

The Image, Alone: Photography, Painting and the *Tableau* Aesthetic in Post-Cinema

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Abstract

Recent art cinema has produced several experiments in the *tableau* that conceive entire movies based on its aesthetic. Such films blur the boundaries between cinema and installation art, and consist of a loosely connected string of *tableaux* which gain a degree of autonomy and therefore cannot be interpreted in the contexts of cinematic narration and dramaturgy. These films are usually categorized as slow movies, and indeed their duration has inspired the majority of their analysis in film theory. Nevertheless, I suggest that we should focus on the similarities between the *tableau* sequences of slow movies and the installations of moving image *tableaux* in order to highlight the ways they revitalise the traditional, intermedial figure of the *tableau vivant* in art, and foreground the single, photographic frame within moving images. Referring to recent reinterpretations of the notion of the transmedial *dispositif* and to the revisions of the *tableau* mode in art (and the ideas of Jean-François Chevrier) I propose to contest Raymond Bellour's idea of the 'battle of the dispositifs' and concentrate on aspects of the complex convergences between the traditional visual arts and the new media of moving images that underlies the *tableau* aesthetic in post-cinema. Taking into account the implosion of the *tableau vivant* into a more generic *tableau* style, I examine a set of gestures and actions of folding together photography, painting and cinema that may define the post-cinematic '*mise en tableau*' (via examples from the films of James Benning, Lav Diaz, Gustav Deutsch, Raúl Perrone, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Tsai Ming-liang).

The effect of picture on picture as a factor in style is much more important than what comes directly from the imitation of nature.

(Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*)

The 'Aesthetic of Confusion' or the 'New Adventure of the Picture Form?'

From the fashionable *cinemagraphs* breathing life into photographs on our

portable screens to the monumental photo-filmic installations exhibited in art galleries, the fascination with moving images posing as pictures (photographs or paintings) and vice versa, is not only ubiquitous in our digital age, but perceptible in all layers of contemporary visual culture. The *tableau* form combining stillness with motion has emerged as an extremely versatile and widely used template of digital imagery, connecting the new media of moving images with traditional arts, everyday consumer practices with highbrow aestheticism. In recent art cinema we often see entire movies based on the aesthetic of the *tableau* which blur the boundaries between cinema and installation art. In such films sequences conceived as individual pictures are no longer aesthetic ornaments, or privileged moments interpreted in the context of a cinematic narration and dramaturgy, but gain a degree of autonomy. And while such films are usually included in the general canon of slow cinema on account of their ‘intensified sense of temporality’,¹ we may not only view them as durational movies, but as films which are concerned with different ways of foregrounding the single, photographic frame in cinema in an unprecedented way, revitalising in the process the traditional intermedial figure of the *tableau vivant*. Accordingly, instead of considering their aesthetic from the perspective of temporality (or, as usually analysed, from the perspective of the cinematic long take), I suggest that we focus on the similarities between the *tableau* sequences of slow movies and the installations of moving image *tableaux* in order to highlight the way in which they effectively re-negotiate the long-established relations between photography, painting and the moving image.

In this respect, I have found that the recent reinterpretations of the notion of the *dispositif*² in film theory as well as in the theory of art may prove productive in determining key features of what we may regard as the post-cinematic *tableau*. In his seminal essays³ Jean-Louis Baudry described ‘the cinema effect’ not as something resulting from the discursive specificities of the film as language

¹ Jonathan Romney, ‘In Search of Lost Time’, *Sight and Sound*, 20.2 (February 2010), 43–44 (p. 43).

² Examples for the reinterpretation of the *dispositifs* of moving images in the last decades include, among others: Raymond Bellour, ‘La Querelle des dispositifs / Battle of the Images’, in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, ed. by Jeffrey Shaw, Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 56–59 (first publ. in *Art Press*, 262 (November 2000), 48–52); Frank Kessler, ‘The Cinema of Attractions as Dispositif’, in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 57–71; André Parente and Victa de Carvalho, ‘Cinema as *dispositif*: Between Cinema and Contemporary Art’, *Cinémas: revue d’études cinématographiques/Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, 19.1 (2008), 37–55; Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Adrian Martin, *Mise en Scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), in particular the chapter ‘The Rise of the *Dispositif*’, pp. 178–205.

³ Jean-Louis Baudry, ‘Ideological effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus’ in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*, ed. by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286–98 (first publ. as ‘Effets idéologiques de l’appareil cinématographique de base’, *Cinéthique*, 7–8 (1970), 1–8); Baudry, ‘The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema’, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, pp. 299–318 (first publ. as ‘Le Dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l’impression de réalité’, *Communications*, 23 (1975), 56–72).

or text, but as a product of its basic technological machinery (*l'appareil*) and a particular 'set up', a 'disposition' (*dispositif*), of the conditions of image projection or spectatorship, of material as well as psychological, social and ideological components. Digital images produced and displayed with new devices and in different conditions of reception bring about a multiplication of the *dispositifs* of moving images, alongside the traditional institutional *dispositif* of cinema (i.e. movies experienced in the cinema theatre).⁴ Raymond Bellour has written extensively about the relationship of film, video, photography at the dawn of the digital age, coining the term '*l'entre images*' ('images in between') to capture the 'collusion'⁵ and collision of these media and their consequences in film. In several of his latest writings and public lectures, however, he has adopted a much more radical stance by declaring that today we see an 'aesthetic of confusion' and a 'battle of the *dispositifs*' (*la querelle des dispositifs*), in which, instead of a fertile in-betweenness, of cross-pollinations among the arts, 'all we have is incertitudes — slip-sliding, straddling, flickering, hybridization, metamorphosing, transition and passages between what is still called cinema and the thousand and one ways to show moving images in the vague and misnomered domain known as Art.'⁶ As a consequence, quite surprisingly, Bellour reasserts the uniqueness of cinema and demands that we delimit it from all other arts using motion pictures.⁷

The *tableau* sequences in recent cinema, in which slow movies, experimental films and installation pieces converge, introduce us to the heart of this ongoing debate on the relation between the new cinematic *dispositifs* and, as Bellour affectionately phrases, citing Serge Daney, 'the cinema, alone.'⁸ But instead of supporting the idea of the clash of the *dispositifs*, purported by Bellour, they lead us to a unique connection between cinema and the *tableau*, or 'the picture form' in painting and photography. According to Jean-François Chevrier⁹ and the discussions in contemporary art theory following his thoughts on the 'adventure of the picture form',¹⁰ the *tableau* can be defined as a particular *dispositif* with a history

⁴ From this point of view there has not been a 'relocation' of cinema in the post-media age, only a multiplication of cinematic *dispositifs*, even though, as Francesco Casetti's latest book argues, 'relocation' has emerged as one of the key words defining the major processes taking place in today's cinema. See: Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy. Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 17–43.

⁵ Bellour uses this verbal metaphor in his *Between-the-Images* (Zürich, Dijon: JRP Rinigier & Les Presses du Réel, 2012), p. 16.

⁶ Bellour, 'Battle of the Images', p. 58.

⁷ A similar conclusion is reached by John Belton in his article, 'If Film is Dead, What is Cinema?', *Screen*, 55.4 (Winter 2014), 460–71.

⁸ Bellour, 'The Cinema Alone/Multiple Cinemas', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 5 (Summer 2013), <<http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue5/PDFs/ArticleBellour.pdf>> [accessed 27 August 2015].

⁹ Jean-François Chevrier, 'The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography', in *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960–1982*, ed. by Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2003 [1989]), pp. 113–28.

¹⁰ The most comprehensive discussions of these ideas were published following the conference

and a trans-mediality of its own. It appears in the history of painting at the time when the image becomes disentangled from its support in architecture or the book and is framed as a picture hanging on the wall, becoming an autonomous art object.¹¹ Beginning from the late 1970s and 1980s the dominance of large scale photographs in art galleries hails in a new era in which photography appropriates this *tableau* form from painting, and becomes disentangled from its own previous connections with print culture. As Chevrier writes: ‘images are not mere prints — mobile, manipulable sheets that are framed and mounted on a wall for the duration of an exhibition and go back into their boxes afterward. They are designed and produced for the wall, summoning a confrontational experience on the part of the spectator’.¹² Thus photography also becomes inextricably intertwined with image-installations, and connected to a parallel evolution of video art, which renounces its intricate contraptions and machineries of display towards the end of the 1980s and adopts the *dispositif* of cinematic projections upon a single or multiple screens on the walls of the art gallery. Leaving aside all commercial uses which are more like the so called ‘furniture films’ that Justin Remes has described: being ‘meant to be looked at but not seen’,¹³ the post-cinematic *tableau* (the single-take image, with its commanding presence, viewed in an immobile frame for a considerable length of time) can be regarded as a ‘new adventure’ of the same, transmutable picture form, of the *tableau* as a *dispositif* handed down to us from painting through photography.

The *tableau vivant* in film has always forced the spectator into a direct confrontation with the image introducing a pause within the flow of the narrative. In certain cases, however, when the distinction between the *tableau vivant* proper (the imitation of a painting) and the *tableau shot* (a static sequence shot that looks like a picture or a scene on a stage) is blurred, the *tableau* form ceases to be an incidental rhetorical device, and appears instead as a more or less rigorously applied constraint, a general mode of pictorial organization, imposing the contemplative *disposition* of the *tableau* form over the string of sequences that make up the entire length of the film (thus facilitating its presentation as an installation or its disassembly into a gallery exhibit). Films based on the aesthetic of the *tab-*

‘Tableau: Painting, Photo, Object’ organized at the Tate Modern in London, 28–29 October 2011.

¹¹ As Chevrier has pointed out: ‘[w]hen it assumes the form of the tableau, the pictorial work affirms its status as an autonomous image, endowed with its own support: the tableau is movable, it is not fixed to one single place, it does not depend upon architecture (in contrast to the fresco); it does not share its support with text (in contrast to the image of an illustration)’. Chevrier, ‘The Tableau and the Document of Experience’, in *Click Double Click: The Documentary Factor*, ed. by Thomas Weski (Köln: Walther König, 2006), pp. 51–61 (p. 51).

¹² Chevrier, ‘The Adventures of the Picture Form’, p. 116.

¹³ Justin Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 39. Such films, he claims, invite a ‘series of distracted glances rather than a focused and comprehensive gaze’ (p. 34). We can see this, for example, in the countless ambient videos uploaded on YouTube showing exotic beaches, waterfalls or forest landscapes running for hours as moving photographs.

leau can in fact be included in the category that Adrian Martin describes as ‘the dispositif film’, a film conceived as ‘a game with rules.’¹⁴

The Photo-Pictorial Gestures of the Mise en Tableau

Based on Foucault’s ideas, Giorgio Agamben describes the *dispositif* as a ‘play of power’, something that realizes ‘a pure activity of governance’¹⁵ in the process through which apparatuses produce their subject, something that can be connected to the military definition of the word *apparatus* in French, as ‘the set of means arranged in conformity with a plan.’¹⁶ Thinking in terms of poetics, and leaving aside more general, ideological or social implications, this could be translated as a set of gestures that realize this ‘governance’ of formlessness into the *tableau* form.

Although Raymond Bellour’s ideas on the ‘clash of dispositifs’ seem untenable, I have found elsewhere in his theoretical writings a set of notions that might be used, paradoxically, to argue for the interconnectedness of the arts realized through the dispositif of the *tableau*. In an intriguing essay presenting the importance of certain ‘figures’ in cinema,¹⁷ Bellour points out that in film analysis too much emphasis has been laid on types of shots and the idea of staging suggested by the second part of the term *mise en scène*. He proposes that we should concentrate instead on the first words of the phrase (*‘mise en’*), on the gesture of ‘placing’ something into a certain form or figure, implying that this form may also come from photography, language, painting, and so on. Thus, he introduces a series of new concepts like *mise en page*, *mise en plan*, *mise en place*, *mise en phrase*, *mise en image*, and even, *mise en pli*.¹⁸ Following this logic of certain figurations taking shape within film, we can also speak of the process of *tableauisation* of a moving image in terms of the gesture of the cinematic *mise en tableau*. Using Bellour’s terminology as stepping stones, in what follows, I will attempt to argue, through a few paradigmatic examples, that presenting a moving image in the form of the *tableau* implies not only one, but a series of gestures or actions. Far from being exhaustive, the examples offered below are meant to tentatively map some of those areas where the gestures of folding together photography, painting and cinema may occur.¹⁹

¹⁴ Martin, *Mise en Scène and Film Style*, pp. 187–88.

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 6 and p. 11.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 7.

¹⁷ Bellour, ‘Figures aux allures de plans’, in *La Mise en scène*, ed. by Jacques Aumont (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2000), pp. 109–26.

¹⁸ With these concepts he successfully contests the traditional thinking that contrasts the ‘cinema of the *mise en scène*’ with the ‘cinema of the image’, a way of thinking that is maintained, for example, in Aumont, *Le Cinéma et la Mise en Scène* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010).

¹⁹ These complex gestures of *mise en tableau* may also be perceived as the ones that distinguish ‘slow cinema’ (which operates to a large extent on the aesthetic of the *tableau*) from so called ‘slow TV’, in which instead of the contemplation of ‘the image’, there is a fluid perception of ‘the world’

Gestures of Containment: Mise en Cadre, Mise en Pose, Mise en Place, and Mise en Image

From the point of view of Agamben's perspective on the *dispositif*, perhaps the most important gestures in the production of a *tableau* are those that result in the containment of free flowing forms and movements, of the evanescent moments captured by the camera in a fixed structure, and which manage to connect 'the liquid intelligence of nature' inherent in the art of photography, as Jeff Wall has so poetically described,²⁰ with the stability of the pictorial organization. The role of placement within a narrative (of the *mise en histoire*) prevalent in fiction films is replaced by the gesture of anchoring 'the natural form, with its unpredictable contours',²¹ all the unfolding movements in time and the changes of light and colour to something that remains fixed within the rigorous composition as a picture. Most of the time this means a placing within a frame (*mise en cadre*), but it can also be a retained pose (*mise en pose*), an abstract geometrical or compositional element, patches of colour that remain unchanged within the ensemble. The *tableau* in its minimalist form conveys therefore an elemental play upon stillness versus mobility, in which mobility is always framed (and contained) by stillness or fixity.

The whitewash on grey concrete, the massive dark walls, the bright zigzag line of the neon light on the ceiling of an underground tunnel in Duisburg in the opening sequence of James Benning's essay film, a crossover between a documentary and an installation piece, entitled *Ruhr* (2009), composed of a series of digital long takes, frame the movement of the cars or cyclists passing by, of the withered leaves crawling along the eerie, deserted tunnel in the draught (fig. 1). The dynamics of the *tableau* recalls the famous photograph of Cartier Bresson (*Hyères, France, 1932*) which captures the moment a bicycle swooshes by in the street against the angular lines of descending stairs and the heavy walls. A similar structure of lines appears in the picturesque static takes of Benning's 2011 film, *Small Roads*: this time a yellow paint on the road, the angles of the improvised barbed wire fence, echoed in colour and form in the road sign stand firmly against the 'liquid' elements of the landscape, the stalks of grain waving in the wind, the clouds floating above in the sky (fig. 2). The carefully chosen position of the camera and the frame emphasizing the structuring elements in the landscape, enclosing the pulse of life, exemplifies more than anything Chevrier's claim that a *tableau* implies not simply a way of seeing but a way of being in the world, the '*tableau* always presents more than it represents.'²² The prolonged attention

through the hyperbolic application of the digital long take (or sometimes the playful flaunting of digital wizardry, as we see in projects like *Tokyo Reverse*, made in 2014 by Simon Bouisson and Ludovic Zuili).

²⁰ Jeff Wall, 'Photography and Liquid Intelligence', in *Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: MOMA, 2007 [1989]), pp.109–10.

²¹ Ivi, p. 109.

²² Chevrier, 'The Tableau and the Document of Experience', p. 51.



Figs 1-2: Stills from James Benning photo-filmic essays, *Rubr* (2009) and *Small Roads* (2011).

given to the frame does not only ensure the general mode of contemplation that defines the *tableau* mode, and suggest an implicit reflection upon its own constructedness, it also foregrounds cinema as moving photography acting as ‘the

pencil of nature',²³ allowing the photographic inscription of the world onto the screen, with an affluence of perceptual details.

What is more, such images always fix the frame upon a particular place: both of Benning's films quoted here are journeys into specific geographical regions, enabling an extraordinary attention to the sense of place. Thus, another important gesture is performed: a '*mise en place*' ensures that the aestheticism of the images, 'the sensory riches extracted from life'²⁴ are 'returned' to the world. These are the words of Jacques Rancière, who identifies this, for example, as the most relevant gesture in the cinema of Pedro Costa, whose films (also screened as installations) set in the derelict Fontainhas district of Lisbon, consist of a series of fixed frame photo-filmic *tableaux* reminiscent of the masters of the Dutch Golden Age.²⁵ They show us how the gesture of '*mise en image*' in the creation of the photo-filmic *tableau* may imply, in the words of Chevrier, 'a return to classical compositional forms, along with borrowings from the history of modern and pre-modern painting',²⁶ even if this means only a few basic elements or principles of pictorial organization. In this sense, Benning's installation, *Tulare Road* (2010), may present a pure form of this feature of the photo-filmic *tableau*. Working like an impressionist painter, he places side by side three takes of the same stretch of highway shot under different weather conditions: in fog, with an overcast sky and basking in light, arranging them in a triptych (fig. 3). These sensuous impressions linger over the abstraction of the landscape, constructed of lines converging at the horizon, where cars vanish into pixel sized dots or emerge and materialize as real objects.²⁷

I will conclude the overview of this set of gestures with a scene from a film made in 2014, *From What is Before* (*Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*). The five and a half hour long film was written, directed, filmed and edited by Lav Diaz. It chronicles in stark black-and-white images the life of a small rural community in the Philippines just before President Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law in 1972. Each loosely connected scene is like a photograph in motion, framed with the same aesthetic care (suggestive of both the emotional attachment and the reflexive distance of the act of remembrance), slowly introducing us to a land and its people, to a world that is about to disappear. In a hauntingly beautiful scene we see a woman with a baby in her arms covered in a blanket, sitting in a boat (fig. 4). She

²³ The metaphor originates from Henry Fox Talbot, a pioneer of photography who published a series of books with photo illustrations with the title *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–46).

²⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London, New York: Verso, 2009), p. 81.

²⁵ See more about Costa's cinematic poetics balancing between photography and painting in: Ágnes Pethó, 'Figurations of the Photofilmic: Stillness versus Motion – Stillness in Motion', in *The Photofilmic: Entangled Images in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*, ed. by Brianne Cohen, Alexander Streiberger (Leuven University Press: Lieven Gevaert Series, forthcoming).

²⁶ Chevrier, 'The Adventures of the Picture Form', p. 116.

²⁷ See an insightful analysis of Benning's work in Silke Panse, 'The Work of the Documentary Protagonist: The Material Labour of Aesthetics', in *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, ed. by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 155–76.



Fig. 3: James Benning's installation *Tulare Road* (2010), an impressionistic, photographic triptych (frame grab from the video available on Vimeo: <<https://vimeo.com/121401079>> [accessed 20 October 2015]).



Fig. 4: From *What is Before* (*Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*, 2014): the gesture of *mise en pose* and *mise en image* that invokes the figure of graceful Renaissance Madonnas.

sits motionless as the rain pours down on her and the boat advances, with the lush, damp foliage swaying on each side, releasing clouds of vapour around her, and we hear the rain pounding against the surface of the water. This time it is not only the contrast between the liquidity of nature surrounding the static figure or the lines of the boat making the linear perspective palpable in the image that mould the image into a *tableau* form. There is also an astonishing gesture of *mise en pose* and *mise en image* that invokes the figure of graceful renaissance Madonnas in painting, framed by nature, arranged in pyramidal compositions emphasizing depth of field. In the film the image is symptomatic of the coexistence of Christianity with local culture, and appears detached from the immediate context of events, as a possible vision in a dream, an apparition of a living picture.

The Act of Building an Image: the Photo-Filmic Diorama

In many of the contemporary *tableau*-films images appear to be built as a *photo-filmic diorama*. Often conceived as actual *tableaux vivants*, such images strike us not only with their constructedness, but also with a unique sense of spatiality, as images are not only contained within a given compositional frame, but they are built like a glass case display. Gustave Deutsch's film *Shirley: Visions of Reality* (2013), according to the author, is a meditation on the 'staging of reality'.²⁸ Each scene unfolds the reconstruction of one of Edward Hopper's canvases. The image is built in the form of an installation assembled as a theatrical set, combined with painted backgrounds and photographed as a cinematic *tableau vivant*²⁹ (fig. 5). The methodology is similar to the way Jeff Wall devises his light boxes, and almost identical to the procedure used by Gregory Crewdson in photography. Crewdson shoots his uncanny, hyperrealist cinematic photographs (also influenced by Hopper) on elaborate film sets constructed for the sake of a single image, sometimes using well-known film actors as models, and assembles the final image as a composite of several takes. The result is a photo-filmic diorama encapsulating a particular historical segment of reality (the tumultuous times of the 1950s and 1960s in Deutsch's film, the contemporary American suburbs in Crewdson's photos), with specimens of human beings placed in the image as puppets.

The Argentinean experimental filmmaker Raúl Perrone inflects this structure in the direction that emphasizes even more the photographic quality of the assemblage. Each take in his film entitled *Favula* (2013) is a composite black-and-white picture of moving images of still faces appearing to be floating in space like daguerreotype portraits. Placed behind another transparent moving image they give the impression of being in the process of exposure, over-exposure,

²⁸ See the synopsis on the author's website: <<http://www.shirley-visions-of-reality.com/index.html>> [accessed 27 August 2015].

²⁹ Deutsch presented scenes from the film along with its sets and props also in the form of an art installation assembled in collaboration with art director Hanna Schimek.



Fig. 5: Building an image like a photo-filmic diorama: *Shirley: Visions of Reality* (Gustav Deutsch, 2013).

affected by the sudden intrusions of light (fig. 6). In *Hierba* (2015) the cinematic *tableau vivant* reproduction of Édouard Manet's famous painting, *The Luncheon on the Grass* (*Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1865–66, oil on canvas 248×217 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) with its visible double layers of moving image and painted background recalls not only the colorized frames of early cinema and the photographic format of the daguerreotype, but also Louis Daguerre's *diorama theatre*, which exhibited superimposed paintings on both sides of a translucent canvas lit from different directions, producing stunning effects of *trompe l'oeil* (fig. 7).

Folding the Image and an Architecture of Photographic Spaces

As these previous examples have shown, building an image as a container often implies the overlapping of different layers of images, of different media folded onto each other, in other words, to appropriate with a more concrete meaning Bellour's phrase, an act of '*mise en pli*.' Bellour introduces the term derived from Deleuze's concept of the baroque fold,³⁰ to top all the other acts of 'placing' discernible in the moving image, indicating the introduction of multiple levels of sensations and abstractions folded onto each other within the same scene, an action of disfiguration of the concrete elements of the *mise en scène*, and an act of figuration on another level.³¹ In many cases of the contemporary *tableaux* films

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993).

³¹ Bellour, 'Figures aux allures de plans', and 'Le dépli des émotions', *Trafic*, 43 (September 2002), 93–128.



Figs 6-7: Raúl Perrone's *Favula* (2013): faces floating in space like daguerreotype portraits, and *Hierba* (2015): the reproduction of Manet's painting in a double layered picture.



(installations, feature films or experimental works), we may discern a similar process of actively folding the image 'from within' a single shot, resulting in 'folds' that reflect on complex relationships in cinema between photography, painting, architecture and installation art. Such folds may also stage a kind of intermedial 'metabolism' of post-cinema in which cinema internalizes and figurates the *dispositif* of the *tableau* within the image itself. This seems to be the case in which another moving image emerges within an inner frame, as a picture on the wall, a *tableau* in motion, juxtaposing and inverting flatness and space, movement and immobility, the 'cinematic' and the 'photographic' within the same shot. James Benning's short film, *Two Cabins* (2011), also exhibited as a two channel installation,³² presents this structure in its purest form by presenting the cabin

³² The film (available on You Tube: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Na7jNa4uj4>> [accessed 20 October 2015]) is part of a larger, more complex project, conceived by Benning in which he



Figs 8-9: Apichatpong Weerasethakul: *Mekong Hotel* (2012) and *Syndromes and a Century* (*Sang sattawat*, 2006): moving photographs placed in the *découpage* of windows on the wall

window as a picture of trees, as a moving still life placed on the wall. Similarly, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Mekong Hotel* (2012) contrasts the abstract lines and forms of the static hotel room, which appears as a kind of installation space, with the fluidity of the movement in the 'picture' revealed in the *découpage* of the window (fig. 8). The opening sequence of Weerasethakul's *Syndromes and a Century* (*Sang sattawat*, 2006) offers a more unconventional variation on this with its continuous tracking shot starting from a similarly abstract space towards a window that unfolds a photograph-like image (fig. 9).

The astonishing finale of Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs* (*Jiao you*, 2013) provides an emblematic, slow sequence for folding movement into stillness and combining different types and textures of images. The scene stages a cluster of image planes around the human figure, in and outside the ruinous architectural space and internalizes a *tableau*. We watch for over five minutes the dark silhouette of the protagonist standing motionless in front of a mural, in fact a charcoal painting based on a photograph, enclosed by picturesque walls, while the whole

actually reconstructed the philosopher Henry David Thoreau's and the anarchist, 'Unabomber', Ted Kaczynski's cabins to reflect on two versions of social isolation.



Figs 10-11: Folds between architecture and photography in Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs* (*Jiao you*, 2013).

scene is lit as an elaborate installation for us to contemplate (fig. 10). The image is symptomatic in fact of another possible *'mise en pli'*, in which the *tableau* is entirely built on the folds between architecture and photography. There are several scenes like this in Tsai Ming-liang's films, which sometimes include a protagonist who contemplates a view from within a space emerging like a sophisticated image installation (see a frame from *Visage*, 2009, fig. 12). In such cases spaces are made abstract by their dense overlay with photographic reflections, the multiplication of inner frames, often with strange loops, or inversions (see fig. 11, or the upside down reflection in Tsai's *Journey to the West/Xi you*, 2014, fig. 13), challenging the traditional frontality of the *tableau*, and resulting in a unique cinematic architecture of photographic spaces. Chevrier emphasized how the *ta-*



Fig. 12: Tsai Ming-liang's *Visage* (2009).



Fig. 13: The entanglement of moving photographs into the fabric of our lives: Tsai Ming-liang's *Journey to the West* (*Xi you*, 2014).

bleau is primarily an autonomous 'way of being in the world',³³ images like these record a re-entanglement of moving photographs into the fabric of our lives and suggest the contemplation of a world that folds around us in infinite variations of inter-media *tableaux*.

³³ Chevrier's presentation video recorded at the symposium organized at the Tate Modern in London, available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99gOPABmVUM>> [accessed 20 October 2015].

Conclusion: the Photographic Experience of the Moving Tableau

The *tableau* as a *dispositif* always implies a viewer standing in front of it, attempting to comprehend the picture as a whole, which is traditionally a single picture, displayed in a manner that visibly separates it from the surrounding space. In classical and modernist cinema, the *tableau* imposes a halt (a break in the narrative, a moment of self-reflexivity or pure visual attraction) by isolating the single take within a series. Post-cinematic *tableau*-films, on the other hand, not only constitute a separate paradigm standing apart from mainstream trends in cinema, but also isolate their viewers. With the exception of film festivals, which only a few people can attend, these films are usually watched in conditions that favour a more intimate reception, like the occasional screenings in film clubs, film schools, art museums, or they are viewed at home, in front of a computer.³⁴ Furthermore, through the repeated gestures of *tableauisation* named above, emphasised in the long, fixed frame sequences, the moving image experience morphs into a photographic one, extending the gesture contained in Talbot's metaphor of 'the pencil of nature': slowly engraving individual pictures into our memory. In either case, this cannot be viewed in terms of what we traditionally regard as *cinophilia* any more. This is not the pleasure of going to the movies and experiencing a ghost-like illusion in the dark space of the cinema theatre, which Bellour defends so passionately as 'the cinema, alone' against all the other forms of moving pictures. It is the sheer pleasure of being in the presence of images, of beholding a single shot as a *tableau*, of facing the image, alone.

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³⁴ The difference between such films viewed in the traditional environment of the cinema theatre, on the computer or in the art gallery will naturally affect the intensity of the contemplative 'disposition' (and as such should constitute an important field in the study of post-cinema), nevertheless, as I have argued, we should also consider the convergence imposed by the trans-medial *dispositif* of the *tableau* itself.