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Time-lapse and the Projected Body

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This article considers time-lapse as an aesthetic device and critical tool within a number of experimental films, with particular attention to the liminal position occupied by the human body. We argue that the body's precarious status within time-lapse is intimately connected to this technique's oscillation between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric modes of vision. While time-lapse underlines the limits of anthropocentric temporal perspectives by bringing long-duration time scales to the forefront, it can also be seen as a way of scaling otherwise imperceptible phenomena to the demands of anthropocentric time. This tension between 'human' and 'non-human' time provides the thematic link among a number of experimental films in which the status of the human body is at stake. Such films, we argue, explore the possibility for the body's presence within the accelerated temporal field of time-lapse. In doing so, they neither assert nor negate the significance of human time, but rather attempt to situate the body within timescales that exceed its phenomenological grasp.

In time-lapse, the playback rate of moving images exceeds the rate of recording, causing very slow movements to become legible. Like slow motion, time-lapse has appeared across myriad contexts, from scientific analysis to advertising, from music video to narrative cinema. However, one immediate difference is that whereas slow motion suspends movements for contemplation, time-lapse creates a kind of 'visibility deficit' by rendering faster movements within the frame as stuttering, ephemeral or incomplete.[1] Filmed bodies offer a particularly effective index for this effect. Like slow motion, time-lapse readily signals its presence when applied to the human body, through which we can easily detect the technique's uncanny speeds and rhythms. Yet whereas slow motion often seizes upon and accentuates the force and aesthetics of physical movement, turning bodies into moving sculptures and revealing the nuances of their motion, time-lapse tends to decorporealize the body.[2] In contrast to slow motion, it struggles to represent the human body in ways that provide expressive or sensual elaboration. To bring the body into time-lapse's accelerated frame is to abstract it from its 'natural' temporality, to deny it physical presence and narrative gravity, and instead to emphasize the technological mechanism driving the moving image. The films we discuss actively investigate this question, confronting the

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'problem' of the time-lapsed body by figuring it, variously, in terms of absent presence (as an observer at the edge of the image), or as present absence (as a ghostly shape that flickers within the bounds of the frame).

The landscape of time-lapse: bodies and worlds

Though commonly associated with landscapes (in which the body is absent) and cityscapes (in which the body becomes invisible), time-lapse focuses on spatial scales that extend from the vast to the microscopic. David Lavery enumerates a list of typical subjects, spanning scientific and cultural uses:

> glaciers, blood corpuscles, blossoming flowers (hundreds and hundreds of flowers in bloom), cell division, sea creatures, cloudscapes, celestial mechanics, construction projects, rotting fruit, the sun rising and setting, puddings baking, storm fronts, traffic patterns... (2006: 2).

By unearthing the dynamic properties of these myriad subjects, from the celestial to the cellular, time-lapse commonly offers perspectives that extend beyond the anthropocentric. For example, Hannah Landecker has explored the early twentieth-century use of time-lapse microcinematography to study human cell development, which allowed scientists to see microscopic scenes as temporal worlds in themselves (2011: 386), quite distinct from the anthropocentric, bounded temporality of embodied human experience (392). Instead of a body, time-lapse at the microscopic scale seemed to project a world.

Indeed, such examples appear to echo Siegfried Kracauer's argument that cinematic techniques such as time-lapse, slow motion, and close-up provide direct insights into a world that lies beyond normal human perception (1960: 52). In the case of time-lapse, however, the notion of a represented 'world' is particularly resonant, given that the technique's archetypical applications in popular media reveal an orientation towards environments rather than bodies. In narrative cinema, for example, time-lapse is generally accorded a peripheral role, often serving to show the passing of time via images of cloudscapes or cityscapes, while the bodies of human characters are

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generally kept clear of its accelerated frame. Although there are certainly exceptions, the dominant model (across a variety of aesthetic contexts) emphasizes spatial environments rather than human actants.

Negotiating between human experience and non-human phenomena, time-lapse also makes evident the operation of distinct temporal regimes. John Urry, writing of the contemporary acceleration of temporal experience, identifies three key temporal regimes: 'the clock, the instantaneous and the glacial' (2009: 197). Clock time is associated with the measurement and rationalization of time which accompanied modernity, manifested in the systematization of railway timetables, the development of a standardized world time, and the linear segmentation of time that can be seen in everything from the factory assembly line to the motion picture camera and projector. Instantaneous time, by contrast, is associated with the rise of electronic imaging and communication systems, which operate at speeds that fall beneath the threshold of human perception – illegible speeds. Glacial time, finally, describes the long temporality of the natural environment, in which change may occur across millennia, at speeds imperceptible to human beings (182-95). These speeds are also illegible, existing at the opposite end of the temporal spectrum to instantaneous time. Meanwhile, perceptible 'human' time is enmeshed with these other temporalities. Glacial time aligns with long cycles of change measurable by the passing of generations, while instantaneous time's technological speed mirrors the physiological speed underpinning human perception, cognition and affect. But it is clock time – the rationalized, uniform, segmented temporality of modernity – that for Urry stands out as being supremely human; only clock time is generated solely by humans (181).

The uses of time-lapse across popular and experimental media gesture towards each of these three temporal 'regimes'. Foregrounding the segmented clock time that is the precondition for cinema itself – the chain of still images that produces the impression of movement – time-lapse also invokes the flickering intensity of the instantaneous, producing visual artifacts that appear and disappear abruptly, as well as the slow march of the glacial, accelerating long-duration processes to the point where gradual change becomes legible. In this way, time-lapse adapts the timescales of the physical landscape to the human-generated timescales of screen media, which are shaped both

by clock time (characterized by schedules and temporal segmentation) and instantaneous time (characterized by instantaneous transmission and liveness).

Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio, 1982) is perhaps the most extensive and well-known exploration of the relationships among the temporal regimes of clock, instantaneous and glacial time. Reggio's visually breathtaking journey through the different scales and tempi of the natural and human world uses the beauty of the former to critique the absurdity of the latter. For example, an extended sequence of clouds in motion – sometimes time-lapse, sometimes not – draws attention to the fact that their movements have a natural elegance regardless of the speed at which they are replayed. The film's accelerated shots of humans in motion, by contrast, make them bounce up and down comically. Human bodies, represented *en masse*, lose their gravity in two ways, since they are robbed of both seriousness and a sense of physical weight and presence. At the same time, the sequences featuring human movement show the way in which contemporary urban life is synchronized with clock time. The regularized, repetitive movement of people in this film is conspicuously shaped by the rhythm of traffic signals and factory machinery. This world takes precedence over the body, even if it is created by humans.

Yet the undermining of embodied temporal experience is balanced by a contrary impulse: in engaging with a host of different worlds, from the celestial to the cellular, time-lapse mediates non-human temporalities of motion so that they can be perceived by the human eye. In this sense at least, the various 'worlds' of time-lapse revolve around the body. Moreover, both film-makers and theorists have also been known to 'project' bodily attributes onto the worlds of time-lapse cinema. For Dziga Vertov, time-lapse and other cinematic techniques made possible a new human-technological vision, encapsulated in the notion of the 'kino-eye', which could, in a revolutionary fusion of human vision and the film camera, act as 'the microscope and telescope of time (from the animated blooming of a flower to the ultrarapid flight of a bullet)' (1984: 68). Meanwhile, Walter Benjamin was intrigued by the new visual technology's capacity to penetrate the material substance of the world, like a surgeon's scalpel cutting into a body (1968: 233). Whereas Vertov seems to call for a new body to accommodate cinematic vision and act as its subject, Benjamin imagines the world itself as a virtual body which acts as its object.

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Other theorists were inclined to go a step further, projecting human qualities onto inanimate objects and plants as soon as they were subjected to time-lapse techniques. Rudolf Arnheim, for example, wrote of seeing 'a climbing plant anxiously groping, uncertainly seeking a hold, as its tendrils twine around a trellis, or a fading cactus bloom bowing its head and collapsing almost with a sigh'. He marvelled at how, as a result of time-lapse, 'plants were suddenly and visibly enrolled in the ranks of living beings' (1957: 115). Germaine Dulac opined that 'we feel, visually, the painful effort a stalk expends in coming out of the ground and blooming' (1978: 32). Such accounts effectively project the properties of the human body onto non-human spaces and objects. This discursive strand is picked up by the 1975 film *Organism* (Hilary Harris), which interleaves time-lapse footage of New York City with microscopic images of the human circulatory system. The voiceover narration makes factual observations about human physiology, with the clear implication that the viewer is meant to read the accelerated city as a kind of body. In one memorable sequence, a discussion of disease is accompanied by shots of stalled traffic. Here, the world – the spatial environment of Manhattan – is subjected to a kind of bodily ordering.

Time-lapse can thus present viewers with a phenomenological experience of embodied vision in which otherwise invisible phenomena become available for sensory apprehension, but also a physiological representation of human embodiment, projected onto the backdrop of its speeded-up environments. In its scalar variability, time-lapse has the potential to destabilize relationships between figure and ground, between body and world.[3] We argue that this potential offers a rich field for aesthetic and conceptual exploration. However, such exploration has been largely obscured by time-lapse's associations with cliché and repetition. David Lavery, chronicling the enthusiasm of early film theorists and film-makers, notes that the exploratory spirit behind early uses of time-lapse has waned: 'time-lapse, co-opted for use by modern advertising', is now 'mundane, commonplace' (2). In the remainder of this essay, we investigate a number of films and videos that stretch time-lapse's aesthetic possibilities, in particular by investigating the body's place within large scales of time and space. In these works, which span 1970s experimental films and contemporary digital videos, the body is neither excluded from the world nor privileged over it;

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rather, in each case there is a negotiation of the terms under which body and world relate to one another.

Mediating landscapes: *Handheld Day*, *Mirror*, and *Water and Power*

By adapting the conventional application of time-lapse imagery to cloudscapes, Californian experimental film-maker Gary Beydler's *Handheld Day* (1976) highlights the work of time on the human body. In this film, we see the passage of the day towards sunset as reflected in a handheld mirror. Behind the mirror, the sky is visible. There are thus two environmental perspectives captured within the film's frame. Although the internal frame of the mirror remains steady, the slight movements of the hand grasping it reflect the effort required to hold the frame in place. Beydler creates a similar effect in the 1974 film *Mirror*, in which he sits with a mirror on his knees in front of another West Coast sunset. *Handheld Day* and *Mirror* reproduce the cliché of the sunset speeded up to match the anthropocentric time of the media landscape. Yet what is most interesting is the way that the human body, caught between two accelerated landscapes (one reflected within the mirror and one visible behind it), appears buffeted by time, as minute movements in Beydler's hand and body signal the effort involved in holding the mirror. Paradoxically, Beydler's stillness requires extraordinary physical exertion. In *Handheld Day* and *Mirror*, we are reminded that it is the human body's physical labour that brings together these different images in the same frame.

By placing the body within the frame, Beydler thus stages an intriguing reversal, destabilizing the conventional relationship between figure and ground. Rather than a body engaged in physical activity against an immobile background, it is the landscape itself that acts against the backdrop of an immobile body. Furthermore, by interpolating himself between two framed landscapes, Beydler renders the body itself as a type of medium: here, the film-maker's body remains visible and its role in connecting two temporally aligned yet spatially opposed landscapes is foregrounded. In *Handheld Day* and *Mirror*, the body neither disappears from the world nor encapsulates it metaphorically (as in *Organism*). Rather, it is suspended within the landscape and stirred by the uncanny rhythms of a durational temporality that exceeds its grasp.

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The notion of the body as medium is also explored in Pat O'Neill's long-form experimental film *Water and Power* (1989). The film features extensive use of time-lapse footage, applied in the first instance to the built environment of Los Angeles and to the natural environment surrounding it. Like *Koyaanisqatsi, Water and Power* offers a critique of the contemporary city, gesturing towards the ecological cost of urbanization. In particular, it provides recurring images of the water pipes that feed the city, as well as the desiccated landscapes that result from this extraction process. Yet O'Neill complicates Reggio's relatively straightforward temporal perspective by superimposing different types of footage, both time-lapse and regular speed. As David James puts it, the lap dissolves that bind the film's images together mean that 'every space in the film seems to be itself in incessant motion and transforming itself into another' (2005: 432). Some of the most striking examples of superimposition involve bodily movement. In a number of sequences, footage of performers (including dancers and musicians) is superimposed on cityscape and landscape imagery. The use of slow shutter speeds, intense lighting and high contrast stock renders the performers' bodies as blurred, luminous apparitions, while the focus on creative activity (other human subjects include an artist's model and a film crew) further links the body to notions of media and mediation. Here, the mediated body flits across the backdrop of the city, but is also subordinated to the film's overarching focus on natural and urban environments in states of transition. The film's interrogation of Los Angeles thus takes a cultural as well as an ecological slant, while using the human body to mediate between art and landscape. Furthermore, the jerky and ephemeral nature of these mediated bodies seems to reveal that they are not entirely self-directed, but subjected to forces from without, including environmental and historical factors, as well as the animating operation of film itself.

As if to underline such technocultural forces, O'Neill also recycles sound and images from Hollywood films, including *Detour* (Edgar J. Ulmer 1946) and *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1923). Again, these clips project human bodies into the film's landscapes. In one sequence, a shot of Moses directing a crowd of followers is gradually superimposed on O'Neill's footage of a rocky backdrop, so that the rocks themselves seem momentarily to be coming to life. Beyond the obvious associations linking the biblical narrative with the history of L.A.'s development

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(Moses leads his followers to the promised land by demonstrating his power over water), this sequence also demonstrates the connections among distinct temporal regimes by gesturing simultaneously towards bodily, historical and geological scales of movement and change. Here, the relationships between glacial, clock and instantaneous time are complex and shifting: it is not simply a matter of showing how humans are 'out of time' with their natural environment (as in *Koyaanisqatsi*) but also how natural, urban and cultural phenomena influence each other. The human body, which appears intermittently, projected into and across landscapes and cityscapes, serves as a point of articulation for these relationships.

The film's opening shot underlines the hidden significance of the body: it shows a human figure in silhouette before a magnificent sunset, jumping from a high bridge into a canyon. The time-lapse effect that pushes the clouds across the sky also accelerates this body, lessening its sense of weight and presence, so that there is little sense of gravity to what otherwise appears to be an act of suicide. As Scott MacDonald comments, this shot underlines the film's 'mix of fascination and concern' in relation to the 'failed dreams of a new life' that haunt Los Angeles in general and Hollywood in particular (2001: 213). This image casts a shadow over the rest of the film, using the doomed body as an index of the ambiguous (and often dysfunctional) relationships between city and landscape, and among geological, clock and media time.

Body as absent presence: *Cobra Mist* and *Adrift*

Emily Richardson's *Cobra Mist* (2008) offers a very different approach, excluding the body almost entirely from its panoramic landscapes. In the process, however, it suggests another way of conceptualizing a 'projected' body. The film uses time-lapse to show the site of a former military installation at Orford Ness in the United Kingdom. Since the site consists of empty bunkers and there are no human figures in the frame, it becomes very difficult to judge the rate at which time is passing. *Cobra Mist* blurs the phenomenological? distinction between real-time and time-lapse by excluding almost all motion and bodily presence. It also does so through sound. The film features an ambient soundtrack that bears an indeterminate relationship to elements of the physical landscape (in fact, it was created in part from environmental

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recordings of the site). Characteristic sounds include rushing air, digital glitches and other effects that somewhat resemble birdsong. Given the empty landscape, these effects lend the film a haunted quality. The abstract and reversible nature of the soundtrack underlines the film's ambiguous temporal status and the absence of a clearly identifiable progression.

Indeed, *Cobra Mist* is a defiantly open-ended film. It does not align itself with the temporality of the natural world or provide a direct critique of modern temporal regimes. What we are left with instead is an unsettling type of temporal indeterminacy. This indeterminacy affects not only individual shots but also the entire film, since the still, empty spaces it depicts offer no clues as to the temporal order of its shots. The moments of greatest certainty are those in which clouds move across the sky or bars of sunlight pass along interior walls. At such moments, the spatiotemporal disorientation briefly recedes. At other moments, the stillness of the landscape, altered only by what appear to be changes in exposure, lends the film a sense of temporal reversibility. In one case, a shot that resembles a still image shifts abruptly into movement when the camera starts to pan, offering the viewer the disconcerting feeling of being spun around. Furthermore, while conventional time-lapse clearly foregrounds its central objects or events (a sunset, clouds moving, the demolition of a building), no such elements are foregrounded here. In *Cobra Mist*, the absence of bodies is thus not offset by the presence of an identifiable focal object or event. Indeed, this 'omission' serves to highlight phenomena that lie beyond the reach of the film's deployment of time-lapse. The abandoned buildings in *Cobra Mist* are crumbling, but their decay happens over such a slow timescale that not even extreme interval photography – filming over months and even years – could capture it. However, the film points in the direction of glacial time by showing a man-made environment that nevertheless seems timeless and beyond human intervention.

Accordingly, the abandoned military bunkers resemble a post-apocalyptic setting. The future-oriented thrust of time-lapse lends a distinctly science fictional cast to the landscape. In an oblique way, the film challenges its viewers to imagine what kind of body could exist in this landscape. Unmoored from the anthropocentric temporality that underpins much time-lapse imagery, this film is discomfiting precisely because it confronts viewers with the absence of the human.[4] The body that might inhabit this

space is by necessity a projected body, in the sense that we must imaginatively project its existence into the dystopian future presented by the film, but also because, inserted into the rapid temporal flow, we might expect it to be subject to the same flickering effect that is the fate of the accelerated body in high-speed visual media. However, the film reserves one surprise for its final minutes: a hand moves into the frame to clean the lens. The film, it seems, is not quite as fast as we imagined. Like Gary Beydler, Richardson uses her own hand as a sign pointing to the physical labour and spatiotemporal embodiment underpinning the film's creation. Up until this point, the overriding question had been: is this film in time or out of time? The appearance of a part of Richardson's body within the film provides a clear answer: it is in time.

In Inger Lise Hansen's *Adrift* (2004), the filmmaker's implied presence is more manifest: the film is comprised of interval photography of the Norwegian landscape that also includes clear traces of human intervention in front of the camera. The film opens with a tracking shot showing an expanse of icy water, before moving to a series of combining conventional time-lapse and stop-motion techniques to render the frozen landscape uncanny. The first of these shows a glacial valley with scudding, time-lapsed clouds visible at the top of the frame. In the foreground, a ridge comprised of glacial moraine undergoes a rapid transformation, as numerous stones shift position from frame to frame. In the next shot, blocky, square-sided rocks are animated to appear as if they are rolling down a slope. The stones' unnatural movement cannot (and does not try to) fool us, however; rather, it makes us conscious of the film-maker/animator manipulating the scene.

Though the stones are animated, other environmental factors cannot be so easily manipulated, and we find our gaze drawn into an ambiguous space where two timescales touch. The stones move as if in real-time, while the clouds in the background speed across the horizon. As the film proceeds, it continues to combine these stop-motion transformations with the rapid movement of shadows, waves, clouds and mist within the same frame. Despite the clear differences between these two types of movement, the film encourages us to read them together. This effect is enhanced by the use of disorienting framing: in some shots, the image is upside down, while in others it is canted at a ninety-degree angle. The film-maker's land-based artifice and the 'natural' movement of the lapping waves are thus rendered mutually

uncanny. At certain points, one type of movement occupies the entire frame and the transitions between shots serve to blur the boundaries between 'natural' and 'artificial' animation. For example, a shot of roiling waves gives way to a bird's-eye tracking shot of stones disappearing from a sandy beach; the sudden edit between these two shots invites us to view the two phenomena as commensurate. *Adrift*'s soundtrack, composed of recordings of wind and water, further underlines the natural setting and also invites us to see the film-maker's interventions as part of the environment.

Hansen's film, set in a landscape shaped by glacial movements, invokes glacial time and then establishes the human as an absent presence within it. Whereas *Cobra Mist* presents an environment in which the viability of human presence is subject to speculation, *Adrift* is replete with indexical traces of the human. As in Beydler's *Handheld Day* and *Mirror*, these markers of human presence are associated with labour: the fields of overturned stones and shells remind us not only of the film-maker's presence, but also of the work involved in transforming the scene. Accordingly, *Adrift* is an overwhelmingly tactile film. Its images of dirt, stone and ice provide us with a rich landscape into which to project our own haptic experiences. And just as the film invites us to join the film-maker in imaginatively grappling with rocks and sand, by placing human and environmental transformations on the same plane, it also invites us to imagine intervening in the movement of clouds, waves and fog. Indeed, it may also remind us that Hansen's land-based interventions serve as re-enactments of durational processes that span centuries and millennia. Without suggesting that the landscape is subordinate to the human, the film succeeds in creating a bodily engagement with non-anthropocentric temporalities.

Body as present absence: *Ghost* and *In Absentia*

Takashi Ito's *Ghost* (1984) deploys time-lapse within an indoor setting. Its subject is not the glacial time alluded to in the landscape-based films of Beydler, O'Neill, Richardson and Hansen. Rather, it serves instead as an exploration of clock and instantaneous time. The film's title makes explicit the way in which time-lapse transforms the body into a phantom presence. Shot using long-exposure interval photography, the film moves through various seemingly empty spaces in and around a

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modern apartment block. But though no body is visible, the film is crowded with evidence of human presence. City light streams in through windows from outside; within the building, coloured floodlights mysteriously flicker on and off, while slides of faces and hands are projected onto walls and then moved around the space. Occasionally we see flash frames of a body (presumably that of the film-maker) in front of the camera, interacting in various ways with the environment; but by the time we register the body's presence, it has gone. At other times, the body in front of the camera makes its movements known by means of the light from a torch which, shot in slow exposure, becomes a kind of luminous snail trail. The affective result of this trail, however, is not one of snail-like slowness but extreme speed. Though the playback of the film is restricted to the clock-time of twenty-four frames per second, our sense is of a presence whose temporality faces no such constraints. The human body holding the torch assumes the properties of the luminous beam emanating from it – weightless, evanescent, and moving at the instantaneous speed of light.

Together, these various forms of mediated disembodiment combine with the film's atmospheric, dissonant soundtrack to create a sense that the space is haunted. But rather than making its presence felt physically by throwing pots and smashing vases like a poltergeist, the film's eponymous ghost makes its presence felt optically. At a couple of points in the film, a dark figure appears in front of the camera; it stands still but shakes its head so that its face is blurred beyond recognition. This is perhaps the most explicit 'horror movie' effect in the film. Crucially, however, its eeriness (like that of the entire film) is not supernatural – it is technological. *Ghost* documents a *technological* haunting, the presence of a ghost in the machine. The ghost in question possesses not only the space being filmed but also the film-making apparatus. The phantom body in front of the camera is a disembodied *metteur-en-scène*, painting with light; meanwhile, the phantom body of the on-screen creator is itself an optical effect created through the use of time-lapse. The film thus uses time-lapse techniques to explore the position of the body within a space of intensive electronic mediation. This is an environment defined by instantaneous rather than clock time: Ito illuminates the space with strobing red and blue lights, and populates it with flashing, incomplete images of eyes, mouths and hands. At one point, the film literalizes the collapse of clock time, by projecting the flickering, warped image of an analogue clock into the

space of the apartment. The place of the body in this hypermediated environment is uncertain, as it becomes fragmented into an array of distorted electronic projections.

The Quay Brothers' film *In Absentia* (2000) also uses time-lapse to produce an unstable sense of time. In this film, a woman sits alone at a desk, trying repeatedly to write a letter with a broken pencil. There is thus a narrative of sorts, although the repetitive nature of the action and the lack of contextual detail provide a sense of confusion that is not only narrative but also temporal. We become gradually aware that the film is in fact a portrait of madness, and that this is what justifies the lack of logical or temporal orientation. The dissonant soundtrack, contributed by Karlheinz Stockhausen, contributes to the sense of disorientation. Perhaps more significant, however, is the way the film combines stop-motion and time-lapse techniques to communicate the experience of atemporality. Most conspicuously, time-lapse is used to show light passing across the room. The related technique of stop-motion animates a puppet figure, as well as broken pencil leads on the windowsill and other objects in the room, although it is sometimes difficult to tell where one technique begins and the other ends. The blurring of this boundary is exacerbated by the deliberate confusion of scale. A combination of shallow depth-of-field, murky visuals and black-and-white cinematography helps to make objects in the frame appear indistinct or abstract, removing spatial cues. For example, the film opens with what appears to be a landscape similar to the one in *Cobra Mist*, but turns out to be an area no more than a metre wide.[5] Even when we move from a shot of the window to an extreme close-up of a pencil sharpener, the sense of scale remains obscure.

This spatial confusion both parallels and contributes to the film's temporal confusion, which is apparently psychologically based. The film presents us not simply with accelerated or slowed time, but with the radical atemporality of madness. Recurrent imagery of clocks, set against other measures of time (such as sunlight moving across the wall) helps to highlight the fact that the character is completely out of step with the rational, ordered temporality of modernity. The progression of time inside the locked room the woman occupies is uncertain and lurching, distorted by the blending of time-lapse and stop-motion. In fact, on the DVD commentary for the film, the Quays reveal that the entire piece uses time-lapse. *In Absentia* was shot early in the morning to catch the changing light. The filmmakers would count five seconds before

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shooting each frame, moving selected elements of the mise-en-scène in the process in order to animate them. The exposure shifts resulting from clouds passing in front of the sun, note the brothers, create a 'powerful flickering' which contributes to the film's presentation of psychosis.[6]

Despite the film's psychological focus and its evocation of traumatic atemporality, *In Absentia* presents time as a phenomenon that manifests itself with overwhelming physical force. Time weighs heavily upon the body, since the body is what remains in the room even as time passes outside. The woman is caught in a temporal trap that combines the slow progression of glacial time with the sudden leaps and tics of the instantaneous in a relationship that defies resolution. The body here carries its own temporality, which totally fails to align itself with the clock time of the rational, ordered modern world. Rather than lightening the character's temporal burden, time-lapse makes her movements all the more painful and lurching. Her obsessive, repetitive scribbling is a never-ending labour.[7] The acceleration of time only serves to reveal the endless progression of such activity towards an ever-receding temporal horizon. Rather than seeing an escape from time, we see a body used up by time. An aesthetic of inscription helps to communicate this idea. This aesthetic is embodied not only in the recurring images of writing and scribbling, or the layering of pencil leads and shavings across the room's miniature 'landscape'. It is, more disturbingly, evident in the way that temporality itself is seen to write itself onto the human body. Like *Ghost*, *In Absentia* uses time-lapse to present the human body as a kind of 'present absence', alienated from the ordered succession of clock time. Yet whereas *Ghost* evokes a hypermediated release from coherent embodied experience, *In Absentia* maintains a focus on duration and the existential weight of embodiment.

The diverse selection of films discussed here together suggest a number of ways in which time-lapse can be used as a speculative tool for investigating the body's ontological status in relation to non-anthropocentric time scales. Here, the body is figured variously as a medium through which environmental forces are made visible, as a liminal figure which leaves traces of its presence in the landscape, or as a kind of ghost suspended outside of its native temporality. Unlike conventional uses of time-lapse, these films neither overlook bodily finitude in visualizing durational processes, nor attempt to subordinate such processes to anthropocentric modes of representation.

Rather, they destabilize the body both as the subject and the object of representation, making ambiguous its place in relation to different temporal scales. In each case, time-lapse serves not to exempt bodies from their temporal commitments, but to foreground their tenuous position at the interstices of clock, instantaneous and glacial time.

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[1] This would seem to parallel Paul Virilio's observation that the contemporary acceleration of technologies of communication and transportation has produced an 'aesthetics of disappearance' (1991).

[2] Discussing a sequence from Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), Vivian Sobchack emphasizes the visceral power of slow motion, which is commonly used 'to punctuate and, by contrast, emphasize the force and speed of the live action as well as to foreground and display, through its extension, the virtuosity of physical bodies in the extremity of motion' (2006: 342). For a more broad-ranging analysis of slow motion's cinematic uses, see Mary Scott Albert's account (1995).

[3] This undermining of anthropocentric vision is also implicit in slow motion. As Vivian Sobchack argues, slow motion 'reveals to us not only the radical energies and micro-movements of movements we live yet cannot grasp but it also interrogates, reveals, and expands the extremely narrow compass of our anthropocentric orientation and habitual perceptions of "being in the world"' (2006: 344). However, we suggest that time-lapse, while also revealing this anthropocentric 'blind spot', renders it in addition as a disturbing fluctuation within the image itself. In time-lapse, the limitations of bodily perception are paralleled by the fragmentation and disappearance of on-screen bodies.

[4] In this respect, *Cobra Mist* recalls Béla Balázs's comment that, as time-lapse makes visible processes that would otherwise be beyond human perception, it gives us 'the feeling of being invisible ourselves' (1970: 173).

[5] On the DVD commentary track for the film, the filmmakers describe the *mise-en-scène* of the opening and closing shots as an 'abstract cosmic landscape where time rolls on. This landscape was only about a metre wide on a little tabletop.' Another shot is referred to as a 'landscape of… pencil shavings' (Quay Brothers 2006).

[6] Ibid.

[7] On a similar note, Vivian Sobchack has noted that the 'effortful' stop-motion animations of the Brothers Quay (and Jan Svankmajer), in their stuttering, intermittent movements, offer a reminder of 'how difficult it is to be animate, to be alive, to struggle against entropy and inertia' (2009: 390).