

Student Name: Sarah Grounds

P Number: 2005771

Programme of Study: Contemporary Dialogues

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Pathway Leader: Hamish Gane

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The In-between

What is the In-between of the Still and Moving Image?



by
Sarah Grounds

Abstract

Exploring the time and space of the still image in all of its forms, from the snapshot to the feature length film, *The In-between* looks at what lies between the still and the moving image. It considers the beginnings of photography and film, what the mediums represent, and how they have evolved together. *The In-between* explores how artists have blurred the line between cinema and photography, and concentrates on the Static Film genre, which emerged after WWII, as a radical reaction to the war, and to the increasing speed of modern consumerist society. Its main focus is Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, probably the most famous cine-roman, a science fiction movie made up entirely of still images but for a few seconds of moving image. *The In-between* looks at how these films show us that in fact, the still and the moving image are the same but for one thing: duration.

Introduction

‘Whence comes the feeling that between any two instants there are others?’ (Green & Lowry, 2006)

After WWII artists started exploring a new genre called static cinema. Maybe as a reaction to the madness of war, Static cinema explores stillness and meditation. And maybe as a reaction to the racing spectacle of modernisation and consumption. Artists decided to slow things down and show that there can be a different way to the mainstream culture of racing forward cinema. (Remes, 2017. p22)

Static cinema comes in lots of sub genres, but in general they all share in some form of stasis. Be it the still image or a moving image so slow that it seems to be still. Andy Warhol famously explored the World of stasis with his furniture films, *Sleep*, *Empire* and *Eat*. *Sleep* was a five hour twenty-one minute film of his then partner, the poet John Giorno sleeping nude. It was shown at sixteen frames per second, so 3/4 the speed of conventional film and featured Giorno from different angles, with some shots repeated multi times. (Arjoon, 2022)



(Fig. 2)

These were films made for people to live with, not sit and watch from beginning to end. Warhol said of *Sleep*, ‘It’s a movie where you can come in at any time. And you can walk around, dance and sing...’ (Remes, 2017. p37) Other films approach stasis in different ways, such as Tony Conrad’s *The Flicker* which is a series of black and clear frames and Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*, a cine-roman science fiction work.

A lot has been written about the contrasting qualities of the still and moving image and how different they are. But what about these works that play on the boundaries and blur the lines between the still and moving image? What are these works actually doing? What is this In-between?

Before we can look at the in-between of the still and moving image though. We need to work out what exactly the still and moving image are, in relation to time.

What is the Still and Moving Image?

‘Film is all light and shadow, incessant motion, transience, flicker, a source of Bachelardian reverie like the flames in the grate. Photography is motionless and frozen, it has the cryogenic power to preserve objects through time without decay. Fire will melt ice, but then the melted ice will put out the fire.’ (Wollen, 1984)

Time and photography have always gone together hand in hand. The still image has been accepted as the quintessential captor of time. For Pointcare, the instant, as depicted through the lens, was an exact representation of a moment in time. A photograph represented the precise moment the shutter opened and closed and caught, what would be seen as, a solid memory. (Doane, 2006. p23)

This perceived precise capture of reality is reflected in the fact that photography was so readily taken up as an institutional tool. It’s was (and still is) widely used in scientific and medical observation. In the 1890’s, Alphonse Bertillon, a French police officer, used the camera to practice his ideas of social engineering, anthropometry. Using photographs and precise measurements of the face he predetermined identity types, in particular a predisposition to crime, or mental health problems. (Sutton, 2009. P7-15)



(Fig.3)

But now we know that things are not quite as simple as that. Time is fluid and in viewing a photograph we are not just viewing that precise moment. We are viewing everything that went before that moment and everything that went after. The viewer, the time and the amount of time, we view the photograph, also impacts how the image is seen.

For Roland Barthes this was the beauty of the photograph. In his famous text *Camera Lucida*, Barthes talks of the famous images of Lewis Payne, who tried to assassinate W.H. Seward the Secretary of State. Payne was photographed by Alexander Gardner as he was waiting to be hanged.

...he is going to die. I read at the same time. This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. (Barthes, 1981. p95-96)

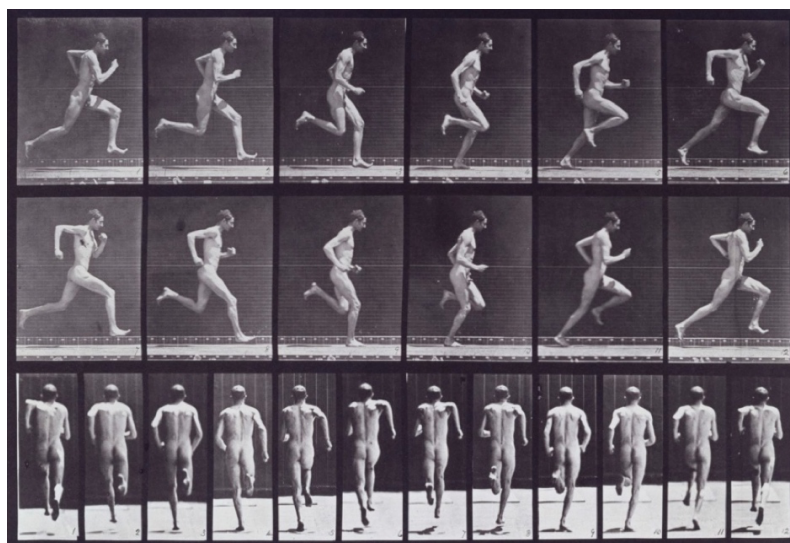


(Fig. 4)

So the photograph represents time on the vertical, an aligning of all moments, before, now and after, in time, in one instant. Film on the other hand is the complete opposite, film is on the horizontal, each frame shot to lead into the next frame.

Eadweard Muybridge, a British born commercial photographer based in San Francisco pioneered a new way of seeing. His experiments with animal movement, shutter speeds and presenting the final images using a zoetrope like machine called a zoopraxiscope, were the first steps to what we now think of as the moving image.

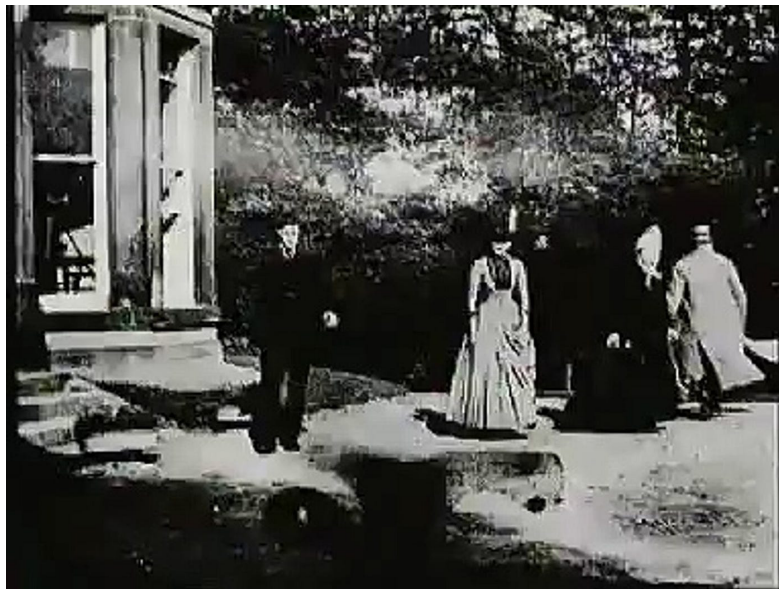
Muybridge was commissioned by the railroad baron, Leland Stanford to photograph his racehorse Occident. The intention was to prove that at a certain time, all the horse's hooves were off the ground, midgallop. Muybridge was finally successful with this in 1872. He then continued to experiment, with the financial support of Stanford, documenting and then animating animal and human movement. (Sutton, 2009. p53)



(Fig.5)

I love Muybridge's sequence photo work, his fascination with life and capturing movement through the lens is something I can deeply relate to.

Not much time after this, what is seen as the first moving image film was made, *Roundhay Garden Scene*. Louis Aime Augustin Le Prince was a French artist and chemistry graduate. He got caught up in the hysteria for trying to create a moving image, inventing various cameras using eighteen and three lenses. In 1888, he was finally successful using a one lens camera he had designed. He gathered his family outside the front of their home, Roundhay in Leeds, UK and asked them to walk, dance and laugh. The 2.1 second work is 12 frames a second and is captured on Eastman paper strips. What is really interesting about this 'first' film is that Le Prince was an artist, so the film is framed very well with thought to space and the people within the space. Looking at slightly later films by people such as The Lumiere Brothers, the works are capturing every day life with no preplanned story to the works. But with Le Prince's work, he had a vision of what cinema could be in the future and from his first success, that vision of a story telling art can be seen. Le Prince though, was not that interested in his one lens creation, he had a bigger vision of creating three dimensional, immersive works that the spectator could become an active participant in. This is something that we still have not been able to achieve to this day. Sadly he disappeared in America in 1890, never to be heard from again. (Matrea, 2023)



(Fig. 6)

Gilles Deleuze, the French philosopher, talked a lot about the moving image. His first book *Cinema 1, The Movement Image*, firstly explains the difference between moving image and the movement image...

'We can therefore define a primitive state of the cinema. Where the image is in movement rather than being a movement image' (Deleuze, 1986)

Deleuze distinguished between these first moving image works and what was to become cinema. For Deleuze a Movement image was cinema of action, films that moved forward in time through different phases. The Movement image would start with perception, the main character would then be affected by that perception, then act upon that perception. This pattern is repeated on varying levels throughout films, up to this day. Deleuze also talked of the Time Image, in *Cinema 2*. This is referring to the new approach to time in cinema after WWII, mainly in European art cinema. The main character in these films will often be affected by a perception and not be able to react. Time images can wander in time, going

back to memories of the past, or thoughts of the future but also just get stuck in a now of intense self reflection. (Sutton, 2009. p65-79)

Deleuze though, viewed photography as merely a medium destined to become the photogram, with cinema being the penultimate form. I am not sure I agree with him on that one. Cinema is just photos presented in a very ordered time. The attention made to the creation of each photogram is minute. Each photo is meaningless without the others, unlike photography, which can tell a whole story in just one image. I would argue that photography is the pure, superior form and cinema, with all those racing images, merged with words and sound are just trying to create something that some can create in just one image. The presentation of these works puts photography at a disadvantage and maybe, if photography were displayed in such a reverent way as cinema. It may not be viewed as cinema's inferior Mother.

So the Moving image is horizontal and gives the impression of motion through it's own movement through an apparatus. It needs two functions to make this happen, still frames on a strip, organised in some sort of chronological order and then an apparatus in which it can move through, to create the impression of movement.

What is the In-between?

When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. (Barthes, 1981. P57)

This leads me then to ask what happens if you mix this up? What happens if we try and reanimate this 'corpse' using the still image to represent motion, with each photo carefully thought out and taken and then presented in timed sequences?



(Fig.8)



(Fig.9)

Photo Sequences have been used in lot's of different ways. In magazines as photographic comic stripes and on television to entertain children at story time. Teddy Edward was a

popular children's Storytime programme on the BBC in 1973. It was narrated by Richard Baker and showed stills of Teddy Edward on his adventures. The character was created by Patrick Mathews, who had the idea of taking photos of his daughters toys and making up stories around them, initially as books. The film crew needed was minimal, as Mathews took all the photos for the show himself. But his insistence that Teddy Edwards be a well travelled bear meant that high production costs went on trips to Spain, Greece and France. Mathews uses fade ins, zoom ins as well as sharp cuts to add interest to the stills on the screen. (Ricketts, 2017)

Many photographers create sequence work and one of the most famous is Duane Michals.



(Fig. 7)

Michals is a mostly self-trained photographer from America. He got a BA in art in 1954 from the university of Denver. But did not actually experiment with a camera until after his art studies, in 1958. One of the things Michals' is most famous for is his sequence works which can be funny, surreal and magical. He presents the sequences in a classic frame by frame format, sometimes adding text to enrich the message of the work. Michals is also famous for his long exposure work and I find his long exposure sequence work, *The Spirit Leaves the Body*, particularly haunting. This work is also cyclical, with the end image also being the starting image. (Oxford school of Photography, 2011)

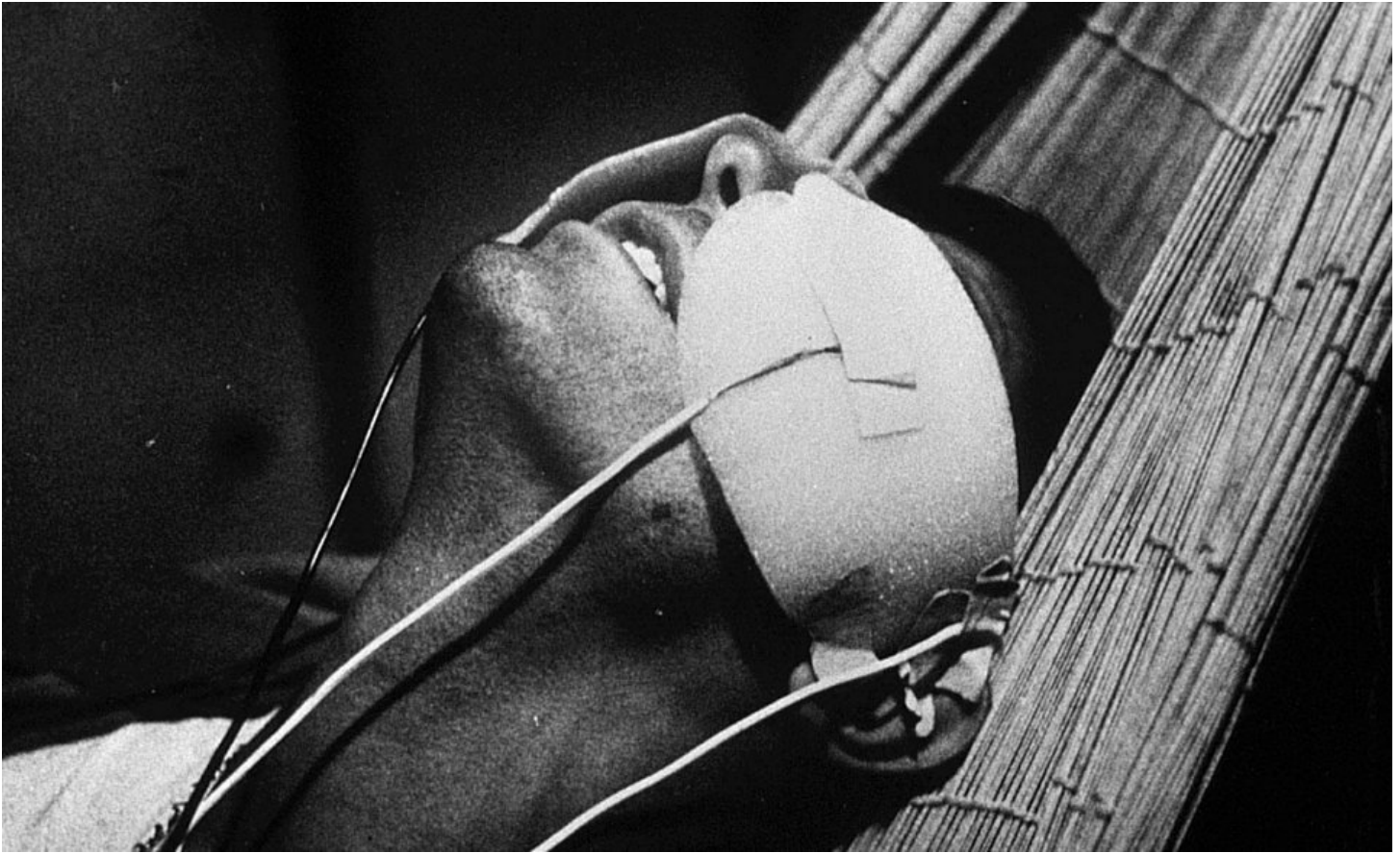
This same structure is used when making modern day gifs, with image sequences that can be repeated unending.

More recently Michals has explored making short films, including revisiting his more famous sequence work and presenting them cinematically after each other on a screen. (Anon, 2016)

This, in particular is the genre of Static cinema that I find the most interesting, cine-romans. The taking of the still image and presenting them in sequence as a film. Why would one choose to do this, rather than use conventional moving image?

For the rest of this essay I am going to look at one cine-roman work in particular, *La Jetée*.

La Jetée



(Fig.10)

La Jetée was a ground-breaking film made by Chris Marker in 1962, released in 1964. What is different about this film is that it is made up entirely of stills, with only a few seconds of traditional moving image. Creating a juxtaposition with conventional cinema, by turning the idea of the freeze frame on its head. (Wollen, 1984) Marker started shooting the film on a whim, in down time while shooting *Le Joli mai*, a documentary of interviews with French citizens. *La Jetée* was a big contrast to Marker's normal documentary style films. It is a post-apocalyptic, science fiction story set in an imagined future after World War III. Paris is destroyed and the humans that survived have moved into underground bunkers reminiscent of conditions in the Holocaust. The voice over is from the main protagonist, of whom we never learn his name. He tells his story from the position of now in time, with the story flipping backwards and forwards as it progresses. What Deleuze would call a Time Image. His story starts as a little boy, before the war, at an airport, and how he saw a man fall to the ground on the Jetty (hence the name of the film). His story also ends with the same scene and the realisation that that man was himself and he had witnessed his own death. Note how, yet again, the circular theme of the photo story has been repeated in the film, as with Michals, *The Spirit Leaves the Body*. The film is built on the premiss that scientists are looking for a way to save humanity. They are using subjects who have a strong link to a memory to do experiments with moving through time. Our main character has a memory of a woman, who was stood on the jetty on that day at the airport, she watched as the man, who seemed to be running towards her, falls to the ground.



(Fig. 11)

Through tortuous experiments using drugs and hypnosis, our main character begins seemingly to travel back in time and meets this woman, whether this is actually happening or whether it is a figment of his tormented mind, we never know. Once he is managing to visit this woman consistently, his captors then send him on his true mission, which is to the future, to bring back a power source that will save humanity. The people of the future though, take pity on him and before his captors are able to kill him, now he is of no use to them, the people of the future offer to help. First off they offer to bring him back to the future with them, this our main character refuses, what he really wants is to return to the woman he has been haunting in the past. This they agree to and the final scene in the film begins, which is also the first scene in the film. But now the viewer and the main character have an understanding of the scene that we did not have before. Before he can meet his love, and as she looks on, one of the scientists intervenes him and shoots him down. (Kawin, 1982)

What I want to look at more closely about this film is the way time is approached through the use of the still image and the presentation of these stills. With the addition of the voiceover, a smooth continuum is created for the viewer and the impression of a chronological story is achieved, even though the images mainly jump from one moment in time, to another. Marker uses many different techniques for presenting different frames to express different events. Sharp cuts, soft dissolves and changes in camera position, reflect conventional movie making. In the dramatic moments of the film, such as the running on the jetty at the end, the frames jump from long range to close up, from front view, to back view, to over view. In one scene, the main character is being tortured and an image of the woman dissolves over this image, as if she has come to soothe him and take him with her to the safety of the past. Markers use of the black screen, through dissolves but also long pauses between frames, help us to empathise with our main character. When he is in a dark

moment of despair waiting to be tortured, we too are plunged into darkness. This timing of the frames through precise editing, controls how long the viewer is allowed to look at each frame. Marker chooses which frames the viewer should see for longer and so feel more. The first view of the woman for instance is prolonged, whereas other images in this sequence tick by quickly. (Harbord,2009. P35)

The scene that stands out for most people in *La Jetée* is the dream scene, the one scene that has a moment of moving image.



(Fig.12)



(Fig. 13)

The scene starts with a dissolve into a shot from above, of the woman lying asleep in bed, the soft sound of birds in the background. The images in this scene are grainier than other images in the film, giving the whole sequence an air of dreamy magic. The images dissolve into each other, hanging on the second image a moment longer than the others. The timings of the changes of frames are not regimented but change with the feel of the scene. Like the viewer is being tiptoed around the woman, aware of the intimate scene they are being shown. On the fourth shot, the frame comes in, more tightly framing the woman's face. The shots come more frequently, with less difference in position than before, giving a smoother effect of movement. As this is happening, the sound of the birds intensifies, as if they are reacting to the caging of the woman's face by the frame of the camera, the birds seem to know that something not of this World is about to happen. Then finally the scene settles into 24 frames per second to create the only moving image in the film. She blinks awake and smiles at us with a look of recognition. (Harbord, 2009. p43-44)

'The only thing that moves is the beloved, waking in bed. The implication is that she is, in that moment, either not real or not real in the way everything else is real.' (Kawin, 1982)

This idea, that Marker was making the woman other by presenting her through 24 frames, is reinforced at the end of the film. When the man is running towards her on the jetty, his pace is matched by the frame rate. Each frame is a step forward, left foot, right foot, increasing in speed. Edited with hard cuts rather than soft dissolves, our antagonist never quite gets to 24 frames. He is shot down before he can reach her and the freedom of being trapped in stasis, trapped within the still image.

Conclusion

'Visually the motion picture is sequential art....Motion is one of the incidental by products.' (Remes, 2015. p6)

What *La Jetée* shows us is that you don't have to actually show movement in a film for a film to move forward. By showing a series of stills, Marker was in fact showing the reality of what all cinema is made up of, which is the still image. The impression that cinema moves is just an optical illusion, no movement is actually happening in any cinema. The presentation of continual still images after each other, fools our eyes into thinking that it is seeing movement. (Remes, 2015. p6)

What we can deduce from this then is that it is not movement that sets the moving image apart from the still image. As the movement image is the still image. What is happening rather is a choice of duration, made by the artist or director. Most still images are presented on walls, in books etc and the author has no power to control how long a spectator looks at the work. But for every moving image work a decision as to how long a scene would be shown to an audience is constantly being made. We could state that duration is the only constant theme that runs through all of cinema and is the thing that separates the 'moving' image from the still. This has been shown to it's extremes in films such as *Blue* by Derek Jarman, a film that shows a blue screen for the entire one hour and nineteen minutes. And *Fog Line*, a film by Larry Gottheim featuring a seemingly still shot of a foggy landscape, lasting eleven minutes.



(Fig. 14)

When I was writing this essay I was constantly being drawn to the analogy of Morse Code and the relationship between the still and moving image. The dots representing the vertical stabs of time that is the still image and the dashes of the moving image. Morse code is also a language based on duration and one can mix up these dots and dashes in limitless different ways to create new, exciting dialogues. I set out asking what is the in-between of the still and moving image, thinking it was something solid that could be boxed and labelled. But now I understand that there is no in-between, photography and cinema have been doing a beautiful dance together, right from the beginning. From the photo in your family album, to the latest Hollywood blockbuster, it is all the still image and all that is changing is time and duration.

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