we will find in Dean and Sala also), is the addition of a ghostly dimension that makes the imperceptible visible. Here the trees are materially absent in the frame yet are given a spectral presence through their silhouettes on the back wall. The back wall effectively shows us something inside that is really outside, and also shows something invisible, as this same silhouette of the trees could not of course be seen (as a silhouette) by the boys looking out the windows.

Once again, Claerbout's images advance debates about moving images after cinema. The sensory gap created by the wavering between absence (of actual trees) and presence (of the silhouetted or potential trees) might have been designed to answer questions once posed by Raymond Bellour: How does one pass from one type of image to another? How does one conjoin in the same space the representational and the nonrepresentational?⁴⁸ Bellour posed his questions at the beginning of the 1990s, before digital images took hold of the cinematic experience. His questions arise from a discussion involving the work of the video artist Thierry Kuntzel, the grand auteur Alfred Hitchcock, and the cinematic provocateur Jean-Luc Godard. In varying ways, he suggests, each introduces video or painting into the cinematic frame and thereby shakes the singularity of the moving image.

He takes his first instance from Kuntzel's film *La Peinture cubiste* (1981), which alternates between video and film and thereby, Bellour alleges, poses the question of the passage between the two. The second instance he takes from Hitchcock's film *Suspicion* (1941). Johnnie, played by Cary Grant, is interrogated by a policeman and, in the background, we see a neo-cubist painting. Bellour suggests that such a *mise-en-scène* creates a kind of internal montage, which allows Hitchcock to represent the unrepresentable in the same frame as the representable.

⁴⁸ Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-Images: Photo, cinéma, vidéo* (Paris: La Différence, 1991), 168.



Tacita Dean, still from *Merlo Merz*, 2002,
 16mm color film, sound, 8 min. 30 sec. (artwork
 © Tacita Dean; photograph provided by Frith
 Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman
 Gallery, New York/Paris)

The third instance he takes from *Numéro Deux* (1975), "the film which initiates the passage from cinema towards other things." In the opening sequences of the film Godard uses (now standard) video techniques and also refilms footage that is playing on video monitors. Analyzing the opening scenes, in which a couple having sex are superimposed with the face of their daughter, Bellour suggests that the impression given by the video is that we do not stay on the surface of bodies, rather we slide into their interior. Most important, he argues, it is video that lends depth to the celluloid image: "Of the surface video we find an uncommon depth that the cinema cannot accomplish without it." Bellour's analysis is relatively brief; he concludes, however, "These three works are united in freeing the real of the image so as to invent lines of another order between the actual and the virtual, the material and the immaterial."¹⁹

The "lines of another order" that Bellour summons into existence are comparable with the wavering we find between absence and presence when looking harder at Claerbout's *Untitled (Single-Channel View)*. However, what distinguishes Claerbout and the other contemporary artists identified here from Bellour's predigital instances is the existence of the actual and the potential in the same image, conjured up by our eyes, rather than in a space *entre* or between created by the edit or interval (or, in Godard's film, by superimposition). In Bellour's *entre*-images, it is stoppage (*l'arrêt sur l'image*) or montage that brings about the passage between; by contrast, in Claerbout's images stillness provides an invitation to look harder, as change happens before our very eyes.

To some extent we have digital video and digital effects to thank for the new access to potentiality that is present in Claerbout's images. Timothy Murray notes "the technological intensification of cinema" after the digital. "What we know as the 'cinematic surface,'" he says, "is now porous, electric, amoebic, fractal, and networked."²⁰ In Claerbout's work stillness and the natural movement of light

19. *Ibid.*, 175, 178, 196, my translations.

20. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Fields* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 36, 37.



Tacita Dean, still from *Palast*, 2004.
 16mm color film, sound, 10 min, 30 sec. (artwork)
 © Tacita Dean; photograph provided by Frith
 Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman
 Gallery, New York/Paris)

create moving images that are perceptually as well as technologically intense. They involve us in their decipherment and provide us the pleasure of perceiving them in their "becoming."²¹ If, that is, we stay and look harder.

Tacita Dean: Something Unrevealed

Dean's work confronts us with even more layers to the cinematic surface. These visual strata serve to join the photographic bent of early cinema actualities with digital renderings that reveal "the depth of time" that moving images might potentially contain.²²

For a sense of how obscurity, in the form of the indiscernible and unvisualizable, operates in Dean's work, listen to the critic Charles Derwent: "There's no beginning, no middle, no end to her work," he marvels, "no development, no outcome; just a sense of something unrevealed, hidden by revelation."²³ The unrevealed hinges on two tendencies that bisect Dean's work, both of which are explicit in the content and framing of her films: first, the intention to look for that which cannot be easily perceived; and second, the obscuring of that which we might expect to see. To ensure the first, Dean often chooses subjects which are difficult to capture on film: an eclipse in *Benewi* (1999), *Totality* (2000), and *Diamond Ring* (2002); refraction of light in *The Green Ray* (2001); birds swooping on a tree in *Pie* (2003); a reflection in *Palast* (2004); and, in all of her work, the passing of time.²⁴ Dean's commitment to using celluloid means that she captures these subjects with no use of digital effects.²⁵

For the second tendency, the obscurity of what we expect to see, we find the repeated combination of two different elements. In *Palast* it is the natural temporal changes in the sky and the manmade building in which they are reflected. Elsewhere we find the same tense copresence of human and natural elements: customers in a restaurant and time passing in *Fernsturn* (2001), the sounds of

21. Laermans, 99.

22. For "the depth of time," see "Night Passage: The Depth of Time—Trinh T. Minh-ha Interviewed by Alison Rowley," in *Digital and Other Virtuologies: Renegotiating the Image*, ed. Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock (London, New York: Tauris), 111–35.

23. Charles Derwent, "Shoot First and Ask Questions Later," *Independent on Sunday*, October 3, 2004, 26.

24. It is worth noting that several of Dean's films also focus on people and places that no longer exist. Both Mario Merz and Dean's uncle in *Boots* (2003) died shortly after she filmed them. The *Palast der Republik* was a former GDR building in East Berlin that has now been demolished. On learning that they were being changed in some way, Dean visited the *Palais* used for *Boots*, the Joseph Beuys gallery, and the Kodak factory in France to make the films *Kodak* (2006) and *Noir et blanc* (2006).

25. Dean's commitment to film is well known and most explicitly present in *Kodak*.



Tacita Dean, still from *Fernsehturm*, 2001, 16mm color film, anamorphic sound, 64 min. (artwork © Tacita Dean; photograph provided by Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris)

the heavy footsteps of a man hobbling around empty rooms as the sun sets in *Boats* (2003), an artist sitting beneath a windblown tree in *Merio Merz* (2002), and a poet and his orchard in *Michael Hamburger* (2008). In one way or another, the elements that cohabit in Dean's films also get in each other's way. This occurs most explicitly in the Merz film, as the tree stops us from seeing the aging artist's face, and the movement of branches in the wind makes the image palpitate with light and shadow, drawing our attention away from what Merz is saying.

Clearly, framing and mise-en-scène are crucial elements for Dean, and they are used to such effect that, despite the fact that, unlike Claerbout, she does edit her films, an emphasis on the single shot is maintained by the expulsion of continuity as a logic. As in the films of Chantal Akerman before her, in Dean's films "each new shot returns us to a beginning, to a new space which contains no mode of articulation grafted from shots preceding it."²⁶ If Dean's intentions explain the content of her films, it is in the formal aspects—the framing, composition, and editing—that the potentiality of the moving image is manifest; we can explore this further in *Pilast*. Escaping actuality, the images in this forty-one-shot film waver between the literal and the metaphorical. This kind of effect and the separation of shots described above have led many to talk of Dean's style as painterly, a term used to indicate a different sense of time and a different kind of gaze at work in the framing of landscape and inhabited spaces.²⁷ In *Pilast*, the tint of the windows ensures a literal amber cast, but the fact that we also see the orange streaks of sunset reflected adds to this a more metaphorical tint. The line between visible and invisible continues to be trod thanks to the placement of the camera, which shows us not what lies behind the windows—the inside of the building—but rather the reflections of sky and cityscape. In *Pilast* framing creates a visual conundrum that mimics that of Claerbout's *Untitled (Single-ChanelView)*. We face the *Pilast* building as if to look into it, but what we actually see is that which exists behind our backs, beyond the periphery of our vision, off screen and out of frame. Materially, then, what we see is not, in actuality, present in the frame.

This conundrum image is made even more complex thanks to the gridlike structure of the building, which provides multiple windows, screens, or frames in each shot. The divided panes become miniscreens for multiple "events." In one

26. Richard Kwietniowski, "Separations," *Movie* 34–35 (Winter 1990): 8. Akerman is a defining influence on many gallery filmmakers due to her employment of a different sense of time than that normally found in cinema.

27. See Sean Rainbird, "A Seat over the Wings," in Tacita Dean: *Recent Films and Other Works*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Britain, 2004), 49.

shot, while outer panes reflect passing clouds, a central pane shows us something hanging off a ledge and blowing (to a different, faster rhythm) in the breeze. In another shot, evidence of natural movement continues as a bottom window pane shows distorted reflections of trees; in others, bright red and orange lights twinkle and four panes reflect the sky, but one large pane at the bottom is black; nothing is discernible.

The focus on manmade structures that, when framed appropriately, divide the composition of the image into further small windows or screens is shared in Dean's other works: *Fernsehtum*, in the windows of the circular tower; *Beets*, in the columns and windows of the building; *Disappearance at Sea*, in the beam of the lighthouse; and her most recent work in honor of Merce Cunningham, *Caneway Event* (2009). As with the visual reference to Plato's cave that we find in Claerbout's *Untitled (Single-ChannelView)*, these mini windows supply a reflexive element that reminds us of the apparatus that produced and (in Dean's case in particular) projects the images. Once again, though, perceptual reality is retained, even as this reflexivity takes hold, since we see both windows in a real building and reflective screens onto which potentiality is projected.

Dean's conundrum images, revealing potentiality, also intensify the moving image's capacity for pensiveness. Pensiveness, a temporal state of involvement through which one might take time to think, allows viewing to fall along a spectrum of abstraction, dreaminess, and attentiveness; it is more usually connected with the photograph than the moving image. In his study of photography, all Barthes had to say about cinematic images was, "I don't have time."²⁸ Because of their time-based nature, their emphasis on change, and their narrative drive, cinematic images were not like photography for Barthes; they lacked "pensiveness," which was prevented by the continuous velocity that kept the images moving on and moving away from him. Hence he observed: "Do I add to the images in movies? I don't think so; I don't have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image; I am constrained to a continuous voracity; a host of other qualities, but not pensiveness."²⁹

Concurring with Barthes, other writers can find time in the cinema only when the moving image is stopped. Instances in which photographs are inserted into the diegesis are explored, for example, by Bellour in his essay "The Pensive Spectator," and Garrett Stewart, expanding on Bellour's brief study, adds to it the diegetic use of the freeze frame.³⁰ More recently, Laura Mulvey has carried out an exploration of the pensive spectator by means of the new ability to pause an image with the DVD controller.³¹ In each of these cases pensiveness emerges only when time stops passing. By contrast, in Dean's images pensiveness occurs even as time continues to pass, and even as we look; we can glean this from reviews of her work. In relation to *Fernsehtum*, Friedrich Meschede finds a capacity for abstraction: "Dean makes the horizontal sequence of the television's tower's window look like a strip of film. . . . The vertical divisions between the windows are like the dark lines separating one photographic frame from the next." He also discovers the existence of dreaminess, "the chance images which the film creates evoke a variety of momentary reminiscences familiar from art history."³² Susan Stewart is moved to attentiveness by *Beetle*: "The dark clouds pass before the sun breaks through again. A hawk flies past. A cow walks off into the distance. . . . At

28. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 55.

29. *Ibid.*, 56.

30. See Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-Images*, as well as *L'Entre-Images 2: most, images* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999); and "The Pensive Spectator," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 1 (1987): 6–10. Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo-synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

31. See Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 Times a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

32. Friedrich Meschede, "Fernsehtum," in *Tudo Dean: Recent Films and Other Works*, 50.

the close of the film, the sun is in place in ordinary time and space and, as we leave the screening room, we, too, return to the world of everyday existence where we are objects of the sun living under the sun."³³

Time continues to pass in Dean's images, yet we are also given time to "add to" them pensively. Turning, finally, to Sala, we will see that his multilayered use of obscurity produces not so much images staging their own becoming, or comundrum images, but rather "image-echoes"—images whose "indeterminate depictions," to use Jacques Rancière's phrase, mean that they keep coming back to us and keep us coming back to them.³⁴

Anri Sala: Disappearance in Progress

In a conversation with Raphaela Platow, Sala responds to a question about the movement of his camera by talking about *Time after Time* (2003). He explains the way in which he chose to pull focus:

The camera is manually set out of focus when the immediate danger dissolves. At that time, the horse slowly disappears. At the threatening approach of a car, I put the camera on automatic focus. As the car lights hit the horse, the illumination allows the camera to focus on its body. The horse becomes visible when danger is present. For me, it was like trying to record a manifestation of the loss of presence and fear. What is the appearance of what is not entirely there?³⁵

Such manipulation of focus distinguishes Sala from Claerbout and Dean, who rarely use lens-based techniques to interfere with what we can see; rather, Claerbout animates the image through digital manipulation, and Dean allows sunlight and its lack to produce natural changes in the image. Sala's technique reveals that on the way to making us question what it is that we see, he wants us to undergo disorientation such that "what is not entirely there" might come into view. Disorientation is produced not simply via visual effects, but also through the way in which his work is exhibited. Two particular solo exhibitions were notable in this respect. The first, at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, *Couvent de Cordeliers* (March 25–May 16, 2004), was called *Entre chien et loup* (Between dog and wolf), a French phrase that refers to twilight as an in-between time in which one might transform at any moment from one element to its dangerous other. The second was named simply *Anri Sala* and held at the Centre for Contemporary Art/Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw. In both exhibitions the artist was attentive to the experience of the viewer in relation to his work. Accordingly he carefully designed the timing of pieces, as well as the space that the viewer would traverse, with particular effects in mind.

For the first exhibition a computer-controlled state of "half-light" was maintained in the gallery, with the projected image darkening rather than lighting the space.³⁶ The half-light mimicked the on-screen indistinctness of *Time after Time* and *Ghostgames* (2002), and accompanied the indefiniteness that characterizes Sala's works such as *Lakkot* (2004), *Demmi i colori* (2003), and *Mixed Behaviour* (2003). We might think of this slippage between night and day, nightfall and daylight, as revealing the potentiality of the moving image in Sala's work.

Sala has described this exhibition as "a landscape, an archipelago at dusk (or

33. Susan Stewart, "The Light of Bone," in *Tootsie Dean: Recent Films and Other Works*, 48.

34. Jacques Rancière, "The Political Agenda of the Crab," in *Anri Sala: "Entre Chien et Loup,"* exh. cat. (Cologne: Walther König, 2004), 65–92, 77.

35. Sala in Raphaela Platow, "A Conversation with Anri Sala," in *Purchase Not by Moonlight*, exh. cat. (North Miami Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, 2008), 87.

36. See Suzanne Pagé, preface to *Anri Sala: "Entre chien et loup,"* 9.



Anri Sala, still from *Time after Time*, 2003.
video, sound, 5 min. 22 sec. (artwork © Anri Sala; photograph provided by Marian Goodman Gallery)

maybe at dawn?).”³⁷ His words explain the combination of visual, emotional, and sensory attack that he aimed to achieve. First, the distinctive use of twilight seems to slow everything down, encouraging viewers to in turn go slower and to question what they see. The mood of the exhibition has been described as meditative, as if in reference to the venue’s former role as a convent, yet the distinctive and deliberate use of sound to punctuate viewings also interrupts the ethereal state into which viewers might otherwise settle. In the second exhibition, Sala was even more ambitious. He inserted slopes into the spaces “to trigger other senses like weight, gravity or vertigo”;³⁸ therefore, walking toward *Time after Time*, viewers were suddenly aware of their bodies’ weight, as the ground sloped down before them. Equally, as viewers walked from room to room, they also moved through different states of perceptibility, from disorientating darkness to severe neon light, then to natural light.

Turning to the work itself, if darkness threatens many of the subjects that Claerbout chooses, it completely engulfs those of Sala, who is interested in the changes wrought on appearance by the loss of light in *Time after Time*, *Uomodomo*, *Ghostgames*, *Blindfold* (2002), and *Three Minutes* (2004). Further, the fact that the visible will be hard to see is indicated in some of his titles. *Ghostgames* suggests traces that may or may not be present; while *Blindfold* recalls a mechanism for preventing the subject from seeing.

The pensiveness of Dean’s work is also found in Sala’s video art, but his interest in twilight states means that it becomes entwined with a kind of sleepiness or dreaminess. Such a state, between dreaming and waking, is actually the subject of *Uomodomo*, in which we watch an old man (*uomo*) asleep on a pew in a Milan cathedral (*duomo*). Dozing his way through the one-and-a-half-minute loop,

37. Anri Sala, “Interview: Hans Ulrich Obrist in Conversation with Anri Sala,” in Mark Godfrey, Obrist, and Liam Gillick, *Anri Sala* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 7–32, 17, 38. *Ibid.*, 28.



Anri Sala, still from *Uomodomo*, 2006, video, sound, 1 min. 24 sec. (artwork © Anri Sala; photograph provided by Marian Goodman Gallery)

Anri Sala, *Blindfold*, 2002, dual-screen video, sound, 15 min. 20 sec., installation view (artwork © Anri Sala; photograph provided by Marian Goodman Gallery)

the man's head moves from upright (as if awake) to bowed (as if in prayer). His only movement is itself a sign of the mind being absent, even while the body is present: a body that needs to be lying down, since its uprightness is in turn a sign of fatigue overcoming corporeality. In a sense then, like the silhouetted trees in *Untitled (Single-Channel View)* and the reflections in *Poiesis*, the man is also a spectral or absent presence: absent in mind while present in body, undergoing the private act of sleeping while unaware of the looks being exchanged about him. Behaving as he should not, he makes social conventions visible.

Uomodomo should be seen alongside Claerbout's *Untitled (Single-Channel View)* and Dean's *Poiesis* for its attempt to help us see something that is not actually present. While Claerbout tries to film an image in a state of becoming and Dean looks for that which cannot easily be perceived, Sala has declared an interest in "disappearance in progress." More specifically, in his notes accompanying *Time after Time* he writes, "There must be a singular way of inscribing beings or things in the present so that they represent simultaneously what they used to be and are not anymore, and represent their disappearance in progress."³⁹ The effect of Sala's simultaneous representation of what was and what is now in the same image is to allow his videos to take on allegorical qualities. Thus, if when illuminated the horse in *Time after Time* looks real—we see its emaciated ribs, its worn hooves and tousled mane—when the same horse is enveloped by shadows its reality is obscured and it takes on any number of new meanings, from the clash of old and new transport to the careless discarding of our relationship to animals and the loss of a simpler way of life.

This simultaneous representation continues in *Blindfold*, Sala's first two-screen projection.⁴⁰ On each screen we see a billboard covered in foil. One is on top of a

39. Anri Sala, notes on *Time after Time*, exh. brochure, CAC/Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2003.
40. A later two-screen work is *After Three Minutes* (2007).



building and framed so that we see only the roof of the building; the second is on top of a single-story building and framed so that we can see the street to one side with other buildings, a walkway, a road, shops, and pedestrians. Despite the differences in *mise-en-scène*, the evolution of both projections involves, first, the near obscuring of that which surrounds the boards, through the angle of the glaring sun on the shiny surfaces, and second, the restoration of context as the angle of glare changes. Across their ten-minute loops these billboards, placed in Tirana and Vlora, dazzle, shimmer, and glare, making them sometimes hard to see. We hear street sounds—as in *Polist*—and at times we see at the edges of the frame people walk past the lower billboard. In contrast to *Polist*, we are given some context for these billboards, as we glimpse a little of the city that surrounds them. Yet, thus contextualized, they seem at odds with their surroundings, blank spaces of eternal return, compared with the decaying life that teems in the city. Further, like Dean's attempt to capture time passing, the billboards also make visible what we may not otherwise notice—the sun setting; indeed they blind us with it. Yet as with *Umsäuen*, points of tension and contrast are created by the inclusion of different temporalities in the same frame. The scale of billboard time and people time is very different, from the epic to the subjective. It therefore seems in keeping with Sala's interest in "disappearance in progress" that these screens are filmed at the end of a day rather than at the beginning, so that we have missed what passed before.⁴¹ The optimism of a sunrise is replaced by the too-late-ness of the sunset, and we must hide our time before night and the next day as time runs out.

• • •

Analysis has shown that potentiality is constituted in various ways: by making us look for something where it might seem there is nothing; by looking for that which cannot easily be perceived and for what is not entirely present; by foregrounding imperceptible natural time rather than human (or cinematic) time; by using composition to obscure what we might expect to see and to mix what we think we see with what we can actually see and what we could see if we looked harder; by filming images in a state of becoming; and by creating visual conundrums and filming disappearance in progress.

Paradoxically, while the images of Claerbout, Dean, and Sala operate through obscurity, in forcing us to look harder, they also draw us into and help us to see the passage of the moving image from its most distant origins in early cinema to its most proximate incarnation in digital practice. Perhaps the greatest revelation of this work, though, is its capacity to make us abandon distinctions between what is actual and what is potential. Through potentiality the visible and invisible, movement and stillness meet and merge, forcing us to redefine how we look, what we see, and what we can say about moving images.

This conceptualization of potentiality can be used to advance debates about how we might talk about moving images after the cinematic. Just as writers such as Fred Ritchin, George Baker, and Michael Fried have argued for an expansion of the photographic field of influence to account for the changes wrought on the ontology of analogue photographs by digital tools, so discussion has also been rife about how moving images have been altered through what Timothy Murray calls "cinema's evolution via the electronic arts."⁴² On the one hand, the contem-

41. As opposed for example to work such as De Rijke and De Rooij's *Bontar Geborg*, which begins as the sun is rising and ends when it has done so. 42. Murray, 16. See Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: Norton, 2009); George Baker, "Photograph's Expanded Field," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 175–88; and Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

porary identity crisis of the moving image can be seen as the legacy of the last fifty years of doubt about its future, as it gets reinterpreted in relation to photography and painting and passes through analogue and digital video. On the other, it springs from the acceleration of visual culture as a blanket discipline that muffles the borders between film studies, art history, and media and cultural studies. Over two decades of the cinematic turn in art practice has also assisted in this challenge to our understanding of what movement should look like in moving images.⁴³

As for the work discussed here, to the degree that it incorporates the past lives of moving images it must also be seen to index other aesthetic practices as well as resonate with a now well-established field of theoretical scholarship interested in the loss of singularity of the cinematic image. Aesthetically these images are the legacy of modernist cinema, in which reflexive practices and other experiments made us conscious of the apparatus behind the illusion. Flicker effects produced by the avant-garde filmmaker Paul Sharits are evoked by the shimmer and dazzle of these images, as is an emphasis on the materials of the projector, celluloid strip, and screen. The natural subjects and painterly composition reference landscape films of Chris Welsby or James Benning, while dark patches in the frame are reminiscent of the flickering video fuzz of Kuntzel. Finally, the trope of the emergence of an object from the dark or a subject from shadows borrows from the video effects of Bill Viola.

While such aesthetic influences are layered across these images, crucially, their existence as images is reasserted through their emphasis on *mise-en-scène* rather than montage and their preference for filmic perceptual realism rather than electronic or digital manipulation. Accordingly, while we may see the moving image's past lives in these images, this vision does not destroy the impression of reality that dominates. That is, we believe that the classroom in *Untitled (Single-ChannelView)*, the building in *Palast*, and the horse in *Time after Time* are "really real" rather than "really made up."⁴⁴

Yet at the same time something has changed in our perception and reception of the image. All these examples offer what D. N. Rodowick calls "phenomenologically significant . . . different . . . conditions for perception, involvement, and pleasure in the image."⁴⁵ The assumption that "nothing happens" can be used in a provocative rather than pejorative sense in relation to these images.⁴⁶ In moving images found in short films made for the gallery, vision comes to us through an act of attentiveness to the visual; it is this attentiveness that provides revelation. For in giving us images that force us to look harder, Dean, Sala, and Claerbout draw us into and help us to see cinema's digital passage. More important, they accomplish the conversion of the moving image from actuality to potentiality.

Catherine Fowler is a senior lecturer in Film at Otago University, New Zealand. Recent essays on the film art axis of influence include "Remembering Cinema 'Elsewhere' from Introspection to Circumspection" (*Cinema Journal*, 2012) and "Once More with Feeling: Performing the Self in the Work of Gillian Weaving, Kutlug Ataman and Phil Collins" (*MIRA*, 2013). Her book on film in galleries since 1990 will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2014.

43. Those who write about a cinematic turn include George Baker and Thomas McDonough. Baker observes that "the photographic object . . . has fully succumbed in the last ten years to its digital recording, quite literally, to a turn that we would now have to call cinematic rather than photographic." Baker, 176. McDonough also begins an essay on the prevalence of explorations of subjectivity by acknowledging a "recent 'cinematographic' turn." Thomas McDonough, "Production/Projection: Notes on the Capitalist Fairy Tale," in *Art of Projection*, ed. Christopher Eamon and Stan Douglas (Owensboro: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 124. See also the catalogue for the 2006 Pompidou Center exhibition *Le Mouvement des Images*, which professes to "offer a rereading of both twentieth-century art and the art of today from the viewpoint of film; its self-appointed aim is to show how the 'seventh art' now irreversibly conditions our experience of both artworks and images." Bruno Racine, "Avant-Propos," *The Movement of Images*, ed. Philippe-Alain Michaud, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006), 9.

44. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular Study of the Senses* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

45. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2007), 107.

46. For use of the phrase "nothing happens" in a provocative sense, see Ivona Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Oksana Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).