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Everyday Transcendence: Contemporary Art Film And The Return To Right Now

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EVERYDAY TRANSCENDENCE: CONTEMPORARY ART FILM AND THE RETURN TO RIGHT NOW

by

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DEDICATION

For Sue, who always sees the magic in the everyday.

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INTRODUCTION

"Now" is never just a moment. The Long Now is the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer your sense of Now, the more past and future it includes. It's ironic that, at a time when humankind is at a peak of its technical powers, able to create huge global changes that will echo down the centuries, most of our social systems seem geared to increasingly short nows.
     —Brian Eno

We walk around like there's some holy moments and there are all the other moments that are not holy, right, but this moment is holy, right? And if film can let us see that, like frame it so that we see, like, "Ah, this moment. Holy." And it's like, "Holy, holy, holy," moment by moment. But, like, who can live that way?
     —Caveh Zahedi

Of Clocks and Cinema

In 1996, a diverse group of scientists, artists, and other thinkers came together to form a group called the Long Now Foundation. The foundation's goal is to provide an antidote to what the founders see as the ever-increasing pace of life and the ever-decreasing collective attention span of society. One of the foundation's flagship projects is the Clock of the Long Now, a massive mechanical clock designed to measure out the next 10,000 years. Instead of seconds, minutes, and hours, the clock measures time in years, centuries, and millennia. The clock's inventor, computer scientist Daniel Hillis, proposed the clock as a means to reclaim a sense of future that he says has gone missing in the public consciousness:

> When I was a child, people used to talk about what would happen by the year 02000.[1] For the next thirty years they kept talking about what would happen by the year 02000, and now no one mentions a future date at all. The future has been shrinking by one year per year for my entire life. I think it is time for us to start a long-term project that gets people thinking past the mental barrier of an ever-shortening future. (Hillis, qtd. in Brand)

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1. The Long Now Foundation and its members tend to render the year in five rather than four digits (e.g., 02000 instead of 2000) in order to emphasize the extremely long views of time that they champion. And, as they jokingly explain, "to solve the deca-millennium bug which will come into effect in about 8,000 years."

This idea that the future has disappeared is a recurring theme for the Long Now Foundation. Author Michael Chabon, reflecting on the Clock, describes the future as "a story that, for a while now, we've been pretty much living without." Like Hillis, Chabon notes that somewhere along the line, we went from imagining the future to living it as the present, in the process losing "our ability, or our will, to envision anything beyond the next hundred years or so, as if we lacked the fundamental faith that there will in fact be any future at all beyond that not-too-distant date. Or maybe we stopped talking about the Future around the time that, with its microchips and its twenty-four-hour news cycles, it arrived." Chabon goes on to argue that the very idea of even imagining the future has come to feel like "something historical, outmoded, no longer viable or attainable" (Chabon). Indeed, one of the underlying purposes of the Clock is to restore a lost sense of faith in human society and culture. The foundation points out that the intended 10,000-year lifespan of the Clock "is about the age of civilization, so a 10K-year Clock would measure out a future of civilization equal to its past. That assumes we are in the middle of whatever journey we are on – an implicit statement of optimism" (Kelly).

If the Clock of the Long Now seeks to reinstill in society a belief in the future, it also hopes in the process to make us rethink our relationship with the present. The idea of the Long Now, which provides both the clock and the organization with their names, was coined by British musician and Long Now Foundation co-founder Brian Eno. For Eno, to live in the Long Now is to realize that "'now' is never just a moment," but that "the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future." The idea of the Long Now is to develop as long a sense of now as possible; that is, to live the present with the maximum possible sense of the past and the future. Eno developed the idea of the Long Now after his first visit to New York City. In New York, Eno was struck by the locals' attitude towards the present:

> Everything was temporary. Enormous buildings came and went, careers rose and crashed in weeks. You rarely got the feeling that anyone had the time to think two years ahead, let alone ten or a hundred. Everyone seemed to be passing through. It was undeniably lively, but the downside was that it seemed selfish, irresponsible, and randomly dangerous. I came to think of this as "The Short Now", and this suggested the possibility of its opposite—"The Long Now". (Eno)

That was 1978. Eno and his colleagues created the Long Now Foundation back in 1996—more than 20 years ago now. The amount of technological and social change in that time period has been staggering. The late 90s, the 00s, and the early 2010s saw computers finish their move from a specialty item to a household fixture. As computing technology spread, the internet came with it, evolving all the while. Bulletin board systems, mailing lists, chatrooms, and MUDs gave way to the Web 2.0, social networking, and MMO gaming. Meanwhile the technologies of connectivity became smaller, more affordable, and more ubiquitous. Today's smart phones have many times more processing and networking power than a top of the line computer from 1996. Perhaps more importantly, these devices are in almost every pocket in the developed world. Today more than ever, we are always on, always connected, always hurtling towards a shorter and shorter "now."

Of course, not all aspects of society and culture have followed this general trend. There are always counter-currents, among them the Long Now Foundation and their various projects. This dissertation is about another cultural holdout: a branch of contemporary art cinema that I call "everyday transcendence." I use this term to refer to a group of films that have, I argue, grown out of a transcendental style of cinema first described by filmmaker and critic Paul Schrader. This new school of transcendental films has emerged sporadically over the last 20 or so years in direct response to the technological, cultural, and social pressures of our contemporary moment. Adapting and expanding the formal techniques of the transcendental style Schrader outlines, these films present a new way of understanding the present by placing

everyday experience into the context of a larger-scale temporal system. Just as the Clock of the Long Now asks us to reconsider daily life in terms of a human story stretching tens of thousands of years, these everyday transcendental films seek to relocate the everyday within a long view of time, thereby redeeming our ever-shortening present and restoring balance to our everyday lives.

Transcendental Style

In his book *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, Schrader outlines the basic structure of cinematic transcendence as it emerges in the work of each of the titular filmmakers. Hoping to counter the potential vagueness and imprecision of the term "transcendence," Schrader begins with rigorous definitions: "'Transcendental style' is not a vague label like 'religious film' which can be attached to films which feature certain religious themes and evoke the appropriate emotions; it is not a catchbasin for all the sniffles, sobs, and goosebumps one has experienced at religious films. . . . It is only *necessarily* a style" (36). The goal of that style, logically enough, is to express the Transcendent itself, the "Wholly Other," a realm of spiritual, Holy, or Ideal being which lies beyond normal human experience (37-8). Schrader attaches no specific religious entities or concepts (e.g., Christ, or Nirvana) to this definition; what, exactly, constitutes the transcendental Wholly Other varies with each artist and each work of art. For the purposes of defining a transcendental style, it is enough to specify that a transcendental work of art aims "to express the Holy itself (the Transcendent), and not to express or illustrate holy feelings" (39).[2] Schrader is always careful to keep this distinction clear,

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2. Schrader makes it clear, likewise, that not all films with religious themes, stories, or iconography are transcendental. In fact, he dedicates a chapter at the end of his book to distinguishing between transcendental film and religious film. Chapter One of this study touches on this distinction with respect to Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life*, a film that exhibits both transcendental and religious tendencies.

insisting again and again on the "difficult but absolutely crucial point [that] transcendental style is a form, not an experience" (77).

So what is transcendental form? Schrader breaks it down into "three progressive steps" that a transcendental film moves through, steps which define both the style and the general structure of the transcendental film (66). The first step is to create a stylized representation of the everyday that emphasizes the "dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living." This stylized version of the everyday strips life of all of its expressive, emotional, or dramatic qualities, thereby "celebrat[ing] the bare threshold of existence, those banal occurrences which separate the living from the dead, the physical from the material" (67). For example, Schrader points to the stylistic tendencies of Yasujirô Ozu, whose static and repetitive compositions, non-expressive actors, predictable editing, and indifference to dramatic action all lead to an extremely stripped down reduction of everyday life. On its own, this banal everyday "would see life deprived of meaning, expression, drama, or catharsis" (70). But in the context of transcendental style, the bland austerity of the everyday serves a specific purpose, namely to "[prepare] reality for the intrusion of the Transcendent" (67).

This intrusion begins with the second step in Schrader's progression, disparity. Disparity occurs when powerful human emotions suddenly emerge from the cold, unfeeling surface of the stylized everyday, resulting in "an inexplicable outpouring of human feeling which can have no adequate receptacle" because the film itself continues to insist on the purely objective materiality of the everyday world. "During disparity," Schrader says, "the spectator watches agonizing human feelings and experiences on screen; there is no expression of the Transcendent. Instead, there is only a totally unresolved tension between a maximum of human expression and nonexpression." For Schrader, this tension results from the fact that "this 'human density' is

actually a spiritual density. This boundless compassion [in Ozu, or agony in Bresson, etc.] is more than any human can bear and more than any human can receive . . . [it] is marked by solemnity and suffering; it is an extension of the holy agony" (71). Disparity begins gradually, at first teasing the viewer's emotions with just a hint of emotional expression peeking through the cold veneer of the everyday. But as the film goes on, disparity emerges more and more until at last it erupts into a decisive action, "a totally bold call for emotion which dismisses any pretense of everyday reality":

> The decisive action breaks the everyday stylization; it is an incredible event within the banal reality which must by and large be taken on faith. In its most drastic form, as in Dreyer's *Ordet*, this decisive action is an actual miracle, the raising of the dead. In its less drastic forms, it is still somewhat miraculous: a nonobjective, emotional event within a factual, emotionless environment. The technical stops employed by the everyday are to varying degrees pulled out—the music soars, the characters emote. The everyday denigrated the viewer's emotions, showing they were of no use; disparity first titillates those emotions, suggesting that there might be a place for them, and then in the decisive action suddenly and inexplicably demands the viewer's full emotional output. (74)

The decisive action brings disparity to a head, demanding a resolution to the tension between the expressionless everyday and the sudden emotional outburst that has just occurred. Moreover, it demands a reconciliation between the material world of the everyday and the spiritual world suggested by the disparate emotions that, Schrader argues, come "only from touching the transcendent ground of being" (71).

In direct response to such a decisive action, transcendental style advances to its third and final step, stasis. By confronting the viewer with a still and silent image—the vase in Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), or the cross at the end of Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951)—the transcendental film "does not resolve disparity, but freezes it into stasis," allowing the viewer to understand the film's tensions from a new, transcendental perspective: "To the transcending mind," Schrader says, "man and nature may be perpetually locked in conflict, but they are

paradoxically one and the same" (76). The final image of stasis in a transcendental film is "intended to suggest the oneness of all things":

> This static view represents the "new" world in which the spiritual and the physical can coexist, still in tension and unresolved, but as part of a larger scheme in which all phenomena are more or less expressive of a larger reality—the Transcendent. In stasis, the viewer is able to crossinterpret between what seemed to be contradictions: he can read deep emotion into the inexpressive faces and cold environment, and he can read factuality into the inexplicable spiritual actions. (108)

Stasis, Schrader says, "establishes an image of a second reality which can stand beside the ordinary reality; it represents the Wholly Other" (76). Stasis is also the step that, once and for all, codifies all of the elements of the transcendental film into a strict aesthetic form. On their own, Schrader says, "the everyday and disparity are experiential . . . they taunt and tease the spectator's emotions. But stasis is formalistic; it incorporates those emotions into a larger form. . . . If successful, stasis transforms empathy into aesthetic appreciation, experience into expression, emotions into form" (77).

This distinction between experience and form is crucial because, Schrader says, "a form can express the Transcendent, an experience cannot. A form can express the common ground in which all things share. An experience can only express one man's reaction to that common ground" (77-9). In other words, cinematic transcendence does not hinge on creating religious or spiritual feelings, nor does it depend on any particular affective or intellectual transaction with its viewer. Rather, it is based entirely on the formal progression from everyday to disparity to decisive action to stasis. Likewise, while all of these formal elements together make up transcendental style, none is exclusive to transcendental cinema and none on its own makes a film transcendental. As Schrader points out, "The use of stasis does not make Antonioni a transcendental artist any more than the use of the everyday by Warhol, mild disparity by Forman, or decisive action by Buñuel make them transcendental artists" (80). That is because

transcendental cinema is defined not just by its individual formal elements, but by the specific relationship between and progression through each of these elements.

A Theory of Everyday Transcendence

While everyday transcendence is rooted in the style and the basic philosophical approach of the classical transcendental cinema Schrader describes, the everyday version of the style crucially shifts the focus of transcendence from the spiritual to the temporal. The basic premise of the everyday transcendental film is that, as a character in Richard Linklater's *Before Sunset* (2004) puts it, "time is a lie." That is to say that time, as we experience it and understand it and think about it in terms of our everyday lives, is not all there is. Just as the everyday—that is, the material world of human experience—is only one part of a larger picture in classical transcendence, so too is the everyday—that is, the ordinary time of human life—only part of a larger temporal picture in everyday transcendence.

This turn towards time is in keeping with classical transcendental cinema, which is, after all, an offshoot of the art cinema movement of the mid-twentieth century. This midcentury art cinema is notably characterized by its approach to time. As Gilles Deleuze famously argues, the fundamental distinction between classical narrative cinema and art cinema comes down to a reversal of priority between time and action. The classical narrative cinema, characterized by the "movement-image," prioritizes the sensory-motor linkages of action and reaction, movement and change. In the cinema of the movement-image, time is used in support of narrative continuity and development—in other words, the film's editing, its structure, the pacing of individual scenes and shots are all chosen based on considerations of drama and action. But in the art film, Deleuze says, this "sensory-motor schema is no longer in operation" (*Cinema 2* 41). Art film on the whole is slower, less concerned (if at all) with narrative continuity and drama, more

concerned with psychological interiority and with the passage of time in its own right. Hence its organization around what Deleuze calls the "time-image." In art film, time rather than action becomes primary, so that "time is no longer the measure of movements but movement is the perspective of time" (*Cinema 2* 22). In subordinating movement to time, Deleuze invokes Henri Bergson, whose philosophy of time is grounded on just this shift. For Deleuze, art film is an artistic parallel to Bergson's insistence that movement and position derive from time rather than the opposite. Thus, by deemphasizing action, the art film makes its ultimate aim "to achieve the direct presentation of time" (*Cinema 2* 38). In the art film, Deleuze says, it is not space so much as time that we move in and through: "the direct time-image always gives us access to that Proustian dimension where people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space" (*Cinema 2* 39).

This characteristic stylistic shift in the use of time is the source of the basic formal materials of transcendental cinema, particularly the slowness and emotional emptiness of the everyday and the liberal use of stasis in place of traditional dramatic climaxes and denouements. Schrader, for his part, ultimately locates classical transcendental cinema within this larger transition from action to time. Though he initially wrote his study of transcendental style in 1971—more than a decade before the original publication of Deleuze's two-volume study—a new edition of *Transcendental Style*, published in 2018, sees Schrader revisiting his text with a new introduction that summarizes Deleuze's ideas before reconceiving of classical transcendental cinema as a transitional step on the path from early art house film to contemporary slow cinema, a "way station, if you will, in the post-World War II progression from neorealism to surveillance video" (3). I think, though, that Schrader's reconception places transcendental cinema too much as a transitional form; he does identify some much more recent

films in the old transcendental style, but these are largely holdouts according to the evolutionary path Schrader traces from classical transcendence to contemporary slow cinema and related forms. What I am interested in here is a different evolutionary branch of transcendental cinema altogether. My argument is that the basic style Schrader originally describes has reemerged in its own right, but transformed. Whereas classical transcendental film adapts the techniques of art cinema (fractured, deemphasized narrative, alienated characters, long expanses of dead time) to approach the spiritual, everyday transcendence uses these and similar techniques to approach time itself *as* a transcendent ground for experience and being.

The capacity of the temporal to serve as the basis of transcendence is linked to everyday transcendence's intuition that time is a lie. Everyday transcendence begins with the idea that the present is always in excess of itself, that, as Eno says, "'now' is never just a moment." In everyday transcendence, time simultaneously exists on two levels: the level of ordinary, everyday experience and a larger, overarching temporality of some kind. This larger view of time varies from work to work, variously appearing as eternity, history, and so on, but in each case the goal of the everyday transcendental style is to make the viewer realize that the present consists of more than itself, that "nowness" is inextricably connected to a larger scheme of temporal being. Thus in a work of everyday transcendence, time is multilayered; it has a depth that is built from what Gaston Bachelard calls "the superimposition of several independent times" (102). This figure of superimposed time has a number of philosophical reference points, starting with Deleuze himself, who gets at something similar when he describes time in the art film as a "mutual image," an "indivisible unity of an actual image and 'its' virtual image" (*Cinema 2* 78). Deleuze, following Bergson, calls on this figure of actual/virtual in order to explain how we experience the passage of time from present to past. "What is actual," Deleuze says:

is always a present. But then, precisely, the present changes or passes. We can always say that it becomes past when it no longer is, when a new present replaces it. But this is meaningless. It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. (*Cinema 2* 79)

Throughout this dissertation, I explore a number of other philosophical figures of temporal superimposition, ranging from Martin Heidegger's discussion of the moment of vision to Augustine's conception of time and eternity to Brian Massumi's Deleuzian exploration of the virtual to Bachelard's theory of the dialectic of duration. What all of these philosophies have in common is that—like each of the films in this study—they describe the present as containing both "now" and something else. That something else, the larger schema of time, is the transcendental other of the everyday in everyday transcendence. Like the spiritual Wholly Other in classical transcendence, it can't be shown directly, but can only be approached through the formal progression of transcendental style. This everyday transcendental style starts with the basic features Schrader describes but makes some important adaptations. The progression of everyday transcendence is as follows.

1. Everydayness: the film begins with a stylized representation of everyday temporality, that is, time as it is experienced in daily life.

This representation varies from film to film, and unlike in Schrader's schema, the stylization of the everyday need not necessarily emphasize the banal and expressionless. In fact, all of the films in this study contain significantly more drama and expressiveness than the films Schrader focuses on. Instead, the goal of everydayness in everyday transcendence is to define a sense of "nowness" or "presentness" or "immediacy" that will later be transcended.

2. Disparity: the emergence, intrusion, or discovery of a temporality that exceeds or conflicts with everyday nowness.

Just as the banal and emotionless everyday in Schrader deliberately gives us no basis for the emotions that arise in disparity, the nowness of the everyday gives us no basis for the other strands of temporality that emerge in the everyday transcendental style. Whereas in Schrader's model, disparity emerges gradually over the course of a film, in everyday transcendence, the everyday is often disparate from the start. Frequently, in the very process of establishing everyday time, the film presents us with incongruous bits of temporality, pieces of a past, or future, or an altogether different concept of time (e.g., the eternal) that seem to have no place in the everyday experience the film is building. Time is very much out of joint in the everyday transcendental film, and we soon find ourselves caught between the film's insistence on the nowness of the present and the growing suspicion (fostered by the film itself) that nowness is a lie, or at least, a very incomplete picture.

3. Stasis (or similar): the use of static or empty shots to effect a transcendental reconceptualization of time.

As our sense of temporal disparity reaches a peak, everyday transcendence uses comparatively static images to freeze in place the temporal conflicts that have emerged over the course of the film in hopes of giving the viewer a new, transcendental understanding of the nature of time and the connections (rather than just the conflicts) between the everyday and whatever larger view of time the film espouses. Everyday transcendence sometimes uses conventional static shots to create this effect, but some films experiment with other techniques that achieve the same end. Linklater's *Before* films, for instance, use emptiness rather than stasis per se, and Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* uses a drastic stylistic break (moving from animation

to live action) to accomplish a similar effect. In all cases though, the basic idea is the same as in the films Schrader describes; stasis (or its equivalent) serves as the culmination of temporal disparity, and is the formal mechanic that (if successful) induces the viewer to transcend the everyday and see time as a larger scheme of which everyday experience is but one part.

4. A return: after effecting a moment of temporal transcendence, the film returns to the everyday, which is now transformed by the viewer's newfound understanding of transcendental time.

This is the biggest formal change from the model Schrader describes. Whereas the classical transcendental film ends with stasis—thus sustaining the point of contact with the Transcendental other—everyday transcendence typically ends with a return to the everyday existence with which it started. By doing so, the everyday transcendental film seeks to redeem, restore, and/or validate everyday experience. When we return to everydayness at the end of an everyday transcendental film, we find the familiar trappings of daily life subtly transformed by what we have just experienced. This experiential return is often coupled with a formal one; everyday transcendental films tend to favor a sort of bookending in which an image, a line of dialogue, or some other formal element is repeated at the beginning and end of the film. In the context of everyday transcendence, this bookending suggests a connection between beginning and end, thus reinforcing the sense of temporal unity that is created by locating everyday experience within a larger, unifying scheme of temporality. Not every film uses both types of return, and each film tends to experiment liberally with these techniques (Linklater, for example, includes returns that entail callbacks to previous films in his oeuvre, whereas *Waltz With Bashir* is built around a "return" to a present we experience only at the very end of the film). Regardless,

the technique is common enough, and important enough to the philosophical effect of the films in question, to be recognized as a key part of the everyday transcendental style.

The remainder of this study consists of my efforts to further explore and elucidate the everyday transcendental style as it appears in a number of recent films. The chapters are organized around a progression from more traditional to less traditional interpretations of cinematic transcendence. Partly this progression coincides with a move from films that borrow heavily from established art film traditions to films that break more original formal ground. But perhaps more importantly, this progression tracks the movement of everyday transcendence away from the spiritual and towards a truly secular, temporal transcendence. This shift is part of what I hope to capture in the term "everyday transcendence." Not only are the films in this study concerned with transcending *everyday* experience, but at the same time, the nature of that transcendence is increasingly "*everyday*" in the sense of ordinary and familiar (the exact opposite, in other words, of the Holy realm that is the basis of classical transcendence). That said, I do not mean to imply that everyday transcendence entails a teleological progression from sacred to secular, where a fully secular transcendence is the end goal or the final form of the style. Rather, different degrees of spirituality and secularity exist and evolve in parallel across the body of everyday transcendence. I am most interested in showing the flexibility of the everyday transcendental style, as the films in question mutate increasingly further from the forms that inspire them while retaining the basic formal hallmarks and the overall philosophical mindset of the style.

Chapter One introduces the everyday transcendental style with a relatively traditional take on cinematic transcendence. The chapter focuses on Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), a film that asks explicitly religious questions and explores those questions as a function

of time. Specifically, the film poses a crisis of faith as a disparity between worldly human temporality (i.e., everyday time) and divine eternity. After exposing the gap between the temporal and the eternal, the film seeks to bridge that gap through a transcendental move that draws on Heidegger's idea of the moment of vision and, in the process, shows some surprising parallels between Heidegger's thoughts about time and those of Christian philosopher Augustine of Hippo. In conjunction with Heidegger and Augustine, the film offers a powerful philosophical basis for the formal principle of the return to the everyday.

Chapter Two explores the work of Richard Linklater, namely his *Before* trilogy (*Before Sunrise*, 1995; *Before Sunset*, 2004; and *Before Midnight*, 2013) and the aesthetically related *Boyhood* (2014). Linklater's approach to transcendence remains rooted in tradition (his films draw heavily on classical neorealist aesthetics and flirt with a quasi-religious idea of eternity), yet they ultimately push towards a more secular, everyday conception of transcendence. This secular push is rooted in time; far more explicitly than Malick, Linklater makes transcendental style about time. Whereas Malick begins with questions of faith and doubt, the human and the eternal, and then frames these questions as a problem of temporal perception, Linklater begins with an unwavering focus on the right-nowness of everyday experience, only to find that "right now" is never an absolute present, but instead always contains other "right nows" in the form of its own past and future. Thus Linklater's central theme, particularly in the *Before* series, is the folding of time, the idea that every moment always contains another moment, so that every now is actually an opening to a larger, transcendent Now that encompasses all possible moments. After exploring this idea at length in the *Before* films, I move to *Boyhood*, which conveys a contemporary everyday experience in which now is on the brink of disappearing in the face of 21st century life. Yet from the increasingly fragmented short nows of this new everyday,

disparity arises as gradual slowing and, at last, a transcendental return to the long now that characterized the *Before* series.

Whereas *Boyhood* shows a present that is threatened by an accelerated rush towards the future, Chapter Three explores what happens when the present is held captive by a past trauma. This chapter focuses on Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* (2008), a film in which the present is haunted by its past as Folman seeks to recover his memories of his involvement in a civilian massacre during the 1982 war between Israel and Lebanon. To get at the nature of transcendence in Folman's film, I place it alongside a thematically similar film by Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). The purpose of the comparison is not aesthetic so much as philosophical. Both films feature characters who exist in a haunted present in which everyday experience is unreal and in which "now" is continuously dominated and recolored by the traumas of the past. Yet where Resnais's film explicitly rejects transcendence, insisting in the end that we can never escape the pasts that have shaped who we are today, *Bashir* is entirely built around a transcendental trajectory. *Bashir*'s brand of transcendence is important for two reasons. First, it completes the move towards a truly secular transcendence. Whereas Linklater's capital-N Nowness and moments-within-moments still carry a quasi-spiritual sense of the eternal, *Bashir* makes transcendence purely a question of history and the everyday. The film's transcendental other is, in fact, a specific past moment that is made present at the end of the film. Moreover, *Bashir*'s moment of transcendence is made possible only because of a real-life act of mediation: the film, which is almost entirely animated, ends with a cut to live-action archival footage of the aftermath of the massacre. Thus the film's transcendence of the haunted present is based entirely on a technological mediation of everyday life. *Bashir* thereby creates a transcendental aesthetic

that is no longer based purely on cinematic techniques, but which is rooted in the interaction between different forms of mediation.

Chapter Four explores this post-cinematic approach to transcendence at more length through Douglas Gordon and Phillipe Parreno's *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006). Whereas *Bashir* ends with a transcendental moment that is rooted in and enabled by an act of mediation, *Zidane* shows us an everyday that is entirely encompassed and saturated by mediation. The film follows football star Zinedine Zidane in real time over the course of a single match, insisting simultaneously on the extreme immediacy of what we see and on the constructed, mediated nature of that impression of immediacy. In the process, the film defines a present marked by a series of disparities, not just between immediacy and mediation, but also between closeness and distance (to/from Zidane) and, most importantly, between the continuity and discontinuity of time. When it eventually transcends this conflicted, immediated present, *Zidane* uncovers a central principle of time—and of everyday transcendence—in the form of what Gaston Bachelard calls the dialectic of duration, which locates temporal superimposition as a basic, unifying principle of temporal experience. This temporal superimposition is the basic model for the transcendental other in everyday transcendence, and thus provides an overriding principle that helps unify the individual examples of everyday transcendence that we see in earlier chapters.

CHAPTER 1 "WHERE WERE YOU?": THE EVERYDAY AND ETERNITY IN TERRENCE MALICK'S *THE TREE OF LIFE*

In analyzing contemporary transcendental cinema, Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* provides an ideal entry point. Compared to the other films in this study, it is the most traditional and the most closely adherent to Schrader's model of transcendental style. Like the films Schrader writes about, *The Tree of Life* has a distinctly spiritual inclination, and like the films in Schrader's study, Malick's film sets up a tension between the everyday and disparity before culminating in images of stasis. But *The Tree of Life* also makes some important changes to the transcendental style. Most notably, the relationship between the figures of everydayness, disparity, and stasis is no longer that of a linear progression but is now much more fluid and complicated. Furthermore, *The Tree of Life* makes the question of transcendence (and of transcendental style) a question of temporality, specifically of the relationship between the everyday and the eternal. This chapter explores how *The Tree of Life* seeks to transcend and redeem everyday experience by exposing the rift between the everyday and the eternal while simultaneously exploring the deep resonances between these two forms of time.

While *The Tree of Life* ultimately seeks to achieve transcendence by way of its aesthetic style and structure, the film starts by posing a theological question in the form of its narrative. In essence, the film is a meditation on the Biblical Book of Job and on that book's central theological crux, which is the question of how and why a benevolent, omnipotent god can allow unfairness, cruelty, and evil. The film centers on Jack O'Brien, who as a child and an adult struggles to reconcile his faith in God with the presence of evil in the world. The plot, told in nonlinear, sometimes abstract fashion, hinges on Jack's relationship with his youngest brother, R.L. (Laramie Eppler), who as a young adult dies in the Vietnam War. Most of the film focuses on Jack's adolescence (where the character is played by Hunter McCracken), though throughout

the film we see brief but meaningful glimpses of Jack as an adult (played by Sean Penn). In exploring Jack's crisis of faith, *The Tree of Life* brings up some common Malick themes, including the idea of a fall from grace and a longing to return to a more harmonious way of living. But more than any of Malick's previous work, *The Tree of Life* develops these themes in an explicitly religious context, and as a result, the film is permeated by a singular tension, which is the disparity between the human experience of the world and the divine, or transcendental understanding of it. In short, Jack struggles to transcend the evils and misfortunes of everyday life in order to see God's hand in a world that seems devoid of His presence. In exploring this spiritual crisis, Malick makes the disparity between man and God a temporal problem, rooted in the disparity between human, worldly time and divine eternity. This disparity is at the heart of *The Tree of Life*; the film develops a distinct aesthetic for each of these two temporalities, and it is through the interplay of these temporal aesthetics that the film develops its philosophical and theological ideas.

The Tree of Life and The Book of Job

Although *The Tree of Life* is not an adaptation or retelling of The Book of Job, the themes and lessons of Job's story are the basis for essentially every aspect of the film, from its plot to its structure to its ideas about faith and time. This Biblical grounding is most obvious in the film's several explicit references to Job. The first such reference is the epigraph on the film's opening title card: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7) Another allusion comes midway through the film in a scene which shows the O'Brien family in church during a sermon on Job. Such allusions are important because they establish a Biblical grounding for the spiritual

dilemma Jack faces, and this Biblical grounding is the film's basis for working through his dilemma.

But even beyond these explicit allusions, Job's story echoes throughout *The Tree of Life*'s narrative. The Biblical story of Job tells of a prosperous and faithful man whose loyalty to God is tested when Satan takes away his possessions, kills his children, and afflicts Job himself with disease. Through all of this suffering, Job does not curse or deny God, but he does decry the injustice of his situation, demanding an audience with God so that he can assert his innocence and challenge the unfairness of his plight. In a series of dialogues, Job and his friends debate the nature of God's justice and question whether the good are really rewarded and the wicked really punished. Throughout these dialogues, Job insists that his fate is unjust, asking of God at one point "Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?" (10:3).[3] He also points to injustice in the world at large, from the desolation of the poor to the prosperity of murderers, thieves, and adulterers (24:1-17).

These kinds of questions and accusations resonate throughout *The Tree of Life*, primarily—though not exclusively—through the character of Jack. Both Jack and Job look around at the world and see suffering unassuaged, cruelty unanswered. The most obvious example of the world's injustice is the death of the youngest O'Brien brother, R.L., which is the central trauma around which the whole film revolves. But as we see in the film's coming-of-age story, even as a child, long before R.L.'s death, Jack is keenly aware of cruelty in the world. In one sequence, Jack notices a disabled man hobbling with a cane; the camera catches Jack's frightened expression as he looks over his shoulder to watch the man walking away. The film then cuts immediately to a crime scene, where Jack, his mother (Jessica Chastain), and his other

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3. All Biblical references are to Robert G. Hoerber et al., eds, *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*.

brother Steve (Tye Sheridan) see several men arrested for reasons we never learn. The episode is confusing and unsettling for Jack, as evidenced by his asking in voice-over, "Can it happen to anyone?" This question reveals a sudden sense of vulnerability in response to what appears to the boys to be a random and unmotivated scene of distress. This sequence, in its fragmented images of hardship and misfortune, shows Jack's growing realization that the world can be dangerous, harsh, and unkind; and moreover, that these misfortunes can befall anyone at any time in any variety of ways.

If this sequence serves as Jack's introduction to the unfairness of the world, another sequence a short time later reinforces the lesson and shows Jack the full depths of the world's cruelty. In this sequence, the O'Brien family witnesses a boy of about Jack's age drown at a community pool. As before, the scene visually emphasizes Jack's confusion and panic in a series of shaky, rapidly-cutting handheld shots of the drowned boy's mother, of Mr. O'Brien (Brad Pitt) directing others and attempting to revive the boy, and of Jack and his brothers looking on in fear. As the sequence continues, Jack begins to question God explicitly for the first time. After the scene depicting the boy's funeral, we see a few shots of the O'Brien brothers playing in the cemetery. Over a perspective shot looking up at the sky out of a grave, Jack asks in voiceover "Was he bad?" A few minutes later, the film cuts to a scene of the brothers playing catch. Their game is framed from an extremely low angle that pushes the boys to the periphery of the frame and draws our attention to the sky. Over this searching upward glance, Jack demands "Where were you? You let a boy die." "You let anything happen," he continues, as we cut once again, this time to a shot of a boy around Jack's age standing in front of a pile of rubble. The boy turns, revealing a disfiguring scar on the back of his head. A quick cutaway reveals the cause of both the rubble and the boy's injury: a fire blazing inside the front door of a home. We then cut back

to a different shot of the burned boy. This time Jack is in the foreground and we see him turn away from the boy's injury in pain and disgust. In this sequence, Jack—like Job—realizes that faith in God is not a guarantee of good fortune, safety, or protection; likewise, he is struck by what seems to him to be God's hypocrisy in demanding good behavior and yet allowing bad things to happen. As he asks over the final shots of the sequence, "why should I be good if you aren't?"

With sequences like these making up the bulk of the film, Jack is thus the most obvious analogue for Job. But although he is the film's main protagonist and thus the one whose perspective is most prominent, he is not the only character who asks Job-like questions about the world. For instance, in one scene, while driving around town with his sons, Mr. O'Brien describes one of his friends who came from humble roots to now own "half the real estate in town." Mr. O'Brien seems disillusioned by the man's success, saying: "Wrong people go hungry, die. Wrong people get loved. The world lives by trickery. You want to succeed you can't be too good." These words, like Jack's elsewhere, echo passages from Job, particularly one in which Job laments the inequality in society, the fact that the poor "carry the sheaves, but still go hungry . . . they tread the winepresses, yet suffer thirst" (24:10-1) whereas "the evil man" not only is "spared from the day of calamity," but moreover is loved and honored, is "carried to the grave, and watch is kept over his tomb. The soil in the valley is sweet to him; all men follow after him, and a countless throng goes before him" (21:30-3). Similarly, in a different scene, following R.L.'s funeral, Mrs. O'Brien answers the priest's assertion that R.L. "is in God's hands now," with the accusing observation that "He was in God's hands the whole time. Wasn't he?" Here again, we see the same basic theme—life's apparent injustice. But unlike in the Book of Job, neither the questioning nor the suffering that prompts it is limited to any one character. Thus

the film is not so much a strict retelling of Job's story as a reimagining of and a meditation on its basic spiritual question: why does God allow evil?

And yet for all that it seems to question, even to accuse God, the film ultimately tells the story of a journey to—not away from—faith. This is another way in which *The Tree of Life* resonates with the story of Job. One of the major lessons spelled out early in the Book of Job is that, throughout all his trials, Job neither turns away from nor curses God. Indeed, the agony that drives Job to demand answers arises not from his material losses and physical suffering, but rather from a desire to renew his former friendship with God, to "see him with my own eyes . . . How my heart yearns within me!" (19:27) This yearning for wholeness, for redemption, for spiritual restoration, burns within Jack as well: during a section of the film in which Jack begins to grow away from his family and to act out, he asks "How do I get back where they are?" Like Job, Jack finds himself out of step with the world and unable to understand its ways. But instead of embracing the way of the world, as his father does, Jack instead longs to live more harmoniously, to find peace with the world and with God.

And paradoxically, the same questioning and doubting that seems to alienate Jack from God seems also to somehow strengthen and nurture his faith. The opening lines of the film, spoken in voice-over by the adult Jack, are "Brother. Mother. It was they who led me to your door." Yet the brother in question is R.L., whose untimely death is at the core of the film's spiritual questioning and would seem to undermine any hope of reconciling Jack's sense of justice with the actual state of reality. The question, then, is how R.L.'s death—along with the many lesser examples of evil throughout the film—ultimately leads Jack *to* rather than away from God.

Towards a Temporal Theology

To answer that question, it is first necessary to recognize the way that *The Tree of Life* frames the theological problem of evil as a philosophical problem of time. In doing so, the film articulates a theology that is rooted in the division of time into two distinct aspects: worldly, human time and divine timelessness (or, eternity). Like so much of *The Tree of Life*, this link between theology and temporality is informed by the Book of Job, as evidenced again by the opening epigraph: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? …When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7) These words are spoken by God when He at last appears to answer Job's complaints. His response to Job consists of a series of rhetorical questions, beginning with those quoted above. On one level, these questions make the obvious point that Job is not God and thus should not presume to question God's ways. But these questions also serve to emphasize how much God's power and scope exceed human experience and understanding. By concluding in this way, the Book of Job thus seeks to explain the discrepancy between a just and benevolent God and an unjust and cruel world by pointing out that our sense of justice is bound within our limited, worldly experience. In other words, the Book of Job points to a gulf between human experience of the world and a divine understanding of it. Crucially, this gulf is rooted in time. By beginning God's cross-examination with the question "where were you when . . ." the Book of Job emphasizes the fact that man has occupied the universe for only a limited span of its history. The implication is that it is impossible for us to relate our lives as we live them to the greater trajectory of time, particularly to a span of time that transcends human existence and encompasses the entire life cycle of the universe.

This basic philosophical and theological problem of time informs not just the story of *The Tree of Life*, but also its most fundamental aesthetic features. When we look at the film's

structure, we find the problem of time as a central organizing principle. The film depicts time on two very different scales, scales that, at least on the surface, seem incompatible. The first is the micro-scale of human experience, which is expressed through the family drama that makes up the film's central story. Within this scale we see numerous different "slices" of time. We focus most of all on a few years in Jack's adolescence; these few years are interspersed with scenes both from Jack's adulthood and from his early life and even from before his birth. In contrast to these various slices of human experience, the film also depicts time on a cosmic scale, as when a long sequence shows the creation of the universe and the origins and evolution of life on earth. This sequence is bookended by a later one showing the destruction of the world and an interpretation of the afterlife. These cosmic scenes seem at odds with the human story because they show us events that utterly exceed human reckoning, both in terms of *when* they happen and also in terms of their sheer scope and size.

Moreover, these human and cosmic sequences are distinguished not just by what they depict, but by the techniques the film uses to represent time at the scale of human experience as opposed to time at the scale of the universe and of eternity. Throughout the film, the human experience of time is always fragmented and disjointed. The sections of the film focusing on the domestic drama favor jump cuts, elliptical editing, extensive handheld camera work, and relatively rapid and jarring shot sequences. For instance, in the aforementioned scene in which Jack sees several men arrested, the film gives us the action in a series of fast-paced, fragmented, only loosely-coherent images: a man led into the back of a police car in handcuffs; an old man with a bandage on his nose; the first man raging in the back of the cruiser; several shots of a crowd of onlookers, their faces frightened, amused, disapproving; Mrs. O'Brien pouring a third man a drink from her thermos, before he too is led into the police car. The editing of the

sequence is designed neither to give us a clear sense of events nor to accurately capture their duration. Rather, the aim is almost impressionistic, evoking the same confusion and fear that we see written across Jack's and his brother's faces. This impressionistic, fractured approach is typical of the human segments of the film. When it is depicting human affairs, the film visually remains in constant, restless motion, creating a sense of time that feels both subjective and transient. As such, this temporal aesthetic emphasizes the erratic inconstancy of human experience, as time skips around freely and associatively, never allowing for rest or reflection.

Whereas the human-oriented sections of the film feature this jumpy, erratic, restless pacing, the sequences depicting cosmic time tend to feature slow, measured pacing and steady composition and framing. When we look at the creation sequence, for example, we find regular, steady visual rhythms. Shots tend to be still, with minimal movement either from the camera or within the frame. Shot duration is relatively long, with each shot lingering thoughtfully on its subject. There is also a sense of repetition and balance to the sequence. At the beginning of the sequence, for instance, there is a series of similar, repetitive shots in which lights and colors gently fade in and then back to black, one after another. The overall effect is a sense of time that is steady, measured, calm, and resolved. In contrast to the nervous temporal aesthetic of the human sequences of the film, this slower and steadier approach suggests something closer to an eternal perspective. The film's use of slowness as a way of suggesting the eternal culminates in several images of near-stasis. The film opens and closes, for instance, with long, static shots of a gently swirling orange-blue light on a black background. In another shot that comes late in the film's final sequence, the camera tilts slowly down from a sunny sky until it comes to rest on an endless field of sunflowers, where it holds steady for nearly 14 seconds. This shot is followed shortly thereafter by a similar held shot of a bridge—an important image discussed in more detail

below. Shots like these create a sense of stillness and timelessness (in the sense of being outside of time) that seems, at least on the surface, to stand radically apart from the fraught human drama that makes up so much of the film.

The Tree of Life's use of slowness and stasis seems at first to descend directly from Schrader's model of transcendental style, which hinges on static images such as the shadow of the cross at the end of Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*. But in practice, stasis in *The Tree of Life* actually marks an important point of departure from the style Schrader describes. For Schrader, stasis comes at the end of a specific stylistic sequence in which a film first establishes a banal, emotionless everyday façade and then punctures that façade with unexplained and incongruous bouts of emotionality (70-1). The resulting disparity between banality and deep emotion exposes a rift between the human and the spiritual, and when the image of stasis finally appears, it forces the viewer to recognize a larger transcendental reality which encompasses both the spiritual and the physical and allows the viewer to see the interdependence of these two realms which previously seemed like incompatible opposites. For Schrader, the image of stasis has this effect only in the context of the tensions the film has previously established; he specifies, in fact, that stasis "succeeds the decisive action and closes the film. It is a still re-view of the external world intended to suggest the oneness of all things" (108). In contrast, Malick's images of stasis are neither as singular nor as final nor as systematically deployed as in the films Schrader writes about. Indeed, Malick's everyday is hardly the blank, emotionless canvas Schrader describes, but is instead the scene of an emotionally fraught drama from the start. Stasis, meanwhile, is interspersed freely throughout that drama. The film doesn't build towards a single decisive moment of stasis, but rather modulates continuously between everyday, worldly time and the static time of eternity. And while Malick's images of stasis do indeed "suggest the

oneness of all things" (a sentiment, in fact, that permeates all of Malick's work), it is this oneness itself that appears to be in conflict with actual human experience. In Schrader's model, a film sets up a conflict between the everyday and the spiritual, and while stasis does not resolve this conflict (such a resolution is impossible), it transcends the conflict itself and thereby gives the viewer the perspective he or she needs in order to make sense of the relationship between the two. In *The Tree of Life*, stasis cannot play this role because stasis—in other words, the eternal— is what is in conflict with everyday time in the first place.

In short, by establishing two distinct durational aesthetics for the everyday and the eternal, *The Tree of Life* turns the problem of spiritual transcendence into a problem of time. By making such a palpable distinction between the human/temporal and the divine/eternal, the film clearly emphasizes the gulf between the human experience of time and the divine understanding of it. Yet if the film is to work as a story about coming to faith, it must find a way to overcome this gulf and to reconcile human temporality and divine eternity. To do that, it must find ways for its characters, and its viewers, to transcend the worldly temporality of everyday life. One of the ways the film accomplishes this transcendence is by repeatedly allowing the eternal to bleed through the temporal, creating a sense of porousness that puts the human and the divine in contact with each other. This porousness takes two forms: a porousness *across time* enacted by the editing between different scenes, and a porousness *within time* created by techniques of visual and sound design.

The porousness across time begins with the temporal fluidity of the film's human story, which weaves a disparate set of individual timelines into a freely associative temporal web. Given the emphasis on Jack's childhood experience and his ongoing grief as an adult, it would be tempting to view the film as being from his perspective; according to typical cinematic

convention, we might see the scenes from his childhood as being a flashback as the adult Jack remembers his brother and his youth. But on closer examination, *The Tree of Life* does not adhere to a typical flashback structure, in part because it doesn't actually adhere to any one human perspective. While we spend much of our time focusing on Jack's point of view, we also see several scenes of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien before Jack's birth, as well as scenes from Jack's infancy, toddlerhood, and early childhood. We also open the film with scenes from Mrs. O'Brien's youth. Likewise, we hear voice-overs from Jack as an adolescent and as an adult and also from his mother and, at one point, from his father. There are even a number of ambiguous scenes that seem to represent characters' fantasies, memories, or visions. This diversity of temporal material undercuts any kind of consistent human point of view and points instead towards a sense of human time as a fabric made up of many people's perspectives. It works against temporal linearity and propriety and suggests instead the pliability and interchangeability of human temporal experience. Instead of strictly depicting scenes from a life (or lives) in a literal, factual way, the film rearranges all of these perspectives so as to put them all into conversation with each other so that all are working together to create a larger meaning.

Thus these human segments of the film seem to be inflected through something like a divine perspective. If the eternal is the unified static present that exists outside of, before and after time, then from the perspective of eternity, worldly time is always already complete, and all people and events in time exist alongside each other. By disrupting the conventional linear timeline of human events, the film lends these events something of this contemporaneousness. This dissolution of linear time is further accomplished by a number of scenes throughout the film which seem to exist outside of time altogether. There are a number of such scenes briefly interspersed throughout the film's main narrative, such as when we see the adult Jack wandering

an almost alien landscape, or when we see other similarly abstract images intercut with the film's main story. But the most obvious such scene comes at the end of the film, in a sequence in which the adult Jack wanders onto a beach filled with people, and is reunited with his parents, both of his brothers, and himself, all of them as they were in his adolescence. This scene is the final consummation of the contemporanizing described above. It is also the film's most literal vision of an eternal present, when time's linearity has ceased and everything simply *is*, all at once. The cumulative result of all of these nonlinear narrative techniques is that even when we are fully immersed in the human drama, the perspective *The Tree of Life* gives us is never a wholly human one. By rearranging all of these human moments according something more like an eternal point of view, the film begins to reveal how even the smallest everyday events are deeply connected to the fabric of the eternal.

The Tree of Life's fluidity across time is not limited to just the human parts of the story; in fact, one of the film's most important structural elements is a call-and-response pattern between the film's human and cosmic sequences. One notable example of this pattern is the transition between the human drama at the start of the film and the creation sequence. After R.L.'s death, we see Mrs. O'Brien wandering the woods in grief. In voice-over, she asks, "Was I false to you?" She closes her eyes, and we cut to black, before an orange and blue light flares into the middle of the screen, beginning the creation sequence as her questioning continues: "Lord… where were you?" It's worth noting the way this transition parallels the end of the Book of Job; just as God appears at last to answer Job's questioning, here the creation sequence is positioned as an answer to Mrs. O'Brien's questions. In both cases, the answer is the same: a reversal of the question "where were you?" The creation sequence ends with a similar call-and-response exchange. Over an aerial shot of an ice-age landscape, we hear the adult Jack intone:

"You spoke to me through her. You spoke with me from the sky. The trees. Before I knew I loved you, believed in you." This is followed by a few images of various organisms on earth along with shots of the adult Jack stumbling across the landscape; he asks, "When did you first touch my heart?" He is answered by a series of cuts that bring us back into the O'Brien's neighborhood, watching the romance between Mr. And Mrs. O'Brien before Jack's birth, which is followed by scenes from Jack's infancy and early childhood, which in turn lead into the central part of the story that follows Jack as an adolescent. Thus the creation sequence ends the way it began, with a human question answered by a dizzying skip across time. By employing this call-and-response structure, the film suggests that the human/temporal and the divine/eternal are not, as they first appear, in conflict, but are in fact constantly in conversation.

This sense of conversation between the temporal and the eternal takes place not just across time, in the juxtaposition of different scenes, but also within time, that is, within individual scenes. In several cases, *The Tree of Life* creates a temporal opening within a scene by modulating between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. One example of this modulation comes at the beginning of the film, when we see the O'Brien parents as they learn about and react to their son's death. This sequence begins with Mrs. O'Brien receiving a telegram informing her of R.L.'s fate. As she first reads the telegram, we hear a quiet mix of diegetic sounds: birds chirping outside the house, the rustle of the paper in Mrs. O'Brien's hands. There are then two quick jump cuts as Mrs. O'Brien reacts to what she has read, and on the soundtrack we hear a low-pitched, distant roar, which swells in volume to drown out the more organic noises we heard before. This non-diegetic drone adds a subtle dissonance to the scene, suggesting the cataclysmic shift that has just occurred in the O'Briens' life. This sonic pattern is mimicked a moment later when we cut abruptly to Mr. O'Brien at an airfield as he learns over the phone of his son's death. Here

again we start with diegetic sounds, although this time the quiet songbirds and rustling paper are replaced by the deafening roar of an airplane on the tarmac. But when the airplane taxis away, its noise diminishes only to the point where it approximates the volume and the timbre of the noise we heard in Mrs. O'Brien's scene a moment earlier. This noise is then shortly replaced by the tolling of a deep, heavy bell. In both cases, we see the same basic technique: diegetic sounds giving way to non-diegetic, affectively suggestive sounds. This same pattern is repeated again later in the film, when the young boy drowns at the pool. Again, we begin with diegetic sounds—first splashing water, indistinct voices, sounds of children playing, then the life-guard's whistle and the gasps and screams of onlookers. Then a minor-key organ swells on the soundtrack as these diegetic sounds fade out. Finally a loud, deep, toneless pounding or roaring sound is heard. Like the drones and bells heard earlier, this roar undergirds the scene with a deep, rumbling sense of gravity and dread.

In all three of these cases, the replacement of diegetic with non-diegetic sound creates a similar effect. In each case it suggests a separation, a distancing from the action on screen. As the diegetic sounds drop away and are replaced by ominous non-diegetic rumbles, there is likewise a palpable dropping sensation, a sense almost of suspension or pulling away. The film thus formally mimics real-life experiences in which a powerful shock or trauma makes time seem to stop or recede. In this way, each of these moments creates an extremely visceral connection between the temporal and the eternal. This connection is already there in narrative terms given that each of these scenes deals with death, which is central to the film's theological exploration of divine justice. But by performing an aural shift from diegetic sounds that anchor us "in the moment" to ominous impersonal thunderings that pull us out of it, the film drops us out of the

temporal flow of the narrative and into a kind of timelessness as both we and the characters are confronted with traumas that seem to stand outside of time itself.

Because these moments link the temporal to the eternal by the sudden intrusion of death, they create an opening that takes the form of questioning, even accusation. Inasmuch as they make us aware of the eternal, they make us aware specifically of eternal injustice and indifference. Each of these moments therefore might seem to serve as another piece of evidence against the existence (or efficacy) of divine justice, making us question the nature of a deity who would allow such suffering. But within the film, as in the Book of Job, this questioning is not cause for doubt; indeed, though these moments leave the characters negatively inclined towards God, they only intensify their awareness of God, even if only in the mode of questioning Him and noticing His apparent negligence or absence.

Whereas these examples of temporal-eternal porousness lead to a negative awareness of the eternal, by the end of the film, we also see an example of this porousness-within-time as something more like a reconciliation. This time, the porousness comes via visual techniques. At the end of the film, following the beach scene, we cut back to adult Jack leaving work in the late afternoon. After five brief shots of the city and of Jack, each featuring the handheld camera work and mobile framing that throughout the film characterizes human temporality, we come to the last two diegetic images in the film. The first is a low angle shot looking up at the blue sky and white clouds reflecting off the windows of a skyscraper. This shot holds steady for a few seconds, slowing the editing pace of the sequence. Finally we cut to a shot of a bridge stretching from the front to the back of the frame. This shot is stationary and is held for 12 seconds; during that time the only movements within the frame are waves blowing across the water and a seagull which swoops out from under the bridge and across the frame. The film then cuts to black and

holds for a few beats, before the warm flame-like light that was the film's first image returns again.

This final shot in particular is significant because it takes up the visual aesthetic we have previously associated with the eternal—namely, a steady camera, a very slow editing pace, and static or near-static compositions—and applies that aesthetic to the human world. The film thus ends by making a formal connection between the human and the eternal. Indeed, in both its duration and its relative stasis, the bridge shot mirrors the aforementioned shot of the sunflowers. But there is a key contextual difference between the sunflower shot and the bridge shot. The former is positioned at the end of the beach-afterlife sequence. By proximity it takes on a sense of divine otherworldliness, a sense that is only enhanced by the bright, heavily saturated colors that intensify the inherent natural beauty of the image. By contrast, the bridge shot comes at the end of a shot sequence that systematically returns us from the timeless, otherworldly beach scene to the present, everyday setting of Jack's urban workplace. It is thus firmly rooted in the realm of worldly, human affairs. Moreover, the bridge itself provides a drab visual object, with none of the natural tranquility and brilliance of the sunflower shot. And yet with its stationary camera and relaxed duration, this shot gazes at the human world with a perspective that has previously been associated with the more explicitly divine elements in the film, such as the creation sequence and the beach sequence. This final shot, then, suggests the permeation of the temporal world by the eternal, and suggests in this permeation a sense of peace, tranquility, and resolution. It suggests, in short, the final, successful reconciliation of the temporal and the eternal.

Heidegger, Augustine, and the Redemption of the Everyday

In this reconciliation, *The Tree of Life* accomplishes its own form of transcendence. Whereas the everyday and the eternal seem initially at odds with each other, by the end of the

film we see how the everyday is actually permeated by, ordered by, even modeled after the eternal. That is not to say that transcendence frees us from everyday time or makes us eternal. But through the experience of transcendence, our relationship to and understanding of time is changed, as a newfound recognition and understanding of the eternal gives new meaning to everyday temporal experience.

This model of temporal transcendence—in which everyday experience is transformed by our recognition of its place in a larger temporal scheme—has deep roots in both secular philosophy and Christian theology. On the one hand, *The Tree of Life* can be seen as an extension of the Heideggerean philosophy that critics have long acknowledged in Malick's work.[4] Specifically, the film's treatment of time and transcendence echoes Heidegger's discussion of temporality in the second part of *Being and Time*. But simultaneously, *The Tree of Life*'s theological impulses echo the temporal philosophy of the 4th Century Christian philosopher Augustine of Hippo. One of the fascinating things about Malick's vision of temporal transcendence is the way it draws out surprising parallels between these two very different thinkers.

The question of the everyday and its connection to a larger temporal trajectory is a fundamental part of Heidegger's ontology. In the second part of *Being and Time*, Heidegger takes up the question of time as history. He argues that the fundamental characteristic of humanity is that we are oriented towards and always moving forward into a future of

4. John Rhym tracks the trend towards these Heideggerean readings in his essay "The Paradigmatic Shift in the Critical Reception of Terrence Malick's Badlands and the Emergence of a Heideggerean Cinema." Examples of such readings include Robert Clewis's "Heideggerean Wonder in Terence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*"; Martin Donougho's "Melt Earth to Sea": *The New World* of Terrence Malick; Kaja Silverman's chapter on *The Thin Red Line* in her book *Flesh of My Flesh*; and Robert Sinnerbrink's "A Heideggerian Cinema?: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*.

possibilities. In order for our lives to be authentic—that is, for our choices and actions to be meaningful and fulfilling—it is necessary for us to be aware of ourselves as not just temporal but as historical beings. In order to achieve an authentic understanding of history, Heidegger says, an individual must first resolutely accept the certainty of his or her own death. In doing so, the individual sees him- or herself as "*in the process of **having-been***" (437).[5] In other words, by recognizing oneself as finite, one is able to see oneself from the perspective of history and think about such things as the significance of one's accomplishments and the legacy one will have left behind.

Once an individual sees him- or herself from a historical perspective, he or she can take stock of the possibilities he or she has inherited and begin to see how these possibilities extend forward into a coherent and meaningful future, which Heidegger calls "fate" (437). The exact definition and nature of fate remain relatively ambiguous in Heidegger's text, but in the context of his discussion of history, fate seems to indicate something like the most meaningful, significant use of one's life. The implication is that in order to live meaningfully, in order for one's actions to have purpose, it is necessary to understand how one fits into a larger historical trajectory and thus to connect one's day-to-day experiences to a larger historical vision. Without this vision (and Heidegger stresses again and again in *Being and Time* that the ordinary mode of existence for most people is inauthentic and unaware), we are quickly swept up in the minutiae and trivialities of everyday life, and we thus lose any conscious sense of purpose or meaning in what we do. In short, according to Heidegger, for our lives to be meaningful, it is imperative that we conceive of the moment-to-moment experiences of our lives in terms of a larger historical picture.

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5. Heidegger extensively uses italics and boldface for emphasis throughout his work. Whenever I quote Heidegger, unless otherwise noted, any emphases are from Heidegger's text itself.

In thinking about Heidegger's discussion of the everyday and history in the context of *The Tree of Life*, it is instructive to look at how these same problems are construed in Augustine's *Confessions*—a work that contains a number of surprising parallels with Heidegger's and that, like Malick's film, struggles to come to terms with the nature of faith. [6] In the *Confessions*, Augustine defines faith in temporal terms, and his account of time is, I believe, quite helpful for understanding more explicitly how *The Tree of Life* connects temporality, transcendence, and theology. In discussing Augustine's conception of time, I should begin by acknowledging that my use of Augustine here is deeply indebted to Joseph Rivera's reading of Augustine's temporal philosophy. According to Rivera, Augustine's understanding of human subjectivity is rooted in his theory of time, and more specifically, in the relation between the temporal and the eternal. In Augustine's account there are two concepts that are crucial for understanding the aesthetics of *The Tree of Life*: humanity's porousness to the eternal, and faith's redemption of time.

For Augustine, time is a worldly phenomenon. Time was created with the world and exists only in it. God, as the creator of the world (and thus of time), stands outside of time. God is eternal, and since to be eternal is to be both everlasting and unchanging, to say that God is eternal is to say that he is atemporal. The world, on the other hand, is fundamentally in time and therefore ruled by it. Time is a fundamental feature of the world and of our existence. It is what allows for change and growth, and also what carries us forward to our deaths. We are fundamentally temporal creatures, constantly stretched between the past and the future and constantly subjected to the flow of time as a never-ending flux (Rivera 89-90). In *The Tree of*

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6. To put it another way, I could suggest that Heidegger's work has a number of surprising parallels with Christian thought. Heidegger translator and scholar John Macquarrie explores Heidegger's latent quasi-Christian themes at length in his book *Heidegger and Christianity*, a work that partly informs the way I read Heidegger in the context of this chapter.

Life, we see this constant flux in the fast-paced, fractured editing of everyday time. As discussed above, this fragmented temporal aesthetic evokes the chaos, confusion, and seeming meaninglessness of human experience. Yet for Augustine, man is not purely temporal. If he were, then we would simply be swept along by the passage of time. Our existence would be ephemeral; we would drift away with no grounding and no coherence. A subjectivity that is only "in the moment" cannot cohere but can only be pulled apart (Rivera 88). A purely temporal being could have no self-awareness or consciousness as we know it because such a being would be constantly in flux. For Augustine, then, there must be something that allows us to anchor and orient ourselves within our experience of time.

So far in this account there is a striking parallel between Augustine's description of man as a temporal being and Heidegger's analysis of Dasein (his word for mankind or humanity) as the same; as Heidegger puts it, "Dasein *stretches along between* birth and death" and "somehow maintains itself constantly" (425). But where Augustine and Heidegger depart from each other is that Augustine offers a very specific mechanism for the coherence of the self. For him, what holds us together over time rather than letting us be pulled apart by it is our porousness to eternity—that is, to God. In his explanation of consciousness, Augustine describes man as a hybrid being. We are temporal in that we exist in time and are subject to its flow, but we are also in touch with and infused by a sense of the eternal. Augustine describes the opening to the eternal as an "inner word," which Rivera glosses as a kind of primordial self-awareness. According to Rivera, it is not a literal word; rather, it is prior to language, self-reflection, or self-awareness, and is in fact what makes subjectivity possible (Rivera 92-3).

For Augustine, this inner word is temporal, not eternal, as it is a part of human existence. Yet according to Rivera, for Augustine, the inner word is modeled after the eternal Word of God;

it is perhaps even that part of humanity that is created "in God's image." It is what lets one understand and be aware of the idea of eternity; it is the awareness that although time slips away ceaselessly for us, that although our lives are always progressing towards death, there is in fact something, to quote the priest in *The Tree of Life*, "which is deathless" and "which does not pass away." The inner word, by putting us in touch with the deathless eternal Word, thus provides a fixed, unchanging frame against which to measure and make sense of the unending flux which is worldly existence (Rivera 93-4).

Here again we can note a parallel to Heidegger, this time to the latter's discussion of conscience as the voice by which Dasein calls itself out from its absorption in the inauthentic busyness of the everyday (319-20). But for Heidegger, the call of conscience arises from within the individual (rather than functioning as an access to something transcending the individual) and calls each person not to anything like God or eternity but rather to an awareness of his or her own potential for authentic wholeness (335). The key for Heidegger is that the call of conscience brings about anxiety, which reveals a deep dissatisfaction and unease with everyday existence. It is the call of conscience that makes us aware of the emptiness of everyday, temporal existence, and which in turn helps us conceive that there is or can be something more. In Heidegger, this something more is the overarching wholeness and continuity of history. In Augustine—and in *The Tree of Life*—this something more is the eternal. In either case, both the secular and the spiritual ways of expressing this concept are united in the basic idea that what allows us to break out of our ordinary unreflective absorption in the world and face the possibility for something more meaningful is a silent voice which calls us from within. In both cases, this inner voice works by making us aware of a sense of history that transcends our individual moment-to-moment experiences.

In *The Tree of Life*, we repeatedly see and hear this inner voice at work in ways that reflect both Heidegger's and Augustine's accounts. Sometimes it is the voice of conscience, as when Jack regrets misbehaviors such as stealing a neighbor's negligee or shooting R.L.'s finger with a BB gun. Sometimes it is the voice of anxiety and longing, as when Jack pines to "get back where they are." Other times it is more nebulous, more akin to Augustine's spiritual inner word, as when the eternal emerges both in and across time, in the call-and-response patterning that rearranges chronological time and in the structural ruptures that occur under the weight of tragedy. In manifesting this inner voice both as Heidegger's call of conscience and as Augustine's inner word, *The Tree of Life* places both aspects of this phenomenon in conversation. If the call of conscience sees Jack consciously reaching for something more than his increasingly empty experience of the everyday world, then the film's moments of porousness suggest the eternal itself reaching out to him (and to us as viewers) as an answer and as a way of making sense of an otherwise seemingly senseless existence.

In addition to the inner word as a link between the temporal and the eternal, the other point in Augustine's philosophy that is pertinent to *The Tree of Life* is his understanding of how faith redeems time. For Augustine, what's at stake in the discussion of time is how we can see our experience of the ever-changing temporal (and temporary) world as meaningfully connected to the grand scheme of eternity. If time is always carrying us towards death, how can we perceive our lives as anything more than an absurd rush towards nothingness? For Augustine, the answer has to do with the conception of history in terms of faith. Faith is possible in the first place only because of the inner word, which allows us to conceive of something more than just this world. Of course, faith, as awareness of the eternal, doesn't and can't *eliminate* temporality. But it can and does *bend* temporality *towards* the eternal. In other words, if human existence is

constantly stretched along between past and future, faith takes both the ever-vanishing past and the seemingly-infinite future and bends them towards the same focal point, which is eternity, or God. If time was created along with the world, then looking into the past ultimately refers one back towards creation, and therefore towards God as the origin of time and history. Likewise, looking to the future, faith refers us to the end of time and of the world, which is in fact a re-opening to eternity (Rivera 98-102).

This conception of time helps to address a basic theological question that runs throughout *The Tree of Life*: where is God? Or more precisely: if God exists, and is everywhere, why do we have no direct experience of Him? Rivera argues that for Augustine, the answer lies in the fact that we are never truly and completely present to ourselves. In fact, strictly speaking, for us there never really is a present, because for something truly to be present it cannot move or change, and existence in this world is characterized by never-ending change. That which is present and unchanging is in fact the eternal, which we cannot fully know because we are of different existential-temporal orders. But faith, in understanding time, refers us to, attunes us to, and ultimately brings us close to God. Rivera describes this as a double movement in which both the past (leading to creation) and the future (leading to the end of the world) bend towards the same point, thereby lifting us towards the present—that is, towards the eternal (Rivera 102). Also, just as both the past and the future converge independently (each on their own) towards eternity, so too do they bend towards each other. Rivera makes the point that in Christian understanding there is a deep linkage between the past and the future: he gives the example of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is performed at once in memory of Christ's sacrifice and in anticipation of his return (Rivera 101).

Throughout *The Tree of Life*, we see powerful enactments of this bending of time through the mechanic of the call-and-response structures described above. When Mrs. O'Brien, in the throes of mourning, asks where God was when her son died, she (and we) are answered by a sequence depicting the creation of the world. But whereas that sequence provides just a single movement (backwards to the creation), the film's final sequence offers a full double movement akin to that described by Augustine. The film's central coming-of-age story ends with the family moving out of their house. After a series of shots showing different stages of the family's departure, we cut to a shot of R.L. in silhouette at the piano, and then to a shot looking up through the treetops of a forest. This last shot tilts down to reveal Mrs. O'Brien walking into the woods; the framing of the shot, her greying hair, and her outfit all reveal that this shot is from the moment much earlier in the film when Mrs. O'Brien walked into the woods and demanded of God "where were you?" This shot is followed by one of Mrs. O'Brien bent over, crying. Again, her outfit and the background place this shot as part of the scene from the beginning of the film when Mrs. O'Brien mourns R.L.'s death. The next shot is of a lit votive candle in a blue holder sitting on a table; this is the same candle that Jack lights at the beginning of the film to mark the memory of his brother's death. In just three shots, then, the film initiates a complex series of movements both forward and backward in time. As we conclude the coming-of-age section of the film, we jump forward decades in diegetic-chronological time to Mrs. O'Brien at the time of R.L.'s death; this is simultaneously a structural jump backwards to a moment we saw earlier in the film, a moment that referred us back even further, literally to the beginning of time itself. The shot of the candle takes us forward even further in diegetic-chronological time, all the way to the present, while also harkening back to a much earlier shot in the film.

This double movement—forward in diegetic time from Jack's childhood to the present, backwards in the film's chronology and also backwards to the creation—also introduces a further jump forward, one that serves as a bookend to the creation sequence that comes early in the film. After the shot of the blue candle, we cut to present-day Jack sitting pensively in his office. We then see him in an elevator. As a deep rumble fades in on the soundtrack, we cut to a shot looking out of the glass front of the elevator and up towards the sky. A distant, deep bell rings out, and we cut to a shot from a similar perspective looking up from within a deep canyon. This shot is held for several seconds, slowing the pace of the sequence as the adult Jack says, in voiceover, "brother." Then, after a brief sequence of shots showing Jack following a female figure through the desert, we see a sequence depicting the end of the world. [7] First we see a tiny black sphere—presumably the earth—slowly being engulfed by a fiery cloud. There is a deep peal of thunder followed by a roaring sound as the adult Jack intones, "Keep us, guide us, to the end of time." As he speaks, we see an aerial flyover shot of a river of lava flowing through a field of ash, followed by a shot of a sphere—again, presumably the earth—as it is lapped and then encircled by hot, dusty winds from the right side of the frame. In the next shot, a flash of lighting momentarily illuminates the sky, and then the camera holds briefly on the pure black that remains. This black screen is followed by a fade in on a distant light shining from behind what appear to be some underwater rocks or reefs. We then cut to a shot of a heavenly body passing in front of the sun, slowly blocking it out in a total eclipse.

With the world thus destroyed and time, presumably, ended, the sequence continues by depicting what appears to be a representation of the afterlife. This representation begins with

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7. This woman's identity is mysterious; she appears sporadically throughout the film without explanation. Brett McCracken argues that she is a divine guide, a sort of literal stand-in for the holy spirit. Her increased presence in the beach sequence in part informs my reading of that sequence as a representation of heaven.

images of death, but quickly transitions to images of resurrection. The theme of death and resurrection is reinforced by the choice of music: the final movement of Berlioz's *Grande Messe des morts*, whose text reads, in part, "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them everlasting rest . . . unto Thee shall all flesh come. Grant the dead eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine on them."[8] After returning to Jack in the desert, we see a shot of a mission village from a distance; in the foreground, two bodies lie in the grass, wrapped in sheets. A few shots later, a point of view shot looks up out of a grave; a woman's hand extends into the shot from above, reaching down over the grave, and is met by another hand that reaches up from within the grave. This shot serves a direct answer to one much earlier in the film, when the young Jack, distraught at the drowning of another young boy, lies in a grave. But whereas the earlier shot emphasized Jack's anger and confusion at the fact that God allows death and suffering, this shot emphasizes the reconciliation and renewal that is to come after the end of the world.

This idea of restoration of the dead is brought home much more literally and viscerally in the remainder of the sequence. As the sequence continues, the adult Jack finds himself on a beach with dozens of other people. First, he sees the boy who was burned in the fire when he was young. As the sequence continues, Jack is reunited with his own family, all of them as they were when he was younger. First he sees the middle O'Brien boy, Steve; then his mother approaches him and they embrace; then we see Jack and his father walking side by side on the beach as Jack puts his hand on his father's shoulder in a gesture of forgiveness. Finally, in a powerful series of images, R.L. himself is revealed standing on the beach, beaming as the adult Jack approaches him and picks him up. Jack then hands his youngest brother to their father, and the sequence

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8. The original text is in Latin; this English translation is taken from the website of the Stanford Symphonic Chorus.

continues with the rest of the family looking at R.L. in awe. The sequence goes on quite a while past this point, depicting both further interactions between the O'Brien family and also more abstract images of renewal, restoration, and heavenly joy.

Thus *The Tree of Life* approaches the forward limit of the double movement Rivera describes. In the final moments of the film, we have moved from Jack's childhood forward to R.L.'s death, then implicitly backwards to the creation, then forward again to the present and beyond that to the end of time. But there is one more movement to be made, and it is absolutely crucial. That is the movement from eternity (at the end of time) back to the everyday. Even throughout the entire end-of-the-world sequence, amidst the otherworldly fantasy and symbolism on screen, there remains an indelible connection to the everyday, a reminder that what we see and what the adult Jack experiences is merely a glimpse of that ultimate end rather than its realization. Throughout the final sequence, Jack remains separate from the action happening around him, even as he does take part in it. Much of the sequence is shot from an over-the-shoulder perspective that puts Jack at the periphery of the frame, placing him at once in the scene and in the audience; he is present with the action, but rarely a part of it. This sense that Jack is not fully integrated into the scene intensifies when Jack reunites with his family. After Jack hands R.L. to their father, we see the rest of the family, framed centrally, gathering around R.L.; meanwhile, Jack looks on from the edges of the frame, sometimes barely in the shot at all. In fact, as the sequence goes on, R.L. and Mrs. O'Brien become the main focal points as Jack gradually disappears from the sequence entirely.

Given the way the film keeps the everyday (in the form of adult Jack) separate from the eternal, it is only fitting that the film ends not on the beach, but back in the everyday world. After the beach sequence and the shot of the sunflowers, we cut back to the same elevator with the

same perspective as before, with the camera looking up and out through the glass elevator front. But whereas the car was ascending before, now it descends. We cut quickly to another shot of light through tree branches, then to a different shot from the descending elevator before the camera tilts downward, inverting the motion from earlier when the camera tilted upwards towards the sky. The next shot is of Jack, standing in front of the building he just exited. He looks around, seemingly disoriented to be back in the city. The next shot is a close-up on Jack's face. He continues to look around, and gradually a small smile pulls up the corners of his mouth. The implication is that the preceding sequence was not merely an exercise in cinematic symbolism, but was in fact a real experience that has in some way changed Jack.

By returning to the everyday and to Jack, *The Tree of Life* thus offers a fascinating cinematic theology that resonates strongly with Augustine's concept of the redemption of time. Just as Augustinian though is rooted in the convergence of past and future, so too does *The Tree of Life* suggest that all time eventually folds back on itself. The constant back-and-forth of the film's final half hour, the fluidity with which we move forward and backward in diegetic time, forward and backward in cinematic structure, and forward and backward to the beginning and end of time itself, all point to the ultimate convergence and coexistence of everyday time and eternal timelessness. The end of the film points back to its own beginning, just as the present day points to Jack's childhood, and just as both of these point to the creation and the end of the world. If the film's chronology is jumbled and challenging to pull apart, that is because the film literally depicts all of time, and because in it past and future are ultimately interchangeable, unified as they are in their ultimate reference back to an eternal *now* of divine unity.

But if this set of temporal moves at the end of *The Tree of Life* is profoundly Christian, it is at the same time profoundly Heideggerean. While Heidegger does not talk about the

redemption of time per se, he describes something very similar in what he calls the "moment of vision." The moment of vision occurs when one acknowledges and embraces one's own finitude and begins to see the present as just one moment within a completed life. As Heidegger puts it, "Only in so far as Dasein *is* as an 'I-*am*-as-having-been', can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes *back*" (373). When one sees oneself as something that both is and that someday will-have-been, then one's "future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present" (374). In other words, the moment of vision entails a double movement. In anticipation, we see the future emerging from the present, and at the same time the future "releases" the present back to us. This double movement—from an everyday "now" to the future, and from the future back to the present—is what gives the present meaning and value:

> In resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one's closest concern, but it gets held in the future and in having been. That *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the "*moment of vision*". This term must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasis. It means the resolute rapture with which Dasein is carried away to whatever possibilities and circumstances are encountered in the Situation as possible objects of concern, but a rapture which is *held* in resoluteness. The moment of vision is a phenomenon which *in principle* can *not* be clarified in terms of the "*now*" [dem *Jetzt*]. The "now" is a temporal phenomenon which belongs to time as within-time-ness: the "now" 'in which' something arises, passes away, or is present-at-hand. 'In the moment of vision' nothing can occur; but as an authentic Present or waiting-towards, the moment of vision permits us *to encounter for the first time* what can be 'in a time' as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. (388)

In other words, the moment of vision exists beyond and outside of time. Heidegger describes the moment of vision as an ecstasis, and this must be understood in the original Greek sense of standing outside of oneself. That is to say that in the moment of vision we stand outside ourselves and outside of time. In *The Tree of Life*, this ecstasis takes the form of the end-of-the-world and afterlife sequence. This sequence employs the double movement Heidegger describes,

moving from the everyday (Jack at work) to the future terminus of death (both Jack's death and the death of the universe), where we and Jack experience a "rapture which is *held* in resoluteness," an "authentic Present" in which "nothing can occur" precisely because what we see in the beach-afterlife sequence is outside of time.

Following this ecstasis, we and Jack are returned to the present subtly changed by what we have seen, ready to "encounter for the first time" a set of possibilities that have always been there within the everyday. As mentioned earlier, these possibilities are what Heidegger calls "fate":

> In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one . . . Once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [*Shicksals*]. This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen. (435)

This process, albeit in more spiritual terms, is precisely what is at play in the final moments of *The Tree of Life*. After experiencing an ecstatic vision of the end-times, Jack comes back to find himself changed. Whereas before he could only see the unfairness of the world and his own anger and frustration at God, now he can see God's presence in the world, as symbolized by the shot of the bridge that fuses the aesthetic of eternity with an image of the everyday. At last it becomes clear how Jack's experiences led him to rather than away from faith. In questioning and accusing God, Jack is ultimately forced to think beyond the bounds of worldly time in order to consider the nature of eternity. In doing so, he is able to transcend everyday experience in order to see how the everyday fits within a divine plan for the universe. With this transformed understanding of the everyday, Jack is able to embrace faith, that "possibility which [he] has inherited and yet has chosen." This, then, is *The Tree of Life*'s moment of transcendence, in

which a series of binaries—the human and the divine, the everyday and the eternal, the rational and the spiritual, the Heideggerean and the Augustinian—at last come together to make up a unified, holistic picture of existence.

Contemporary Challenges for Transcendental Style

If these final moments are the culmination of *The Tree of Life*'s theological searching, they also offer an example of the challenges that transcendental style faces in the contemporary world. These challenges can be seen in the lukewarm response the film has received from some scholarly viewers. Some of that middling response has been directed at the film's style and execution, with viewers finding it overlong, muddled, and so on. But what I find more interesting and pertinent is the way many scholarly viewers have seen the film as an intellectual decline for Malick, whose prior work has been celebrated for its philosophical depth and richness. To take just one example, in his review of the film, David Sterritt praises parts of the film's aesthetic vision, but argues that this vision is let down by the film's spiritual ambitions, which he calls "nostalgic and naive". For Sterritt, the film's religiousness works against its intellectual complexity, reducing the film to an endorsement of "unchanging uniformity" (57). At the end of his review, Sterritt argues that:

> What this flawed, fascinating film needs more of is the boundless contingency of the human spirit, faced with unyielding pain as well as needed solace, and greater recognition of the power we humans have to remake and rejuvenate the myths, philosophies, and theodicies we invent to make sense of ourselves. Instead the film gives us those obedient sunflowers and the dutiful worshippers they symbolize, transfixed by a radiance that out-glows and often veils the horrors of the world, but does not prevent them from recurring no matter how soothingly, suggestively, spellbindingly it shines. (57)

Sterritt is not alone in his discomfort with the film's religious content. Some commentators outside of academia have argued that Malick's recent work—including both *The Tree of Life* and its follow-up *To The Wonder* (2012)—has fallen victim to contemporary academia's basic

ignorance of and discomfort with Christian theology.[9] Yet spiritual and religious themes and Biblical allegories are nothing new in Malick's work. A recurring theme across his filmography, even in his earliest films, is the loss of innocence and the search for redemption, ideas that resonate with the Christian story of mankind's fall from grace.[10] Themes like these are not explicitly religious, of course, but they do reflect a powerful spiritual quality running throughout Malick's cinematic philosophizing. Along with this general kind of spiritual pining, one can find more specific Biblical parallels as far back as Malick's debut, *Days of Heaven* (1978), which Hubert Cohen argues is a specifically Biblical allegory told in part from a God-like perspective.[11]

On the whole, though, in Malick's pre-*Tree of Life* work, these kinds of allegories and quasi-Christian thematics remain in the background, as these earlier films tend more towards a generalized spiritualism rather than specific scriptural interpretations or theological expositions. But with *The Tree of Life*, the generic spirituality that marks Malick's previous work gives way to an explicitly Christian vision, and it is this explicit Christianity, and the literalness with which Malick pursues it, that I think runs the film into some trouble. In its pursuit of expressly Christian theology, *The Tree of Life* sometimes crosses into what Schrader calls religious rather than transcendental cinema. Schrader distinguishes between the transcendental film and the religious film in terms of the balance between abundant and sparse means, a set of concepts he borrows from philosopher Jacques Maritain. In aesthetic terms, Schrader associates abundant

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9. For examples of such views, see Rod Dreher, "On Not Seeing Terrence Malick's Art," Damon Linker, "Terrence Malick's moving Christian message — and film critics' failure to engage with it," and Josh Timmermann, "Terrence Malick, Theologian: The Intimidating, Exhilarating Religiosity of *The Tree of Life* and *To the Wonder*."

10. We see this theme of innocence lost play out at length in the character of Holly (Sissy Spacek) in *Badlands* (1973), for instance, as she gradually grows to regret her association with Kit (Martin Sheen). Likewise, in *The Thin Red Line*, Private Witt (Jim Caviezel) reflects on war as a corruption of the good in humanity, and pines for a lost state of innocence and spiritual peace.

11. Hubert Cohen, "The Genesis of Days of Heaven."

means with the "sensual, emotional, humanistic, [and] individualistic" characteristics of a work, whereas he describes sparse artistic means as "cold, formalistic, hieratic. They are characterized by abstraction, stylized portraiture, two-dimensionality, rigidity." Whereas abundant means "encourage empathy," sparse means "encourage respect and appreciation" (173-4).

Turning to the cinema, Schrader argues that transcendental films employ a progression over time from abundant to sparse means. By embracing stylistic realism and familiar dramatic techniques such as character and plot, the film draws viewers in by giving them something to identify and empathize with. But over time, the film replaces the abundant with the sparse, beginning with the dull banality of the everyday world and culminating in the image of stasis, after which, Schrader suggests, "the viewer keeps going , moving deeper and deeper, one might say, *into* the image" as if "proceeding down the aisle of a Byzantine church" (179). But whereas the transcendental film seeks to elevate the viewer from the human to the divine by way of the progression from abundant to sparse means, the religious film, Schrader says, mistakenly lowers the spiritual by relying too heavily on abundant means. In an effort to make mystical and miraculous events realistic and relatable by depicting them literally on screen, films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956) ultimately reduce the spiritual to the realm of human drama. As Schrader puts it, a religious film "can make an ardent atheist sympathize with the trials and agonies of Christ. But he has not lifted the viewer to Christ's level, he has brought Christ down to the viewer's" (182). On the one hand, *The Tree of Life* places itself mostly in the transcendental camp, adhering (albeit in a less linear form) to Schrader's abundant-sparse progression, as the identifiable human story and its emotions repeatedly give way to images of cosmic immensity and indifference. But in the beach-afterlife sequence, the film adopts the overabundant approach to the spiritual that Schrader associates with the religious film. By

depicting literally and in such great detail the resurrection of the dead and the joyful reunion of the O'Brien family, *The Tree of Life* seeks to make the afterlife real and relatable; but in doing so, the film brings heaven down to a human level, reducing the eternal to a series of heavy-handed symbols of rebirth and restoration. Perhaps this is why Sterritt seizes on "those obedient sunflowers" that cap the beach sequence as a symbol of what he sees as the film's intellectual simplicity. For all the nuanced philosophical and theological work *The Tree of Life* does elsewhere, the climactic sequence does somewhat undermine the rigor of the film's transcendental vision.

But even without the aesthetic incongruity of the beach sequence, I suspect critics like Sterritt would still find *The Tree of Life* naïve, and I think that response is directed more at the film's transcendental vision itself rather than its specific execution of that vision. The very idea of transcendence relies on certain assumptions about both art and the world, and these assumptions are inherently divisive. In his review of *The Tree of Life*, Moritz Pfeifer argues that audience reactions to the film reveal a split between idealists and analysts. The former, he says, believe in unities, great truths, and the possibility of infinity. For the idealist, art is important because it can give us a temporary access to infinity by expressing universal truths. On the other hand, the analyst, Pfeifer says, loves breaking things down and explaining them; for the analyst a great work of art is rich with irony and self-consciousness. The analyst disbelieves in the infinite, and views as foolish the idea that art can connect us to infinity because the analyst believes in no such thing. To the purely analytical mind, then, a work of art can have no meaning outside of itself, outside of what it can generate in its internal references and tensions; the idea that art can help us think about the universal meaning of our lives is questionable. And this sense of universal meaning, in the form of transcendent temporality, is just what *The Tree of Life* insists

on, perhaps to its detriment in a contemporary intellectual environment that thrives on analytical thought.

Moreover, in making the question of transcendence a question of time and history, *The Tree of Life* raises concerns that go beyond mere skepticism of religion or of transcendental aesthetics. Earlier, I argued that the film's climactic, transcendental moment can be seen in Heideggerean terms as a moment of vision in which Jack at last grasps his fate (*Shicksals*), thus redeeming his everyday experience. This idea of history as pointing towards individual fate is unusual today, and it becomes downright uncomfortable when we follow Heidegger's discussion further to the concept of collective "*destiny* [*Geschick*]." Destiny, Heidegger says, "is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people. . . . Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free" (436). In his explication of Part II of *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie acknowledges that modern readers are likely to be "puzzled or even upset" by Heidegger's recourse to the concepts of fate and destiny, which particularly in English "arouse suspicion" (Macquarrie 45-6). And no wonder; the concept of history as a vast organized plan involving individual fates and national destinies invokes precisely that most unsettling aspect of Heidegger's thought: his association with Nazism. In explicating Heidegger's ideas about fate and destiny, Macquarrie mentions the way these words echo the idea of manifest destiny; going a step further, it's easy to see how the very concept of collective destiny is haunted by the specter of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Today it is difficult to view the idea of grand historical plans without suspicion, through eyes that too many times have seen this concept used to justify or inspire hegemonic violence.

Yet this is a far cry from the empowering, redeeming, hopeful sense of history *The Tree of Life* endorses, a sense of history not as a nationalistic divine right but as a way of understanding why we suffer and why that suffering does not negate meaning. *The Tree of Life* seems to want us to see how our lives are connected to the lives of those around us, but also, through the divine plan of history, to the lives of those who came before and will come after us; and to existence as a whole—to the life of the planet and of the universe itself. And apart from the specifically Christian inflections, this is not so new an idea for Malick after all. Most of his films have contained this impulse to unify and universalize, to reconnect and reintegrate humanity with itself and with nature. His films have always proposed, in one way or another, that, as Private Witt (Jim Caviezel) suggests in *The Thin Red Line*, "all men got one big soul." *The Tree of Life* is no different, except that it wants to specify the nature of that soul. In doing so, it turns to the concept of transcendental history, in which time is redeemed in the realization of divine destiny. In a sense, then, *The Tree of Life* works as an attempt to redeem the very concept of history itself. That we might find this attempt naïve says as much about contemporary attitudes towards spirituality, time, and history as it does about the film itself.

CHAPTER 2 "IT'S ALWAYS RIGHT NOW": RICHARD LINKLATER'S TRANSCENDENTAL NOW

I guess I was interested in how cinema worked with reality . . . How you could sculpt out real time. I was never that interested in conventional storytelling – my mind doesn't work that way. I'm looking for experiential moments. Plot twists just seem antithetical to how we process the world. One thing follows the next.
        —Richard Linklater, quoted in Hattenstone

Everything happens today . . .
        —Spiritualized

Whereas *The Tree of Life* reframes a spiritual conundrum as a problem of time, other works of everyday transcendence go a step further, making time itself the basis of a quasi-spiritual approach to life. Nowhere is this clearer than in the works of Richard Linklater, a filmmaker who, like Malick, adheres to a fairly traditional mode of filmmaking—in this case borrowing heavily from neorealist style. Compared to Malick, though, Linklater represents a stronger move towards the everyday, both in his attempts to update transcendental cinema to better suit the contemporary world, and in the way his vision of transcendence shifts from the explicitly religious to a sort of secular spirituality. On the one hand, Linklater's films flirt with a quasi-religious undercurrent that seems to inform their idea of transcendence. But on the other hand, his films never fully embrace nor reject these religious tendencies, choosing instead to make transcendence a question not of the spirit, but of time itself. In short, Linklater's work moves towards a transcendental Now, the Wholly Other of an everyday experience in which we generally are not present in any given moment because we are pulled instead towards the potential futures that might spring from that moment. By awakening us to the transcendental Now, Linklater hopes to transform this everyday by showing how, as one character says, "it's always right now," a statement that holds surprising philosophical depth in the context of Linklater's work as a whole.

This chapter takes up four of Linklater's films. Three of these, *Before Sunrise*, *Before*

Sunset, and *Before Midnight*, form a trilogy and should, in my view, be taken all together as a single project. The three films follow the relationship between Jesse (Ethan Hawke) and Céline (Julie Delpy) over the course of eighteen years as the characters meet for the first time (*Sunrise*), meet again nine years later (*Sunset*), and spend a day together on vacation, finally as an established couple (*Midnight*). Above all, the *Before* series is an exercise in real-time storytelling. The films themselves are real-time in that each individual film takes place over the course of, at most, a single day, meaning that the action we see on screen occurs almost in real time. Likewise, the series as a whole takes place in real time in the sense that, because there is a nine-year gap between the releases of each of the *Before* films, the story of each film accordingly takes place nine years after the events of its predecessor. The result is a story whose action mostly takes place off-screen, featuring characters who viscerally undergo the passage of time as their actors age over an 18-year period. The fourth film in this chapter, *Boyhood*, builds on this real-time approach while introducing a crucial change. *Boyhood* follows a young boy, Mason (Ellar Coltrane) as he grows up from age 6 to age 18. The film was made by shooting footage every summer for twelve years, then editing the combined footage together into a single, episodic story. Like the *Before* series, *Boyhood* is an exploration of real-time storytelling, but differs by condensing its twelve years into a single film—a structural choice that has important implications for transcendental style.

Indeed, the central argument of this chapter is that the *Before* series and *Boyhood* represent two increasingly radical attempts to update transcendental style to suit contemporary life. I begin by showing how the *Before* trilogy adheres to the basic progression from everydayness to disparity to stasis while reimagining the idea of transcendence not as a spiritual movement but as a temporal one. Whereas transcendental cinema traditionally asks how the

human can coexist with the divine (as in *The Tree of Life*), the *Before* series asks how the present can coexist with the future; that is, the films seem to ask how it is possible to live in a present that is always trying to become its own potentiality. I then turn to *Boyhood*, which takes this question further by asking how it is possible to live in a present that has *already* given way to the future. Structurally, *Boyhood* stretches the formula of transcendental cinema, embracing accelerated change and condensed duration at the expense of both everydayness and stasis, two of the key elements of transcendental style. Yet in the end the film finds its way to transcendence precisely because it lacks these two elements; their absence in fact creates a powerful negative image that ultimately draws the characters (and the viewer) back towards the everyday in a transcendental return to "right now."

Sculpting Real Time in the *Before* Series

Given Linklater's dedication to real time, it is no surprise that his cinematic transcendence is deeply rooted in everyday life. Traditional transcendental cinema, Schrader argues, begins with "a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living"; this representation is achieved through a highly stylized realism that sets up the everyday as the ground through which the transcendent will eventually erupt (67). In the *Before* films, Linklater devotes himself to the rhythms and realities of everyday life. Indeed, these films achieve a sense of reality so strong that viewers frequently assume that they are improvised when in fact they are heavily scripted and carefully rehearsed.[12] Yet for all that the product on screen may seem perfectly spontaneous and effortless, an analysis of Linklater's filmmaking techniques reveals a deliberate stylization that proceeds according to a set of well-established cinematic traditions. In particular, much of Linklater's early filmmaking, including the *Before* trilogy,

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12. Linklater and his actors have spoken frequently about the intense work required to achieve the appearance of spontaneity on screen. See for instance the interviews in Hattenstone or Riley.

borrows heavily from the stylistics of Italian neorealism. One way this influence emerges is in Linklater's ongoing interest in the everyday lives of average people. Particularly in his earliest films, Linklater shows an affinity for the ordinary, sometimes marginalized people of his own time: from the outsiders, eccentrics, and weirdoes of *Slacker* (1991) to the discontented teens of *Dazed and Confused* (1993) to the aimless 20-somethings of *Before Sunrise*, Linklater's films consistently focus on young people who feel out of place in their own worlds and who can't or won't fit themselves into mainstream culture.

In crafting these characters, Linklater employs several practices designed to enhance the sense of reality on screen. For one, like the neorealist directors before him, Linklater typically favors relatively unknown actors, some of whom, like Ben Affleck in *Dazed and Confused*, would go on to wider fame, others of whom, like Wiley Wiggins, who co-starred in *Dazed and Confused* and later starred in Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001), would be little heard from again. Likewise, Linklater is famous for sharing a great deal of creative control with his actors so that their real experiences and personalities can shine through in the finished film. For instance, in the *Before* series of films, lead actors Hawke and Delpy shared rewriting duties with Linklater, even earning writing credits in *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*. Describing his creative philosophy, Linklater explains that:

> I'm very interested in the reality of these actors on the screen, so I know you can't just say lines that are written by someone else. The script, the text, has to work its way through the person, and so by having Julie and Ethan kind of work with me in rewriting that script, and personalizing it and demanding they give a lot of themselves, I thought that was the only way that film could ultimately work the way I wanted it to. ("'Before Midnight,' Love Darkens and Deepens")

In addition to his approach to casting and writing, Linklater borrows a number of other stylistic tendencies from neorealism. For instance, his films are shot exclusively on location, using only available light and favoring long takes and tracking shots that let the action unfold at

its own pace. All of these stylistic decisions result in the impression of spontaneity, of actual lives unfolding before us in real-time "experiential moments," as Linklater puts it (Hattenstone). Yet this spontaneous nowness is a cinematic illusion, no less the result of careful craftsmanship than the flat, emotionless banality that constitutes the everyday in Ozu, Bresson, or Dreyer.

Unsurprisingly, this interest in "sculpting real time" is itself a tendency Linklater inherits from the neorealist school. French film theorist and neorealism proponent André Bazin points out a distinction between the "dramatic duration" of the traditional narrative film and the real duration of neorealism, arguing that the traditional narrative film structures duration as a kind of "expressionism in time" that works to heighten drama and emotion and to emphasize the emotional content of the story.[13] By contrast, the neorealist film "must now respect the actual duration of the event" (*What Is Cinema?: Volume II* 65). That is to say that in the neorealist film, events on screen retain their real duration, are never accelerated, slowed, condensed, or expanded. Moreover, in its editing, the neorealist film "must never add anything to the existing reality" (66). Anything missing from a scene or from an edited sequence remains missing, thereby staying true to the limited nature of knowledge in everyday experience. Thus, Bazin argues, the craft of neorealism entails a fidelity to actual duration; that is to say that the neorealist film seeks to create a cinematic duration that is as faithful as possible to the real duration of the events depicted in the film.

This insistence on real duration runs throughout Linklater's work, and nowhere more so than in the *Before* series, where the events of each film take place within a single day, afternoon, or night. In *Before Sunset* in particular, we see an entire sequence of events unfold more or less

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13. Interestingly, Linklater himself is conversant with Bazin's work, even incorporating a discussion of the Frenchman's theories in one segment of *Waking Life*. This segment, and its significance to Linklater's transcendental cinema as a whole, will be addressed later in this chapter.

in real time; the main characters meet in Paris after having not seen each other for nine years. They decide to take the few hours before Jesse's flight back to the United States to reconnect, and the film follows them as they walk through the city and talk about their lives and their relationship. Nothing is cut, condensed, or elided. At the same time, the *Before* series also wholly embraces the elliptical aesthetic that Bazin describes. Each film respects the real-world time that has passed since its predecessor; just as there are nine-year gaps between the release of each film, so too are there nine-year gaps between each segment of on-screen story, with the characters having aged and had significant life changes in the interim. While some of the missing story is filled in through dialogue, the films offer almost nothing in the way of storytelling contrivances to fill the gaps.[14] Instead, each film seeks only to capture its own particular moment in time, leaving it to the viewer to connect each cinematic slice of life into an overarching narrative. *Boyhood* uses a similar strategy on a different scale, presenting a series of vignettes of its protagonist's childhood and adolescent experiences. Given this elliptical aesthetic, it is no surprise that each of these films also concludes with an open-ended, unresolved question of what will happen next, of whether Jesse and Céline will get (or stay) together or where Mason's life will go now. In each case, when our time with the characters is over, nothing is added to fill in what will happen next; the future is left open and the characters are left to their lives rather than pointed towards neat dramatic conclusions.

Time is a Lie: The Disparate Present

Yet for all that Linklater's craft strives for transparency, his treatment of the everyday is no less stylized than that of the filmmakers in Schrader's study. In Schrader's transcendental schema, the everyday masquerades as realism, but it is in fact a carefully crafted facade. It shows

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14. Apart from one brief flashback at the start of *Before Sunset*; but as we will see, this scene serves a much more complex purpose than simply refreshing our memories of the previous film.

us a picture of everyday life that is as banal and as stripped of expression and emotion as possible. That is because in Schrader's schema, the emotional sparseness of the everyday is repeatedly punctured by unaccountable emotional experience, and the disparity between these two qualities ultimately elicits the transcendental moment of stasis. Linklater, on the other hand, presents us with an everyday that is stylized as nowness, as a present moment that is experienced as much in "real time" as possible. Yet just as Schrader's emotionless banality gives way to unexpected emotion, so too does Linklater's "now" always insist on more than itself, arcing outward into myriad futures and pasts that pull and stretch at the present, putting it in apparent conflict with itself. The result is an ongoing tension between nowness and futurity, a disparity that will ultimately need to be overcome by transcendence.

This complication of "right now" begins with *Before Sunrise*. After meeting by chance on a train, Jesse and Céline spontaneously decide to scrap their individual travel plans and spend the rest of the day and night exploring Vienna together. The film follows them as they wander the city, deep in conversation and rapidly falling for each other. Structurally and stylistically the film adheres to the tenets of neorealism. The camera unobtrusively tracks the characters as they walk through the city; the action and dialogue on screen unfolds at its own naturalistic pace, heedless of any traditional dramatic arc; and while some time is elided, nothing is filled in by cinematic contrivances such as montage or flashback. The result of these techniques—which characterize not just *Before Sunrise*, but the whole *Before* series—is an emphasis on the spontaneous present moment that is unfolding "right now." Jesse and Céline themselves are well aware of this sense of spontaneous nowness. In one exchange, they observe that they currently inhabit "some dream world," in which "our time together is just ours, its own creation"; and it is because "this whole evening, all our time together, shouldn't officially be happening" that "this feels so

otherworldly." Eventually, the two agree that what "makes our time and specific moment so important" is that this is their only night together, and that after tonight they will never see each other again. Jesse offers Céline a ceremonial handshake, dedicating it "to our one and only night together, and, uh, the hours that remain," and then the couple say goodbye to each other so that they won't have to do so the next morning.

Yet even as Jesse and Céline agree that what makes their night together so special is its status as a moment out of time, a suspended "now," they can't help thinking of this present in terms of a potential future. In fact, their encounter begins by reframing the present from a futural perspective. When the two first get off the train in Vienna, Céline hesitates at the thought of leaving with a man she just met. Jesse convinces her by telling her to imagine herself ten or twenty years into the future, in a stagnating marriage, wondering what would have happened if she had gotten involved with one of the other men she met in the past. As Jesse says, "I'm one of those guys . . . so think of this as time travel from then to now to find out what you're missing out on." From the start, then, Jesse and Céline's shared present is conceived in terms of (and in contrast to) one possible future; with respect to this future, the present moment is situated as a hypothetical what-could-have-been. As a result, as the film goes on, it is difficult to see the present without seeing it in terms of what could be. This is true not just for the viewer, but for Jesse and Céline. Even as the two try to insist on the nowness of their time together, just framing the evening in terms of "the hours that remain" brings home more pointedly the connection between the present and the future. It is no coincidence that this exchange follows immediately from a fruitless discussion of how the two might see each other again.

Moreover, even agreeing that this is their only night together doesn't stave off thoughts of the future; if anything, it strengthens the influence of the future on the present. Not long after

their handshake, Jesse and Céline lounge in a park, talking and looking up at the stars. Soon, they begin to make out, but then Céline pulls away and tells Jesse that "I don't think we should sleep together" because "since we're never going to see each other again, it would make me feel bad. I won't know who else you're with. I'll miss you." A moment later, she protests further that sleeping with Jesse would be "like some male fantasy, meet a French girl on the train, fuck her, and then never see her again, and have this great story to tell. I don't want to be a great story, I don't want this great evening to just have been for that." In both instances, Céline's in-the-moment reasoning and decision-making is informed not by what she wants now (in fact, she is the one who moments earlier invited Jesse to kiss her) but by her thoughts of the future, and specifically by the way she has begun framing the present in terms of a future, thinking about how she will remember this present after the fact.

This kind of thinking—experiencing the present from a futural perspective—preoccupies both characters for the remainder of the film. In the next scene, as they walk through the streets in the light of morning, the characters discuss what they are each going to do when they get back home. As they talk, Jesse suddenly exclaims, "Oh shit . . . We're back in real time." A moment later, they hear a harpsichord through the windows of an apartment. They pause, listen, and then dance to the music. Jesse then stops and says, "I'm gonna take your picture. So I never forget you, or, uh [he looks around] or all this." Celine agrees, and they stare at each other, wordlessly memorizing the moment, before leaning in for a kiss. In the following scene, the two recline on a rooftop and Jesse suddenly says, "the years shall run like rabbits…" Céline responds with perplexed curiosity, and Jesse explains that he has a recording of Dylan Thomas reading a W.H. Auden poem. Trying to imitate Thomas's "great voice," Jesse recites two more stanzas from the poem:

      All the clocks in the city
      Began to whirr and chime:
      'O let not Time deceive you,
      You cannot conquer Time.
      . . .
      'In headaches and in worry
      Vaguely life leaks away,
      And Time will have his fancy
      To-morrow or to-day.'

After reciting these lines, Jesse looks off wistfully. This unexpected poetic interlude underscores the way the awareness of time, with its inexorable drive towards the future, has transformed the present moment for Jesse and Céline. In fact, the film's whole romantic arc can be described in terms of a conflict between two or three potential futures. In his time travel metaphor, Jesse hypothesizes a future in which he and Céline never met, or at least never spent any meaningful time together. By the end of the film, this future no longer exists, but has been replaced by two new futures: one in which Jesse and Céline go their separate ways and their time together was a once-in-a-lifetime experience; and one in which the two reconnect and forge a relationship together. For most of the film, the characters try to convince themselves and each other that the former is the only realistic, practical option, and that the lack of a shared future is in fact what makes this present magical. But by the very end of the film, just before Céline boards her train back to Paris, she and Jesse both relent, agreeing to meet again on the same platform in six months. Then they say goodbye for the last time, Céline boards her train, Jesse gets on a bus to the airport, and the film ends, leaving totally unresolved the tension between the two futures.

These two competing futures are brought back into play in *Before Sunset*, which takes place nine years later and brings to a head the conflict between what is, what was, and what could have been and could still be. *Before Sunset* finds Jesse in Paris on the last leg of a tour promoting a novel that he wrote based on his night with Céline. Céline attends his talk at a

bookstore, and the two then spend the next hour and a half before Jesse's flight catching up and reconnecting as they walk through the city. As the film follows their reunion, it develops a powerful and explicit tension between the present and all of the temporalities that constantly spiral out of it. On the one hand, *Sunset* is the most now-oriented of the trilogy, taking place entirely in the time that Jesse has between his talk and his flight. We follow the characters in what appears to be real time, with nothing elided or omitted, and in this way the film is utterly committed—even more so than *Sunset* or *Midnight*—to the real duration of the present.

Yet for all this commitment to nowness, from the very moment that Jesse and Céline see each other, "now" ceases to be merely the present and instead becomes a complex constellation of temporalities. At the promotional event that opens the film, Jesse is asked about his next book project, and he explains that he wants to write a book that "all [takes] place within the space of a pop song, you know, like three or four minutes long, the whole thing." He explains the premise of the story, involving a man who is "totally depressed"; though the man is married with a beautiful wife and daughter and a good job, "it doesn't matter, because what he wants is to fight for meaning" and because "happiness is in the doing, right, not in getting what you want." As the man sits in his dining room, his 5-year-old daughter jumps up on the table and starts dancing to a pop song. As he watches her, the man suddenly realizes he is 16 again, watching his high school sweetheart dancing to the same song on the roof of her car "with a facial expression just like his daughter's." As Jesse tells this part of the story, we see a visual flashback to Jesse and Céline's harpsichord dance in *Before Sunrise*. This scene is the only time in the trilogy where Linklater deviates from the present by including anything like a flashback, and it is striking not just because it breaks from the series' consistent dedication to nowness, but also because of the way it formally links present and past into a single hybrid moment. As Jesse talks, what we hear

remains in the present while what we see is a series of images from the past. As he describes the little girl dancing, we see a shot of Jesse spinning Céline; as he describes the man suddenly reverting to his 16-year-old self, the footage on screen cuts to the reverse shot of Jesse 9 years ago, then cuts back to the present-day Jesse telling the story. As he describes the high school sweetheart's facial expression, there is another short sequence of shots of Céline speaking to Jesse and then smiling at him. We then cut from Céline 9 years ago to Céline in the present; the cut reveals that she is standing at the back of the bookstore, listening to Jesse.

Although this sequence of shots resembles a typical cinematic flashback, as the scene goes on it becomes clear that the intention is not to recapitulate prior events (the usual purpose of a flashback), but rather to convey the sudden, dramatic convergence of past and present. As we cut back to Céline in the bookstore, Jesse continues pitching his book idea: "He knows he's not *remembering* this dance, he's *there*, he's there in both moments simultaneously. And just for an instant, all his life is folding in on itself, and it's obvious to him that time is a lie." As Jesse finishes this thought, he finally sees Céline, and, after a long hesitation, he goes on to say that "it's all happening all the time and inside every moment is another moment all happening simultaneously."

This idea of a moment within a moment and of time folding in on itself lies at the heart of *Before Sunset*. As the film goes on, Jesse and Céline wander around Paris, talking about what happened in the nine years since their night in Vienna. Quickly it is revealed to the viewer that the two did not meet on the platform six months later (Jesse showed up, Céline did not), and that in fact this is the first time the two have seen each other since that night. Jesse, for all intents and purposes, has become the man from the story he describes in the bookstore. He is married with a son, is a successful writer, and is clearly miserable. Céline, too, has moved on and has both a

career and a boyfriend, but like Jesse, she is dissatisfied with her life. As the film goes on, it becomes clear that this unhappy "now" is exacerbated by the fact that both characters have clung to the memory of that night nine years earlier, and to the possibilities that arose on that night. At one point, Jesse confides to Céline that he was driven to write a book about their encounter by a secret hope "that you might come to a reading in Paris, and I could walk up to you and ask, 'Where the fuck were you?' . . . I think I wrote it in a way to try to find you." Later, in the film's final scene, Jesse and Céline go to her apartment, and Jesse persuades her to play him a song on the guitar. As she begins to sing, it is immediately obvious that the song is about that first encounter: "Let me sing you a waltz/About this one night stand/You were for me that night/Everything I always dreamt of in life . . . One single night with you, little Jesse/Is worth a thousand with anybody . . . Even tomorrow in other arms/My heart will stay yours until I die." By the end of the film, then, both characters realize that the feelings and possibilities that first arose nine years ago are not just memories, but are still vividly alive. Likewise, they gradually realize that the potential future they glimpsed in *Sunrise* is somehow still alive and waiting to be grasped.

With that realization, like the man in Jesse's story, the two find their lives folding in on them. After she plays her waltz for Jesse, Céline urges him one last time to leave for the airport so that he will make his flight, but instead he puts on a CD from her collection. As Nina Simone's "Just In Time" begins to play, the two begin discussing the singer. Céline then starts quietly singing along: "Now you're here, now I know just where I'm going/No more doubt or fear, I've found my way." Jesse sits and smiles as Céline describes and imitates Simone's stage mannerisms. She begins dancing to the music, then finally turns to Jesse and, still imitating Simone, tells him that, "Baby, you are gonna miss that plane." We cut to Jesse, and the camera

slowly zooms in on him as he smiles, thumbs his wedding ring, and replies, simply, "I know." He laughs and we cut back to Céline dancing for a few more seconds as the shot fades to black. In just a few short moments—in the space of a pop song—everything has changed, and time has folded back on itself. On the one hand, Jesse and Céline are in the present, a "now" in which their lives are very much separate (as Jesse's touching of his ring reminds us). Yet as Céline dances and Nina Simone sings that "Your love came just in time, you found me just in time," the characters are simultaneously back in 1995, with two very different futures ahead of them. They are currently living one of those futures, but it is clear that as the film ends, they are once again facing the future they both would have preferred, the one in which they get together after all. In these final shots, then, it does indeed seem that time is a lie as the now that is gives way to the future that could have been and could still be.

Whereas the first two *Before* films are concerned with the disparity between the present and the future that springs up unexpectedly from that present, the final film in the series, *Before Midnight*, is concerned more with the disparity that results from a present that suddenly seems to have no future. Taking place nine years after *Sunset*, *Midnight* finds Jesse and Céline on holiday in the Peloponnese, now in a long-term relationship and with young twin daughters of their own. At last the two seem to have what they have wanted all along, but it soon becomes clear that they each have an idea of the future that conflicts not just with the present, but with each other's future visions. Jesse is struggling with the distance from his son Hank, who lives in the United States (whereas Jesse and Céline currently live in Paris), and he wants to move there to be closer to him. Céline, on the other hand, wants to focus on her career and is considering a major job offer from the French government. Throughout the film, the characters clash over these two potential futures, and the incompatibility of their desires seems to suggest that their relationship

has little way forward. Céline even says at one point, when Jesse first broaches his desire to be closer to Hank, that "this is where it ends," and that she is "marking this [as] the day you light the ticking bomb that will destroy our lives." As the film goes on, Céline's prediction increasingly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy until, in the climax of the film, Jesse and Céline get in a massive fight that culminates with Céline storming out of a hotel room, telling Jesse that she doesn't love him anymore. To judge by what we have seen to this point in the film, if their relationship isn't over, it soon will be.

Yet from this emotionally ruinous present, the couple manages once again to find a sense of shared future, and they do so, fittingly, through the same metaphor of time travel that helped bring them together in the first place. Following the fight, Jesse goes outside to find Céline sitting alone on a patio. Sitting down next to her, Jesse tells her that he is a time traveler. After assuring her that he is the same man she met on a train in 1994, he pretends to read her a letter from her 82-year-old self. The letter assures her that she will be fine and that Jesse is to be her guide through the current rough patch of her life. This scene harkens back to the scene in *Before Sunrise* when Jesse convinces Céline to get off the train with him by asking her to imagine herself in the future, looking back on that moment and wondering what could have been. In that film, Jesse's time-traveling metaphor serves to reframe the present from the perspective of the future. In *Before Midnight*, Céline inadvertently performs a similar reframing early in the film, when her observation that "this is where it ends" casts the present as the climactic moment in which the couple's relationship is damaged beyond repair. But at the end of *Midnight*, Jesse's return to the idea of time travel serves to offer yet another reframing, presenting an alternative future to the one that has come to dominate the rest of the film. Whereas it has seemed increasingly that, as Céline puts it, "We were on parallel tracks for a while, but now our tracks

have crossed and I'm going west and you're going east," in this final scene, Jesse's "letter" forces the two to think instead about a future that in the moment seems impossible—a future in which Jesse and Céline have smoothed over their differences and lived a long, happy life together.

Crucially, it is this act of reimagining a shared future that, at least for a start, begins to repair the relationship. Thus a central takeaway from *Before Midnight* is the extent to which the present is not its own but is in fact dominated by its potential futures. When Jesse's and Céline's individual ideas of the future diverge, the present is soured. When they start to think of a future—one which began in this present moment—in which they break up, all they can see in the present is their differences. But when they can both (even desperately or begrudgingly) imagine a future in which they are still together, even when that imagined future does nothing to address the very real problems and challenges in their relationship, the present suddenly seems salvageable.

By finding all of these ways to leverage the disparity between present and future, each of the *Before* films explores the way that real time interacts what we might call virtual time. Here I am borrowing the word "virtual" from philosopher Brian Massumi.[15] Massumi describes the virtual as the realm of potential that underlies all experience. In his words:

> The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded and sadness is happy (happy because the press to action and expression is life). The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained. (3, original emphasis)

In other words, the virtual describes a conception of time in which "the present" actually

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15. Massumi's work is, in turn, indebted to Deleuze's concept of the virtual, which is itself derived from Bergson's writings.

contains both past and future, and in which what *is* combines with all that still could be. According to Massumi, the virtual is contained within the actual: it is "the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way" (9, original emphasis). This commingling of actual and virtual, of what is and what could be, lies at the heart of the *Before* series. After all, the driving emotional force of the first two *Before* films in particular comes from the "lived paradox" of Jesse and Céline's actual lives when faced with the potential life they could have together. Although in the first two films the two characters cannot reasonably see a future together because of all the obstacles between them, they can *feel* it, and ultimately, this felt, virtual future becomes their "press to action and expression."

In other words, as the virtual emerges from the actual, it simultaneously pushes the actual forward, driving the present towards its own future. For Massumi, the defining characteristics of the virtual are its fluidity and its indeterminacy. The virtual names the infinitely complex, ever-fluctuating realm of all that could be, and as virtuality coalesces into real action, the field of potential could-bes continuously modulates in concert with what actually is. As Massumi puts it, "Emergence emerges. Changing changes" (10). Taken all together, the *Before* films offer a rough illustration of this principle. In each case, the potential for what could be tangibly changes what is, so that the virtual becomes the driving and unifying force across the three films. In *Before Sunrise*, Jesse and Céline meet as strangers, but their mutual attraction sparks a potential future between them, a future that, at the end of the film, is left tantalizingly in the realm of the virtual. And although the two don't get back together after six months, it is the lasting fascination of their unrealized virtual future that does eventually bring them back to each other in *Before Sunset*, when the two characters meet again because that virtual future has stayed so vividly alive that it drives Jesse to write a memoir of his experience with Céline and drives Céline to read it

and go see Jesse again. And finally, somewhere in the nine years between *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*, the virtual blossoms into the reality of a long-term relationship, children, and a Greek vacation. But changing changes, and in the third film, the reality of a life together necessitates a reevaluation of the virtual. The characters were always defined by the seeming impossibility of their potential life together. Now that they *are* together, the nature of their potential has changed, but to their detriment, they seem unable to recognize or adapt to this fact. The implied lesson of the third film is that as changing changes, it is necessary to change with it, lest one find oneself stuck in a set of outdated possibilities long after life's real potential has moved on.

Emptiness and Stasis in the *Before* Films

By repeatedly punctuating the present with the virtual, the *Before* films create a temporal disparity that demands to be resolved. As with banality and emotion in the films Schrader describes, there is a gap between the real-time "nows" that make up these films and the virtual futures that animate them. This temporal gap, which corresponds to the gap between the human and the spiritual in Schrader's model, is palpable within the films themselves: for all that Jesse and Céline repeatedly try to embrace nowness by savoring the moments they find themselves in, they can't help being drawn out of their presentness into thoughts of the future (whether that is a future they desire or, in the third film, one they fear). This disparity between present and future, actual and virtual, is what must be overcome (or at least reimagined) by transcendence. If for Schrader the goal of transcendence is to show the interconnectedness of the human and the spiritual realms (as was also the case in *The Tree of Life*), in Linklater's films the goal is to explore the inflection point between present and future, actual and virtual. And as in Schrader's model, Linklater's temporal exploration culminates in distinct moments of stasis in each *Before*

film. More precisely, these images of stasis emerge as images of emptiness, of spaces depleted of their former meaning and thus transformed into something at once familiar and other.

In *Before Sunrise*, these images of emptiness occur at the emotional climax of the film, just after the two lovers say goodbye and go their separate ways. After shots of Céline departing on her train and Jesse making his way through a bus depot, we see a series of shots showing key locations from earlier in the film: the riverboat, the balcony, the alleyway, the graveyard, the Ferris wheel, the plaza, the riverbank, the park. Each location immediately calls to mind the scene that transpired there earlier in the film. But each of these locations, so magical and meaningful the night before, is now either devoid of discernible human figures or nearly so. We thus see the spaces emptied of the energy that gripped them just hours earlier; we see them as they exist in themselves, "back in real time," as Jesse puts it shortly before he and Céline leave each other.

By ending this way, the film emphasizes the ephemerality of the preceding night and the fragility of the specific "nows" that made up Jesse and Céline's encounter. This sense of ephemerality echoes an earlier scene in *Before Sunrise*, when Jesse and Céline come across a poster advertising a Seurat exhibit. As the film shows, in a series of close-ups, the poster's reproductions of some of Seurat's hazy pointillistic art, Céline explains that "I love the way the people seem to be dissolving into the background . . . It's like the environments, you know, are stronger than the people. His human figures are always so transitory." In the sequence of empty spaces, we see a cinematic expression of this human transitoriness. Once Jesse and Céline have departed, we are left with just the backgrounds, in this case a series of locations around Vienna. In a way, this sequence inverts Schrader's model of banality and emotion. Instead of progressing from a banal everyday to an unaccountable sense of emotion, *Sunrise* moves from an

emotionally charged "now" to an unaccountably empty version of that same now. By progressing in this way, the film reveals the virtual by showing us the actual stripped of the virtuality it formerly contained. What we realize in this sequence of empty images is that the virtual (the imagined/potential future) is what gave life and energy to the film; without the virtual, the actual (the physical environs of Vienna) is suddenly empty of emotional interest.

While *Sunrise* uses its images of stasis to emphasize the transitoriness of human experience, the analogous sequence in *Sunset* does just the opposite, showing how potential can be conjured up from such empty spaces just as easily as it can be lost. In *Sunset*, the logic of the empty spaces in the first film is inverted. Whereas *Sunrise* ends with shots of formerly key locations now empty of people and activity, *Sunset* begins with a series of shots of the locations that Jesse and Céline will visit over the course of the film: Céline's courtyard, a river boat with the Notre-Dame Cathedral in the background, the entrance of a garden Jesse and Céline walk through, the facade of the café they visit. Of course, on first viewing, the significance of these locations doesn't come across; the sequence appears to be merely a collection of establishing shots of Paris. But on repeat viewings, these shots serve an anticipatory function, reminding the viewer of what is to come. In this way they are the functional opposite of the shots at the end of *Sunrise*, because they show not what was but what is to be. The banality and everydayness of the locations signifies not (as in *Before Sunrise*) the virtuality that has been lost, but rather the virtuality that will emerge over the course of the film, that will grip and animate each of these seemingly everyday locations.

Whereas *Sunrise*'s emptiness emphasizes contingency and *Sunset*'s emphasizes potential, *Midnight* synthesizes these two aspects of emptiness into the *Before* series' most complete vision of the link between actual and virtual. On the one hand, the emptiness sequence in *Midnight*

seems at first to signify an end, one potentially more permanent than in *Sunrise*. Late in the film, Jesse and Céline go to a hotel room that their friends booked for them as a getaway, but instead of enjoying a romantic night together, they get in a huge fight that is the film's emotional climax. The fight is followed by a series of shots showing the lost potential of the night and of Jesse and Céline's relationship. There is a shot of the cup of tea Céline made and never drank; a shot of the door she slammed on her way out; a shot of the coffee table, with the untouched glasses of wine Jesse poured; a shot of the bed, where the fight started in earnest. Like the empty location sequences from the previous two films, this sequence shows the relation between reality and potential; but in this case what is being shown is the potential that never came to be, the evening that was intended versus the one that unfolded. The key difference between this sequence and the analogous sequences in the earlier films is that here each shot of abandonment is followed by a reaction shot of Jesse as he looks around the room at each object. By including Jesse in the sequence in this way, the film suggests that there is still potential lurking even in these ruins of the night. The sequence ends with a wide shot of the whole room, encompassing each of these elements, followed by a final close-up of Jesse's face as he seems to make a decision. The next shot begins the final scene of the film, in which Jesse attempts to win back Céline.

This scene in *Midnight* thus offers the series' most complete version of the actual-virtual paradox. Like *Sunrise*, the scene shows us what happens when the actual is suddenly divorced from the virtual—in this case we see Jesse and Céline's entire relationship reduced to the detritus of their doomed evening together. But in that same moment, just like *Sunset*, the scene shows us how potential never truly vanishes, but is always there, waiting to be transformed into reality through action and expression. Thus the climactic scene of *Before Midnight* at last gives the series its moment of transcendence. Schrader, writing on Bresson, says that:

> [Stasis] represents the "new" world in which the spiritual and the physical can coexist, still in tension and unresolved, but as part of a larger scheme in which all phenomena are more or less expressive of a larger reality—the Transcendent. In stasis, the viewer is able to crossinterpret between what seemed to be contradictions: he can read deep emotion into the inexpressive faces and cold environment, and he can read factuality into the inexplicable spiritual actions. (108)

In this scene in *Midnight*, we are able to see the same moment, the same sequence of shots, simultaneously as an end and as a beginning. Faced with an unbearable actuality, we suddenly see the virtual that lies beneath it, and from this intolerable present, we are able immediately to turn, with Jesse's time-travelling ploy, towards a new future that moments ago seemed impossible. In this final moment of transcendence, then, the *Before* series suggests that the actual and the virtual, while distinct aspects of time, are never really opposed nor separate from each other, but are always present, always interacting with and reshaping each other.

These moments of transcendence may, on the surface, seem different from the one we see in *The Tree of Life*. In Malick's film, the everyday is temporarily escaped from. There is a clear delineation between the human and the divine, and with the beach sequence at the end of the film, there is a definite movement from everyday time to divine eternity and then back again. Linklater's transcendence differs in that there is no "outside" of time in the same way that the divine, in Malick, is a separate, atemporal mode of being altogether. Instead of God or eternity, Linklater posits that the wholly other to everydayness is a transcendental Nowness that underlies all of experience, linking seemingly disparate moments in a kind of transcendental simultaneity. Thus for Linklater, transcendence is not about leaving time and then coming back to it (as in *The Tree of Life*). Rather, what is transcended in Linklater's films is an inauthentic experience of time in which, unaware of the transcendental Now, we don't experience the present fully (or in some cases, at all). In transcendence, we don't leave time per se; we leave this faulty everyday *experience* of time in order to encounter transcendental Nowness before returning to the actual

presentness of our current moment. Thus, unlike in *The Tree of Life*, when transcendence and return happen, we don't necessarily feel like we've gone anywhere, but all the same, things are suddenly, subtly different.

Boyhood **and the Disappearing Now**

In exploring the realm of the virtual that underlies everyday experience, the *Before* series systematically dilates the everyday, focusing in on the "now" so that we can begin to see all the other moments, past and potential, working within the present moment. But *Boyhood*, while in many ways a very similar project to the *Before* series, depicts a contemporary mode of life in which the present is rapidly disappearing. In contrast to the *Before* films, each of which places us in a specific place at a specific time for a specific duration, *Boyhood* throws us into a world where space and time are increasingly fragmented and dislocated. The result is a film that above all conveys not the present (as in each *Before* film) but rather the passage of time, which is felt as a constant, accelerated rush into the future. Yet as the film goes on, there is a growing disparity between this structural and thematic futurity and the main character Mason's growing desire to experience a nowness that seems to be rapidly disappearing from contemporary life.

Part of the reason for *Boyhood*'s erosion of nowness is structural; whereas each individual *Before* film is a single two-hour slice of an exact moment in Jesse and Céline's lives, *Boyhood* fits dozens of episodes spanning 12 years into a single 165-minute film. The film depicts the childhood of a boy, Mason, from ages 6 to 18. *Boyhood* was filmed over the course of that 12 year span, with footage shot each summer from 2002 to 2013, and then edited down into a single feature film. The actors playing Mason and his family—his mother, Olivia (Patricia Arquette), father, Mason Sr. (Ethan Hawke), and sister, Samantha (Lorelei Linklater)—remain the same, so as in the *Before* series, we see the actors age as their characters do. But while

Boyhood resembles the *Before* films in matching diegetic time to real life production time, the condensation of *Boyhood*'s 12 years into a single film results in a drastically different experience of time than what we saw in the *Before* series. In particular, this condensation of time leaves little room for the presentness that characterizes the *Before* series. Instead of the dilated nows of those earlier films, *Boyhood*'s everyday is made up of fractured, discontinuous spaces and a series of presents that are already slipping away.

This fracturing of the present is reflected in *Boyhood*'s approach to spatial representation. Whereas the *Before* films follow in the neorealist tradition by setting each film in a single specific location that itself becomes a sort of character in the film, in *Boyhood* we see a life in which specific and consistent locations have given way to generic, ever-changing anyplaces. One striking example of this change is the sheer number of times Mason and his family move. Several of the key transitional points in the film's story revolve around moves to different parts of Texas. In the first half hour of the film, the family moves three times, first from the suburbs to Houston, where Olivia goes back to school in pursuit of a Masters degree and a better job. While in school she begins a relationship with one of her professors, Bill (Marco Perella), and soon marries and moves in with him, combining their two families. When Bill becomes increasingly drunk and abusive, Olivia takes Mason and Samantha and leaves Bill, moving in with her friend Carol (Barbara Chisholm). The family later moves to their own place; eventually Olivia remarries again, and she and her new husband Jim (Brad Hawkins) buy a new house. After divorcing Jim offscreen, Olivia sells the house and moves, with Mason, into an apartment of her own.

The sheer number of these moves, combined with the fact that several of them happen off screen and that none of them make it particularly clear where the family is moving from or to,

makes it hard to keep track of the family's exact location. As a result, when we see Mason at school, or playing in his neighborhood, or exploring the nearest downtown, it is always a different school, a different neighborhood, a different city. The end result is that the locations become generic; the school, house, or neighborhood in a given scene could be any school, house, or neighborhood at all. Even when the action takes the characters to specific locations, as when Mason Sr. takes the kids to an Astros game, or when Mason and his high school girlfriend Sheena (Zoe Graham) spend a night in Austin as part of a college campus visit, these locations are all only brief departures from the endless string of unspecified locales. Even the Astros game sequence effectively erases Houston, reducing it to the backdrop the family drives through on the way to the stadium. The result of all this is an inversion of what we see in the *Before* films. Whereas those are each set in a unified, coherent space that becomes its own character in the film, in *Boyhood* the very lack of consistency, unity, or spatial coherence becomes its own kind of character. Instead of creating a picture of modern urban life as the first two *Before* films do or even a pastoral retreat as *Before Midnight* does, *Boyhood* depicts a contemporary experience in which life is scattered, contingent, and unsettled; in which spaces become less important in themselves because they are always in flux and therefore ultimately replaceable.

In discarding the *Before* series' insistence on the unity and specificity of space, *Boyhood* eliminates one of the main techniques those previous films use to establish a sense of nowness and presentness. Simultaneously, *Boyhood* makes an even more drastic change by abandoning the *Before* films' insistence on the strict correlation of cinematic time to real time. The very essence of *Boyhood* is the condensation of time, the folding of a whole childhood into three hours of film. One way *Boyhood* achieves this condensation is by eliding major portions of the story. Even in the middle of some of the film's most fleshed-out sequences, such as the half-hour

or so that chronicles Olivia's failed marriage to Bill, we find some striking elisions. The first time we see Bill is when Olivia attends his psychology class, bringing Mason because he is not feeling well. At the end of the class, she introduces Mason to Bill and explains why they are there. After Olivia and Bill chat for a few moments, Bill asks if "Grandma might be available for some babysitting." As Olivia says yes, we see Mason stop at the door, a look of curiosity on his face as he listens to the conversation. The next shot is of Mason, Samantha, and two other children playing on a trampoline. This is followed by a shot of Mason and Samantha's grandmother yelling "hey kids, they're here!" from the back of the house. As the kids run in to the house, we see hung on an archway a banner reading "Welcome home, honeymooners! We love you Mom & Dad." In this way an entire relationship, from dating to engagement to marriage, is implied in three or four shots. Similar elisions, in which major life changes happen off screen and are established only implicitly, continue throughout the film. While we see elision in the *Before* series, in *Boyhood*, it is used to a different effect. In the *Before* series, for example, between the first two films Jesse gets married, has a son, and becomes a successful author all offscreen. The difference is that those developments happen in the real nine-year gap between the releases of *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*; crucially, within those two films themselves, time flows continuously with little to nothing elided from scene to scene. In *Boyhood*, by contrast, all of these gaps in time are contained within a single film, making all of the missing moments that much more obvious and striking. It's not just that *Boyhood* plays fast and loose with the real duration of events; it's that the film keeps major events from us entirely, so that from one scene to the next, a year may have passed, and life may have majorly changed, all without warning or explanation. The result is an erosion of the present itself. Unlike the *Before* films, which each rooted us in a specific time and place, *Boyhood* sets us adrift in world where

place is unspecified and changes on a whim and where time passes in unpredictable and inconsistent chunks. As the film goes on, there is no longer a "now" in which to situate ourselves, at least not in the same sense as in the *Before* films.

The Short Now and Its Discontents

In painting a picture of contemporary life, then, *Boyhood* shows us a world in which the present seems to be disappearing. The classic cinematic markers of *here* and *now*—the neorealist unity and continuity of space and time—are shattered, but this shattering seems not so much an arbitrary change in film style as it is a reflection of the way life is actually lived today. That is to say that *Boyhood* is not so much a rejection of the neorealist aesthetic as it is an attempt to adapt that aesthetic to the needs of the contemporary world. As he gets older, Mason gradually becomes aware of (and unhappy with) the effect contemporary life has had on the experience of the present. In one scene, while driving with his girlfriend Sheena, Mason rants about smart phones and social media and the effect they have had on life. Mason argues that humans are willingly turning themselves into cyborgs, that they are "already biologically programmed for our little cyborg upgrades," citing the "dopamine rush in your brain" when "you hear that ding on your inbox"; he concludes that "It's like we're being chemically rewarded for allowing ourselves to be brainwashed." Sheena asks him how his deleting his Facebook account will change any of this, and Mason says that "I just want to try and not live my life through a screen. I want, like, some kind of actual interaction. A real person, not just the profile they put up." While he talks, Sheena checks her phone, and then jokes that she wasn't paying attention to him. Mason replies that "I know you're joking, but, I mean, it's kinda true, you have been, you know, checking your phone this whole time, and so what are you really doing? You don't care what your friends are up to on a Saturday afternoon, but you're also obviously not fully experiencing

my profound bitching so... it's like everyone's just stuck in, like, an in-between state, not really experiencing anything."

In bemoaning this "in-between state," Mason calls attention to the way contemporary experience is increasingly mediated by social networking and online personae. Curiously, the culture of status updates that he protests here can be seen as an influence on the structure of the film itself. Instead of an extended, lived moment of life as we have in the *Before* films, *Boyhood* gives us a series of snapshots and updates over the years. The result is the reduction of the present to a series of marks on a timeline, a catalog of accomplishments, setbacks, and key events. This reduction of the present is explicitly addressed a little later in the film, not by Mason but by his mother. As Mason is packing to move off to college, Olivia has a small breakdown, declaring that "This is the worst day of my life," that "I knew this day was coming, I just—I didn't know you were gonna be so fucking happy to be leaving." She goes on to say that "My life is just gonna go, like that! This series of milestones. Getting married, having kids, getting divorced, the time that we thought you were dyslexic, when I taught you how to ride a bike, getting divorced again, getting my masters degree, finally getting the job I wanted, sending Samantha off to college, sending you off to college. You know what's next? Huh? It's my fucking funeral!" When Mason suggests that she is "jumping ahead by like, forty years or something," she replies, defeated, that "I just thought there would be more." Olivia's rant echoes Mason's in the way it calls attention to the shrinking and disappearing of the present. In Olivia's case, she realizes after the fact that she let her life become a "series of milestones"; that rather than immersing herself in the nowness of any of these moments, she simply breezed past each of them, treating each as the next item on some checklist of life, like the empty status updates Mason bemoans during his car ride with Sheena. Like Mason, Olivia at last realizes she wants

more; she longs for the same kind of real experiences her son also seeks.

This longing for real experience—for nowness—in the face of the disappearing present constitutes *Boyhood*'s version of disparity. In a way, this disparity is very similar to what we saw in the *Before* series. In both cases, disparity begins with characters' desire to live in and experience the present. In the *Before* films, disparity arises from the fact that the more one immerses oneself in the present, the more one becomes aware that the present is always more than itself, so that one thus becomes pulled out of the present and towards a past or a future. In *Boyhood*, the problem is the opposite, because in *Boyhood*, the present is now somehow less than itself, having become merely a fragmentary step on the path of forward progress. Moreover, whereas each *Before* film calls on images of stasis to crystallize the connections between now and future, actual and virtual, *Boyhood*'s constant motion leaves no room for stasis, at least not in any traditional sense. Accordingly, transcendence in *Boyhood* will necessitate a rediscovery of and a return to nowness, because only in such a return can we hope to find the time and space for stasis and transcendence.

The Moment That Seizes Us

This return to nowness begins, as *Boyhood* draws towards a close, with a slow deceleration that leads back to a sense of presentness that has been absent for most of the film. After Olivia's rant, we see a shot of Mason, looking silently at his mother, and then a shot of Olivia, head in her hands, also silent. We then cut to the next scene, where an aerial shot looks down on a rural highway that stretches off into the distance. The camera tilts downward to reveal Mason's truck driving on the road. Once the truck is fully in the frame, the camera holds it there for several seconds before cutting to a shot of Mason at the wheel. This overhead shot is far from an image of stasis; not only are both the camera and its subject literally in motion, but the image

also serves as a visual metaphor of progress as Mason drives towards his future. But at the same time, the shot begins to hint at the same functions that stasis serves in the *Before* films. By beginning with just the road itself before revealing the truck, which is initially out of frame, this shot ever so briefly suggests the sense of emptiness that is so key to the *Before* films. This emptiness only lasts for a second, but it is enhanced by the shot's placement immediately after such a powerful emotional climax. This use of emptiness as a direct counterpoint to human emotional density is the hallmark of stasis in the *Before* series and in traditional transcendental cinema in general. Like everything in *Boyhood*, this shot is always in motion, so the effect only lasts a moment, but it is enough to initiate a larger move towards something slower and stiller.

The scene continues this slowing trend over the next few shots. After a few shots of Mason at the wheel and of the truck moving down the road, we see an even stiller sequence. First, there is a long shot of Mason and his truck stopped at a gas station. While his truck is filling, Mason gets his camera out and begins to take pictures of some of the objects around him: a rusty old lantern, a fire hydrant, a traffic light. This sequence has a deliberate structure to it. We see Mason raise his camera to his eye to frame his shot, then we see the object from his perspective and hear his shutter close, then we cut back to Mason as he stands and looks for his next subject. Rhythmically, this sequence is similar to the sequence of still-lifes at the end of *Before Midnight*. But whereas the objects in the latter film were imbued with meaning because of the fight that preceded that sequence, these objects hold no apparent meaning beyond their visual interest to Mason. Yet this lack of meaning, of obvious purpose, is in fact what makes this sequence of shots important in its own right. Throughout the film, Mason has chafed against the way everything in his life has been future-oriented and purpose-driven. For instance, at one point, we see Mason photographing a high school football game as a punitive assignment from

his photography teacher. Indifferent to the game on the field, he takes pictures of things like the kicker's practice net, which prompts Mason's friend to lean over from the stands to tell him that their teacher wants him to "cut the artsy crap and shoot the game." In that earlier scene, the insistence that his photography is not art but an assignment is one of the things working against the idea of nowness. Mason is not free to explore the moment as he sees fit, but rather is commanded to transform the present into a product, in this case a set of photographs that can be used to report on the game. He desires immediate experience, yet he is forced into the role of mediator. But at the gas station, his photography is finally free to be art rather than product, and in the process it becomes a means of dilating the present. For a brief moment, progress and purpose pause as Mason explores the particular physical details that make up a more-or-less arbitrary now. Whereas throughout his life he has always been pushed towards a future, here he is free to be guided only by his own immersion in and sensitivity to his particular place and time.

This return to the "now" culminates in the final scene of the film. At the end of the film, Mason arrives at college and meets his new roommate, Dalton. Dalton introduces Mason to his girlfriend, Barb, and Barb's roommate Nicole. The four then go hiking in Big Bend National Park. As the sun sets, Mason and Nicole sit on a rock talking. Nicole turns to Mason and says, "You know how everyone's always saying, 'seize the moment?' I don't know, I'm kinda thinking it's the other way around. You know, like, the moment seizes us." Mason enthusiastically agrees with this idea, saying "Yeah, I know. It's constant, the moments, it's just, it's like it's always right now." This idea that "it's always right now" at first glance seems like nothing more than a truism; yet in a film where "right now" has been eroded to almost nothing, this sudden emphasis on "right now," and specifically on "right now" as a "moment that seizes us" marks nothing less than *Boyhood*'s gesture towards transcendence. It is, to be sure, an

incomplete and underrealized gesture, yet nevertheless it is a gesture that subtly realigns all that came before it.

To fully appreciate this realignment, it is useful to look at how the idea that "it's always right now" taps into a line of philosophical thinking developed elsewhere in Linklater's filmography, not in the *Before* series but in his 2001 rotoscope-animated film *Waking Life*. *Waking Life* follows a nameless protagonist (Wiley Wiggins) through a series of surreal encounters with bizarre characters as he attempts to wake up from what seems to be an endless dream. At one point the protagonist meets Linklater himself, and the filmmaker shares with the protagonist a dream he had. Linklater begins by summarizing the "preamble to the dream," a Philip K. Dick essay that suggests that time is an illusion created to make the world forget that it is still 50 A.D. and that Christ's return is imminent. Linklater then goes on to explain how in his dream, he meets a woman who tells him that:

> Philip K. Dick is right about time, but he's wrong that it's 50 A.D. Actually, there's only one instant, and it's right now, and it's eternity. And it's an instant in which God is posing a question, and that question is basically, "Do you want to, you know, be one with eternity? Do you want to be in heaven?" And we're all saying, "No thank you. Not just yet." And so time is actually just this constant saying "No" to God's invitation. I mean that's what time is. I mean, and it's no more 50 A.D. than it's 2001. And there's just this one instant, and that's what we're always in.

In other words, time is simply the illusion that arises from the continuous "no"; it is a product of our ignoring or forgetting or denying eternity. In this conception, it is quite literally *always* "right now" because "right now" is only one, endlessly extended instant. "Right now," though it takes the guise of any number of ordinary everyday moments, is in fact always an opening to eternity just waiting to be discovered and accepted. And though the on-screen Linklater character goes on to tell the protagonist that he doesn't really believe in this conception of time, it is a conception that nonetheless resonates throughout Linklater's filmmaking. We might think back, for instance,

to Jesse's idea in *Before Sunset* that "time is a lie," and to the way that film then illustrates that idea by showing time folding in on itself as past, present, and future all converge at the film's climax.

Indeed, whether or not Linklater personally believes in the eternal, he certainly seems to believe in cinema's power to touch on something contained within, though much greater than, everyday experience. Another scene in *Waking Life* explicitly addresses this cinematic power. Midway through the film, the protagonist wanders into a movie theatre bearing the marquee: "The Holy Moment." As he watches the film-within-the-film, we see filmmaker Caveh Zahedi talking to another man about André Bazin's cinematic ontology. After first explaining Bazin's description of film as the reproduction of reality, Zahedi emphasizes Bazin's Christian faith, arguing that for Bazin, "reality and God are the same," and that therefore film is "a record of God, or of the face of God, or of the ever-changing face of God." Zahedi goes on to argue that, in Bazin's view, the power of cinema is its ability to frame any given moment in order to reveal the holiness of that moment. Everything, Zahedi says, is holy, because everything in the world is a different incarnation of God; in our everyday lives we forget this fact because we are absorbed in our worldly concerns, but when a film cuts out, frames, and preserves a portion of reality, it can reveal the holiness that is always immanent in all of existence. In short, the power of cinema is that it can reveal what Zahedi calls "the holy moment." That is, film can reveal God's immanence in even the most mundane everyday moment; as Zahedi puts it, "We walk around like there's some holy moments and there are all the other moments that are not holy, right, but this moment is holy, right? And if film can let us see that, like, frame it so that we see, like, 'Ah, this moment. Holy. And it's like, 'holy, holy holy,' moment by moment."[16]

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16. It is worth noting that in this explication, Zahedi takes some liberties with Bazin's ideas,

These scenes from *Waking Life* put a new emphasis on Mason's declaration that "it's constant, the moments . . . it's always right now," suggesting that the "it" that is constant, that is always right now, that is always waiting to seize us, is in fact the eternal. And while Linklater's films don't share the explicitly Christian themes of *The Tree of Life*, while Linklater's cinematic avatar in *Waking Life* personally disavows belief in the quasi-religious ideas he lays out, these scenes reveal, at the very least, a fascination with the idea of eternity, an interest in the connection between the eternal and the everyday, and a belief in the power of the cinema to reveal the former at work in the latter. We have already seen how the *Before* films exercise this cinematic power to reveal, if not eternity, then at least a transcendental Now that lies both beyond and within each everyday moment. In the larger context of all of these ideas, then, when Mason suggests that "it's always right now," his words cast a new light on all of the fragmented moments in time that make up *Boyhood*. From the perspective of Zahedi's holy moment or Linklater's eternal instant, each of these fragments, no matter how small, is a sliver of infinity, and each holds the potential to reconnect itself not just to all the other nows that surround it, that lead up to it and proceed from it, but also to time as eternity, as the transcendental Now that at once unites and springs from each individual everyday now.

By reconnecting all of these fragmentary moments to each other and to a bigger picture of time, Mason's and Nicole's exchange thus serves as *Boyhood*'s moment of transcendence. Yet we reach this point without following the familiar path laid out by Schrader, in which

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drawing conclusions that are not explicitly supported by Bazin's film writings. Dudley Andrew, for instance, criticizes Linklater's and Zahedi's representation of Bazin as an oversimplification and points out that Bazin himself never used the term "holy moment" (*What Is Cinema?: Volume II* xii). But what is important about this scene is not the accuracy of its Bazinian scholarship so much as the way the ideas Zahedi outlines inform—and help us understand—Linklater's own filmmaking practice.

transcendence occurs in the moment of stasis, as the static image on the screen calls on the viewer to re-envision the relationship between the everyday and the eternal. Indeed, while *Boyhood* gradually begins to gesture towards stillness, it never actually reaches a stasis point. Instead, the film suggests a different model of transcendence, one based not on stasis but on the process of returning, specifically returning to the everyday. As in *The Tree of Life*, this model of returning brings to mind Heidegger's concept of the moment of vision, a double movement which both originates from and delivers us back to the present. What is interesting about the moment of vision in *Boyhood* is that, rather than belonging only to a single character in a single moment (as with Jack in *The Tree of Life*), it occurs gradually and collectively across the final sequences of the film; it is a process that begins not with Mason himself, but with his mother and her moment of crisis concerning her own life. According to Heidegger, the moment of vision is preceded by the experience of anxiety, which "discloses an insignificance of the world; and this insignificance reveals the nullity of that with which one can concern oneself—or, in other words, the impossibility of projecting oneself upon a potentiality-for-Being which belongs to existence and which is founded primarily upon one's objects of concern" (393). That is to say that in anxiety, one realizes that meaning and fulfillment can never come only from everyday worldly concerns. This aspect of anxiety is precisely what Olivia expresses as she bemoans the "series of milestones" which have come to define her life. In this moment, she realizes that the concerns she has built her life around—marriages, children, work—have not given her fulfillment, but have instead become only markers of time's passing. What especially elevates her monologue to the level of anxiety is her realization that "what's next [is] my fucking funeral!" Heidegger argues that anxiety arises with respect to one's mortality; it "is grounded primordially in having been, and only out of this do the future and the Present temporalize themselves." In anxiety we

are acutely aware that we will die, and this awareness colors our experience of our everyday surroundings. In her moment of anxiety, Olivia looks ahead to see herself as something-that-has-been, and in doing so recognizes the "naked uncanniness" of worldly existence in the emptiness of the milestones that have made up her life (394).

Yet the experience of anxiety is not alone constitutive of a moment of vision. Indeed, the scene with Olivia does not by itself meet Heidegger's description of the moment of vision in which one is delivered mindfully back to the present to take charge of one's "*authentic* potentiality-for-Being" (394). Her scene ends, as we saw earlier, with her anxiety still unresolved as we shift our attention to Mason as he sets off for college. In fact, it is through Mason that we are eventually brought back to the present, at first through the subtle deceleration and in-the-moment-ness of his roadside photography, and then more explicitly through his conversation with Nicole and his declaration that "it's always right now." Heidegger describes the culmination of the moment of vision as "coming back resolutely to one's thrownness" so that we can "*encounter for the first time* what can be 'in a time' as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand" (435; 388). In the moment of vision, we return to "right now" to find it full of unrealized potential. Whereas in anxiety we look at "right now" and realize, as Olivia does, that we "thought there would be more," in the moment of vision we are able to see that there is indeed more, that the present contains that realm of potential that we have variously named the virtual or the eternal (or what Heidegger dubs "fate"). Moreover, in declaring that "it's *always* right now" (my emphasis), Mason (and we) realize that this realm of potential exists not just in *this* moment, but in *every other moment*, both those that have already occurred in the film and those that are yet to come.

This return to the present as a moment of transcendence is not just a philosophical

construct. It is reinforced by a stylistic shift in the last few seconds of the film. After their final exchange, there is a wordless, 15-second shot of Mason and Nicole stealing glances of each other until each catches the other looking; this shot is a direct parallel to similar shots with Jesse and Céline in both *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*. By borrowing this visual language to show the burgeoning attraction between Mason and Nicole, the film reinvokes the sense of a dilated, seemingly-endless now that was the hallmark of each of the *Before* films. In other words, just as Mason finally experiences a return to nowness, so too does the film itself, as we suddenly find ourselves back in the aesthetic nowness of the *Before* films. And while this final shot is obviously not the kind of static image that Schrader describes, it arguably serves much the same purpose. Indeed, the extended "long now" of this final shot marks such a sudden and drastic contrast to the rapidly-passing time that makes up so much of the film that it feels, by comparison, like stasis. The impact of this final shot is further punctuated by the abrupt cut to black that ends the film. The cut seems to put an exclamation point on this new idea of right-now-ness, and it leaves wide open the sense of possibility that has just opened up for the characters. There may be no stasis per se, but ultimately the same effect is achieved. At the end of *Boyhood*, we are able to cross-interpret between the short nows that have made up most of the film and the long nows that characterize the *Before* series (and that represent the sort of experience that Mason longs for). Moreover, we are able to see that short and long, nowness and futurity, are not exclusive of each other, but are, as Schrader puts it, simply different aspects of the larger scheme of the transcendent.

Beyond the Transcendental Now

Taken all together, we can see how Linklater's filmmaking forms a natural progression from the transcendental cinema established in *The Tree of Life*. Like Malick, Linklater adheres

primarily to traditional, established cinematic aesthetics. And like Malick's film, Linklater's *Before* films in particular adhere relatively closely to the model of transcendence that Schrader lays out, specifically in terms of the banality-disparity-stasis progression. But at the same time, Linklater's films also exhibit a truly contemporary, everyday transcendence. The everydayness of this transcendence begins with the move away from the conception of transcendental cinema as an inherently religious or spiritual phenomenon. To be sure, as we saw earlier, Linklater's ideas about time are at least mildly influenced by religious thought, in particular by the notion that God, or eternity, is inherent in each everyday moment. Likewise, Linklater's dedication to neorealist-inspired filmmaking—to what he calls "sculpting real time"—seems linked to this notion that cinema holds the power to reveal the eternal at work within the everyday.

Yet for Linklater this spirituality remains in a state of ambivalence; it influences the way Linklater's films structure time, but it never actually appears as a thematic element in the films themselves (except in *Waking Life*, which inherently deals with questions of life and death and in which Linklater disavows the same religious ideas he himself introduces). When *The Tree of Life* moves towards transcendence, it is abundantly clear, from the film's religiously-themed story and its cosmic imagery, that the realm of the transcendental is the realm of the Eternal in the form of the Judeo-Christian God. Like Malick's film, the *Before* series and *Boyhood* reach beyond human contingency and temporariness, seeking something larger and more permanent than the individual nows that make up our lives. But in the end, the exact nature of this something more remains more nebulous than in *The Tree of Life*, more abstract and conceptual than Malick's realm of Christian creation and afterlife. Whereas *The Tree of Life* ultimately seeks to transcend time to touch the eternal—which, by definition, is outside of time— Linklater's films seek to transcend one aspect of time (the everyday, or the actual) to get at

another aspect of time which is embedded in yet distinct from the first. This second aspect of time, for Linklater, is the transcendental Now, the moment, holy or otherwise, that is always waiting to seize us.

Ultimately, Linklater's work raises two issues that are at the heart of everyday transcendental cinema: the desire for a sense of permanence and of greater meaning that is not founded in spirituality, and the question of how to be present in a now that is fundamentally challenged by the pressures of the past, the future, or the realities of contemporary everyday life. The remaining chapters see these issues played out in increasingly ambivalent ways compared to the fundamental optimism of Malick's and Linklater's films. Chapter 3 explores what happens when potential itself breaks down and time is caught in a cycle of returning not to the present, but to a traumatic past that inserts itself in place of the present. Chapter 4 explores what happens when the optimism found in Linklater collapses into solipsism with the question of how, if every moment is as imbued with potential as every other, any moment can be significant at all. Finally, there is one other aspect of everyday transcendence that is only touched on in Linklater's work (and in this chapter) but which assumes vital importance in the remaining chapters of this study, and that is the role of technology in the contemporary experience of time and transcendence. This technological influence first appears in *Boyhood*, where it plays a relatively minor role. But in the chapters to come, technology will play a central role both in the texture of everyday life and in the mechanics of transcendence itself.

CHAPTER 3 DAYS OF PRESENT PAST: HISTORY, NOWNESS, AND THE HAUNTED PRESENT IN *HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR* AND *WALTZ WITH BASHIR*

If Linklater's films show a gradual evolution of the transcendental style, Ari Folman's animated documentary *Waltz With Bashir* represents a much more radical change both in the formal structure of the transcendental film and in the nature of cinematic transcendence itself. Whereas Linklater's *Before* series and *Boyhood* use the logic of everyday transcendence to explore and enrich neorealism's sense of nowness, *Waltz With Bashir* applies the same logic to an already experimental documentary aesthetic. In the process, *Bashir* ends up speaking to another, even more specific branch of art cinema, namely the subset of New Wave cinema carved out by Alain Resnais. Many of Resnais' films explore the tangled relationship between present and past, experience and memory. In structuring his cinematic meditations on historical and personal traumas, Resnais typically forgoes conventional chronological structures in order to investigate the way time and history are reconfigured by "the complexity of the human process of imagination and recall" (Wilson 4). In doing so, Resnais' films tend to create complex, ambiguous presents that are forever haunted by their own pasts.

In this chapter I am particularly interested in the way that *Waltz With Bashir* works as a sort of spiritual successor to Resnais' 1959 film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. *Hiroshima* depicts the burgeoning, ultimately abortive love affair between a nameless French woman (Emmanuelle Rivas) and a nameless Japanese man (Eiji Okada) in the title city. Throughout the film, both characters are haunted by the specter of the atomic bombing of the city at the end of World War II, and additionally, the woman is haunted by the personal trauma she experienced during the war, namely the death of her German lover and her subsequent madness and imprisonment in her parents' cellar in Nevers, France. *Bashir*, which hovers somewhere between documentary and memoir, follows filmmaker and protagonist Ari Folman's attempts to recover his lost memories

of the 1982 war between Lebanon and Israel, and specifically his memories of his role in a

massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

While historically and stylistically the two films are very different, they both explore a

haunted present; that is, a present which is defined and lived solely in relation to a traumatic past.

In these haunted presents, the very boundaries of time, space, and even identity become blurred

and indistinct as the present seeks to efface itself in favor of the past moment which always

hovers over it. And in both films, the protagonists are themselves haunted by pasts that seem to

leave them no recourse in the present. The nameless female protagonist of *Hiroshima* is haunted

simultaneously by her inability to escape her past and by her inability to hold onto it. Similarly,

Folman is haunted by a past he can't even remember, and is forced to go in search of the trauma

that has evaded his memory.

But for all these similarities, *Hiroshima* and *Bashir* ultimately reach two very different

conclusions about the nature of the haunted present. For Resnais, the traumatic past becomes a

trap from which the present cannot escape; his film ends by affirming that our pasts, our personal

traumas, forever mark us, that they separate us from each other in the present because they

separate us *from* the present. *Bashir*, on the other hand, ends with a radical adaptation of

everyday transcendence: borrowing the idea of transcendence as a return to the present, *Bashir*

ultimately returns to the past *as* a present, a move that gives the film a way out of the temporal

trap that defines the end of *Hiroshima*. But while *Bashir*'s use of the return puts the film in the

same family as *The Tree of Life* and Linklater's films, it remains a distant relative. For one thing,

while *Bashir*, like *The Tree of Life* and *Boyhood*, is about transcending a specific kind of

everydayness, the actual connotations of that transcendence are quite different. Whereas in

Malick and Linklater, the return to the present is an embrace of the possibilities and freedoms the

present affords, *Bashir*'s return to the past-as-present is more about exorcising the guilt of the past in order to free the present (a present we never actually see) from the weight of memory.

Moreover, in comparison to the films we have previously explored, *Bashir* introduces some important differences in the mechanics of transcendence, specifically with regards to the role of technology and mediation. While Folman's film very loosely corresponds to the model of transcendental cinema, with the haunted present providing both everydayness and temporal disparity, the film ends not with an image of stasis but with a violent stylistic break. The most salient stylistic feature of *Bashir* is that while it is structured more or less as a documentary, it is animated—until the final sequence, where the film cuts shockingly from animation to live action archival footage of the immediate aftermath of the massacre. On the one hand, this stylistic break is a functional parallel to the moment of stasis, in that it forces the viewer to reconsider and reflect on the temporal and philosophical disparities that precede it. On the other hand, the technological nature of this break represents a crucial evolution in the everyday-transcendental style. If *Bashir* ultimately transcends the haunted present and redeems the past that haunts it, it does so only thanks to the existence of a media archive, which has fortuitously preserved a crucial moment of the past. In leaning so heavily on the archive for its ultimate effect, *Bashir* implies a significant role for media technologies in guiding our experience and understanding of time.

Ghosts

In order to examine how *Waltz With Bashir* reimagines everyday transcendence, it is first necessary to look at the way the film corresponds to the overarching structure of transcendental cinema, the progression from everydayness to disparity, culminating in a moment of stasis. Even more so than Malick or Linklater, Folman pushes against the boundaries of this structure,

specifically with regards to everydayness and disparity. In fact, in the haunted present, everydayness and disparity are one and the same. Instead of beginning with a banal present that gradually becomes disparate, *Bashir* gives us a present that, from the start, is wracked with spatiotemporal disparities. In this way it draws its lineage not from the transcendental films of Schrader's study but from Resnais' approach to the haunted present in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. *Hiroshima*—and, in turn, *Bashir*—gives us a present that is marked from the start by disorientation and ambiguity with respect to time, space, and the boundaries of the self.

In *Hiroshima* this disorientation begins with the very first sequence. The opening shot is of a pair of lovers embracing; yet what we see is a close-up on two sets of arms along with part of a torso while a fine ash drifts down and adheres to their skin. The shot is cropped so closely that it is difficult to tell who is who, which limbs belong to which body—it may even take a moment to realize what we are seeing. This shot dissolves into a sequence of similar, but less abstract shots of the arms, shoulders, hands, and torsos of the two protagonists as they make love in a bed. Just as we come to grips with this imagery, the tone shifts again as the man says, in voiceover, "you saw nothing in Hiroshima." As he speaks, we see the woman's hand on his shoulder. She digs her fingers into him as she insists that she "saw everything." She goes on to describe what she saw: the hospital, the museum, and a series of other sites, exhibits, documents, and re-creations dedicated to preserving the horror of the atomic bombing of the city. By starting this way—by representing the passionate couple as a series of chopped up, disembodied limbs and by then immediately transforming the scene of passion into a scene of historical trauma—the film drops us in to a site of tonal and spatiotemporal ambiguity. The scene introduces the essence of the film's plot and themes (two lovers discuss their traumatic pasts), but with no context to pin

down what is going on. In this opening sequence, we don't know where we are, or when we are, or who is speaking.

The disorientation that is established in the opening sequence is carried forward over the course of the film. For instance, throughout the film it is clear that in the haunted present, time is unstable, as the present is frequently punctuated by and conflated with the past. One example of this conflation happens early on, when the woman looks at the man as he sleeps face-down on the bed. As she gazes at him, her eyes come to rest on his hand, which twitches as he sleeps. From the close-up on the man's hand, we suddenly cut to a close-up on a different man's hand—that of a German soldier (the woman's past lover, as we will later learn) as he lies dying in the street. We cut back to the present, and the woman is shaken by the sudden eruption of the past within the present.

A similar series of intercuts between past and present takes place in the middle of the film, in a key central sequence in which the woman finally tells her personal tragic past to her Japanese lover. As the two sit in a café, the woman explains how, during World War II, she fell in love with a German soldier (Bernard Fresson) who was part of the force occupying her home town of Nevers. On the day the town was liberated, the soldier was shot and died in her arms. Their affair discovered, she and her family were disgraced; and when she went mad with grief, her parents locked her in their cellar for a period of months. As the woman tells this story, we cut between images of the present (the lovers sitting at their table) and of the past events the woman describes. As her story goes on, these cuts between past and present become increasingly and deliberately jarring. For instance, at one point the woman describes how, during her imprisonment, she scraped her nails off by clawing at the walls. In the present, she grasps her lover's hands while saying that, "hands are useless in a cellar," at which point we cut

immediately to her bloody fingers scraping at the rock walls of the cellar before cutting back to her healthy, intact fingernails as she reaches for her glass. As her story goes on, the woman mentions a cat who found its way downstairs with her, and we see a series of shots that cut from her eyes to the cat's and back, until suddenly, instead of the expected cut back to the cat's eyes, we cut to a shot of the café. This cut functions almost as a flashforward, as we move jarringly from the past back to the present, and it emphasizes the fact that by this point, the past and the present have so commingled that it is difficult to find the boundaries between the two.

Just as the line between present and past becomes blurred over the course of *Hiroshima*, so too do the borders between one place and another. After telling her story to the man, the woman goes out walking by herself through the streets of the city. As she walks slowly and aimlessly, we see a brief series of shots of Hiroshima's nightscape. Bright lights and neon signs illuminate the streets and storefronts as the woman walks by. But then we cut from one such shot to a shot of a building corner with very different architecture. Set into the side of this building is a plaque that reads: "Place de la République." We are in Nevers. The camera tracks forward towards the plaque, and then we cut on that same forward tracking motion to a large marquee emblazoned with Japanese characters. The sequence continues in similar fashion, matching Hiroshima and Nevers shot for shot, as the woman begins to narrate. "I meet you," she says, over a shot of Hiroshima. We cut back to Nevers: "I remember you." The next line bridges a cut from Nevers back to Hiroshima: "This city was tailor-made for love. You fit my body like a glove." The sequence goes on with the woman speaking, ambiguously, to one or perhaps both of her lovers as the city on screen constantly oscillates between Hiroshima and Nevers. The overall effect of the sequence is to suggest the way the woman is caught between two places, and two time periods, at once. In Hiroshima, falling in love with a new man, she finds herself pulled back

to the site of her previous love affair with the German soldier. Likewise, in remembering and sharing the story of Nevers, she finds her present tinged with the death and loss and guilt and madness that she first encountered in that town. Caught between the two places, she seems to inhabit neither. As she walks the streets of Hiroshima, she does so absently, oblivious to the cab that drives around her as she walks down the middle of a road, oblivious to the street musicians who brush past her as she walks. It is almost as though she makes herself a ghost as she sinks further and further into the haunted present that defines her existence.

Just as time and place become blurred and ambiguated in *Hiroshima*, so too do the boundaries that separate one person from another. This blurring of identity is suggested in the opening shots of the film, whose disembodying images of the lovers makes it hard to tell whose body is whose. The woman herself describes a similar blurring of bodies while recalling what happened in Nevers. As she lay on top of her dying German lover, she says, after a while, his body and hers became the same. This interchangeability of bodies is also suggested in the aforementioned cut between the hand of the sleeping Japanese man and that of the dying German man. The fluidity and uncertainty of identity becomes even more extreme during the café scene. As the woman tells her story, the man presses her for more details, and as they converse, they both begin to speak in the present tense and to refer to him as though he were her German lover. For instance, he asks her whether "I am dead" when she is in the cellar, and she confirms that "you're dead." This use of present tense, along with the fact that the man is verbally role-playing as the German lover, comes without warning, making their conversation at the café jarring when we first hear it. Taken all together, these various shifts and conflations of identity, combined with the film's repeated confusion of time and space, bring home the nature of the haunted present,

which blurs the lines between present and past to the point that the present can no longer operate independently of the past that haunts it.

Continuing in this tradition that *Hiroshima* establishes, *Waltz With Bashir* similarly constructs a haunted present in which the boundaries of time, place, and self are blurred. In fact, the use of animation allows *Bashir* to employ this blurring effect even more extensively than *Hiroshima*. In Resnais' film, present and past are in frequent contact; but as a live-action film, *Hiroshima* can only accomplish this contact by intercutting images of the present and the past, or of one place and another. The result is that even as they are brought into contact with each other, the present and the past always remain distinct. Their relation is one of juxtaposition rather than an actual combination of the two. For instance, in the sequence where the woman walks through Hiroshima at night, there is no question of *confusing* Hiroshima with Nevers; even as the woman finds herself torn between the two locations, perhaps even mentally inhabiting both of them at the same time, the cities remain two distinct, separate places. Indeed, even as the sequence works to compare and conflate the two, one cannot help but notice the difference between Nevers, with its old stone buildings and gated courtyards, and Hiroshima, with its busy city streets and its bright neon lights.

In contrast, *Waltz With Bashir* uses the flexibility of animation to move fluidly, almost imperceptibly between present and past, or one place and another. With animation, different locations and temporalities can be seamlessly blended into the same "shot," creating a cinematic "now" that is a hybrid of present and past, of one place and another. There are, of course, major ontological (not to mention stylistic) differences between animation and live action. These differences are captured, for instance, in André Bazin's argument that the photographic image (whether in still photography or in the traditional moving picture) captures a trace of the

photographed object and thereby serves as a record (Bazin would say a reproduction) of the object's realness (*What Is Cinema: Volume 1* 14). The photographic image is thus a guarantor of reality, at least in the sense that when we see a photochemically-captured image, we are assured that the pictured scene, object, or person was in fact physically present before the camera. The field of film studies has recently debated the extent to which this ontological realness extends to digital cinema and the extent to which digital compositing and effects have blurred the line between live action and animation.[17] These debates are far beyond the scope of this study, but needless to say, with the pseudo-hand-drawn animation that comprises the bulk of *Bashir*, we are well aware that what we are seeing is not "real" in the same way a photographed image is. The film itself even suggests this difference when one of Folman's subjects gives him permission to "draw as much as you like . . . but don't film." The implication seems to be that drawing—and animation—is somehow less real than photography and live-action film. This presumed difference in realness is crucial, as we will see, for *Bashir*'s moment of transcendence, which hinges on the juxtaposition of animation and live action and on the apparent ontological difference between the two.

But until that point, *Bashir* capitalizes on the way animation allows for a hallucinatory, muddled sense of time within a single continuous "shot." The flexibility of this animated haunted present is brought home from the very start of the film. *Bashir* opens in 2006 with Folman (who provides the voice for his own animated avatar) meeting an old comrade, Boaz (Mickey Leon), in a bar. Boaz tells Folman of a recurring nightmare he has that stems from the war, and asks

17. For an example of the former, see, for instance, D.N. Rodowick's controversial claim that Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002), recorded to digital video in a single, 86-minute take, fails to convey duration "nor is it a 'film' in any conventional sense of the term" (165). For an example of the latter, see Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*, which explores at length the idea that all digital cinema is essentially animation.

Folman how the latter has dealt with his memories. Folman replies that he doesn't remember his experiences in the war. But later that night, he suddenly begins to experience flashbacks to his time in Lebanon. While driving home from his meeting with Boaz, Folman pulls over near the shore and looks out at the sea. At this point, we are looking over Folman's shoulder at the water as he explains that his flashback took him not just to the war, but to the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut; as he speaks, he turns to his left to look back at the city, and our perspective pans with his, revealing that Folman is now standing outside Beirut as flares paint the night sky yellow. We then cut to a long shot of naked man emerging from the water at the edge of Beirut. This is followed by a shot of a much younger Folman floating in the water, apparently just waking up or coming to. The scene continues as Folman and several other men emerge from the water and enter the city.

This vision, which recurs throughout the film, is the cryptic fragment of memory that drives Folman to investigate his past. What's crucial about our first glimpse of this vision is the way it merges present-day Israel with an historical (if imagined) Beirut in a single seamless cinematic moment that fuses the two distinct historical periods and places them into a single time and space. As Folman looks out over the water, we see the chronological present; when he turns back to the city and sees Beirut, we see the chronological past. Because both present and past are encompassed within a single "shot," they come together to form a single, unified cinematic present. This temporal unity typifies the film's approach to memory and time. To remember, the film suggests, is to reanimate the past in such a way that remembered moments come alive and intermingle with the lived present. Thanks to animation's ability to combine images freely and to transform them at will, this fluid intermingling of past and present becomes an integral part of the fabric of the film. Through sequences like this early one, the film is able to make images of

the present and of the past feel equally here-and-now by allowing both present and past to share the screen and transform freely between one another.

The extreme fluidity of past and present, the ease with which any "here and now" can become the "then and there" of the Lebanon war, continues throughout the film. A few scenes after his initial flashback, Folman goes to the Netherlands to interview another one of his old comrades, Carmi (Yehezkel Lazarov), in hopes of clearing up his memories of the war and the massacre. While the interview doesn't give him the answers he hoped for, it does trigger another flashback, which occurs as Folman is riding in a cab back to the airport from Carmi's farm in the Dutch countryside. We see a shot of Folman's pensive face through the rear passenger window of the cab. It is winter, and as the cab drives down the road, the reflection in the window shows us the dead trees passing across Folman's face. Suddenly, instead of a leafless deciduous tree, we see a palm tree reflected in the window, and then an armored vehicle full of troops. Meanwhile, the wintery bluish-grey sky visible through the back window of the cab has warmed to a deserty orange. Suddenly Folman realizes the change in his environment, and whips his head around in a double-take. We cut to see over his shoulder as he watches the armored vehicle driving down what is now clearly a road in Lebanon. The scene continues with more shots of the armored vehicle, including a close-up of a younger Folman firing a mounted machine gun from the top of the vehicle as Folman's voiceover tells us that on his way to the Amsterdam airport, his memories came flooding back to him.

As with Folman's earlier vision of the war, what is most striking about this flashback is the way it combines two places and two historical moments into a single haunted present. There is a distinct moment where the older Folman is in the cab in the Netherlands, and there is then a distinct moment where the younger Folman is in the armored vehicle in Lebanon. But in

between, there is a distinct moment where the older Folman looks out the back window of his cab and sees his younger self riding to war through the Lebanese countryside. In this latter, transitional moment, we see time fold in on itself as it becomes a haunted present, a "now" that hybridizes the past and present so fluidly that the two temporalities become one and the same on screen.

One of the interesting effects of this fluidity between present and past is that in *Bashir*, the present seems to influence the past just as readily as the past influences the present. Given the powerful traumatic experiences the film explores, it is no surprise when the past bleeds into the present; but what is less expected is the way the present continuously bleeds into the past. This bleeding-through manifests frequently in the surreal, detached tone assumed by most of the film's flashbacks to the war. When soldiers in the film recall their traumatic experiences, they speak with a sense of distance and calm that belies the horrors they are describing. This verbal distancing is to be expected given the time that has passed since the war; but what is interesting is the way this sense of calm becomes imprinted upon the past as that past comes alive for us on screen. For instance, midway through the film, one of Folman's interviewees, Frenkel (Shmuel Frenkel playing himself), describes an ambush in an orchard that resulted in him shooting and killing a young boy. On the screen, we see the orchard; it is animated with a sense of otherworldly mystery, with rays of sunlight slanting through the trees. On the soundtrack is the Largo movement of J. S. Bach's Harpsichord Concerto No.5; the softly dancing melody adds to the dreamlike tranquility established by the images on screen. As the Israeli soldiers slowly make their way through the orchard, two small boys emerge from hiding and fire on them with RPGs. This attack is presented entirely in slow motion. The only sound is the Bach piece and the noise of the rocket tearing through the air and exploding against an Israeli APC. At this point we

briefly cut back to the present and see Frenkel as he tells the story, before cutting back to the orchard as the soldiers open fire on the boy. Now the soundtrack is silent save for the gunfire. The flashback ends with a still, silent shot of the boy lying dead.

This sequence is a good example of how traumatic and violent memories are treated throughout the film. Such memories frequently take on a surreal air, and the orchard sequence is no exception. The soldiers in the orchard move as if in a dream, their faces slack and expressionless. Meanwhile, the atmospheric lighting and the incongruous sound design combine to transform what was in reality a violent, chaotic ambush into a lilting, airy fantasy sequence. This sense of unreality demonstrates the reciprocal nature of past and present in *Bashir*'s haunted present. On the one hand, the act of remembering brings the past to life in the present: as Frenkel speaks, that moment in the orchard in 1982 becomes our cinematic here-and-now. On the other hand, even as memory revives the past, it also transforms it, so that what we see and hear in the orchard is colored by a detached matter-of-factness that belongs not to the events on screen, but to the present mindset of the man narrating those events. What we see, in short, is the past, but the past specifically as colored and reshaped by the present. In this way the film shows how the interpenetration between past and present is a two-way street; the past becomes alive in the present in the act of remembering, but so too in the act of remembering do the psychological and emotional states of the present reinterpret the past. Put another way, the past we see in these sequences is not the *actual* past, any more than the present is the *actual* present. Rather, both "past" and "present" are functions of the haunted present that characterizes the film as a whole.

Another way in which *Bashir* expands on the formula set out in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is in its treatment of the self in the haunted present. In both films, the boundaries of self become porous in the act of remembering. But in *Bashir*, unlike in *Hiroshima*, there is a real sense that

the haunted present is a collective rather than individual experience. In *Hiroshima*, the woman briefly lets the Japanese man into her past, verbally transforming him into the "you" of her deceased German lover. Yet her memories of Nevers ultimately remain hers alone. They are singular, personal, and proprietary. Hers are the only personal memories we ever get in any detail, and almost immediately after she shares those memories, the woman expresses a profound ambivalence about the shared act of remembering she has participated in. Throughout the film, she is haunted by "the horror of forgetting." She feels immense guilt at the fact that she can no longer remember certain aspects of her German lover, as though in forgetting his eyes or his voice she has somehow betrayed him. Yet she also feels the act of remembering as its own kind of betrayal. After sharing her story with her Japanese lover, she returns to her hotel room, where she begins to talk to herself and to the dead German man: "You were not quite dead yet," she says; "I told our story. I cheated on you tonight with that stranger. I told our story. You see, it was there to tell. . . . Look how I'm forgetting you. Look how I've forgotten you." Thus on the one hand, *Hiroshima* construes memory as a means of keeping the past alive by reanimating it in the act of retelling it. Yet on the other hand, there is a profound ambivalence about the shared nature of that act, an ambivalence that seems to stem from the desire to hold onto memory as a personal, proprietary experience; as the woman says in this same interior monologue, "In her youth in Nevers she had a German love. We'll go to Bavaria, my love, and we'll get married. She never went to Bavaria. Let those who never went to Bavaria dare speak to her of love!"

Waltz With Bashir is different in that it seems to embrace the transformation of personal memory to collective memory. The film begins with Folman's quest to regain his own individual experiences of the war. But because that quest requires him to seek out others to help reveal his own memories, the film in fact suggests that the individual is inseparable from the collective. We

see this fact from the beginning of the film, when the encounter with Boaz is what causes Folman to interrogate his own memories. We see it as well in the fact that Folman's journey into his own past can only proceed through the act of talking to old comrades, in the process incorporating their stories into his own. This incorporation is demonstrated in the way that each of Folman's interview subjects becomes, for the time he is speaking, the dominant narrative influence in the film. Not only do we hear each veteran's voice and see him as he relates his past, but in each case we flash back to see the scene in the war as the soldier describes it.

Moreover, the film also frequently depicts the fantasies and dreams not just of Folman, but of all of the film's speakers. For instance, the very first sequence in the film takes us inside Boaz's mind, showing us his nightmare of a pack of dogs charging through the streets, terrorizing everyone in their path before congregating at the foot of a building, barking up at Boaz as he looks out the window. We see this dream sequence before we even know what it is, because only after seeing it do we transition into the reality of Boaz at the bar with Folman. By opening this way, the film places us inside Boaz's head even before we meet Folman, let alone learn that the film is his attempt to recover his own memories. Thus the opening sequence immediately establishes the kind of psychological and narrative parity that will run throughout the film.

As *Bashir* goes on, there are similar examples of other peoples' fantasies brought to life. For instance, another of Folman's old comrades, Carmi, describes how on the boat to Lebanon, he coped with his fear by falling asleep and hallucinating. As he speaks, we see a gigantic naked woman swim towards the boat, board it, and carry Carmi off. She swims away with him clutching to her stomach as gentle music plays, soft water sounds echo on the soundtrack, and an airplane bombs the boat in the background. The disjuncture in tone between the serenity of

Carmi's dream and the horror of the attack on the boat—along with the fact that these two events share the same frame—echoes the similar tonal detachment in the orchard scene described above. This detachment suggests the way that, for Carmi, fantasy provided a means of coping with fear so that he could go on with the work of fighting. It is interesting to note how Carmi's fantasy thus differs from Boaz's nightmare, which came after the fact and signifies guilt at action already taken (Boaz explains that his nightmare is the result of having to shoot all of the dogs in a village prior to an Israeli attack). Moreover, both of these examples contrast with Folman's own initial vision, a kind of fantasized memory that encapsulates Folman's own sense of guilt but also, in its vagueness, his inability to really remember what happened during the war. Thus not only does the film depict the fantasies of multiple individuals, but it also allows each of these fantasy scenes to work differently, honoring in each case the mindset of the person whose fantasy it is or was. Through this manifold approach to fantasy, the film moves towards a collective psychological account of the war. Not only do we see the war through a number of different perspectives as each soldier recounts his own experiences, but we also directly see and feel the variety of psychological and emotional effects of the war. This sense of collective psychology signals Folman's willingness, in contrast to *Hiroshima*'s female protagonist, to share the burden of remembering. His willingness to let go of the reins of his own memory will ultimately be crucial for *Bashir*'s ability to transcend the haunted present.

Transcending the Haunted Present

Up to this point, *Hiroshima* and *Bashir* both loosely correspond to Schrader's model of transcendental aesthetics. Instead of contrasting everyday banality with disparate emotional content, both films show us an everyday that is inherently disparate, an everyday in which present and past, here and there, self and other are all thrown into confusing conflict with each

other. This conflict corresponds to the conflict between physical and spiritual in the traditional transcendental film. And whereas in the traditional transcendental film, what is to be transcended is the apparent conflict between two seemingly opposed realities, in *Hiroshima* and *Bashir*, what is to be transcended (no longer in any spiritual sense but in the profane everyday sense) is the haunted present itself: for only in disentangling past and present can either be redeemed, and only in this transcendence can one be free to live life, for the haunted present has no future, only a past.

This final point is brought home powerfully in *Hiroshima*'s last scene. Resnais' film ends not with transcendence but with resigned acceptance of the haunted present. At the end of the film, the woman returns, distraught, to her hotel room. The man walks in and goes to her. She sits on the bed and begins to cry. He stands over her silently, until she looks up at him and screams: "I'll forget you. I'm forgetting you already! Look how I'm forgetting you! Look at me!" The man grasps her arms as the camera tracks forward to give a close-up on her face. "Hi-ro-shi-ma," she sounds out the syllables. The man puts his hand to her mouth as if to silence her, then pulls it away. "Hiroshima," she repeats, "that's your name." "That's my name, yes," he replies, as the film cuts to the reverse shot of his face looking on with a mixture of sadness, frustration, and resignation. He continues, "And your name is Nevers. Nevers in France," and the film fades to black. The implication of this exchange is that in the end, these characters cannot escape or overcome their pasts. For the woman in particular, it seems to be the case that their individual past traumas—the bombing of Hiroshima, the death of her lover and her ensuing madness and imprisonment in Nevers—mark and define them to such an extent that they cannot move on or build a new life in the present. Indeed, the woman has been living her present life in deference to her past; horrified by the prospect of forgetting or betraying her lost German love,

she can't let herself pursue a new relationship in the here and now. That is why, in order to open up about her past, she transforms her Japanese lover into her German lover; it is why after sharing her past, she confesses her betrayal to her German lover; and it is why, in this final exchange, when she looks at a potential relationship with the Japanese man, all she sees is the potential for loss, for "forgetting you." It is clear, in the film's closing moments, that a significant part of the woman is still trapped in Nevers, searching and waiting for a man who will never come because he has already died. As long as she carries this Nevers and this traumatized young woman within herself, her present will always remain haunted and will never lead into a future but only back into the past.

But if there is no real present and no future in *Hiroshima*, it is, at least to an extent, because the woman wills it so, because she doesn't *want* to move on from her past and because she wants to preserve the proprietariness of a trauma she feels as uniquely hers (or as uniquely shared between her and her deceased German lover). Throughout the film, the female protagonist experiences the haunted present as an intensely personal, individual, isolating state, her own personal present that exists alongside but separate from the objective present unfolding around her. The gulf between her personal haunted present and the everyday objective present is obvious, for instance, in a late scene in which she goes to a bar by herself. She sits at a table alone. Her Japanese lover follows her into the bar, but sits at a separate table nearby, watching her. Meanwhile, a different man sees the woman across the room, comes over to her table, and tries desperately to engage her in a conversation which she mostly ignores. Scenes like this make clear the extent to which her hauntedness belongs to her alone and separates her from the world around her. Indeed, from the perspective of her haunted present, the normalcy of the everyday world is, in fact, disparate. The world of grief and guilt that she inhabits is so distant from the

world of present-day Hiroshima that the idea of a man picking up a woman at a bar becomes incomprehensibly incongruent.

But in *Bashir*, Folman shows no such proprietariness; as we have seen, he willingly passes narrative control of the film to each of his interlocutors, allowing the film to become a much more collective act of remembering than *Hiroshima* is. This collective tendency and this willingness to let go lead directly to the film's final moment of transcendence. The film's last sequence finds Folman on the streets of the Sabra and Shatila camp the morning after the massacre. Before we actually see Folman there, we see a talking head interview with Israeli journalist Ron Ben-Yishai (playing himself), who took his crew into the refugee camp and filmed the aftermath of the massacre firsthand. As Ben-Yishai speaks, we see animated images of the carnage that he describes. We linger on the face of a lifeless young girl, almost buried in rubble, as Ben-Yishai recalls seeing the girl and being reminded of his own daughter. As Ben-Yishai finishes describing the devastation in the camp, we begin to hear the screams of the town's women as they rush into the street. The screaming continues as we sweep past the crowd of women and close in on two soldiers standing in the middle of an intersection, watching the women. As we move closer to the soldiers, we see that one of them is Folman. The final animated image in the film is a close-up on Folman's horrified face; a steady, low throb fades in on the soundtrack, building tension until finally there is a cut and we see a live action shot (presumably from Ben-Yishai's footage) of the women in the street. The screaming and crying on the soundtrack provides a bridge between the close-up on Folman and the shot of the women, but the visual disparity in the unexpected cut from animation to live action is shocking nonetheless. In the live footage, we see the women's reactions as they weep and yell at the camera, gesturing in despair at the ruin around them. The sequence then continues with shots of

dead bodies piled all over the town. The final shot of the sequence, and of the film, shows several bodies laid out around a pile of rubble, then zooms in to show a child's face protruding from within the rubble, echoing the similar animated image of the young girl from moments earlier; the film freezes on this shot and then fades to black.

Structurally, the shift to live action fulfills several parts of the transcendental aesthetic. To begin with, this shift functions as a decisive action, "a totally bold call for emotion" that "breaks the everyday stylization" and "suddenly and inexplicably demands the viewer's full emotional output" (Schrader 74). Now, unlike a classical transcendental film, *Bashir* has not exactly been emotionless and objective up until this point, as most of the film's accounts of the war are just as harrowing as one might expect. Yet until this point, the traumas Folman and his comrades have described have been contained by the animated stylization and by the sense of affective distancing and detachment outlined above. But by cutting from animation to live action, *Bashir* suddenly negates both this stylization and this distancing, thus freeing the previously contained horror and demanding a suddenly intensified response to what is on screen.

At the same time that the cut to live action functions as a decisive moment, it doubles as the final component of transcendental style, the moment of stasis. In the classic transcendental film, the static image is "an image of a second reality which can stand beside the ordinary reality; it represents the Wholly Other" (76). But whereas the Wholly Other of classical transcendental cinema is the spiritual realm, *Bashir*'s Wholly Other is the traumatic past itself along with the unassimilable trauma and guilt it brings. Whereas most of the film has tried to make sense of the past, offering psychological explanations for Folman's distorted memories and his overwhelming sense of guilt at an act he enabled but did not himself perpetrate, the end of the film confronts the massacre as a trauma beyond sense or understanding. Moreover, the ending acknowledges a

different sort of otherness as well, the otherness of the victims of an ethnically- and religiously-motivated slaughter. When the film first cuts to the archival footage, one of the women speaks clearly to the camera. As she speaks, her words, in Arabic, are not subtitled. These are the last words spoken in the film. By ending in this way, *Bashir* in the end abandons the verbal structures that have led the film to this point; whereas previously, language has been one of the main vehicles for approaching the past, here the film discards language in the face of the wordless horror of death. At the same time, by ending with the perspective and the voices of the Lebanese and Palestinian civilians who were the victims of the massacre, Folman in a sense lets go of the past, handing it back to those who were wronged.

In addition to enabling this encounter with otherness, the ending of *Bashir* also functions as the sort of return that is characteristic specifically of everyday transcendence. But whereas the previous films in this study have characterized transcendence as a return to the present, to absolute nowness, *Bashir* differs in that its transcendence consists of a return to the past, or more accurately, to the past *as a present*. The whole film, of course, has been *about* the past; Folman and his comrades have described and explained it, and we have seen it imagined and recreated through the animated image. But in all of these cases, what we are dealing with isn't the past in and of itself, but rather an abstraction of the past as a function of the haunted present. That is to say that the main action of the film takes place neither in the past nor the present, but in an illusory in-between state that is ultimately neither. Indeed, even the sections of the film that ostensibly take place in the present (i.e., Folman's various interviews and conversations with his old comrades) are actually in the past. Folman tells us, for example, that "the meeting with Boaz" that opens the film "took place in winter, 2006," meaning that the "present day that makes up much of the film is actually already a past of its own. The closest we have to an actual present

is the Folman who speaks in voiceover, looking back both at the war and at the interviews that constitute the bulk of the film. Everything else, the memories of the war and also the conversations through which those memories are shared, takes place in the nebulous no-time of a haunted present that is also already a past.

But in the final moments of the film, this no-time is finally abandoned in favor of a seemingly immediate past present. With the cut to live action, the structure of time collapses; we are confronted by an image of the past so direct and visceral that it *becomes* present. Whereas earlier in the film, past and quasi-present live alongside each other, in the final moments of the film, the past becomes all that there is. Yet in the process, it also ceases to be past, in the sense of something that has already happened. Instead, it seems to be happening right now, in front of us, in the present. In this way, the film's juxtaposition of animation and live action capitalizes on the way we experience and interpret these different modes of cinema; next to the stylized polish of the animation, the grittiness and rough quality of the video images seem to connote a sense of authenticity, and more importantly, immediacy and *nowness*, qualities that we realize (if we haven't before this moment) have been missing from the animated image. Moreover, *Bashir*'s use of the archival image also capitalizes on the indexical quality of such footage, its status as an absolute imprint of a past reality. In this sense, the footage that ends the film is a preserved present; as Bazin puts it, it is "the object itself, but freed from temporal contingencies." [18] The object, in this case, is twofold: it is the aftermath of the massacre (the women wailing in the streets, the bodies piled high in alleyways, etc.), but it is also this moment in time, this *present*, this *now*, that is freed of its original temporal bonds and revived again as a present in the moment of viewing.

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18. "cet objet lui-même, mais libéré des contingences temporelles" (*Qu'est ce que le cinema?* 14)

In reanimating a past *now*, *Bashir*'s ending induces the same kind of temporal vertigo that Roland Barthes finds in still photography. Analyzing a 19th century photograph of a young man awaiting execution, Barthes writes that the power of this photograph is the way it conflates the present and future tense: "I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. . . . [Similarly,] In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder . . . *over a catastrophe which has already occurred.*" In eternally preserving the present-ness of its subject, Barthes argues, the photograph creates a dissonance between life and death: "These two little girls [in a different photograph] . . . how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then *already* dead (yesterday)" (96, original emphases).

A similar dissonance between past, present, and future comes into effect in *Bashir* with the cut to the television footage. In the footage of the aftermath of the massacre, we see a tragedy *that has been* and *that is happening right now*. This quality of "has happened/is happening" exists within any documentary footage, but the effect is heightened in *Bashir* where the footage comes as a rupture in the film. Previously, the animated image has given us at least the illusion of distinct tenses; even when we see images of the war, the use of animation coupled with the narration by Folman's subjects creates a clear impression of "this happened." But the archival footage shatters that illusion and thrusts us suddenly into a past present. It is this sudden present-ness of the past that makes the end of *Bashir* a return rather than just a memory. And it is this gesture of return, in this case enabled by the technological preservation of a past present, that allows the final moments of *Bashir* to function like the moment of stasis in a traditional transcendental film, breaking the structures that have been established and allowing (or forcing) us to look at the situation anew.

The first two chapters of this study note how the moment of transcendence redeems the everyday by transforming it anew into a present. *Bashir* does something similar with the past, transforming what has been the object of memory—and of obsession, of horrified imagination, of inexplicable guilt—into a present in its own right. In this transformation, Folman lets go of the past in a twofold action. In letting go of the past, he lets it stand on its own and speak for itself. No longer inflected through his or anyone else's memory, no longer transfigured into animation, the past is free, and real, and *now*. But we can also infer that in letting go of the past, Folman frees not just it but also himself. Once we cut to live action, we never return to Folman, in voice-over or otherwise. There is no need. In contrast to *Hiroshima*, which ends with no future, only with a present that points back inevitably towards its own past, *Bashir* ends by making a future (however implicit) possible. In freeing the past from the constraints of subjective memory by making it into an objective present, Folman simultaneously relieves himself of the burden of remembering, leaving him free, presumably, to carry on with his life.

Technologies of Memory and Transcendence

A key point in this analysis is that *Bashir*'s moment of transcendence entirely hinges on a technologically mediated encounter with the past in the form of the cut to archival footage. This encounter with technology is an important component of everyday transcendence, but one that has not yet been fully explored. In *Boyhood*, we began to see the creeping influence of technology on everyday life and on the experience of the present. But *Boyhood*'s attitude towards contemporary technology was relatively one-dimensional. After decrying the way social media distances us from the presentness of experience, Mason relatively quickly effects a return to the presentness he seeks, and does so in the form of a real-life, person-to-person connection while out in nature. The clear, if implicit, message is that technology impedes presentness. Yet as

Bashir demonstrates, technology can actually be a powerful tool for shaping and guiding our experience of time, even allowing us to experience a "now" that would not have been possible without technological intervention. Indeed, it is in part this specific embrace of technological mediation that separates *Bashir* from *Hiroshima* by making it possible to transcend the haunted present. But *Bashir* and *Hiroshima* together show that the mere presence of a mediated past does not automatically induce transcendence. Indeed, both films explore the technological mediation of time and experience, yet they reach very different conclusions, with *Bashir* transcending the same kind of haunted present that *Hiroshima* remains trapped in. The difference, it seems, is partly in the nature of the technologies in question and partly in the way these media technologies are incorporated into the structures of the respective films.

Both *Hiroshima* and *Bashir* employ what Alison Landsberg calls "prosthetic memory." According to Landsberg, prosthetic memory emerges when a person's interaction with a historical narrative produces in that person a felt, personal, experiential "memory" of something the person has never actually experienced firsthand. Through exposure to films and other visual representations, written narratives, and cultural sites such as museums, a person can "remember" a past to which he/she has no direct personal, familial, or even cultural ties. Moreover, as Landsberg explains, these memories are just as real as, and function in the same ways as, personal experiential memories. This is significant because it means that memory is not exclusively the product of personal experience, but can also be transmitted through media representations of the past.

This idea of culturally-mediated memory is explored extensively in *Hiroshima*. In that film, our only source of knowledge of the history of Hiroshima itself is the woman's descriptions of her own encounters with cultural sites of memory. The film's opening sequence consists

mainly of the woman's account of these sites as she recalls some of the things she has seen in the city. "I saw the hospital," she says, and as she speaks, we see an exterior shot of a hospital followed by a dolly shot that travels forward down a corridor within the hospital before cutting to a sequence of shots of the patients in one of the rooms. "Four times at the museum in Hiroshima," she continues, as we see a sequence of establishing architectural shots of the museum followed by shots of the exhibits she describes: a model of the ruined city, a section of girders, melted and twisted by the heat of the bombs; a "bouquet of bottle caps," likewise melted together into a heap; piles of hair lost by Hiroshima's radiation poisoning victims. The sequence continues in this fashion as the woman relates—and we see on screen—her various prosthetic memories of Hiroshima.

Even though these memories are not "hers" in the traditional sense, as Landsberg suggests, she clearly feels them as personal and emotional experiences rather than merely understanding them as impersonal knowledge about the past. In fact, as the sequence continues, she draws a parallel between the tragedy in Hiroshima and the tragedy in her own past. "Like you," she says, "I too have struggled with all my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone. For my part, I struggled every day with all my might against the horror of no longer understanding the reason to remember. Like you, I forgot." These words reveal that she has internalized her memories of Hiroshima so thoroughly that these memories have gained similar status to her prior, firsthand memories of Nevers.

As these prosthetic memories of Hiroshima join up with the memories of Nevers, both sets of memories begin to work together to shape the woman's haunted present. Eventually the woman transitions from talking about the bombing of Hiroshima to reflecting on her current

relationship with the Japanese man. As she does, we cut to a sequence of tracking shots that travel forward down a series of streets in Hiroshima. Meanwhile, the woman narrates: "I meet you. I remember you. Who are you? You're destroying me. You're good for me. How could I know this city was tailor-made for love. How could I know you fit my body like a glove?" As she speaks, the forward motion and point-of-view perspective of the camera creates a visual parallel to the earlier shots that travelled down the hallway within the hospital. Likewise, this sequence both visually and verbally forms a bookend to the much later scene in which the woman wanders through Hiroshima on foot; but whereas that sequence conflates Hiroshima and Nevers, this earlier sequence conflates the Hiroshima of the present with that of the past. Taken altogether, these sequences suggest a haunted present that is made up of a mix of the actual present, the woman's own personal memories, and her prosthetic memories of the bombing of Hiroshima. By placing all three of these on equal footing, *Hiroshima* powerfully demonstrates the ability of prosthetic memory to become real for those who encounter it.

In *Bashir*, on the other hand, the encounter with the technologically-mediated past plays out very differently. In *Hiroshima*, the cultural sites of memory are worked into the narrative; they are places the woman has been, and she relates them to us, interprets them, and reflects on them. In *Bashir*, the archival footage of the aftermath of the massacre is offered without comment or explanation, and as a result we experience it firsthand in a way we don't with the photographs and museum exhibits presented in *Hiroshima*. As noted earlier, this firsthand experience is important for the way it capitalizes on the documentary image's capacity to function not just as a prosthetic memory, but as a prosthetic "now" that unfolds before us as though present.

But while this prosthetic nowness is enabled by the inclusion of documentary footage within the fictionalized narrative, the effect is not guaranteed by such footage. That is because part of the difference between prosthetic memory and prosthetic nowness comes not just from the nature of the archival material itself, but from how it is framed within the film. Indeed, *Hiroshima* actually contains newsreel footage of the aftermath of the bombings. Such footage makes up part of the woman's prosthetic memories of Hiroshima. "I saw the newsreels," she says; "Dogs were captured on film for all time. I saw them." As she speaks, we see a three-legged dog hobbling through a rubble-filled street. This is followed by a series of shots of survivors walking through the ruined streets of Hiroshima, as the woman continues: "I saw the newsreels. I saw them. Of the first day, the second day, the third day. Of the fifteenth day too." The sequence then continues with a series of gruesome shots of the injuries inflicted by the bomb. We see two children, framed from behind to reveal their scalps showing through their unnaturally thinned hair; we see a boy being treated for severe burns, then another boy whose lips and portions of his face have been burned away; more children and even babies covered in burns; a woman's eyelid being pulled open so that doctors can swab the empty socket.

Superficially, the images in this part of the sequence seem similar to the images at the end of *Bashir*. Yet the way this footage is used creates a very different effect than in *Bashir*. For one thing, the horrific footage on screen is deliberately contrasted with the woman's voiceover, which tells us that, "Hiroshima was covered in flowers. There were cornflowers and gladioli everywhere, morning glories and day lilies born again from the ashes with an extraordinary vitality unheard of in flowers before then." The juxtaposition of this narration with the images of maimed victims creates a powerful emotional dissonance that emphasizes the ugliness of the injuries on screen by contrasting them with the woman's description of unnatural beauty. The

effect is powerful; yet in using the newsreel footage in this way, *Hiroshima* negates the very temporal qualities of such footage that *Bashir* exploits. Whereas *Bashir*'s archival footage makes us experience the temporal vertigo of a moment that simultaneously *has happened* and *is happening*, *Hiroshima*'s newsreel sequence emphasizes the horror of something that *happened*. The difference lies in the fact that, whereas *Bashir* springs its archival footage on the viewer suddenly, using the footage to break the containment of the animated image, *Hiroshima* incorporates its newsreel footage into a larger sequence of prosthetic memory, which becomes its own kind of containment. By the time we see the newsreel footage, it slots logically into the already-established structure of this segment of *Hiroshima*, thereby containing what, in *Bashir*, is an unaccountable excess.

One other crucial difference between *Hiroshima* and *Bashir* comes in the availability of the technologies of memory at the decisive historical moments of each film. *Hiroshima*'s dual tragedies (in Nevers and Hiroshima) occurred when television was barely in its infancy, meaning that the moving image was largely restricted to the cinema and that most events in the world were not filmed for posterity. Meanwhile, the massacre at the center of *Bashir* took place nearly forty years later, by which point television was nearly ubiquitous, meaning it was much easier to record and disseminate footage of a much wider range of events and to do so in a much more timely fashion. In a very real way, technological interaction with the world, with the present, and with the past had evolved in those four decades. One implication of this evolution is an increased availability of the media archive. For the woman in *Hiroshima*, the defining tragedy is not the bombing of Hiroshima, but rather her own experience in Nevers, for which Hiroshima only later becomes an analogue in that it is also a past trauma that she feels must be remembered. When it comes to Nevers, there were no cameras and accordingly there is no media archive. She alone *is*

the archive, and she alone, therefore, bears the burden of remembering—and the horror of forgetting. But for Folman and his decisive historical moment, the massacre, there is a media archive available to supplement his own recollection. By placing this archive at the final climactic moment of *Bashir*, Folman is thus able to transfer the burden of memory from himself to his film and to the archival footage it contains.

Technologies of mediation have obviously evolved even further in the thirty years since the Lebanon War. Today, cameras are utterly ubiquitous. With the proliferation of smartphones, security cameras, and the like, there is increasingly little of human experience that *isn't* recorded and implicitly added to collective archive of experience. But for all that *Bashir* demonstrates how this archive can be judiciously used to craft a unique encounter with a present that might otherwise have been lost, there is still much truth to Mason's complaint, in *Boyhood*, that technological mediation frequently serves as a barrier between people and the world they inhabit. The paradox of mediation is that even as it can bring us closer to things that we might otherwise have no access to, the very act of mediation simultaneously marks a barrier between us and the mediated object. The following chapter will explore this paradox in detail along with the question of how, in a world where everything immediately becomes part of a technological archive, any one moment can stand out as significant.

CHAPTER 4 THE IMMEDIATED PRESENT: TEMPORAL DIALECTICISM IN
ZIDANE: A 21ST CENTURY PORTRAIT

Whereas *Waltz With Bashir* uses a technological mediation of the past as both a mechanism for transcendence and as the target of that transcendence, Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's experimental documentary *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* instead takes mediation as a basic condition of everyday experience. The film focuses on French football star Zinédine Zidane as he plays in a single match, a Spanish league encounter between Zidane's team, Real Madrid, and Villareal. To shoot the film, Gordon and Parreno placed 17 film cameras around the field and throughout the stadium and instructed their camera operators to focus almost exclusively on Zidane for the entirety of the match. The resulting footage is edited together to create a real-time study of Zidane's participation in the game. Along with this firsthand footage captured by the film crew, *Zidane* contains footage from the Spanish television broadcast of the match as well as some other assorted footage, and it also features a soundtrack by Scottish post-rock band Mogwai. The film also contains a set of subtitles that appear on screen sporadically and give what appear to be mostly Zidane's musings about the experience of playing football. In compiling all of this material, Gordon and Parreno seek to create an immersive, up-close-and-personal experience of the match and of Zidane. At the same time, the film readily acknowledges its own act of mediation and in fact suggests that mediatedness is a central part of the event it covers. In this way, *Zidane* presents us with an everyday characterized as an immediated present, a now whose sense of immediacy is entirely constructed from a self-aware act of mediation.

In constructing this immediated present, *Zidane* also, like *Bashir*, structures itself loosely around a question of history. But whereas *Bashir* is built around a specifically defined historical moment and spends its time trying to find the truth of what happened at that moment, *Zidane* is concerned more generally with the question of what counts as history, of how the everyday

(especially in its guise as immediated present) becomes a significant historical event. From its opening titles, *Zidane* wonders whether "an ordinary day like this might be forgotten or remembered, as anything more or less significant than a walk in the park." In a remarkable sequence at half time of the match, the film attempts to place itself into historical context by including a series of images of current events from around the world on the same day as the match. Yet in doing so, the sequence fails to answer its own basic question as its series of actualities simply continues to flatten everything into one undifferentiated "now." Accordingly, when the film eventually moves towards transcendence, it is the very concept of historical significance that the film aims at as the "Other" to the immediated present.

In pursuing this transcendental "Other," *Zidane* follows a familiar structure. The immediated present in which we are immersed is rife with disparities in the form of several formal oppositions that run throughout the film. The first opposition is between proximity and distance, as the images and sounds the film offers alternate between bringing us closer to Zidane and separating him from us. The second opposition emerges in the play between immediacy and mediation as the film self-consciously acknowledges its own acts of technological intervention. The final opposition brings us directly to the matter of time, as the film alternates between a conception of time as continuous and as discontinuous. It is this last opposition that actually forms the basis for transcendence, for what emerges is a conception of time as inherently dualistic—as what French philosopher Gaston Bachelard calls a dialectic of duration. This dialectical understanding of time reclassifies the film's oppositions not as disparities, as they initially seem, but as equally necessary parts of a unified whole. Where *Zidane* differs from the preceding transcendental films—all of which similarly find a sense of unity from disparity—is

that it ultimately relies not on a Wholly Other that is outside of everyday experience, but rather on a principle of unity that emerges from everyday time itself.

As Close As You Can: Closeness and Distance

In order to appreciate the implications of *Zidane*'s transcendental move, it is necessary first to examine the oppositions that make up the basic texture of the immediated present. The first and most immediately evident opposition is that between closeness and distance. On the one hand, the very idea of *Zidane* is to bring the viewer closer to the action than ever before, as suggested in the film's opening subtitles which proclaim: "Face to face, as close as you can, for as long as it lasts, for as long as it takes." Accordingly, the film favors techniques such as close-ups and zooms to create a sense of nearness; in fact, such techniques are so important that the film pioneers the use of then-new lenses to achieve results that would otherwise have been impossible.[19] Visually, we often find ourselves close enough to Zidane to see each drop of sweat on his face and each bit of dirt on his socks. The camera lingers frequently on his hands as they hang at his waist, or on his feet as he taps his toes into the turf while walking. These details, unseen on an ordinary television broadcast, take on magnified significance in repeated cinematic close-ups. Moreover, this sense of closeness is paired with a near-constant sense of motion. In general, the camera tends not to hold static shots while Zidane moves through the frame; rather, our view tends to pan and zoom in concert with his movements. The camera wheels with Zidane as he rushes for the ball or sprints to get open; the image blurs as the camera struggles to keep him in the frame. Even in the game's quieter moments, we are never at rest. Instead, we walk or jog along with Zidane as he patrols the field while the game continues off screen. As a result, we

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19. One such lens is the Panavision 300x, whose continuous 7mm-2100mm zoom allows the operator to go from extremely wide to extremely close in a single shot. According to the making-of short included on the DVD release of the film, *Zidane* is the first commercial use of this lens, which was at the time still a prototype designed for the U.S. Army.

not only feel physically close to Zidane, we also feel like we follow him and move with him. In a very visceral way, these visual techniques bring us closer than normally possible both to the action and to the man who is the subject of this cinematic portrait.

This visual sense of proximity is reinforced by the film's soundtrack. Alongside Mogwai's ambient score, the film's most persistent, and often, its most striking aural content is the noise of the game and of Zidane himself. The film uses a number of aural close-ups and "sound zooms" to further enhance the sense that we are close to Zidane. We hear Zidane breathe, grunt, and shout. We hear the thud of the ball, the pounding of feet on grass, the crunch of bodies coming together. The crowd's roar is a constant presence, threatening at times to engulf the field and us and the players with it. At times all of these sounds crash into each other in a shapeless cacophony, but at other times, the film picks out individual aural details for emphasis. On a visual close-up of Zidane's feet, for example, the general ambient noise of the match and the crowd is overlaid with the scuffling, scraping sound of Zidane's studs against the grass. By isolating and amplifying such a minute sound so that it is the aural focus of the shot, a moment like this pushes away the chaotic excitement of the match and replaces it with a sense of intimacy, a sense that we are alone with Zidane in the midst of the action. The film achieves a similar effect in a later shot when Zidane approaches the referee after a questionable call and the general buzz of the match drops away so that we can hear Zidane quietly tell the referee he should be ashamed.

In moments like these, the sound design of the film shows its power both to amplify and to qualify the sense of proximity established by the film's visual component. Whereas the cameras tend to determine how close or far we are from Zidane in any given shot, the soundtrack tends to determine whether the shot feels more or less intimate. When the soundtrack emphasizes

the full noise of the match and the crowd, then however visually close we are to Zidane, we remain aware of his surroundings and his role in the larger action; we are close to him, but not alone with him. When those ambient noises are replaced by music and/or by aural close-ups on Zidane himself, we find the player thus isolated from his surroundings and our sense of proximity becomes a sense of intimacy, of a one-on-one encounter with Zidane.

A final way the film brings us close to Zidane is through a series of subtitles that appear sporadically throughout the film. Most of the time, these subtitles appear to be expressing Zidane's own thoughts about the experience of playing football. "When you are immersed in the game," an early set of titles says, "you don't really hear the crowd. You can almost decide for yourself what you want to hear. You are never alone. I can hear someone shift around in their chair. I can hear someone coughing. I can hear someone whisper in the ear of the person next to them. I can imagine that I can hear the ticking of a watch." Thoughts like these, revealed through the subtitles, create a sense of interiority to Zidane that might not otherwise be there. We get a sense of what Zidane thinks and feels while playing, which enhances our feeling of intimacy by giving us the sense that we are peering into the player's own experience. This sense of intimacy is further enhanced by the way Zidane's descriptions parallel the formal moves the film itself makes. In this case, Zidane's descriptions of hearing specific details from the crowd mirrors the way we hear close-up details from the match and from Zidane himself (we even, at times, hear individual voices and noises from the crowd just as Zidane describes).

Yet for all these efforts to create a sense of intimacy, *Zidane* simultaneously labors to create a sense of distance between us and the player. For example, for all of the detailed close-ups of Zidane, there are also a great number of shots in which Zidane is pushed to the periphery of the frame, shot out of focus, obscured by obstacles in the foreground, or even absent entirely.

Numerous shots throughout the film find Zidane walking at or even out of the edge of the shot. Sometimes this happens when Zidane's own movements on the field prove too fast and unpredictable for the camera to keep up. But at other times, Zidane's escape from the frame is quite intentional. The DVD release of the film includes a making-of documentary that chronicles the filming of the match, and includes footage from inside the production truck from which Gordon and Parreno monitored and directed the shoot. At one point, Gordon calls for all cameras to simultaneously move to maximum zoom on Zidane; as they do, he instructs the operators that "it doesn't matter if you don't keep him in the frame." Similarly, at another point, Parreno asks one of the camera operators to "try to play with the focus . . . on the crowd behind Zidane sometimes." And indeed, there are numerous shots throughout the film where Zidane is in frame, but is momentarily obscured as the camera racks focus onto the crowd or onto players in the foreground. At still other times, the camera chooses to look away from Zidane entirely, tilting upwards to peer at the scoreboard or the stadium lights, or even, at one point in the second half, leaving the field entirely as a handheld shot makes its way from the empty concourse, up the stairs, and finally into the stands. Shots like these work counter to the aesthetic of closeness; for all that the film promises to bring us "as close as you can," it takes specific steps to simultaneously obscure Zidane, to leave him always just beyond our grasp right when we get closest to him.

Moreover, even when we do stay close to Zidane, our closeness comes with an inherent, paradoxical form of distancing in that, the closer we get to Zidane, the further we get from a coherent understanding of the match itself, which structures the film and which is the basis for the film's act of portraiture. In other words, the whole idea of the film is to show us not Zidane, the man, and his whole life on and off the field, but to show us specifically Zidane the footballer.

Thus the film focuses exclusively on Zidane in his natural habitat, so to speak, showing him doing what he does best and what he is famous for—playing football. Yet by bringing us as close as possible to Zidane, the film frequently renders the match around him incomprehensible, thus divorcing Zidane from the very context that gives him meaning as a subject. Much of the time, the match itself unfolds off screen and thus at the edges of our awareness. For the most part, we only see the ball when Zidane has it, and as soon as he passes or shoots it, we have no idea how the match progresses from there. As a result, we find ourselves following Zidane while having little idea of how he is actually influencing the match.

Similarly, throughout the film, we see and hear Zidane calling to his teammates, but we never see who or what he is responding to. At one point we actually see him share a joke with a teammate who is, for once, also on screen, but in this instance we don't hear what is said nor do we have any inkling of what their exchange is about, we simply see both players laughing as they jog off in separate directions. This moment is in stark contrast to the earlier moment which made us privy to Zidane's comment to the referee; whereas that earlier exchange created a powerful sense of intimacy, this later moment does just the opposite by deliberately not letting us in on the joke. Likewise, the film almost never bothers to show us what Zidane sees. He is nearly always looking off out of the frame, but because most of the shots are of him, we almost never get an eyeline match to show us what he sees and is responding to. The only such shots, in fact, come when Zidane looks up, at which point we see the aforementioned shots of the scoreboard and of the lights. Thus, when we do follow Zidane's gaze, it inevitably leads us away from the match as it travels up and away from the field entirely.

In short, for all that the film promises to get close to Zidane, this closeness comes paired with a paradoxical distancing. When the film is not simply obscuring or ignoring Zidane, we find

that the closer the film gets to the player, the more it tends to isolate him from his surroundings, thereby creating a tension between, on the one hand, the sense of closeness that comes from a studious focus on Zidane, and on the other hand, the larger context (the match) that is obscured by that closeness.

Running Towards the TV: Immediacy and Mediation

This tension between intimacy and distance is related to an equally crucial tension, that between immediacy and mediation. On the one hand the film insists upon immediacy, as evidenced by the film's real-time aesthetic and its desire to get "as close as you can, for as long as it lasts, for as long as it takes." But just as the film's pursuit of closeness comes with an inbuilt sense of distancing, so too does immediacy bring with it the inescapable act of mediation. From the very start of the film, mediation and immediacy are placed side by side. The film begins with a black screen emblazoned with white titles: "from the first kick of the ball" and then "until the final whistle." At that, the Universal logo appears, but the familiar globe and text are noticeably pixilated, and scan lines pulse regularly through the image. Clearly, what we are seeing is the filmed image of a televised image. After the Universal logo fades to black, we cut to an overhead shot of the pitch, with a title reading: "Madrid, Saturday, April 23rd, 2005." Immediately noticeable is the fact that the field, too, is pixilated, that this is in fact the television broadcast of the match. As if to confirm that fact, the Spanish television commentary fades in on the soundtrack as the film camera zooms slowly and steadily in on the image. After a few moments, the camera finds Zidane on the television screen and centers him in the frame. The zoom continues; Zidane is now the only figure in the shot, but the film camera has by now zoomed so close to the television screen that the individual pixels are now discernible, and Zidane's form is nothing more than the blurred outline of his white Real Madrid kit. Nevertheless, the zoom

continues, and we get so close that the shot becomes a grid of red, green, and blue squares, with Zidane appearing only as an occasional shimmer of white. The camera holds on this extreme zoom on the television screen as the main title design appears, with each letter of Zidane's name appearing on screen, one after the other, each superimposed over the last.

Finally, as the titles end, the camera begins zooming out. The pixels become smaller until they finally resolve into a recognizable image again. Zidane's number 6 shirt is just visible as a blurred shape, as is his distinctively bald head. Instead of slowly zooming all the way back out, the film cuts abruptly several times in order to keep Zidane as central in the frame as possible given his appearance on the television broadcast. Then, suddenly, we cut from the television broadcast to a shot from one of the in-stadium film cameras. It takes five minutes of film to finally see this shot, and as soon as it is there, it is gone, with a sudden cut back to the television broadcast, which plays for a few seconds before another quick cut back into the stadium with a different angle on Zidane. This time we stay with him, although the film continues to play with obscured images; one of the first few direct film shots we see of Zidane is from a camera stationed behind one of the goals. After showing Zidane's face for a second or two, the camera suddenly racks focus to the goal net in the foreground, leaving Zidane just a blurred shape in the background.

This introductory sequence is curious for the way it lays out its promise of unprecedented closeness and immediacy at the same moment that it remediates an already-mediated image of the event it promises to get close to—and does so in such a way that it obscures its promised subject, Zidane, beyond recognition. At first glance, this sequence can be read as establishing a firm opposition between, on the one hand, the familiar mediated image of Zidane as seen every weekend on the television screen, and on the other hand, the new view of him offered by the film

itself. In this interpretation, the televised image is included to emphasize, by contrast, the sense of immediacy the filmic image conveys: television only gets us so close, and if we try to get closer, the image breaks down, while the film's cameras can take us much closer than that while retaining clarity. This sense of juxtaposition is furthered by the use of sound in the sequence: when we see the televised image, we hear the sound of the broadcast, which is quiet and tinny. When we are in the stadium, we hear the sound of the game as the film production captures it: the roar of the crowd and the ambient sounds of play are much louder, with a much fuller sonic range. We get the sense that the televised view of Zidane is distant, remote, detached, as compared to the cinematic view of him, which is loud, visceral, and immediate. According to this reading, the television screen in the opening sequence is a barrier that the film must overcome. We literally run into this barrier when we try to zoom in to Zidane's televised image only to have that image break down into the physical constituents of the television's pixel array.

But another way to look at this opening sequence is that the television is not just a barrier, but also an object in itself, something that in its own right we are drawn close to. Early in the film, the subtitles have Zidane saying the following:

> As a child, I had a running commentary in my head when I was playing. It wasn't really my own voice, it was the voice of Pierre Cangioni, a television anchor from the 1970's. Every time I heard his voice, I would run towards the TV. As close as I could get. For as long as I could. It wasn't that his words were so important, but the tone, the accent, the atmosphere, was everything.

What's fascinating about this is the way Zidane's words are echoed in the film's opening proclamation to get "as close as you can for as long as it lasts." In light of Zidane's recollection of his childhood viewership of matches on TV, we can now see the film's closeness both as a closeness that exceeds that offered by television, but at the same time as a closeness *to* television, that is, to the mediated image itself. And indeed, as the film goes on, it never really leaves the

televised image behind. Instead, throughout the match, we repeatedly return to the television broadcast, as snippets of that broadcast are interspersed with the firsthand footage of Zidane. The use of televised images is most noticeable at the match's big moments, such as the three goals (the match ends in a 2-1 Madrid victory). The first goal comes from a penalty kick to Villareal; in the film, we are on a first-hand shot of Zidane when we hear the whistle. We then cut to a television instant replay of the foul for which the penalty was awarded, which we hadn't seen at all while focused on Zidane. After going down early, Madrid comes back to win in the second half. Their first goal is set up by Zidane, and this time we do see the goal firsthand as he dribbles past a defender and crosses the ball for his teammate to score. Even so, the film then includes a television instant replay of the goal, giving us a different, broader perspective on the action we just saw firsthand. Meanwhile, the film presents Madrid's second goal in just the opposite way. We initially see the play "live," though not firsthand but on television. Just prior to the goal, we cut to the television broadcast as the play develops around Villareal's box. A Madrid player swings the ball in, and another knocks it into the net. We return to firsthand footage with a clever cut on action as the ball flies into the goal and we cut from the television broadcast to a filmic shot of Zidane watching the ball hit the netting.

Far from being an inferior, less immediate medium, in moments like these, the television broadcast seems to fill in for an implicit lack in the cinematic footage of Zidane. When the film cuts to television footage, it is often in order to provide additional coverage, showing us action that was obscured or even missing from the firsthand footage of Zidane. By including the televised images, the film at once compensates for and (by doing so) acknowledges the limitations of the firsthand cinematic images. The cost of our unprecedented closeness to Zidane is that we are often so close that we have no view of what is going on in the match. The key

incidents are either not visible at all firsthand (like Villareal's penalty award) or at best are captured on film but in a way that makes it hard to see and comprehend the play as a whole (Madrid's first goal, for instance). The inclusion of the television footage to fill in these gaps is an acknowledgement in part of what the televised image still does better. By embracing rather than rejecting this other medium, the film is able to compensate for the self-imposed limitations of its own aesthetic goals.

Moreover, there is also a sense in which the film includes the televised image not just to fill in gaps, but because it views the very act of mediation as an integral part of the event it is depicting. In other words, the film seems not to take as its object the match "in itself," as a "real" that precedes and is independent of the act of mediation, but rather the film seems to take "the match" as including the action on the field but also the mediation of that action in the familiar form of television. The film is aware that the contemporary experience of sports is inherently tied to its mediation. This is true from a practical perspective, for instance, in the massive television deals that have helped make sports big business and that have helped disseminate club teams and leagues to a global audience, in the process making stars like Zidane into worldwide celebrities. But it is also true from a phenomenal and experiential perspective, which is to say that the average sports fan encounters sports most commonly through a screen, such that the broadcast becomes part of the event itself, and the trappings and conventions of that medium come, in their own right, to connote liveness (as Zidane himself acknowledges in his description of the atmosphere of the television broadcast).

In this way, *Zidane* calls to mind the aesthetic of remediation as described by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Bolter and Grusin define remediation as a "double logic" which seeks to combine "our culture's contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy."

exchange" (55; 58). Moreover, by incorporating its acknowledgment of mediation into its aesthetic of immediacy, *Zidane* recognizes that mediation as a fundamental part of the immediacy of the event in question. "The experience of media," Bolter and Grusin say, "is the subject of remediation"; going further, *Zidane* emphasizes that the experience of media is in fact a component of primary, immediate experience in the contemporary world (59). The presence of cameras, the act of broadcasting and filming the match (and these days, the act of photographing or filming a live event on a smartphone) is an inherent part of the liveness of that event; thus by remediating these acts of mediation, *Zidane* seems to say that there is no actual distinction between the immediate event (the match) and its mediation—that mediation is itself part of the immediacy. This fact is brought home in Zidane's reflection about the running television commentary in his head as he played as a child. Here the most immediate possible experience of the game (playing it for oneself) is colored—is mentally remediated—by the familiar tones and rhythms of the television broadcast, as though the imaginary presence of mediation would somehow make the firsthand experience of playing the game *more immediate* than it already is. Hence the two strands of *Zidane*'s aesthetic—the transparent, firsthand view of Zidane and the hyperawareness of mediation—come together to form a single, hybrid whole: what is at once immediate and mediated is the immediated present.

Fragmented Memories: Temporal Continuity and Discontinuity

The final paradox presented by *Zidane*'s immediated present is temporal, as the film sets up an opposition between continuous and discontinuous time, that is, between time conceived of as a unified flow and time as a series of fragmented moments. At first glance, the film seems to offer us nothing but time as flowing, undifferentiated duration. This sense of flow originates in the film's inexorable progression through the match, from start to finish, and is enhanced by the

film's relative lack of structure or temporal signposting. In Deleuze's account of the "time-image" in midcentury art film, it is the breakdown of dramatic linkages and causalities that catalyzes a shift from action-oriented cinema to time-oriented cinema, and something similar is at work in *Zidane*. Though the film is on the one hand the ultimate sensorimotor experience (a close-up account of a sporting event), we have already seen how the focus on Zidane removes or obscures many of the causal connections of the match itself. In other words, the match *could have* served as a source of narrative drama, but it largely doesn't, thus leaving the material onscreen to operate, more often than not, as the "purely optical and sound situation[s]" that characterize Deleuze's time-image (*Cinema 2* 18).

When *Zidane* is operating in this mode of undifferentiated time, sizeable stretches of the film pass by without much of note happening in the match. It is easy to get lost in such passages and to be swept along by the seamless flow of time. One such passage begins about 28 minutes into the film. There is a long shot of Zidane, in the left third of the picture, with the crowd behind him. A Villareal player enters the right side of the shot, about to take a throw-in, and we cut to a reverse shot of Zidane, who runs to his right as, offscreen, we hear the ball being kicked, and as Zidane spins around to follow it as it goes past him, the camera tilts down to show his feet before tilting back up to show his upper body, now partially obscured by an assistant referee. We cut to another wide shot of Zidane as, from out of frame, several players run across the shot chasing after the ball; they continue to move towards the camera and eventually out of the shot as the play continues offscreen. We cut to another shot, which sees Zidane jog across the frame before he stops, bends over, and picks up a lump of grass and drops it back into the divot it came from. After a few more shots of Zidane either out of focus or obscured by other players, we see a shot of the player bending over to pull up his socks.

A sequence like this is notable mostly for how unnotable it is. Nothing important happens in terms of the game or Zidane's participation in it; none of the shots, camera movements, or edits convey any kind of interesting action nor do they provide any particular formal commentary on the action. Instead, what a sequence like this really seems to convey is the passage of time itself, as experienced in a state of flow and immersion. In passages like this, *Zidane* thus creates what we might call an aesthetic of *durée*. *Durée* is Henri Bergson's famous conception of time as fundamentally continuous, as an indivisible, unified whole. For Bergson,

> Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. (100, original emphasis)

In other words, time is less a succession of discrete moments than a fundamentally enduring continuity. By invoking the idea of time as a melody, Bergson means to show how time cannot be subdivided without losing something of its essence. Time, for Bergson, like music, "may be compared to a living being, whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected." To change one element of the whole, to "interrupt the rhythm by dwelling longer than is right on one note" is to create a "qualitative change . . . in the whole of the musical phrase. We can thus conceive of *succession without distinction*, and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought" (100-1, my emphasis).

This idea of succession without distinction certainly fits passages from *Zidane* such as the one cited above. One of the fundamental aesthetic aims of the film is to capture the real

rhythms of Zidane's performance, the totality and unity of duration as it unfolds for him. In this sense the film takes up the philosophical premise of neorealism, which in its purest form eschews drama in favor of duration. That is to say that rather than letting dramatic considerations shape the film's pacing, neorealism seeks to preserve the actual duration of events, letting them unfold "in real time" with minimal disruption by editing or other cinematic interventions. *Zidane* in this sense presents us with a neorealist counterpart to the typical football broadcast: whereas the latter is structured and motivated entirely by the drama of the match, cutting as frequently as is necessary to keep the ball and the action around it in the frame, including numerous replays and alternative angles to provide full coverage of the key dramatic moments of the match, *Zidane* seeks only to convey the experience of one man, heedless of how much action or drama Zidane himself might encounter. Hence long stretches of nothingness, of what Schrader calls "irrelevant action in real time" (Schrader 5). comparable to the famous maid sequence in De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952)*,* a favorite of Deleuze, for whom it exemplifies the transition from action-oriented cinema to a cinema of pure time (*Cinema 2* 2). Just as films like De Sica's loosen and sometimes sever the linkage between image and action, duration and drama, so too does *Zidane* seem to aim at its own sort of pure duration, a sense of continuous succession without distinction that can no longer be subordinated to the larger narrative of the match nor understood as a series of football plays and exchanges (analogous here to the scenes of a drama and to the individual actions that make up and structure those scenes). What remains, seemingly, is *durée*, time as pure flow.

But this is far from the whole story. For as we've seen, immersive segments like that described above are only part of the overall structure of *Zidane*; paired with television replays and with a variety of distancing techniques, they make up only one side of an opposition between immersion and distance, immediacy and mediation. Little surprise then that when it comes to

Zidane's philosophy of time, we are once again dealing with a duality. Indeed, the above cited passage of film, on its own a bastion of unstructured, indivisible time, made only of the happenstance moments of "irrelevant action" that point to pure *durée*, is only part of a larger structure; a structure that is subtle and conceptual, emerging primarily on repeated viewings, but a structure nonetheless. Indeed, the first half (of the film and of the match) is organized around a series of oscillations between immersion and distance, between the impression of immediacy and a series of distancing, reflective gestures. We have already seen how the film's introductory sequence, with the slow zoom on the television screen, transitions haltingly into the first-hand footage of the match, with some cuts back and forth between the "live" cameras and the television broadcast. As the "live" image gradually takes over, we complete the first of several transitions that make up the organization of the first half. Once we are on the field with Zidane, we stay there for a good twenty minutes, steeped in the immersive firsthand footage that brings us close to the action. But soon, there is a change; after a brief moment of action involving Zidane, we hear a short musical cue, seemingly over the stadium PA system, and at that the film cuts abruptly from a shot of Zidane to a shot of the speakers hanging from the top of the stadium. The next shot is of Zidane again, but it is paired with a sudden change on the soundtrack; the ambient noise of the match and the crowd has been mixed into the background, making way for the guitar-based score provided by Mogwai, which we now hear for the first time since the title sequence, along with close-up sounds of Zidane that separate him from his surroundings.

As the sequence continues, we encounter, for the first time in the film, titles that give Zidane's inner thoughts (the only previous titles we have seen were part of the film's introductory title sequence). "When you step on to the field," the titles say, "you can hear and feel, the presence of the crowd. There is sound. The sound of noise." Gradually, the music begins

to fade out, and as it does, the ambient crowd sound fades back in, reflecting Zidane's statement. The subtitles continue: "When you are immersed in the game, you don't really hear the crowd. You can almost decide for yourself what you want to hear. You are never alone." A moment later we see a brief shot of Zidane looking upward; his glance is matched to a quickly-panning shot of the lights high above the field before we return to a shot of the player looking off frame (one of the very few instances of a traditional eyeline match in the film). With this second shot of Zidane, the soundtrack abruptly changes; the music is now completely gone and the stadium noise is now at full volume once again.

Thanks to the bookending of this sequence (beginning with the shot of the PA speakers and ending with the shot of the lights) and the aesthetic shifts within it (the audio changes, the sudden reappearance of the subtitles, the sense of interiority contained within the content of those titles), there is a sense that this segment of the film is set off from the sections around it. It is a subtle, qualitative change in that we are still seeing the same "first-hand" images of Zidane, but the tone, the atmosphere, are different. Our previous sense of immersion, immediacy, and action have been replaced by a sense of reflectiveness and introspection. To a small degree, action is replaced with thought, before returning again to action. Importantly, this is not an isolated shift; in fact, the entire first half consists of more of these oscillations between full immersion in the action and a subtle drawing back towards something more introspective and reflective. Each of these oscillations is marked similarly, with the reappearance (and disappearance) of the score on the soundtrack and with the prevalence (or absence) of subtitles on the screen. This back-and-forth continues until half-time. So, while *Zidane* may upon first viewing feel like an undifferentiated expanse of time, an exercise in pure duration, a careful examination reveals a subtle but unmistakable sense of structure (down to the fact that the first

external/internal oscillation, described above, begins right at the halfway-point of the first half of the match). Time in *Zidane*, in other words, appears as *durée* only occasionally, only within a larger, constructed dialectic of time.

In this way, *Zidane*'s temporal aesthetic is structured around what Gaston Bachelard describes as "the opposition of instants and intervals," of "on the one hand time which is ineffective, scattered in a cloud of disparate instants and on the other, time which is cohered, organized, and consolidated into duration" (91). Against Bergson, Bachelard argues that time is not a unity but a duality, a dialectic of which continuity is only one side. This duality results from a fundamental "*temporal alternative* that can be analysed by these two observations: either in this instant, nothing is happening or else in this instant, something is happening. Time is thus continuous as possibility, as nothingness. It is discontinuous as being" (44, original emphasis). In other words, in moments of inaction, time manifests as pure possibility, as what Massumi would call the virtual, that realm of pure potentiality in which anything could come to be. But as soon as becoming concretizes into being (as it always constantly does), the pure continuity of potential (i.e., nothingness) solidifies into a single discrete and concrete moment that is (i.e., being). As Bachelard puts it, "Whatever the series of events that are being studied, we observe that these events are bordered by a time in which nothing happens" (46). Life thus consists of myriad overlapping events and phenomena; and while each event might itself be continuous, it is also bordered by discontinuity, by nothingness or by that which is not the event itself. In this view, life is not a constant flow but rather an endless oscillation between these two modes of time and being.

We see this oscillation in *Zidane* in the constant back-and-forth between immersion in the physical stimuli of the match and the more distant passages of reflection and introspection. We

see it as well on a smaller scale, as our experience of the match even within "continuous" passages of time is made up of individual transitions between being and nothingness, reality and potential, discontinuity and continuity. In this way, *Zidane* differs from the neorealist films that first created the cinema of the time-image. These earlier films favor long takes wherever possible, and for good reason. A long take emphasizes the passage of time by preserving the duration of the action or event it captures; and if what the shot captures is irrelevant action or even the absence of action, we become distinctly aware of the passage of time through boredom, anticipation, and so on. But *Zidane* does not use long takes. When the film is operating in its continuous mode, it conveys the flow of passing time, but it does so through an endless series of individual shots, each of which represents a break in the flow. The shots may be stitched together more or less by matches on action or by a similar play of focus or framing in two consecutive shots, but the end result is a curiously discontinuous continuity that brings home the Bachelardian oscillation between events and the nothingness that borders them. We see a close-up on Zidane's legs and feet as he paces back and forth; nothing is happening, but in a moment, anything could. The arbitrary banality of the shot allows the mind to wander, to wonder what else is happening in the match and when Zidane will be involved. Suddenly, a cut as the ball rolls past Zidane, who is now a blur of motion: something is now happening. He dribbles, passes, gets the ball back, and then sees his next pass intercepted by an opponent. The event ends. The play continues off-screen as we stay on Zidane, for whom, once again, nothing is happening. His brief possession of the ball, though unfruitful in this instance, constitutes nonetheless a discrete concrete moment, a microevent that is distinct from the expanses of continuous nothingness on either side of it. This analysis could be taken even further, treating each shot as a self-contained event, discontinuous from the shot on either side of it. Or further still, each shot could be said to

contain an event, so that the shot itself moves from the nothingness of its own beginning through whatever action, however miniscule, makes up the body of the shot, back to the nothingness that remains at the conclusion of that action. In this way, even the stretches of film that seem continuous are in fact made up of countless discontinuities, a fact that is fitting given that Zidane himself describes the playing experience as one of discontinuity in a subtitle that reads, "The game, the event, is not necessarily experienced or remembered in 'real time'. My memories of games and events are fragmented."

Forgotten or Remembered: Time and/as History

This dynamic between continuous and discontinuous time points towards another dynamic, one at the philosophical heart of *Zidane*: the dynamic between everyday time and time as history. From its very beginning the film is concerned with this question of history. We see this from the very opening titles, which conclude: "From the first kick of the ball until the final whistle. Madrid, Saturday, April 23rd, 2005. Who could have imagined that in the future, an ordinary day like this might be forgotten or remembered as anything more or less significant than a walk in the park." By starting on this note, the film frames everything that comes after in terms of a question, namely, the question of whether the events on screen are memorable and significant or whether they merely amount to "a walk in the park," that is, to irrelevant action as compared to the larger historical context surrounding the match.

But this question begs another one: what counts as historically significant? The film seems poised to address this question with a sequence that occurs during half-time in the match. As the players leave the field, the film cuts from a shot of Zidane to a frame of video static that suddenly resolves into a blurry shot of a beach with the subtitle "Saturday, April 23rd, 2005." With another cut, the titles continue: "Puppeteer brings Bob Marley to life in Ipanema Beach

puppet show," as on screen we see a dancing marionette of Marley. The sequence continues with an assortment of video clips and textual descriptions of things that happened around the world on the same day as the match. The events range from typical news headline material ("Hundreds of homes are destroyed in Serbia-Montenegro during the worst floods in forty years," or "Car bomb in Najaf, Iraq, kills 9 in wave of escalating attacks") to peculiar human interest stories (the Bob Marley puppet, "A 48 hour marathon reading 'Don Quixote' is performed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Cervantes' book") to the bizarre ("Hundreds of toads swell to 3 times their normal size and explode in a fresh water pond in Germany") to the scientific ("The spaceship 'Voyager' records plasmawave sounds at the solar wind termination shock boundary," and "The ivory-billed woodpecker believed to have been extinct since 1920, has been spotted in North America") to the utterly banal and personal ("My son had a fever this morning" and "I had something to do today…").

By incorporating news stories from the same day as the match it covers, *Zidane* seems eager to place its main subject within a larger historical context. But by mixing together so many different kinds of stories in no particular order, with no sense of hierarchy or differentiation between what would traditionally be considered newsworthy and what would not, the film only muddles the question of history that it seeks to answer. The half-time sequence ends by recapitulating the film's opening lines. After a clip of "The Asian-African summit com[ing] to a close in Jakarta," the familiar title "Who could have imagined that in the future," returns to the screen. The full line ("an ordinary day like this . . .", etc.) continues to unfold over a series of cuts from a black screen to a shot of the stadium lights to an extreme close-up on Zidane's eyes, after which the second half kicks off with the title, "Madrid, Saturday, April 23rd, 2005." We are back where we started, in more ways than one, and we are no closer to an answer to the question

of historical significance. Is *Zidane* more or less significant than a car bomb in Najaf? Is it more or less significant than an exploding toad? We still don't know.

Though it might not be immediately apparent, this lingering question of history is rooted in *Zidane*'s fundamental dialectic between continuous and discontinuous time. The connection lies in the fact that the dialectical coexistence of discontinuity and continuity demands a mechanism for *making* continuity out of time's discontinuous constituent parts, and history is one such mechanism. Bachelard argues that continuity is actually produced by a series of mental processes, or "ordering actions," whereby the mind, in its analytical and emotional capacities, gives meaning to the individual instants we encounter by linking them together into events (65). These ordering actions, Bachelard says, proceed according to the principle of narration. On this point, Bachelard quotes Pierre Janet, whose "insight . . . is very profound: 'what has created humanity is narration, and not by any means recitation.'" In other words, Bachelard says, "we do not remember simply by repeating but we have to *compose* our past. Character is a biased story of the self." Bachelard continues to quote Janet, for whom "the work of memory does not finish with the act of memory: 'It is not over when the event ends, because memory is perfected in silence . . . This is why a memory is better after a few days than it was at the beginning, it is better made, better wrought. It is a literary construction that is made slowly and is gradually perfected'." Bachelard concludes that "Events do not therefore settle along the length of a duration like direct and natural gains. They need to be ordered in an artificial system – a rational or social system – that gives them meaning and a date" (64). In fact, it is this mental ordering that separates memories from dreams. As Bachelard says:

> [Memory] must be differentiated from reverie precisely because true memory possesses a temporal substructure that reverie lacks. The images of reverie are gratuitous. They are not pure memory because they are incomplete, undated memories. There is no date and no duration where there is no construction; there is no date without a dialectic, without

differences. Duration is a complex of multiple ordering actions which support each other. If we say we are living in a single, homogenous domain we shall see that time can no longer move on. At the very most, it just hops about. In fact, duration always needs alterity for it to appear continuous. (65)

Dreams, in other words, exist outside of time precisely because they evade the emotional and rational structures by which we construct a sense of continuity in our waking lives. Dreams are both discontinuous within themselves (defying the usual laws of time and causality) and discontinuous from our waking lives, precisely because they do not fit into the continuous narratives we make of our everyday experiences.

For all its drive to understand time as history, *Zidane* often operates as something more akin to a dream. For example, under the ostensible guise of providing historical context, the half-time sequence merely piles up a series of instants with no clear ordering; there is no sense of a hierarchy of importance to the events we see, nor is there a clear throughline of cause-and-effect, nor are the events arranged in such a way that suggests any kind of deliberate commentary via comparison or juxtaposition. Instead, like dream images, the news clips are largely "gratuitous"; though they are in a literal sense given a date, in the way they are jumbled together they are functionally akin to the "incomplete, undated memories" of reverie. The same can largely be said about the film as a whole. Though we understand that the images we see of Zidane exist within the larger context of the match, the film generally declines to use that larger context (or any other context, such as Zidane's career, or his life, or so on) to shape its images into a coherent narrative. The result is that within the largely unordered images of the film, time struggles to move on rather than "just hop[ping] about" as in a dream.

And yet, it does move on. The match, and the film, proceed inexorably to their end, and then pass into memory and, perhaps, into history. This inexorability is guaranteed by the very nature of cinema, which affixes a definite, objective duration to whatever it mediates, and which

places each of its images in a definite order within that duration. By means of this ordering, and by its very nature as a temporal art, any film can be said to create a stretch of continuous time, however discontinuous or fragmented the actual contents of the film itself. Even a purely abstract film like Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963), for instance, creates its own continuity as it unfolds on the screen. Yet it is important not to conflate this cinematic continuity with mental continuity, as it is tempting to do in the case of a real-time documentary film such as *Zidane*. On the one hand, *Zidane seems* to offer us a more-or-less perfect record of the match (or at least of Zidane's performance in it). The cinematic record of his actions is far more precise and detailed than what we could commit to memory by simply watching the match firsthand.

But there is a crucial difference between cinematic record and human memory, and that difference is one of duration. While on the one hand mental actions such as memory are what create the impression of continuous time, memory does not in fact give us access to duration. Bachelard is careful to distinguish between past and memory, noting that:

> Our personal history is therefore simply the story of our disconnected actions and, as we tell it, it is with the help of reasons and not of duration that we consider ourselves to be giving it continuity. Thus, our experience of our own past duration is based on real rational axes; without this structure, our duration would collapse. We shall be going on to show that memory does not even give us direct access to temporal order; it needs to be supported by other ordering principles. We ought not to confuse the memory of our past and the memory of our duration. Through our past, what we know, using this word as Pierre Janet defined it, is at the very most what we initiated in time or what, in time, has collided with us. We retain no trace of the temporal dynamic, of the flow of time. (52)

Thus we find a disparity between cinematic duration and human memory. The human mind may "retain no trace of . . . the flow of time," but this "temporal dynamic" is precisely what film captures, particularly in its documentary and neorealist modes. A film like *Zidane* creates continuity precisely through the principle of pure duration that Bachelard says is inaccessible to the human memory. Such a film records and preserves both the sequence and the exact duration

of a series of instants. Any such series, experienced firsthand by a person, may or may not have been remembered as continuous, may or may not have been ordered together by the mind as a stretch of "real time," may or may not, in fact, have been remembered at all. And if it were remembered, such a memory would result from "other ordering principles"; the memory would come from the emotional impact of the events, or from their role in a chain of causality as understood by the person experiencing them. But for a film to "remember" a series of events, it is necessary only to point the camera the right way and press "record." That is because cinematic memory requires—in fact, consists of—nothing more or less than a record of duration. In a sense, then, film and video prosthetically retain what human memory cannot; in a variation on Bazin's argument that photography fulfils the psychological desire to preserve life against death, we could say that cinema fulfils the psychological desire to preserve duration.

Thus *Zidane* ultimately runs up against a disparity between the human experience of time, which is inevitably ordered into duration through the narratives we create as memories, and the exact record of duration that cinema can provide, a duration that can be preserved and replayed without any ordering actions, that is, without the aid of narrative to piece together disparate instants, or to guide our eyes and our minds towards meaning. In this way the "pure time" aimed at in Deleuze's conception of art cinema is in a very real way incomprehensible to us; yet as *Zidane* demonstrates in its efforts to connect time and history, there is always the tendency to *seek* a meaning or intention that may or may not be there at all. In the absence of narrative aids, we thus experience cinematic duration as a friction between "real time" and meaningful time. To overcome this friction requires an act of transcendence which moves us beyond this opposition to see how the instantaneous and the continuous, the durational and the memorial, ultimately fit together.

Transcending the Immediated Present

   Zidane pursues this transcendence using techniques that are by now quite familiar. We have already seen how the film constructs an everyday that is rife with disparity. As these disparities unfold, we see the immediated present gradually give way to its own past and future, which creep into the picture as moments of temporal collapse that characterize everyday transcendence. The first such temporal collapse occurs towards the end of the first half. After a free kick for Madrid, the whistle blows for another stoppage, and we cut to a close-up of Zidane as the score fades back in on the soundtrack and the crowd noise gives way to an audio close-up on Zidane's breathing and the occasional sounds of the ball being kicked around on the field. But now these familiar audio cues are joined by a new set of noises as we hear the sound of a group of children playing football. We hear their shouts, their arguments, and even a dog barking in the background. As the match continues and we watch Zidane competing in a back-and-forth midfield battle, we hear only these phantom childhood noises, the sound of the ball being kicked, Zidane's breathing, and, at one point, his voice as he speaks to a teammate.

   By juxtaposing these (for lack of a better term) nondiegetic audio elements over the now-familiar images of the match, the film creates a sudden sense of a moment out of time. This scene is functionally quite similar to the opening scene of *Before Sunset*, in which the audio of Jesse speaking in the present unfolds over nine-year-old images from *Before Sunrise*. In *Zidane* the details are reversed (with images of the present coupled with sounds from the past), but the effect is the same, as we are given the sense that, as Jesse puts it, "inside every moment is another moment all happening simultaneously." Suddenly, Zidane is at once an international superstar playing at the highest level for the world's richest club and he is a boy playing in the streets of Marseille. This sense of folded time is strengthened when the sequence is briefly

punctuated by a shot of the television broadcast. When we return to the first-hand shots of Zidane a moment later, the television commentary now remains on the soundtrack alongside the noises of the childhood game. This incorporation of the television commentary recalls Zidane's statement earlier in the film about the running television commentary in his head when he played as a child.

Our sense of past-within-the-present is further reinforced by the titles that appear on screen at this point: "I remember playing in another place, at another time, when something amazing happened. Someone passed the ball to me, and before even touching it, I knew exactly what was going to happen. I knew I was going to score. It was the first and last time it ever happened." As these titles unfold on the screen, the audio transitions back to the familiar mix, as the music and childhood sounds fade out and the crowd noise fades back in, gently ending this moment of reminiscence. This sequence is notable because of the way it effortlessly slips from present to past and back again—not as a flashback or as the recitation of a memory, but as a commingling, as the simultaneous unfolding of present and past within a single moment. Suddenly, unexpectedly, we find "right now" exceeding itself, pointing outside of itself just as in the previous films in this study.

A similar, if more nebulous and protracted collapse occurs throughout the second half. This time, the collapse finds the present folding into its own future, and it arises through another familiar transcendental technique, that of an unaccountable buildup of emotions. Whereas the first half of the film works to establish the basic oscillations that form the aesthetic and temporal structures of the film, the second half takes those basic structures and injects them with an unexpectedly ominous undercurrent. The second half of the match is inherently more discontinuous than the first, thanks to a number of stoppages for goals, substitutions, and a

second yellow card for one of Madrid's players. But these natural breaks are paralleled by a more discontinuous and disorienting direction in both the camerawork and the editing of the film. Throughout the second half, there are a number of shots that deliberately break or obscure our connection with Zidane; everything from a series of dizzyingly fast pans right after the start of the half to a number of shots that deliberately throw Zidane so far out of focus that he is no more than a smear of white on green. Such techniques create a sense of restlessness, as though the film is looking for something it can't quite find. Similarly, there are a number of shots in the second half that use an extreme digital zoom to close in on details of Zidane's shoes, or his face; the use of digital zoom creates highly distorted and pixilated images that contrast with the high quality of most of the film's photography. This contrast is heightened by the frequent coupling of the digital zooms with slow motion, which only further emphasizes the jarring textures and, paradoxically, turns close-up images into a reminder of our actual distance from Zidane by calling attention to the act of mediation and to its limitations. Taken together, these techniques create a sense of choppiness and disconnection that wasn't there in the first half. This more jarring photographic style is abetted by the editing, which cuts away from the action more frequently than before, as in a series of shots midway through the half that follow Zidane's eyes up to the stadium lights and to the scoreboard several times over the course of a minute or two. This shot sequence works to suggest a sense of urgency, impatience, and distraction; at the time, Madrid is still down 1-0, so the series of shots alternating between the scoreboard and Zidane's face suggest a sense of mounting pressure and frustration at the way the match has gone up to that point.

But by far the most effective technique the film has for creating a sense of foreboding in the second half is its use of sound and particularly music. In the first half, when music appeared,

it was relatively placid, consisting of calm, thoughtful figures played on clean electric guitars with simple bass and drum accompaniment. In the second half, though, Mogwai's sound becomes more aggressive and menacing. Almost immediately after the second half kickoff, the live sound gives way to an edgy drone of distorted guitar feedback that accompanies a sound close-up on Zidane angrily shouting "hey!" at something off screen and then breathing heavily while glaring at the action around him. This kind of droning, unsettling sound characterizes most of the music in the second half. A later sequence finds more guitar feedback, this time playing out over a rumbling, meandering distorted bass line, as a particularly physical sequence of play unfolds on the field. These guitar drones continue throughout the second half, contributing to the ongoing sense of unsettledness and annoyance that characterizes this part of the film.

This growing sense of disparate emotion culminates in the final moments of the film, which see Zidane ejected from the match for striking an opponent. For the last five minutes or so of the film, we hear yet another drone; this one fades in very slowly, weaving in and out of the crowd noise that initially dominates the soundtrack at the start of this sequence. The images we see during this time are innocuous enough; we even see Zidane smile for the first (and only) time in the film as he shares a joke with one of his teammates. But all the while the drone on the soundtrack tells us something darker is coming. Sure enough, as the drone reaches its crescendo, the film cuts to the television broadcast and we see a scuffle break out to the side of Villareal's goal. As we cut back to the firsthand footage, Zidane runs to join the fray, and then, behind a group of other players, we can just see him throwing a punch at an opponent's face. While this action unfolds, we hear the crowd, but this noise is digitally filtered and mixed to be lower than the droning, unchanging music, which continues as the referee breaks up the melee, summons

Zidane and his opponent, and shows them each the red card, at which point the music finally fades and is replaced by crowd noise.

The use throughout this final sequence of the drone—an unchanging, single note, held indefinitely, varying only in volume and texture—creates a sense of inevitability and finality as these last moments unfold. Moreover, the use of other, similar drones throughout the second half creates a sense of climax, a sense that everything was leading to this. Indeed, on repeated viewings, the drones, distortion, and feedback used in the second half become much more apparent with the knowledge of how the match will end for Zidane. Knowing that he will eventually be ejected for getting in a fight greatly increases the sense of frustration and restlessness that seems to be simmering below the surface for the whole half. Thus the sense of ominousness that characterizes the second half is itself a subtle folding of time within the film, as the presentness of each moment of the second half seems to look ahead with resigned dread to the climactic moment that ends Zidane's involvement.

There is also a further and more explicit folding of present and future at work in the second half. As Zidane makes his way off the field after being shown the red card, his last words, in subtitles, are "When I retire I'll miss the green of the field, 'le carré vert'." A simple declaration, but one that functions, on a very small scale, like the moment of vision in Heidegger's philosophy. In Heidegger's moment of vision, one looks ahead to the certainty of one's own death and, seeing one's life as a finite, finished product, returns to the present with an enhanced sense of focus and freedom. What's at stake in *Zidane*'s final moments is a football career, not a life as a whole, but all the same, in this moment Zidane pictures himself "*in the process of **having-been***" (437). Zidane's statement, which comes at the end of his participation in the match and which is coupled with the formal ending that follows just seconds later, creates

a powerful sense of finality; it is not death, but nonetheless the smaller ending Zidane (and

Zidane) envisions here brings with it a sense of loss and of finitude that bring real stakes and

gravity to the proceedings.

In its last moments, then, *Zidane* taps into what Bachelard calls a "dialectic of joys and

sorrows" that makes up the human experience. "We . . . know," Bachelard says, "that it is time

that takes and that gives. We suddenly become aware that time will take from us again. Thus,

reliving time that has disappeared means learning the disquiet of our own death" (51). In this

sense, a certain Barthesian quality of *Zidane* also comes into play; as in the final live action

sequence of *Bashir*, *Zidane* shows us a "now" that simultaneously is happening and has already

happened. To watch such a film is, in a very real sense, to "reliv[e] time that has disappeared."

Like the photographs Barthes studies, the film carries with it a sense of temporal vertigo:

watching the film, we experience Zidane as a cinematic here-and-now, all the while knowing that

(as of this writing) he is already retired (and there will come a time, of course, where one will

watch the film knowing Zidane is here-and-now and Zidane is already dead).

By ending on this sense of vertigo, *Zidane* brings us back to the dialectic between

continuity and discontinuity. For Bachelard, death and loss play a crucial role in defining this

dialectic: "In teaching us all that time can break," he says, "meditations [on death and loss and

regret] lead us to define time as a series of breaks. We can no longer really attribute uniform

continuity to time when we have had such a vivid premonition of the weakening and failing of

being" (51). But even as our awareness of finitude highlights time's discontinuities, our

emotional response to death and loss ultimately paves the way for a continuous experience of

this discontinuous time. As Bachelard says:

> The soul places the confusion of its feelings beneath the mind's discontinuous
> determinations. We cannot therefore overemphasize the importance of Janet's

observation that 'change is nearly always consonant with feelings, and very often with the feeling of sadness. Change is in fact quite sad; in all its forms, it is nearly always a dying'. Thus, we base all the events in our lives on the continuum of our sorrows; we translate in to the emotional language of continuity what would be more accurately expressed in the clear and trenchant narrative of objective events. Continuity is but our emotion, our unease, our melancholy, and the role of emotion is perhaps only to blunt ever-hostile newness. (60)

In other words, for Bachelard, time in its objective, impersonal form is inherently discontinuous and fragmented; but through the faculty of emotion, we make sense of it as a continuity, linking, for instance, the presence and the loss of a loved one through the internal experience of grief. No wonder, then, that the second half of *Zidane* introduces an unexpected emotional undercurrent that ultimately leads the way to the climatic sending off. In fact, the very structure of the second half illustrates this principle perfectly: linking the otherwise disparate actions of the match is the rising sense of unease and unrest, carried primarily by the music. This building sense of unease ultimately prepares the emotional explosion that ends Zidane's involvement in the match. Even as it is, the outburst at the end seems to come out of nowhere, yet (especially on repeat viewings, knowing what's coming) the formal expressions of agitation, impatience, and so on., do what they can to "blunt" the "ever-hostile newness" of the film's eventual conclusion (as well as the even more eventual conclusion of Zidane's career itself).

As the second half's buildup of emotion culminates in the decisive moment of violence that ends Zidane's participation, it ultimately, as in Schrader's model, finds itself answered by an image of stasis. In this case stasis appears as a return to the pixilated screen that started the film. As Zidane leaves the field, he is framed from behind as he walks off towards the player's tunnel. As soon as Zidane disappears down the tunnel, the camera tilts up, past the upper tier of the stadium, past the floodlights, and into the black night sky. Almost immediately after the shot goes black, we fade into an extreme close-up on the pixilated television screen from the very

beginning of the film. After a beat, the film's title design appears, a jumbled amalgamation of all of the letters of "Zidane." In the opening title sequence, we saw this design being formed, as each letter appeared on screen in turn (Z, then I, etc.) with each letter superimposed over all the previous ones. Now, at the end of the film, we see the process in reverse, as first the E, then the N, and so on, disappear until there are no letters left. We stay on the pixilated screen for the end credits, which begin a few seconds after the "ZIDANE" logo has gone.

This final image serves several functions in the overall context of the film. It is, of course, an image of stasis in the classic sense, a still, mute picture akin to the cross at the end of Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*. It stands as if in answer to the tensions that have boiled over, as if to reconcile the various oppositions that have run throughout the film without finding answers. Yet this static screen holds neither answers nor reconciliation; instead it simply freezes all of these preceding conflicts in place in what would normally in this sort of film be a moment of transcendence. This suggestion of transcendence is enhanced by the way this last shot forms a bookend with the film's introductory sequence. We have seen similar bookending earlier in this study, particularly in *The Tree of Life* (the image of the shifting light that opens and closes the film) and in the *Before* series as a whole (the metaphor of time travel, which is invoked at the beginning of *Before Sunrise* and again at the end of *Before Midnight*). As in those films, the bookends formed by the pixelated screens in *Zidane* create a sense of formal unity and completeness.[20] Moreover, in both *The Tree of Life* and the *Before* series, these bookends also

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20. This formal unity also creates a sense of temporal unity and continuity; that is why Bachelard gives special emphasis to the "psychology of *beginning*," that is to actions, rituals, or events that "inaugurate a duration" (57). He says that "All well constituted duration must thus be given a clearly differentiated beginning. How can it not be seen that in these splendid and solemn beginnings, the causality of reason takes the place of what was claimed to be the causality of duration? Here the supremacy of willed time over lived time is plain" (58). By extension, when a formal beginning is paired with its ending counterpart (in each of the bookending shots or scenes

suggest a transcendent connection between beginning and ending. In Malick's film, the reappearance of the mysterious light at the beginning and end of the film suggests the unchanging and non-linear nature of the Eternal, as well as pointing to the Augustinian conception of time in which past and future ultimately converge towards a single, divine point that is God's eternal present. Meanwhile, in Linklater's films, the recurrence of the time-travel metaphor is yet another example of time being "a lie" and life "folding in on itself" in a single, simultaneous instant, the transcendental Now.

Thus we see *Zidane* ultimately hewing closely to the formal devices of everyday transcendence. The film begins with a disparate present which ultimately collapses towards its own past and future, then ends with an image of stasis that suggests the ultimate interconnectedness of beginning and end. But one crucial element remains unclear at this point. Transcendental cinema aims to reveal the Wholly Other that lies unseen alongside everyday reality; in everyday transcendence, this Other is another view of time, one which stands above or apart from time as we experience it in our everyday lives. In all the previous films in this study, by the time we reach the moment of transcendence, we have been given a relatively clear idea of the Wholly Other towards which the film aspires to transcend. In *The Tree of Life*, that Wholly Other is explicitly religious; it is the concept of time as divine eternity, and in the moment of transcendence we see that each of the disparate fragments of time we encounter ultimately refers back to that unified, divine whole. Linklater's films flirt with this idea of divine eternity (particularly in its guise as the "Holy Moment") before ultimately settling on a more secular vision of a perpetual Now which unites all moments as one (as in the claims that "inside every

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described above), the two together implicitly set aside the expanse of time in between, separating it from the time and space that surrounds it and declaring it to be a unified, continuous event, action, or series.

moment is another moment all happening simultaneously" and "it's always right now"). *Waltz With Bashir* continues this secularizing trend, showing us a Wholly Other that is a specific past moment that remains an indelible "now" in its own right and which dominates the haunted present to such an extent that every "present" moment ultimately refers back to this past present, a moment in time so brutally traumatic that it exceeds any attempt at rational understanding or emotional assimilation. But when we reach the end of *Zidane*, we have little sense of a possible other to the present we have been experiencing. For a while, the film seems to treat History as its Wholly Other as it looks for a connection between the match it covers and the broader events taking place in the world concurrently with that match. Yet with the half-time sequence, the idea of history itself becomes jumbled, and by the end, the film seems to have jettisoned the one rational structure that seemed to promise a clear counterpoint to everyday ambiguity. As a result, when the film hits the formal point of transcendence, we appear to have nowhere to go, no possible destination outside of the everyday time we have already been inhabiting. That is because in the end, *Zidane* pursues a truly everyday transcendence, which is to say a transcendence rooted not in a temporal other but in a fundamental principle of everyday time itself. That transcendental principle, which emerges from the dialectical nature of *Zidane*'s immediated present, is the principle of temporal superimposition.

Magic and Nothing At All: Temporal Superimposition

At the end of the film, as Zidane is walking off the field after receiving his red card, he muses in subtitle that "Magic is sometimes very close to nothing at all. Nothing at all." There are a number of ways to interpret this phrase. Most immediately, Zidane's observation could refer to the thin line between a good or bad performance. This particular match certainly sees several wild swings in Zidane's fortunes. Zidane initially has little involvement in the match, but then

with one move, he sets up Madrid's tying goal and sparks their comeback win; then, not long after, he gets in a fight and gets sent off. In this way, the statement about magic also suggests the thin line between the passionate intensity that made Zidane a great player and the outright aggression that saw him ejected from this and thirteen other matches in his career, most famously the 2006 World Cup final, in which he was sent off for headbutting an opponent in the chest in what turned out to be the final match of his career. But these are far from the only fine lines suggested by Zidane's statement. This is, after all, a film built around a series of fine lines. We have already seen how the film's basic aesthetic is structured around oscillations between opposite tendencies, between proximity and distance, immediacy and mediation, continuous and fragmented time. It is only fitting, then, that in searching for magic—for transcendence—*Zidane* aims at the fine lines themselves. That is to say that rather than trying to overcome or reconcile the oppositions we have encountered, the film seeks the boundary lines that define each opposition and which also mark the points at which they meet.

Each formal opposition in *Zidane* ultimately converges towards a point of superimposition, a term used by Bachelard to describe what he sees as the fundamental "density" of time (102). For Bachelard, the concept of density explains how we are able to mentally experience time as continuous when, as he argues, objective, lived time is inherently fragmented and discontinuous; it "is made of accidents and far closer to quantum *inconsistencies* than to rational *coherence* and real *consistencies*." By contrast, "mental time is not, we believe, just an abstraction from life's time. The time of thought is in fact so superior to the time of life that it can sometimes command life's action and life's repose. Thus, the mind's time pursues its action deep down, acting at level different from its own level of sequence" (102, original emphasis). This mental time takes many guises; it is the emotional ordering by which we construct a sense

of continuity from disparate events and order them into coherent memories, and it is also the intellectual ordering by which we learn and perfect complicated skills.[21] In each of these cases, the key thing is that mental time proceeds totally independently of lived time; moreover, even individual mental processes unfold independently of each other, giving mental time a dimension of depth both relative to lived time and within itself. As Bachelard says, "thought time and lived time cannot be postulated as being naturally synchronous. There is a kind of vertical relativity that gives pluralism to mental coincidences and that is different from the physical relativity which develops at the level where there is the passage of things" (104).

This idea of deep time, of time having multiple levels, is absolutely crucial to Bachelard's conception of duration. "Time has several dimensions," he insists, "it has density. Time seems continuous only in a certain density, thanks to the superimposition of several independent times" (102). This idea of superimposition—along with the idea that mental time proceeds at a certain depth—stems from Bachelard's idea that time is both horizontal and vertical. In its purest form, the horizontal axis is the time of life, or "the time of the world," which is to say time at the objective and physical level at which things occur. The vertical axis, by contrast, is the time of the mind and of consciousness, which at any given moment has the capacity to expand straight

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21. Bachelard dedicates a whole chapter to this process, which he calls "intellectual causality." He gives the example of a billiards player, who must consolidate a whole set of discontinuous experiences in order to produce skillful action. "We do not really have at our disposal a substantial, positive, and unified memory that would allow us to reproduce exactly a skilful action," Bachelard says. "We must first weigh up contradictory memories and achieve the balance of opposite impulses" (85). Only in evaluating, comparing, and internalizing a whole collection of disparate, discontinuous past actions (i.e., previous successful and unsuccessful shots a player has made) can the mind synthesize the correct action for the current situation. This synthetic activity happens not in real time but in "thought time"; it takes place entirely independently of the objective duration in which the billiards game unfolds. Yet at the end of the mental process, "thought time takes precedence over lived time" as all of these disconnected past moments are transformed, through the activity of the mind, into a skillful action in the world (85).

upward in a movement perpendicular to the horizontal movement of life-time. As Bachelard says, "This line running perpendicular to the temporal axis of life alone in fact gives consciousness of the present the means to flee and escape, to expand and deepen which have very often led to the present instant being likened to an eternity" (105).

In this discussion of density, there are a number of parallels between Bachelard's thought and some of the philosophies and aesthetic principles we have encountered earlier in this study. Most immediately, the idea of superimposition—of moments stacked on top of other moments to create a simultaneous depth—brings to mind Linklater's proposition (found in many guises throughout his films) that every moment contains another moment, that every moment moreover is an opening to infinity or to eternity. This figure of simultaneity is familiar as well from *The Tree of Life*, which combined Augustine's sense that all time converges towards a single, homogenous eternal moment with Heidegger's concept of the moment of vision, in which present and future briefly coincide in a single moment. *Waltz With Bashir*, meanwhile, transforms this philosophical idea into a powerful aesthetic experience by concluding with a moment of Barthesian vertigo in which we witness a moment that is simultaneously past and present.

Zidane, for its part, borrows from all of these tendencies, showing us how past and future overlap the present as well as containing, in its play between immediacy and mediation, a sense of that same temporal vertigo that powers the end of *Bashir*. We find, in short, a basic principle of transcendence in *Zidane*. That is the principle of deep time, of the superimposition and the "fundamental instantaneity" of multiple mental-temporal processes (111). There is the ongoing throughline of real time experience. From this real time we routinely retreat into a realm of mental repose and reflection (marked by the music-and-subtitle sequences in the first half) even

as real time continues to unfold around us. At other points, the unfolding of real time is superimposed with memory and with thoughts of the future and of an ending. Another superimposition occurs at half time, when the time and action of the match is superimposed with (more or less) simultaneous actions from around the world. Even the basic aesthetic dualisms that shape the film—the oppositions between proximity and distance, immediacy and mediation, continuity and discontinuity—can be seen as superimpositions of disparate tendencies. Examined analytically, any given moment of *Zidane*, or any given aesthetic tendency in the film, might be seen to be at odds with any other; yet the sheer depth of superimposed tendencies and temporalities, the way these overlap with each other, the way we flow smoothly back and forth through different levels of time, all create a unified and continuous experience.

In the end, we find that what we initially took to be divisions—between closeness and distance, immediacy and mediation, continuity and discontinuity—are better characterized as horizons. A horizon is a boundary, but it is also a meeting point, a point of superimposition. Ultimately, it is this idea of the meeting point that Zidane aims at in its moment of transcendence. What the film seeks to reveal to the viewer—what it itself seeks to understand— is the line that marks both the contact between magic and nothingness, and the separation between the two. What remains ineffable, what is truly transcendent, is the mechanism by which the two sides of that line communicate, flow and transform one into another, while remaining discrete entities.

This transcendental communication is what Bachelard calls the tonality of ideas. At the end of his study of duration, Bachelard turns to a discussion of poetry, which he appreciates especially for its capacity to superimpose contradictory thoughts and images, saying that:

> We have come to realize that it is the idea that sings its song, that the complex interplay of ideas has its own tonality, a tonality that can call forth deep within us all a faint, soft

murmuring. If we speak soundlessly and allow image to follow image in quick succession, so that we are living at the meeting point, the point of superimposition, of all the different interpretations, we understand the nature of a truly mental, truly intellectual, lyric state. (154)

Once again, we find echoes of philosophical ideas we have encountered earlier in this study. Here it is the idea of an inner voice, the inner word of Augustine or the call of conscience in Heidegger, now transfigured from word to song, to a "tonality" that invokes "a faint, soft murmuring." In every case—Augustine, Heidegger, Bachelard-via-*Zidane*—this inner sound calls us out of everyday absorption and awakens us to the transcendental continuities that rise out of, above, and throughout our otherwise disconnected experiences of everyday time. In Augustine it is the residual voice of God leftover from creation which allows us to cohere and to endure rather than being entirely pulled apart by time and lost in worldly temporality, to access the eternal in our moments of faithful awareness, and to thus redeem a present that seems on its surface utterly divorced from the spiritual. In Heidegger it is the inner voice of the conscience that drives us to anxiety in the face of everyday banality, that warns us when we are wasting our lives mindlessly and that through anxiety forces us to face our own mortality—which we must do periodically if we are to seize the fateful potential that lies ready for us (though often unseen) in every present moment. With a bit of inference, we could even see a similar voice at work in *Boyhood* and in *Bashir*, in Mason's growing discontentment with the everyday world around him and with Folman's dogged insistence on finding out the truth of his past.

And here, in Bachelard and *Zidane*, it is the inner play of pure ideas and thought that animates and coheres the inert fragments of disconnected everyday time. To live at the point of superimposition is to see all possibilities, including contradictory ones, coexisting in the same moment. It is to experience at once the immediacy of mediation and the mediation of immediacy; it is to be close to and far from Zidane at the same time; it is to live a present that is already past,

and to read in that past present another past, as well as a future (a future that is now the present). This ideal of superimposition—which allows us to sustain this plurality of meanings all at once, without favoring any one so that it eclipses any other—is the fundamental transcendental counterpart to ordinary everyday experience. This transcendental simultaneity was unabashedly called God or Eternity in Malick; Linklater almost called it that, but deferred to more secular interpretations. Folman took a much more specific tact, showing us the specific overlapping of two particular moments in time. *Zidane*, at last, boils the concept down to its purest form, revealing the principle of simultaneity that is the fundamental unifying force of the temporal dialectic. Thus at last we come to an answer to the question that runs throughout the film. Is *Zidane* any more or less significant than a walk in the park? It is both. It is magic, and it is nothing at all.

CONCLUSION

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
         —T.S. Eliot[22]

Believe, believe
In the resolute urgency of now
         —The Smashing Pumpkins

In keeping with the spirit of everyday transcendence, I want to end by returning to where I started, particularly to the question of everyday transcendence in relation both to classical transcendental cinema and to contemporary art cinema. This idea of coming full circle is crucial; it is, in fact, what distinguishes everyday transcendence from these closest of peers. Both classical transcendental cinema and contemporary temporal art cinema (slow cinema and its ilk) are characterized by movement *away*: away from the everyday, away from action, and away from narrative. In the case of classical transcendence, the movement is from a familiar and "realistic" human experience to a departure or escape—in the final instance, transcendence means leaving the immanent behind (Bresson's priest dies, for example, and his soul ostensibly moves on while we are confronted by the immovable, impassable image of the cross). Meanwhile, in the contemporary cinema of time, narrative and action are what is to be escaped in pursuit of "pure" temporal experience. As I mentioned at the start of this study, Schrader himself conceptualizes transcendental cinema as a step towards contemporary slow cinema, which for him exemplifies a cinema of pure time. Schrader places classical transcendental cinema alongside other midcentury art film styles as part of a Deleuzian evolution from narrative to temporality. In Schrader's view, directors like De Sica, Antonioni, Ozu, Godard, Bresson,

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22. This excerpt from Eliot's "Little Gidding" is, fittingly, quoted on the front page of www.10000yearclock.net, a sparse informational site for the Clock of the Long Now.

Resnais, and all the rest were just testing the waters; for him, the seed of art cinema only germinated with Andrei Tarkovsky, whose work initiates a "crucial transition . . . from narrative digression to dead time. . . . What Bresson and Ozu were moving toward, Tarkovsky brought to resolution. Delayed cuts were extended indefinitely. Ozu's ''pillow shots' (still-life images) became entire scenes" (9). Schrader claims that:

> there is a before-Tarkovsky and an after-Tarkovsky. Before was art house cinema. After was film festival and art gallery cinema. Before was slow cinema predicated on paying viewers. After was slow cinema underwritten by arts organizations. Tarkovsky was not a 'pure' slow cinema stylist—he was more interested in poetry than stasis—but he made slow cinema fashionable. He made Béla Tarr possible. (10-11)

What Schrader means by this is that Tarkovsky made possible the purest temporal cinema yet, an ostensibly narrative cinema in which story can be practically nonexistent, in which instead the length and the weight of time itself becomes the entire focus of the film experience. Schrader quotes Tarr himself, who says "'I despise stories . . . They mislead people into believe something has happened'" (25). Instead, slow cinema aims to explore what Schrader attributes to Tarkovsky as "time pressure"; in other words, rather than depicting a story that unfolds in time, slow cinema "examines how time affects images" (8; 10).

But for me, everyday transcendence is characterized not by a one-way movement from the human to the transcendent or from action to time, but rather by its *return to* those things *following* a transcendental departure. The style, in fact, hinges on the reintegration of everyday time with transcendental time (or, in Deleuzian terms, the reintegration of action and time). This reintegration has three central components: the refraction of time, a rupture in the narrative fabric, and the reassembly and reintegration of the disparate elements that have been pulled apart by refraction and rupture.

By refraction, I mean to suggest the way that cinema can reveal a web of interdependent temporal strands that make up a single block of time, just as a prism reveals the constituent wavelengths that make up a given beam of light. This refraction is central to everyday transcendence, but it can be seen perhaps most clearly in more experimental cinematic projects such as the early installation pieces by *Zidane* co-director Douglas Gordon. More than a decade before *Zidane*, Gordon created an installation piece called *24 Hour Psycho*, which consists of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) slowed down so as to extend the run-time to 24 hours. The resulting piece runs at about two frames per second, fast enough to retain a nominal sense of motion, but slow enough to dissipate any narrative momentum, to make most shots feel interminable, and for the viewer to start noticing unimportant minutiae within each shot. Watching the famous shower scene, for example, I am first struck by the way slowness heightens the tension of the moments before Marion's murder. I know what's coming, and I find myself trying to anticipate the moment when Norman will rip the shower curtain open. Once the murder begins, the slowness at first heightens the horror as Marion's pain and fear are extended twelve-fold. But as the scene goes on, she screams, and I notice, for the first time, that Janet Leigh has one crooked tooth. She slams her hand against the shower wall, and a shot that once lasted a second or two now fills the screen for an eternity. As the shot lingers, my focus begins to wander; I notice her perfect manicure, and then I start to wonder how much longer I'll be staring at her hand, and why Hitchcock spent so much time on this shot, anyway, and how much longer it is going to take her to die.

What I experience in this five minute extract from *24 Hour Psycho* is a relatively pure example of temporal refraction. What was originally just the first few seconds of the shower stabbing scene now reveals itself as a complex interweaving of multiple strands of time. There is

the diegetic time of the film's narrative, which is rendered nearly incomprehensible in sloweddown form, yet which still persists in the viewer's knowledge of (or at least familiarity with) the film's story and its famous set-pieces—in this case the shower scene. There is the time of exhibition, in other words, the duration of the installation piece itself, stretching on for a full day and implicitly challenging a viewer to endure it. There is the experiential time of viewing the piece, time characterized by curiosity, boredom, anticipation, and deferral, as well as by the extreme defamiliarization created by the drastic manipulation of the film's pace. Each of these facets of time is at play in any viewing of the piece: a viewer of the installation will experience a combination of the film's diegetic temporality, the installation's own glacial pace, and his/her own experience of time while viewing the piece (Biesenbach 14). These aspects of time— narrative (the pacing and plotting of the film), diegetic (time as it elapses within the represented world), cinematic (the actual runtime of the film), and experiential (time as experienced while watching the film)—are present in any cinematic work; *24 Hour Psycho* just brings them to the forefront in an extreme and obvious way by manipulating the viewer's expectations. No doubt slow cinema performs a similar refraction. A shot goes on, and on. We become aware of the time, the slowness of the editing, its disconnect from any narrative concerns or conventions. As this lack of narrative urgency stretches on, we become aware of the time of viewing itself. Like *24 Hour Psycho*, a slow film is deliberately challenging; the viewer is meant to be bored and frustrated, as well as enthralled and curious.

A similar kind of refraction is at the heart of everyday transcendence. We see it in the overlapping yet discontinuous human and cosmic timelines brought forth by *The Tree of Life*'s discontinuous and scrambled storytelling. We see it in Linklater's still and empty shots, which reveal how the present unfolds simultaneously with its own past and its potential futures. We see

it at the end of *Bashir* when the past that has dominated the present at last becomes present in its own right. And we see it in *Zidane*'s oscillations between immediacy and temporal distance. But there is a key difference between refraction in everyday transcendence and refraction in slow cinema or in something like *24 Hour Psycho*, and that difference lies in the *interruption* of narrative motion and momentum. Whereas in slow cinema the refraction is sustained over the course of the work, in everyday transcendence the refraction comes all at once as a rupture in the fabric of the film. It is provoked, catalyzed, created, or otherwise brought about by the narrative or in service of it, but at the moment of transcendence, time in fact shatters the very narrative structure that has called it forth.

This shattering is similar to that described by Vivian Sobchack in her account of real death on screen. Writing of Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*, which contains a scene in which a real rabbit is actually shot and killed on camera, Sobchack argues that the rabbit's death "momentarily fractures the classical coherence of its narrative representation, introducing the off-screen and unrepresented space in which the viewer lives, acts, and makes distinctions as an ethical social being." The rabbit's death differs from the deaths we are accustomed to seeing on screen, namely the death of fictional characters. A character's death—no matter how gruesome, graphic, sudden, shocking, or tragic—is safely contained within the narrative, "is, in fact, constituted and determined by" narrative codes. "The rabbit's death," by contrast, "exceeds the narrative code which communicates it. It ruptures and interrogates the boundaries of narrative representation. . . . The rabbit's death violently, abruptly, punctuates narrative space with documentary space" (293). The point is that actual death evokes a powerfully real, visceral experience (as Sobchack says, in the language of semiotics, it "is experienced by us as indexically real, rather than iconically or symbolically fictive) (283). This visceral realness tends

to exceed any efforts at representational or narrative containment; in other words, to show real death in a narrative film is to break the spell of fiction with the undeniably real.

My argument is that something similar happens with time in the context of everyday transcendental cinema. In the everyday transcendental film, time ruptures the fiction, escaping the bounds of narrative containment and bursting forth in its own irreducible and unrepresentable richness. This rupture is easiest to see in *Bashir*, which is entirely structured around the aesthetic break between animation and live action, a break which we can now see as a deliberate punctuation of narrative space by documentary space. *Bashir* of course gains some of this effect by including images of real death, showing us the dead bodies of the massacre's victims. But even before those images, the film already achieves a powerful sense of rupture by moving from the relative containment and safety of the animated image to the visceral reality and nowness of the live-action documentary image. In other words, the sense of rupture does not depend on the images of death that follow, but rather results in the first place from the sense of here-and-nowness achieved by replacing the animated image with the documentary image. The aesthetic shock is so great because suddenly, without warning, we are neither in our seats in 2019 nor in Israel in the nebulous "present" that makes up most of the film—we are in Beirut on the morning of September 17, 1982. Here it is not just the horror of death and violence that exceeds narrative containment, but time itself, namely the weight and realness of a specific past moment that is suddenly, unexpectedly present once again as a "now."

Of course, in *Bashir*, this weight of time is very difficult to separate from the death and trauma that are at the film's core. But in Linklater's work, we find similar examples of the indexical weight of time. In both the *Before* series and in *Boyhood*, we are confronted with the real passage of time in a way that is incorporated into the narrative, but never fully contained by

it. When we watch *Sunset* or *Midnight*, we are immediately stuck by the weight of time and its impact on the characters and their stories, but also on the actors themselves. The effect that the intervening years have on Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke has an indexical quality that both is linked to and exceeds the diegetic passage of time for Céline and Jesse. The visceral weight of time is brought home, in particular, in the brief flashback early in *Sunset*. As we cut from the Parisian bookshop to the streets of Vienna, we are struck by just how young the two lovers were nine years ago. The contrast gives us a jolt that comes entirely from the fact that Delpy and Hawke themselves are actually nine years younger in the flashback than they are "now"; they themselves serve as the indexical sign of the time that has passed in the imaginary of the narrative. *Boyhood* uses the same technique to heightened effect, given that all of Mason's aging over the course of twelve years takes place within one film. As in the *Before* series, this passage of time is motivated by the narrative, and as in the *Before* series, the passage of time wholly exceeds narrative convention. That is to say that while the story is about Mason's childhood and adolescence, rather than relying on coming-of-age narrative tropes, Linklater lets us actually see his character (and actor) grow up. Like Renoir's rabbit, whose actual death on screen is called for in the script yet wholly breaks the safe container of narrative, the actual aging of Linklater's characters both conforms to and wholly exceeds the needs of the stories in question.

In short, everyday transcendence relies on a particular relationship between narrative time and real time, between diegesis and documentary. In practice, these temporal relationships exist on a continuum. On the left side of the scale is *The Tree of Life*. In that film, time is largely contained by narrative. We see both the beginning and the end of the world, both of which suggest an eternal perspective which transcends the temporal; but we are aware that these glimpses of the infinite are imagined, not indexical; they are special effects shots, and however

good a job Malick does juxtaposing them to the realistic human portions of the film, we are well aware that these moments exist only because the story demands them and movie magic can create them. Yet even here in this realm of containment there are small excesses, specifically in the form of Malick's characteristically poetic shots of nature, which bring a pseudo-documentary punctuation to the narrative world. Malick's work has always contained this sort of excess, starting with the lingering shots of wheat dancing in the wind in *Days of Heaven*. *The Tree of Life* is no different, including, for example, a shot of Austin's famous massive bat colony in flight at dusk, an image with no apparent narrative purpose but which seems to be included for its beauty and sense of natural wonder. This sort of punctuating shot takes on new significance at the end of *The Tree of Life* with the shot of the bridge, analyzed at length in the preceding chapter on that film. Held for a full 12 seconds and devoid of any overt narrative meaning or significance, the shot introduces an observational and meditative aesthetic right at the climax of the film. It is nothing like the shattering, disorienting rupture of the rabbit's death, but it is a moment in which the documentary eye suddenly arrests the narrative momentum of the film. It is worth noting, as well, that this shot is the culmination of the film's transcendental movement, fusing the human and divine aesthetics by bringing the stillness of the divine to a real human image. In other words, it is at once a moment of rupture and of reincorporation as human and divine, narrative and documentary, action and time all coalesce in a single shot.

If Malick is on the left of the spectrum, tending mostly towards narrative containment, then on the right is *Zidane*, which tends towards an exclusively documentary, observational aesthetic. *Zidane* is on the one hand nothing but an uncontainable unfolding of time. Unscriptable, unplannable, unpredictable, the action of the film plays out of its own accord, with no thought to narrative structure, theme, or character. Yet for all that it embraces this ephemeral

real-time quality, we find the film itself longing for some form of permanence and stability. This longing is reflected in the film's preoccupation with history, with understanding how the events unfolding in real time on the field fit into the larger context of human experience. We see the film use the techniques of repetition and bookending, we encounter variations in sound and editing that seem to try to shape a rough emotional trajectory, we see a series of subtitles that lend a loose philosophical tone to the proceedings. All of these little moves serve to take what is otherwise a purely documentary approach a little towards a narrative sensibility. Whereas *The Tree of Life* adds small documentary punctuations to an otherwise wholly narrative container, *Zidane* starts from pure temporality (the real-time documentary eye) and tries to shape it into something resembling narrative containment—while staying true to its own style and not adding any kind of overt narrative explication or framing.

All of which is to say that everyday transcendence is not about a move away from narrative, but is, if anything, a reintegration of narrative and temporality, an attempt to find a balance between the two. The goal of everyday transcendence is not to escape the present but to transform it by transforming our relationship to it. That is why, having ostensibly achieved transcendence, the end goal is not to stay in that transcendental space but to come back to the present while holding on to the transcendental capacity to see time differently. This transformation takes many forms across the films in this study. In *The Tree of Life*, it comes as a spiritual revelation. In the *Before* series and in *Boyhood*, we encounter a transcendental stillness or emptiness that returns us to nowness with a renewed sense of the urgency of the present. *Waltz With Bashir*, facing a present that is entirely displaced by the weight of past trauma, seeks to heal that trauma by honoring the absolute reality of the traumatic past by restoring its here-and-

nowness. *Zidane*, finally, shows us that to fully embrace the present is to accept the ambiguity of experienced time and to live at the meeting point of continuity and discontinuity.

In each of these cases, the goal of everyday transcendence is not for the viewer to achieve and sustain a transcendental state. That is, if not impossible, highly impractical. As Caveh Zahedi puts it in *Waking Life*, "who can live that way?" But what everyday transcendence does point us towards is an awareness of and an openness to the transcendental aspects of time that are always there, always shaping everyday time, and always accessible to us if we know how to see them. Everyday transcendence calls us to live everyday life with more awareness of the bigger picture, with the knowledge that "'now' is never just a moment," but that the present is always inextricably linked to its own past and future (Eno). And that's where in its basic concept, everyday transcendence is not just a cinematic style, but a philosophical and spiritual experience. It is to hear the ticking of an enormous, 10,000 year clock, and to know that millennia from now, our descendants will hear that same ticking, that in some ineffable way, our "right now" and theirs is linked across time.

APPENDIX: FILMOGRAPHY

24 Hour Psycho. Created by Douglas Gordon, 1993.

A Scanner Darkly. Directed by Richard Linklater, Warner Independent Pictures, 2006.

Badlands. Directed by Terrence Malick, Warner Bros., 1974.

Before Midnight. Directed by Richard Linklater, Sony Pictures Classics, 2013.

Before Sunrise. Directed by Richard Linklater, Sony Pictures Entertainment, 1995.

Before Sunset. Directed by Richard Linklater, Warner Bros., 2004.

Boyhood. Directed by Richard Linklater, IFC Films, 2014.

Days of Heaven. Directed by Terrence Malick, Paramount Pictures, 1978.

Dazed and Confused. Directed by Richard Linklater, Gramercy Pictures, 1993.

Diary of a Country Priest. Directed by Robert Bresson, L'Alliance Générale de Distribution

  Cinématographique, 1951.

Hiroshima Mon Amour. Directed by Alain Resnais, Pathé Films, 1959.

Late Spring. Directed by Yasujirô Ozu, Shochiku, 1949.

Mothlight. Directed by Stan Brakhage, 1963.

Psycho. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1960.

Russian Ark. Directed by Alexander Sokurov, Seville Pictures, 2002.

Slacker. Directed by Richard Linklater, Orion Classics, 1991.

The Thin Red Line. Directed by Terrence Malick, 20th Century Fox, 1999.

The Tree of Life. Directed by Terrence Malick, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2011.

To the Wonder. Directed by Terrence Malick. Magnolia Pictures, 2013.

Umberto D. Directed by Vittorio De Sica, Dear Film, 1952.

Waking Life. Directed by Richard Linklater, 20th Century Fox, 2001.

Waltz with Bashir. Directed by Ari Folman. Sony Pictures Classics, 2008.

Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait. Directed by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, Anna Lena

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ABSTRACT

EVERYDAY TRANSCENDENCE: CONTEMPORARY ART FILM AND THE RETURN TO RIGHT NOW

by

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"Everyday transcendence" names a style of filmmaking exemplified in recent works by Terrence Malick (*The Tree of Life*), Richard Linklater (the *Before* series and *Boyhood*), Ari Folman (*Waltz With Bashir*), and Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno (*Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*). In each of these films, time operates on two interrelated levels: time as we experience it and understand it in our daily lives, and time as an overarching big picture. This big-picture temporality varies from film to film and is often ambiguous: for Malick, it appears as divine eternity; for Linklater, as a secular concept of an eternal Now; for Folman and for Gordon and Parreno, as a broad view of human history.

What all of these films have in common is that each is built around a movement from everyday time, in the form of the present, to transcendental time and back again. This movement is accomplished through an evolution of the transcendental style first outlined by Paul Schrader, who describes a specific formal progression from everyday banality to disparity to stasis. This progression, Schrader suggests, creates a structural movement from the everyday material world to the transcendental spiritual world. In showing how everyday transcendence adapts these formal techniques and structures to effect temporal transcendence, I identify two trends that

distinguish the films in this study from those that Schrader focuses on. The first is a shift from transcendence as a specifically spiritual phenomenon to a more secular one; the second is the adaptation of transcendental style to the realities of a contemporary world in which our daily experience of time has been profoundly transformed by technologies of mediation and connectivity. This second trend in particular suggests that everyday transcendence has emerged as an aesthetic response to a world in which our sense of time has become diminished and disconnected. In the face of such a contemporary experience, everyday transcendence serves as an urgent call to return to nowness, and to do so with an expanded sense of what "now" is and of how the present connects to the past and the future.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Aaron Pellerin received his B.A. and M.A. in English from Florida Gulf Coast University. He is an experienced university instructor, having taught classes in film studies, literature, and composition. His research and teaching interests include art cinema new and old, continental philosophy, film noir, and science fiction and horror in film and literature.