

ADAA7000 Coexistent Perspectives Module

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What does the experimental manipulation of cinematic time in Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* and Martin Arnold's *Pièce Touchée* reveal about the nature of perception and temporality in relation to Bergsonian philosophy?

Based on question 4. Time, Memory and the Archive: In what ways do contemporary artists and designers remagine time, memory, and archival practice, whether through repetition, rupture, slowness, or nonlinear temporality? How do these temporal aesthetics intersect with cultural, technological, or historical concerns?

Abstract

This essay examines what the experimental film manipulations of Douglas Gordon and Martin Arnold reveal about the nature of the perception and temporality in relation to Henri Bergson's philosophy of time. The study offers an overview of Bergson's distinction between quantitative 'clock time' and qualitative 'lived time', specifically focusing on the concept of duration. Utilising Gilles Deleuze's cinema books as a theoretical bridge, this essay argues that despite Bergson's scepticism toward cinema as inherently spatialised medium, experimental film provides a transformative perspective on his work. Through a close examination of Douglas Gordon's slowness and protraction, and Martin Arnold's fragmentation and compulsive repetition, the essay demonstrates how the manipulation of appropriated Hollywood footage can represent the physicality of duration. These case studies argue that such cinematic interventions do more than dismantle the linear narrative; they actively disrupt the viewer's habitual perception forcing an encounter with time as an unyielding, material force. Furthermore the analysis reveals that these films interrogate the voyeuristic gaze of classical cinema, exposing hidden gender dynamics and mechanics of violence embedded within domestic space.

Ultimately, this essay posits a new framework for understanding the intersection between philosophy and experimental cinema, suggesting that the film medium can function as a potent tool for philosophical inquiry.

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Introduction

In the early 20th century, Henri Bergson famously argued that time is qualitative and not quantitative, meaning that measurable time fails to show how time is really perceived. For him time is not a series of measurable moments but rather a continuous flow of experiences, something that he called a duration (*durée*). Yet, in the context of cinema Bergson claimed that film cannot truly represent lived experience. Built from static frames and governed by mechanical succession, the moving image risks reducing duration to mere spatial measurement.

However, looking across the vast history of experimental film, artists have persistently used cinema to challenge and in some ways exaggerate the conventional practices of standard cinema to question aspects of human life such as time and perception. In this case artists such as Gordon Douglas and Martin Arnold used experimental manipulation of footage to do precisely what Bergson believed it could not do: to slow time, fracture it, loop it, change the order of moments and make it almost physically felt.

Although Bergson might have challenged the role of cinema regarding its' representative abilities of showcasing the time, his theories remain crucial to understand key concepts of time beyond its' mechanical qualities. This essay examines how temporal distortions in Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* and Martin Arnold's *Piéce Touchée* resonate with Henri Bergson's philosophy of duration and lived time revealing how cinematic time can be felt rather than simply measured and what it can reveal about the gendered power dynamics embedded within domestic space. By stretching, repeating and fragmenting

time, both works disrupt narrative continuity and expose underlying structures of control, tension and perception.

The first chapter of this examination will offer a brief outlook into Bergson's core concepts regarding duration and mechanical time by looking into few of his major works such as his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*). To help bridge the gap between Bergsonian philosophy and cinema, Deleuze's writings in *Cinema 1: Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: Time-Image* offer a unifying element that contextualises the intersection between film and philosophy in the lens of Bergson's philosophy. This will set the ground for case studies that will follow in chapters 2 and 3. Both films will be analysed through their radical approaches of time manipulation; for Douglas the extreme slowness and stretching, for Arnold repetition, stutter and compulsion. By looking into the film structures closely, it will reveal latent gender power structures encoded in domestic spaces and manifested through the utmost manipulation of time.

The final chapter synthesises the findings made in both films to demonstrate what Gordon and Arnold's films reveal about the nature of perception and time in relation to Henri Bergson's philosophy. It will also interrogate the visible intersection between philosophy and experimental film, positing a potential new way of thinking about philosophy in terms of cinematic interventions.

1. Bergson and Deleuze

At the heart of Henri Bergson's philosophy of time, which forms the central focus of this chapter, lies a fundamental dissatisfaction with how time is commonly understood and measured. For Bergson "The idea of a homogeneous and measurable time is shown to be an artificial concept, formed by the intrusion of the idea of space into the realm of pure duration" (Pogson, 2001). The concept of duration (*durée*) was conceived by Bergson to avoid seeing the time as a sequence of divisible and quantifiable units. It was first introduced in his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (first published 1889) where Bergson examines the nature of time, suggesting that seeing it as series of sequence of separate moments is illusory and that authentic freedom resides in the capacity to act in the immediate present. For Bergson, duration is inseparable from perception and consciousness. This discourse is evident in his later book *Creative Evolution* (1911) where he refers to more of an individual and subjective experience of time that lives within us and our consciousness. Bergson suggests that time is not made of separate, static instants but unfolds as a continuous accumulation, where past presses into the present. Furthermore, he suggests that even when nothing seems to change externally, our inner experience is constantly shifting because each moment carries the memory of the one before. (Bergson, 1911). By the example of *Creative Evolution*, it is not hard to notice that Bergson's approach of conceptualising time stems from desire to understand time as something opposite from space, he was interested in the intuitive qualities of time and temporality, something that comes from the inward experience.

This aligns with another philosopher Martin Heidegger whose approach to theorising time was closely linked with existentialism and phenomenology as well as criticism of mechanical time (vulgar time). For Heidegger time (or temporality) is an aspect that allows us to make sense of being he says of time “as the possible horizon for understanding whatsoever of being” (Heidegger, 1926, p.1). Though coming from different perspectives Bergson’s focus on freedom and Heidegger’s on authentic existence, they both challenge the idea of quantitative time in favour of subjective, lived experience. The implications of this challenge, particularly regarding perception and the moving image, necessitate a thorough conceptual definition. Therefore, the core of Bergson’s philosophy the concept, of duration deserves close, immediate examination as the central articulation of this qualitative, inner temporality.

Duration is Bergson’s attempt to distinguish time from space to better understand consciousness as a pure continuous flow of inner experience before that experience is spatialised, quantified and articulated by the intellect and language, therefore for Bergson this state is inherently temporal, meaning it exists only as a pure duration. This emphasis on a non-spatialised inner life is crucial because “In the duration, there is no juxtaposition of events; therefore, there is no mechanistic causality. It is in the duration that we can speak of the experience of freedom.” (Lawlor, Moulard-Leonard, 2025).

To illustrate duration as a qualitative multiplicity Bergson presents with few analogies in yet another one of his books *Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1946). One of those analogies suggests duration can be visualised as a continuous tape being unwound from one spool to the other, this model captures how the past grows and the

future shrinks, demonstrating that lived experience is indeed a form of continuity separate from mechanical adjacency (1946, p.194).

However, in *Time and Free Will* (2001, p.109) Bergson identifies that our intellect tends to “get into a habit” of using external markers to make sense of the correspondence between external world and our conscious life and its’ successive parts likening the process to endosmosis. Using the metaphor of the swinging pendulum, Bergson argues that we mistakenly treat our conscious life as a series of separate oscillations, resulting in mixing time with space. This ‘habit’ of spatialising the internal into external is precisely why Bergson remained sceptical of the cinematic artform. For him, the cinema was merely a mechanic extension of the pendulum-logic; he stated that images are inherently static and incapable of representing movement, “Because, for him, no image can represent duration. An image is immobile, while duration is “pure mobility”” (Lawlor, Moulard-Leonard), this leads to his criticism of cinematic artform.

Yet, this does not necessarily diminish Bergson’s work and does not set it apart from cinematic time, because for Deleuze this critique became a fertile ground to in a sense revitalise Bergsonism in the context of cinema, particularly in his two landmark volumes *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: Time-Image*. Deleuze reconfigures Bergson’s philosophy and reveal hidden potential within cinematic form. He argues that the classical cinema (The Movement-Image) only reproduces the intellect’s error, but modern cinema can cease to operate solely as a machine for reproducing action. His Cinema books thus pose a new direction in philosophy questioning whether a cinema “can offer us new ways to think, and if it can, how has it done so?” (Vaughan, 2013, p. 23). Deleuze answers to this by demonstrating that when mechanical link between action and

reaction is severed, the camera is freed directly from image time itself. This offers a crucial distinction between *Movement-Image* (subordinating time) and the *Time-Image* (liberating time) that enables analysis of how experimental artists actively utilised the very mechanisms Bergson criticised.

The essential novelty of the *Time-Image* lies in Deleuze's observations of fundamental transition in how cinema represents temporality. Deleuze examines forms of modern post WWII cinema, where characters are no longer subordinate to action, instead, he identifies the emergence of a new cinema structured around *opsigns* and *sonsigns* situations that "do not respond to, and are thus unrestricted by, the sensory-motor scheme." (Angelucci, 2014). With the breakdown of action and causal continuity, time is no longer subordinated to movement but becomes directly perceptible through duration, memory, waiting, and repetition.

Moreover, Deleuze's writings in *Time-Image* (1989) constitute to reconceptualization and expansion of Bergson's notion of subjective time. He distinguishes three major theses regarding the nature of time: first, that the past coexists with present from which it emerged, second, that thus past is preserved itself in a non-chronological manner, and third, that at every instant time bifurcates, splitting itself into passing present and preserved past. He goes to say:

Bergsonism has often been reduced to the following idea: duration is subjective and constitutes our internal life. And it is true that Bergson had to express himself in this way, at least at the outset (Deleuze, 1989, p.82).

Furthermore, Deleuze argues that simplification of Bergson's subjective time lacks ontological shift. Bergson in his work has increasingly moved toward the view that only

true subjectivity is time itself, a non-chronological time is what forms foundation of reality. This paradox in Deleuze's mind proves that time is not internal to us, but we are internal to it, structuring reality of existence itself. (Deleuze, 1989, p.82).

This radical shift in perspective from Deleuze along with the foundational philosophy of Bergson allows for transformation of the cinematic image from a mere representation of action into an objective manifestation of duration. If the time is indeed "internal to us" and we are not master of it, but subjects to its mechanism, then experimental cinema constitutes an important apparatus to make this theory visible. By stripping away narrative causality and the sensory-motor link, films of Gordon and Arnold function as pure opsigns, forcing viewer to confront time as a primary, non-chronological and almost physical environment. The following case studies will demonstrate how these artists use mechanical static frames of film to make time visible and felt and what such manipulations reveal about politics of image such as gender.

2. Douglas Gordon *24 Hour Psycho* 1993 (Shower Scene)

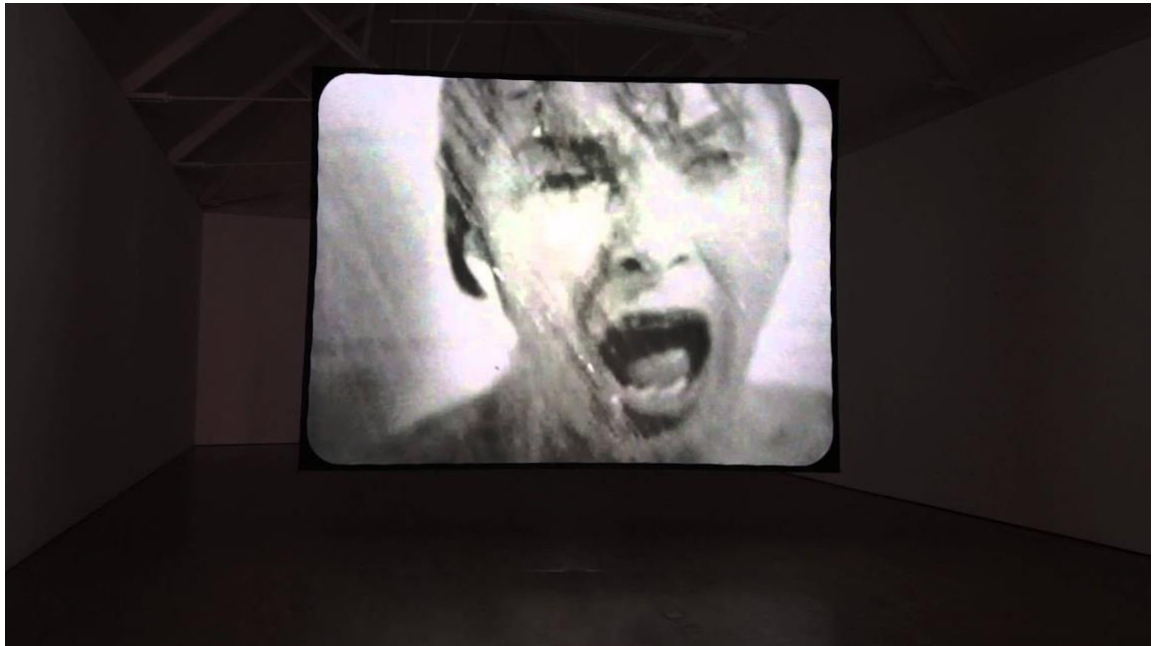


Figure 1 Still from *24 Hour Psycho* (Gordon, 1993)

Perhaps the most prominent example that embodies the transition from movement cinema to time cinema is Douglas Gordon's 1993 video installation *24 Hour Psycho*. Douglas appropriated Hitchcock's 109 min film *Psycho* from 1960s by slowing it down to approximately two frames per second, making the film last 24 hours. By this radical manipulation of footage Douglas shatters the sensory-motor link that defines the traditional thriller, the narrative dissolves leaving behind what Bergson described in the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution* (2008) as the "immobile sections" of film. The movement ceases to subordinate to the plot, and the film is no longer a sequence of actions, a but a sustained opsign. This chapter will argue that by stretching the iconic shower scene from its original 3 minute into a gruelling nearly 40-minute-long experience, Gordon forces the viewer to exit the flow of chronological story time and experience an

embodiment of time itself, revealing hidden mechanics of violence and gender power within domestic spaces, through creation of crystalline temporal space.

The shower scene is a pivotal moment in the Hitchcock's *Psycho*, depicting a murder of the female character Marion Crane. In the original scene Marion enters a bathroom to take a shower, when a shadowed figure wielding a knife stabs her multiple times, she screams and struggles and the figure leaves as the female succumbs to the injuries.

Douglas Gordon appropriated the footage of this scene and stretched into a pure dissolution. In Hitchcock's original there are about 90 cuts, while all the cameras remain static (Stockman, 2011), creating a rush of dynamic movement. By slowing it down, Gordon reveals the "immobile sections", decreasing the shock of the speed and actual narrative, and exposing the viewer to a prolonged and almost exhausting stillness. As Ballestrase pointed:

When lengthening the scenes, Gordon's intention with this temporary alteration is to remove the immediate tension that occurs in them, that is, to take the drama out of the film (2016).

The seemingly simple intervention from the artist reveals and modifies a complex mechanism of perception and memory, constructing an anachronism that allows for the dissolution of meaning within the scene. By doing that Gordon jams the habitual perception that the viewer is accustomed to, forcing a confrontation of the images as a site of pure duration instead of seeking the action. Thus spectator is also faced with what Deleuze described as an opsign, which is an optical image that does not correspond to any immediate narrative action or progression (Deleuze, 1989). In the case of the *24 Hours Psycho*, the alteration of temporal structure erases the production of meaning

leaving it up to viewer's subjectivity. This radical manipulation also affects the footage itself, the narration or characters are no longer pivotal "In Gordon's work, physical interaction is redefined, and the slowed-down murder scene becomes abstract" (Sammarcelli, 2020) meaning that now the autonomy lies in the material of the footage itself. The viewer stops watching a murder scene but is rather exposed to a study of materiality of the film, its textures, grain of the film, shades of monochrome.

With regards to time itself, it could be argued that by stretching and slowing down the footage Gordon explores the effects of duration (Sammarcelli, 2020). Those temporal dynamics constitute Deleuze's concept of *Crystal-Image* which could amplify the effectiveness of Gordon's manipulations. Deleuze describes *Crystal-Image* as moments where time is in between an actual and virtual state, he further explains it in terms of Bergson by saying:

The real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is coalescence' between the two (Deleuze, 1989, p. 68).

In *Crystal-Image* past and present lock together (Totaro, 1999) in what Deleuze refers to as a circuit making actual and virtual indistinguishable. In *24 Hours Psycho*, particularly the shower scene a virtual state refers to the original Hitchcock's film, where the actual image is what happens in Gordon's work, the slowness and stretching creates tension and friction between slow screen and fast memory of the original scene, exposing viewer to the latent power and gender structures within the domestic space and even Hollywood films.

The gender asymmetry within films particularly old Hollywood films and many of the Hitchcock's works exposes the concept of Male Gaze which "refers to the idea that the point of view in Hollywood films is male, and that women are usually presented on screen for the sexual pleasure of men." (Byrne, 2013). In the shower scene viewer is faced with a vulnerable nude female in a bathroom being attacked by a masked, shadowed male figure "all rapid cuts and screams, goes so far as to visualize the violent scopophilic rape [...]in which the audience is forced to, at times, assume the role of the murderer himself" (Byrne, 2013). It links to the observation that Hitchcock's *Psycho* is often considered to be a film about watching and voyeurism, while Gordon's manipulation offers an exhausting visual experience amplifying the mechanical and physical effects of time. Beyond the voyeuristic gaze Gordon's slowness performs as a clinical study of gesture of violence itself. As the manipulated image is not subordinate to action and narrative the murder scene is in a way deprived of the thrilling factor and becomes cold, physical and gruelling spectacle.

Ultimately, Gordon transforms Hitchcock's thriller by breaking the sensory-motor link revealing not only mechanics of violence and predatory gaze hidden by narrative speed but also harrowing duration. By contrast the following case study will examine Martin Arnold's *Piece Touchée*, as a different example of temporal manipulation that approach the idea of perception and duration while simultaneously revealing gender power dynamics.

3. Martin Arnold *Pièce Touchée*, 1989



Figure 2 Still from *Pièce Touchée* (Arnold, 1989)

While Gordon explores duration and perception through extreme linear extension and slowness, Martin Arnold reaches similar point in narrative dissolution through fragmentation, and obsessive rhythmic repetition. In *24 Hour Psycho* viewer is subjected to endure the weight of a single, stretched moment, while *Pièce Touchée* (1989) exposes one to a stuttering loop. Yet, similar as Gordon, Arnold utilises the element of stretching, as the original scene he appropriated from a 1954 Hollywood film *The Human Jungle* lasted about 18 seconds, and he expanded into a 16-minute-long spectacle.

The premises of the scene show a man allegedly a husband, coming through the door greeting, a woman apparently his waiting wife. Right from the outset, the gender dynamics are subtly revealed similarly as in *24 Hour Psycho*, Scott Macdonald in an interview with Martin Arnold observes that *Pièce Touchée* “explores the Hollywood cliché that is [...] a cinematic gesture that polemicizes a culturally approved relationship

between the genders” (1998). Yet, while Gordon reveals them through expansion, Arnold achieves it through fragmentation.

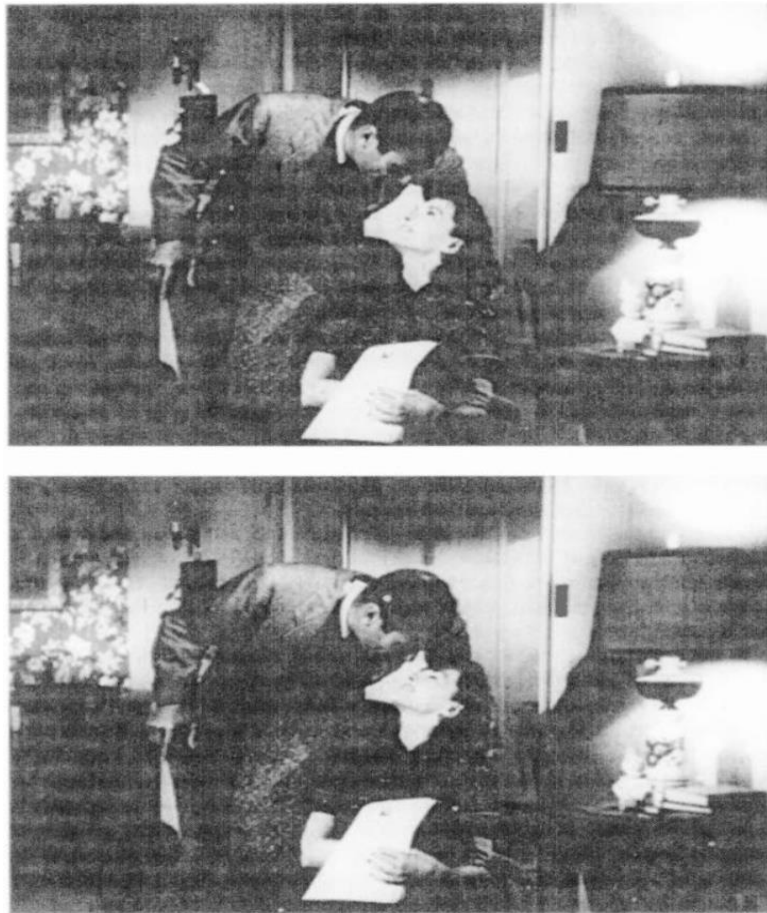


Figure 3 Successive Frames from the kiss sequence in Pièce Touchée

Arnold uses an optical printer to manipulate the footage, particularly by creating a backward and forward movement which he admits created certain fascinating events (Macdonald, 1998) visible for instance in the kiss sequence (fig 3). A momentary kiss is transformed by Arnold into almost a minute long act of rhythmic repetition, that foregrounds the durational and voyeuristic nature of the gaze. Along with Arnold's temporal experiments new meanings are produced. Initially a motionless woman sitting in the armchair is charged with a potential to move. Through the “stuttering” and hesitation Arnold prevents the movement and narrative to fully develop, severing the

sensory-motor link. This transforms Gordon's experiments into Deleuze's *opsign*, because any of the narrative that is seen in the original clip is completely dissolved and image is liberated from any form of progression but charges them with anticipation. The viewer is subjected to staggering stretching of cinematic time, where the gestures are looped, repeated and reversed never fully realising, these procedures disrupt the habitual endosmosis of cinematic time.

It is also interesting to point out the difference between the techniques used by both artists to manipulate the cinematic time. While Gordon uses minimal montage and focuses on extreme slowness and protraction of time, Arnold relies heavily on montage to reconfigure pre-existing footage. By manipulating the order of associations those being linear, backward or discontinuous Arnold generates a new cinematic language (Tuttle, 2005).

Although distinct both artists exemplify how experimental manipulations can challenge temporal perception and reveal information that would otherwise be obscured by conventional film technique. These manipulations link back to Deleuze's *Movement and Time-image*. Through his framework, it can be seen how both Douglas and Arnold achieve different, often polarising representations of time in their work. In relation to *Movement-image* Deleuze distinguishes it as the indirect representation of time, as it is dictated by the successive shots and the time is subordinate to movement. The disruption of that subordination distinguishes both films. While Gordon slows down the footage until the action dissolves, the viewer is forced to watch time itself pass, revealing not only the durational qualities of time but making it physical as well. In the case of Arnold, while the stuttering montage might initially resemble as a *Movement-image*, the systemic

aberration and reversal of subordination creates a *false* movement which now depends on time (Wartenberg and Curran, 2005 p. 35-36). This reversal forces the movement become subordinate to time, rendering time directly.

However, the significance of this direct and indirect representation of time extends beyond the theoretical and philosophical framework of the manipulations. Similarly, as with *24 Hour Psycho*, *Pièce Touchée* constitute an important structure for exploring the gender-political implications hidden within the domestic setting of the film that was revealed by Martin Arnold's radical disruption of cinematic time. It could be argued that the hesitant movements of the characters (woman waiting for a man) reveal to be performative and mechanical rather than natural which could imply the artist's commentary on the gender asymmetry within Hollywood film, but also perhaps throw a shadow on current issues regarding the gender norms. Martin Arnold himself talking about the process of making the film shown his interest in the idea of disrupting the calm composition of the original scene emphasising on the Hollywood representation of gender, where woman is usually waiting for a male hero to come home. Furthermore, he says:

The structure of space in conventional narrative cinema is as much at a deadlock as the structure of gender, and because of that I felt great pleasure in thoroughly shaking up that space (1998).

These temporal manipulations of domestic space also relate to Gordon's work. In both films domestic interiors undergo a radical transformation, becoming what Deleuze (1989, p.5) terms, *any-space-whatever*. He observes that traditional cinema relies on 'sensory-motor situations' in which the setting "presupposes an action which discloses

it". By disrupting the motor-link, Gordon and Arnold establish a "purely optical situation" this time in the domestic sphere (1989, p.5). Consequently, the bathroom in *24 Hour Psycho* and living room in *Pièce Touchée* function as *any-space-whatever* because these manipulations strip them of their sense of intimacy and sanctuary-like qualities. Instead, the characters, particularly women, are subjected to a direct, unmediated gaze. In this durational state the viewer's perception shifts from casual observation to an uncomfortable voyeurism.; the private moment is dismantled, exposing the viewer to the mechanics of control and violence in the domestic space. Thus, experimental procedures such as slowness and 'stutter' serve as vital examples of how formal cinematic techniques can reveal the intersection of duration and hidden gender politics.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this investigation reveals that time is not merely a background for the cinematic action but a separate physical force that can exist independently from its measurable qualities. Through various formal interventions it can be manipulated and exposed especially in the realm of experimental cinema. That aligns with Bergsonian philosophy that attempted to apprehend time accurately and test it against its mechanical notions. This is because any manipulations dismantle the habitual perception and expose the time to pure duration that Bergson examined in *Time and Free Will*. This is especially evident in the films of Douglas Gordon and Martin Arnold where the experimental manipulations of cinematic time successfully illustrate the tension between Bergson's central conflict of pure duration and spatialised time as well as challenge his critique of cinematic artform.

Through Gordon's extreme protraction and slowness and Arnold's fragmentation, they manipulate the formal elements of the film; to move from a Movement-Image to Time-Image, this is done through reversal of subordination. They question the conventional film techniques where the images are subordinate to perception or action and instead transform them into Time-Images where the images are infused with time and no longer subordinate to the action. Moreover, such manipulations as well as appropriation of Hollywood films can be revealed as a site for political urgency, inviting the viewer to witness the invisible or overlooked aspects of topics such as gender, violence or control especially in the domestic sphere. The broader significance of Gordon and Arnold's works also lies in the relationship and in a way control of the viewer, revealing the demand for a spectator to be not only a passive viewer but almost a responsible witness of they are watching. These procedures perhaps constitute a groundbreaking direction within the field of experimental cinema, demonstrating that formal manipulations of time are not merely aesthetic choices, but also ethical interventions.

Consequently, it can be argued that cinema particularly the experimental movement is perhaps more closely related to philosophy than it might seem as it does not only illustrate philosophical concepts, but actively produces them through procedures such as stretching, repetition or fragmentation. Ultimately, Gordon and Arnold prove that cinema is not a mechanical illusion Bergson once feared, but a transformative medium that in many ways challenges the temporality, perception and hidden structures.

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