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.” However, key

preoccupation 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 cinematographic, actualities
denoted real life filmed in real time with a minimum amount of

intervention. Actualities can therefore be seen as axioms of indexticality.

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.”

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.

In contrast to this accepted application of the term “actuality,” the term

“potentiality” has not been taken up in relation to moving images.2 In doing so

this essay aims to pose potentiality as offering a different way of designating shifts

in “imaginera” following cinema’s digital passage.4 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 meta-

physical debates from Aristotle to Giorgio Agamben.5 Agamben takes up Aristotle’s
dialectic from actuality to potentiality so as to focus on the problem posed by the

verb “can” (poten). Essentially, to say “I can” requires a recognition of the possibility

that “I cannot” “To have a faculty means to have a privation. And potentiality

is not a logical hypostasis but the mode of existence of this privation.”6 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.”7 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, “potentially and actuality, what is capable and what is actual, what is possible and what is real, can no longer strictly be distinguished.”

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. 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.

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 still in time (but is not a photograph).” 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.”

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 Rauru, Bocclesweg, 1900 (1997), Kindergarten Anntonia Sarr’s Ella, 1937 (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. Rauru 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
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, Claerhout can be said to reverse the hierarchies of film language that brought forth Doane's emergence of cinematic time. 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." 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." With Doane and Sutton in mind, we might think of Claerhout'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 Claerhout 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, 10 min., looped, installation view (artwork © David Claerbout, photograph provided by Micheline Swijger, 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 potentially lingering in visual and temporal elements; framed here is a classroom in which four rows of desks are visible. Perspective is slightly off-center.

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-Channel View) 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-Channel View) 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, 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, Clairbout'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? 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 makes 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.
Tacita Dean, still from Mario 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 extr or between created by the edit or interval (or, in Godard’s film, by superimposition). In Claerbout’s extr-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
Tacita Dean, still from Polast, 2004, 16mm color film, sound, 43 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." If that is so, 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.

For a sense of how obscuration, 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.” 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 Banewl (1999), Totality (2000), and Diamond Rings (2002); refraction of light in The Gem Ray (2001); birds swooping on a tree in Pr (2003); a reflection in Polast (2004); and, in all of her work, the passing of time. Dean’s commitment to using celluloid means that she captures these subjects with no use of digital effects.

For the second tendency, the obscuration of what we expect to see, we find the repeated combination of two different elements. In Polast it is the natural temporal changes in the sky and the manmade building in which they are reflected. Elsewhere we find the same sense copresence of human and natural elements: customers in a restaurant and time passing in Fenstern (2001), the sounds of
the heavy footsteps of a man hobbling around empty rooms as the sun sets in Boots (2005), an artist sitting beneath a windblown tree in Maria 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 Claerhout, 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.”16 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 Pêlot. 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.17 In Pêlot, 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 blurred 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 Pêlot framing creates a visual conundrum that mimics that of Claerhout’s Untitled (Single-ChannelView). We face the Pêlot 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
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: Fensterbren, in the windows of the circular tower; Bete, in the columns and windows of the building; Dispenza at Sea, in the beam of the lighthouse; and her most recent work in honor of Merce Cunningham, Climber’s Nest (2009). As with the visual reference to Plato’s cave that we find in Claerhout’s Untitled (Single-Channel View), these mini windows supply a reflective 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 reflectivity 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 pensive sensivity. Pensive sensivity, 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.”

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.”

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. 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. In each of these cases pensive sensivity 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 Fensterbren, 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.”

Susan Stewart is moved to attentiveness by Bete: “The dark clouds pass before the sun breaks through again. A hawk flies past. A cow walks off into the distance. . . . At
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." 21

Time continues to pass in Dean’s images, yet we are also given time to “add to” them pensive. 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. 22

Anri Sala: Disappearance in Progress

In a conversation with Raphaëla 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? 23

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, Covent 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. 24 The half-light mimicked the on-screen indistinctness of Time after Time and Glauges (2002), and accompanied the indefiniteness that characterizes Sala’s works such as Läkt (2004), Dammi i clipi (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

maybe at dawn?" 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”; 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 disorienting 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, Umomunoma, Ghenghis, Blasfield (2002), and Three Minutes (2004). Further, the fact that the visible will be hard to see is indicated in some of his titles. Ghenghis suggests traces that may or may not be present; while Blasfield 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 Umomunoma, in which we watch an old man (ona) asleep on a pew in a Milan cathedral (dume). Doinz his way through the one-and-a-half-minute loop,
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 Piers, 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.

Umødeooms should be seen alongside Claerbout’s Untitled (Single-Channel View) and Dean’s Piers 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.” 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. On each screen we see a billboard covered in foil. One is on top of a
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 Puls—and at times we see at the edges of the frame people walk past the lower billboard. In contrast to Puls, 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 Umusho, 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 to 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. “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.”

On the one hand, the contem-
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 Kunzel. 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-Channel View), 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.

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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 reincarnation, quite literally, so a turn that we would now have to call cinematic rather than photographic." Baker, 176. McDonough also begins an essay on the prevalence of experiments in subjectivity by acknowledging a "recent cinematic turn." Thomas McDonough, "Production/Projection: Notes on the Capitalist Fairy Tale," in Art of Projection, ed. Christopher Cronin and Stan Douglas (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 124. See also the catalogue for the 2006 Pompidou Center exhibition Le Mouvement des images, which professes to "offer a revealing 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 Tausig, Mimesis and Abjection: A Particular Study of the Senses (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 45.