

Cinematic Stilling: Before and Beyond the Slowness of Slow Cinema

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Abstract

In this paper I consider instances of the moving image apparently becoming still in film-based cinema. I contrast these with what has been identified as 'slow cinema.' Slow cinema is said to encourage contemplation, however, I do not see the process of becoming still I invoke requires a viewer's protracted contemplation that slow cinema invites. Rather the stilling I identify can initiate an active reflection on the part of the viewer upon the relation of the becoming still of the moving image with a meta-image that a movie, containing such instances, offers in the context of other of its content, or even through references it makes outside of itself. I suggest that the technical relation of the photogram of the film frame to the very possibility and existence of film-based cinema has bearing on the moments in film when the moving image apparently undergoes stilling. I conclude by briefly contrasting the temporal shift of film-based stilling with the temporal malleability of digital cinema.

Reflection versus Contemplation

[1] The slowness of slow cinema provides, for some, a refreshing aesthetic alternative to the sensory assault of fast-paced Hollywood movies. With its longer shots dwelling upon elements within a movie's world, the significance of which does not necessarily contribute to the forward movement of a movie's story, slow cinema's supporters see this de-emphasis of narrative as commendable because it allows the heightening of other aesthetic qualities. Slow cinema, according to Jonathan Romney, "downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality" (Romney, 2010). Matthew Flanagan notes that slow cinema employs "de-centred and understated modes of storytelling," instead placing "pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday" (Flanagan, 2008).

[2] Slow cinema stands in marked contrast to what David Bordwell has termed 'intensified continuity:' the phenomenon of rapid editing that is generally evident in movies of recent decades compared to what had typically been the case earlier (Bordwell, 2002). The near manic cutting rate of certain action driven Hollywood movies, such as *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) – both with an average shot length (ASL) of approximately two seconds, is particularly contrasted with the languidly slow rates of slow cinema movies such as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010), with an ASL of just over half a minute, or *I don't want to sleep alone* (Ming-liang Tsai, 2006), with an ASL of over 1 minute.¹ While a fast ASL does not necessarily have to serve narrative development, the cuts alone deliver the audience visual activity and rhythmic impetus. Longer shots make possible the conveyance of the sense of the *real-time* passage of time both within the world of a movie and in that of the audience's experience of the movie itself and its portrayed world. The average duration of shots alone, though, may not be a sufficient measure for what is considered slow cinema – knowing a movie's maximum shot length and its total number of shots in addition to ASL gives a better impression of its editing pacing and rhythm. For example, *Werckmeister Harmonies* (Béla Tarr, 2000) consists of 37 shots, with its longest over nine and a half minutes. But these measures are blind to pacing of activity or action in shots. Despite the characterisation of Alexander Sukurov's *Russian Ark* (2002) as: "Slow cinema's most spectacular novelty hit" (Romney, 2010), its single 96 minute long shot travels through a couple centuries of Russian history by following

the wanderings of characters or the peregrinations of a narrator/guide through the rooms, halls and courtyards of Petersburg's Hermitage populated with a cast of hundreds if not thousands of actors and extras. As Matthew Flanagan note, only when shots' durations noticeably exceed the narrative or informational significance they present do they achieve the slowness of truly slow cinema (Flanagan, 2008).

[3] A stoush of words ensued after *Sight and Sound's* editor, Nick James, questioned whether any example of slow cinema be deemed worthy simply because of its slowness (James, 2010a and 2010b).ⁱⁱ Blogger Harry Tuttle responded as if James' suggestion represented a blanket philistine rejection of what he prefers to call Contemporary Contemplative Cinema (CCC) (Tuttle, 2010). It does seem to me overly precious to feel the need to quarantine from negative criticism any example of slow cinema or CCC because of fear that this might threaten the sacrosanctity of class of movies in general. While Tuttle actually rejects the term "slow cinema," because it encourages, according to him, "contempt and caricature" [ibid.], he does identify Slowness – along with Plotlessness, Wordlessness and Alienation – as a characteristic of CCC (Tuttle, 2007). Given that Tuttle emphasises the contemplative character of the movies that interest him, it seems reasonable to assume that slowness, especially that in terms of extended shot duration, is a key element in allowing both the contemplative nature of the movies to be conveyed to viewers and for viewers to contemplate this contemplativeness. Extended duration is certainly a key element, for it can help "highlight the viewing process itself as a real-time experience in which, ideally, you become acutely aware of every minute, every second spent watching" (Romney, 2010, p. 43). Equally important, though is either relative inactivity, or rate of change of activity, within longer shots. For example, what Matthew Flanagan refers to as 'a cinema of walking' involves the activity of characters' walking - and possibly travelling shots tracking them or presenting their point of view while walking – at a steady pace for durations that clearly exceed that necessary to convey the narrative significance of the activity. James notes the implicit threat veiled in the demand on an audience's patience made by such sequences: "as you watch someone trudge up yet another woodland path... admit you're bored and you're a philistine" (James, 2010a).

[4] Lack of activity – or steadiness of state thereof – within extended shots is, then, a feature of slow cinema/CCC that is an inducer of contemplation for viewers so inclined (and of tedium, for those not). A particularly steady state is that of stillness, one in which activity is suspended completely into stasis. At just over 8 hours in length, Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964) stands as an extreme case of cinema of stasis as well as near impossible demand upon patience for it to be viewed in its totality. If anything, though *Empire* demonstrates that a shot of stillness, even when given near unendurable duration, in no way operates as a still image. Nevertheless, the still image has always haunted film-based cinema. Film frames, the constituents of the moving image, are still images. Within each film frame there is absolute stillness and timelessness (although, as a photogram, the film frame might be a record of a slice of time). Use of the freeze frame in cinema is the means of presenting the equivalent of a film frame in the course of a movie, and this device is typically used to interrupt the temporal flow of a movie's narrative.ⁱⁱⁱ As an obverse of slow cinema, I want to consider not cinema's use of the still image itself, but of a cinematic approach, by slowing down – by an active *stilling* – to the stilled image. And in place of contemplation as slow cinema's mode of reception, I will consider how the experience of this stilling can engage a viewer in reflection.

[5] Slow cinema seeks to occasion a passive contemplation in the course of a movie through shots that linger upon the quotidian states or activities. Stilling, on the other hand, offers an active reflective relation with the cinematic image, one that does not necessarily have to be experienced concurrently during a movie's viewing. Reflection can occur after the event, so its duration is not tied to that of the event; reflection can recur, so the one event can be the source of repeated or extended reflection. Reflection can also occur in the course of an event, but – unlike contemplation – adds reflective input to our experience of the event. The examples of stilling I will discuss each, bar one, involves quite short durations, yet the reflections they initiate play out in their own time. I do not reject the idea of slow cinema or contemporary contemplative cinema; however, I am setting the example of stilling and its associated reflective reception as an alternative to these, lest that slowness be regarded as the only course for viewers' thoughtful engagement with cinema. Slowness is too easily achieved for it ever to be a marker of quality in its own right. Slowness may be a commendable principle when it comes to food, yet simply because a meal is very slowly prepared and consumed does not guarantee its

culinary or social success. That said, stilling, too, can be relatively easily achieved, especially in the digital domain. The examples of stilling with which I will deal, though, are ones from film-based cinema. They are from four very disparate movies. This disparity demonstrates that the use of stilling is not limited to any particular class or genre of movie. But it is not the use of this stilling in its one right that is of significance, rather, as I hope to show, how they engage reflection upon the those moments of stilling in relation to other of a movie's content or to references made by the movies in which they appear. I will conclude my discussion by a brief consideration of the malleable temporality of digital cinema.

Stilling

[6] The dangerous relation between still/stilled image in this cinema is perfectly demonstrated by the final shot of Monte Hellman's *Two Lane Blacktop* (1971). The camera is inside a street drag racing car, positioned by the driver (James Taylor), looking over his shoulder through car's windscreen. The commencement of the race between this and another drag car has just been signalled, and, so, the final shot begins with the car beginning to move from a standing start. As it does so, however, the expected increase in the car's speed does not occur, because the film itself begins to lose speed: the slowing movement of the driver's long locks of hair making the film's deceleration apparent. 25 seconds after the beginning of the shot, the film stops entirely. This, however, is not a freeze frame, for, a second later, a scorch mark appears out of the silhouette of the driver's head, as if the film stock itself is being caused to combust by the heat of the projector's lamp. The searing spreads rapidly across the frame, which then quickly fades black, and rolling credits appear. The movie's narrative is brought to an end, then, by projecting the apparent stilling of the film reel itself as the film footage itself seemingly comes to a halt. The conclusion of *Two Lane Blacktop* is made doubly final with its last image's ostensible immolation. Even though we may realise that the scorching we see had itself had to have been filmed, we must still recognize that film stock actually needed to be brought to a stop in a projector for its burning to have be recorded on film, and for us to ultimately see a representation of this, either on film or, nowadays more likely, in digital form. It would have been technically simpler to end *Two Lane Blacktop* with a freeze frame, but because instead we witness film's susceptibility to the heat of the lamp that projects the images it bears, we are forcefully reminded that the film must

be kept rolling, and, so, (freeze frame aside) the cinematic image has to never stop moving.

[7] On its own then, the very ending of *Two Lane Blacktop* might cause us only to recognise the material nature of film stock and the operation of the apparatus of the film projector. However, upon reflection we might recognise a resonance between the final shot's last seconds and a two shots that shortly preceded it. The first of these shows the drag car's mechanic (Dennis Wilson), who is preparing the vehicle for the final race, leaning into its engine bay holding a timing light. The second is an extreme close-up of the timing light's beam illuminating marks on the car's pulley wheel and engine block. The engine is running, so pulley wheel is rotating, but the timing light acts as a stroboscope and only flashes when the marks on the pulley wheel are nearly aligned with a mark on the engine block, thus effectively suspending them. If we reflect back from the movie's very end toward these two shots, we become aware that an analogy exists between the conjunction of light and rotation in the case of both the car's engine's tuning and the filmic image's projection. The film reel rotates as the pulley wheel and the projector's shutter creates what can be considered a stroboscopic effect, albeit one that has a sufficiently high frequency so as to be hardly perceptible. The timing light's stroboscopic beam manages to apparently suspend the timing marks on the pulley, though we know the engine is still turning it rapidly. The marks on the pulley wheel aren't completely still though, they judder slightly as if in emulation of film's flicker effect. The timing process successfully applies discrete sampling (the stroboscopic effect) to a continuous process (rotary motion). Film only creates the impression of continuous motion, but it employs the quick succession of discreet samples (film frames) to do so.

[8] If our reflection causes us to recognise the analogy between timing light and movie projector, we might then find, in the movie's last seconds, the expression of an impossible wish that a movie (or the road movie journey – or drag race itself) might reach a state of becoming still but without stopping. This is not so much a state of stillness, but one of stalling: the verbal forms implying – better than the abstract noun – that it is an active condition. Stalling might be imagined to be an asymptotic approach toward the stillness: that is, the moving image may approach the condition of the still one to infinity, but never to finally attain that condition.

However, there are practical/technical factors in film-based cinema that preclude this ideal possibility. Because the moving cinematic image is constituted by discrete, still ones, the approach to stillness – the stilling – itself cannot be continuous. It is possible to imagine reducing frame rate beyond even one frame per second. But beyond a certain point, what might ideally operate as an asymptote becomes an event horizon. The scorching of the film stock in *Two Lane Blacktop* demonstrates that this horizon has no beyond.

[9] In Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) the film stock is also shown as if it burns on screen. In this case, though, the footage does not slow to a stop, rather, for a few seconds prior, it seems to shred vertically in two as it runs through the projector's gate before it suddenly then burnt through. Nor does this represented break in the film's footage end the movie, rather this occurs almost exactly half way through it. So, because the narrative ultimately continues, *Persona* necessarily must negotiate the crossing of the event horizon of film footage being brought to a halt. That crossing is effectively represented by a searing white screen, lasting several seconds, that follows the film stock's apparent disintegration. In terms of the movie's narrative content the sudden destruction of the film footage and image it bears – which happens to show a medium close shot of Alma (Bibi Andersson) as she peers out a window past a half-parted sheer curtain at Elisabet (Liv Ullman) – serves to highlight the disturbance of Alma's sense of her own identity, which has become inflected by her relation with the latter, that the narrative had just set up. However, the break in footage and effacement of the film image (of Alma looking out at Elisabet) does not just serve to add emphasis to a narrative turning point: the very technical underpinning of film image is also asserted. For the incandescent blank screen does not immediately give way to a continuation of the movie's narrative, rather the white screen is firstly interrupted by brief cuts of footage similar to some of that seen during the *Persona's* pre-title sequence. And it is highly significant that at the movie's outset the cinematic image and the filmic medium had been given overt presence, with the relation between still images of film frames and their animation as moving image being made forcefully manifest. The movie opens with an extreme close up of a projector's lamp lighting up, then, among other shots related to cinematic projection, there is an extreme close up of film footage spooling stutteringly off a reel; then a jerky animated image surrounded by the film frame and sprocket holes appears for a few seconds. The content of the movie's very first

shots, and then the later apparent failure of the footage and immolation of the film image make it easy to understand why the working title of *Persona* had been *Kinematografi* (Steele, 2005, p. 54). Controversially, amid the pre-title sequence's moving images dealing with film's projector-driven movement and the cinematic image's animation (as well as others whose content evoke faith, sacrifice and mortality) there suddenly flashes – for an almost subliminally brief moment – a still image: that of an erect human penis. So, while *Persona* may not manifest stilling as such, it does imply both the asymptote and event horizon that separate's cinema's movement from the still images used to constitute it.

[10] If *Two Lane Blacktop*'s terminal stilling was in the temporal domain, Michael Snow's 'experimental film,' *Wavelength* (1967) offers an approach to a still image that is both spatial and temporal. *Wavelength*, most of which is a single slow zoom shot, lasting almost all the film's 45 minute duration, might be retrospectively claimed by the 'slow cinema' movement. However, despite Gene Youngblood's reaction at the time, it is certainly far more experimental than contemplative.^{iv} For its relative simplicity, *Wavelength* delves into several key cinematic conditions: for example, that of the cinematic shot's consumption of space and of time as recorded on the medium of film; that of aspects of the material and chemical nature of the medium of film itself made manifest by sporadic light bleeds and chemical cross processing effects; that of cinema's implicit narrative impulse teased out by a couple of very brief appearances of characters in shot; as well as, that of a tension between image and soundtrack, which is heightened by the soundtrack becoming louder as the camera's zoom narrows in more closely on the still image that increasingly fills its frame. During its last third, though, *Wavelength* is essentially a moving image approaching a still one. As the zoom shot narrows onto the wall on what had initially been of the far side of the loft space in which *Wavelength* was filmed, it becomes clear that centred in the camera's aim is a still photograph of a choppy surface of open water. As this image grows increasingly larger as the camera zooms closer still, the soundtrack, featuring sine wave tones of varying frequencies become more insistent.

[11] While *Wavelength*'s slow, deliberate zoom shot finally brings the photograph on the wall into close view, it still only occupies about a quarter of the movie frame. The long cinematic shot cannot zoom quite enough for its frame to become fully filled by

the still image. A dissolve to a second, even closer shot, which lasts the film's last few minutes, is required for the screen to be completely occupied by the photograph's image. It is as if an un-filmable, un-representable threshold (an asymptote, an event horizon?) had to be crossed to for the camera to completely enter the stillness of the photograph. But even once fully filled by the still image the camera initially continues to zoom further into it, before this movement finally comes to a pause. Even so, the camera continues to move ever so slightly on its mount, most likely its lens being of a longer focal length, which would amplify even the slightest unsteadiness of the camera upon its tripod. This subtle restlessness almost seems – ironically – an attempt to perturb into motion the wavy water surface the photograph presents. The cinematic image has approached the stillness of the photograph but itself never quite arrives at full stillness itself. What we witness is not so much the cinematic images achievement of stillness, but rather a very close attempt at becoming still, at stilling itself. Because the still image that *Wavelength* makes its final goal is external to it, this image can be held almost still without risk of the self-destruction that *Two Lane Blacktop*, in its attempt to still itself, suffered.

[12] Even with an image that should be absolutely and irreversibly still, there can be a latency, a potential for un-stilling. In Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), the otherwise steady pacing of the still photographs that illustrate the visual unfolding of the narrated story is replaced, at one point, by a sequence of images that quickly dissolve one to the next. These show the face of a sleeping woman. In the last split second of this sequence the woman's eyes open as if moving in near real time. The experience this moment offers is truly wondrous: we are shown an awakening of the woman, but also, for just a moment, the animation – the coming to life – of the image. That one moment of un-stilling inflects the entire movie and its themes of time and memory and predestination. Un-stilling can be even more subtly introduced. An especially well-known example of a still image not so much coming to animation, but being filled with shifting spatiality, occurs in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Deckard (Harrison Ford) uses an image analyser to effectively look around corners in a photograph he retrieved from the hotel room that had been occupied by the replicants he is pursuing. He is able to zoom in onto a reflection in a convex mirror on the wall of the room shown in the photograph. This allows him to see a detail in a space beyond the photograph's camera's view, and to then to shift the viewpoint thus causing a sleeping woman to come into view. When *La Jetée's*

sleeping woman's eyes open temporal movement is imparted to what had been up until then a sequence of still images: the reverse of what occurred at the end of *Two Lane Blacktop*. In *Blade Runner*, the movement within the scanned image is primarily spatial (though, of course, it happens in time as well), as is the case of the movement of the camera's zoom in *Wavelength*. Curiously, these two examples of un-stilling discussed here both involve sleepers. But what is sleep, if not a manner of stilling – of being relatively but never totally still?

Stilling and Meta-Image

[13] In the examples of stilling/unstiling considered above, not only is there the actual instance of footage's speed varying or its playback being highlighted, there is the relation of those instances to something else either presented within the movie itself or a reference a movie makes outside of itself that gives the stilling/unstiling greater resonance. The facticity of photographs and their ability to support memories had already been called into question in *Blade Runner*. When a replicant, Rachel (Sean Young), proffers Deckard a photograph of 'herself' as a child as 'proof' that she is human, he disabuses her, telling her that her memories had been implanted ('gifted' her) when she was created. So before the Esper sequence, the duplicity of photographs has already been implied (the relation of photographs and memory is also conveyed by the presences of multiple old photographs in Deckard's apartment and in other scenes in the movie). The sleight performed on or by the Esper photograph is anticipated when Deckard examines the picture of mother and daughter Rachel discarded as she left his apartment: in a point of view close up of the photograph the shadows of foliage visible in it appear to sway for an instant. So, reflecting upon the sleight that unstiling performs in the Esper sequence in relation to the role photographs play elsewhere in the movie evokes that meta-image of photograph as duplicitous/hyper-veracious.^v

[14] In *Two Lane Blacktop*, a meta-image is elicited by the analogy that is established between the shots showing the tuning of the car's engine and what happens when the movie's projector apparently comes to a stop in the final shot. Here the meta-image involves a couple of cinematic images, but it also requires a viewer's recognition of the analogy on offer. That necessitates that the viewer refer back after

having seen the final image to slightly earlier ones; in other words, it requires an act of reflection, and through that reflection, the paradox of stilling what is moving while it remains in motion emerges. In the case of *Wavelength*, we have the moving image approaching a still one, but we need to recognise the implications of this; this film's duration allows for such reflection to develop in the course of its viewing. However, on first viewing, it only becomes clear in the latter part of the movie, that a still image is, in fact, the 'target' of the movie camera's slow optical approach. With *Two Lane Blacktop*, the reflection must come – even if immediately so – after the event of its viewing, because the instance of stilling occurs at its very end. In the other examples, the reflection is more likely to occur after the event. In the case of *Persona*'s use of stilling, on the one hand there is the meta-image of the relation between the cinematic image and the apparatus by means of which a movie is screened was established during its pre-title sequence, along with the metaphoric overtones of the searing light of the projector; but there is also the meta-image of the projected image of the protagonists' faces, also set up in the pre-title sequence, and the question of the identity relation between Alma and Elisabet, which is effectively brought to a crux when half of the image of Alma's face is torn from the screen, as the film's footage has been shredded by a projector.

Digitally malleable temporality

[15] As Laura Mulvey, among others, has noted digital and electronic movie playback technologies “allow an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame” (Mulvey, 2006, p. 53), but equally these technologies also make available the experience of the moving image slowed down (as well as sped up, and, of course, played in reverse at various speeds). This temporal malleability – or “mutable temporality” (Fetveit, 2011), as Arild Fetveit has termed the condition in regard to music videos – is equally available in movie production and consumption. Since the days of the VCR, but now even more so with digital formats, commercially available movies have been able to be scanned back and forth at various speeds. The temporal malleability that consumers themselves can control is often to be seen in digital-era commercial movies, for example through whiplash camera moves, abrupt zooms, bullet-time effects, etc. Pre-digital cinema did offer slow and fast motion, but digital cinema far greater variability of playback speeds: rapid acceleration and deceleration of footage can occur in a single shot. Now cinematic time can easily compressed or dilated.

Often it is the actual rate of change of speed or variable shift from stretching to squashing of time that is the dominant impact of temporal scaling effects. Fast/suddenly slow/suddenly fast again motion sequences – which are the staple of video advertisements, music videos, TV sports broadcasts and digital movies alike – make the rate of change of speed a significant aspect of their phenomenal impact. Change of playback speed (of which stilling is a case) is commonplace in all modes of use of digital moving pictures, so it cannot have the same register it once would have in film-based cinema.

[16] With temporal manipulation – including stilling – being technically child’s play with digital video, its impact, if just used as an effect, can hardly be remarkable. If such a technique is to be used in digital cinema, it to have any resonance beyond mere effect, it would need have some significance in relation to the content of the movie in which it appears or to material the movie references. The digital movie format is already a meta-medium, encompassing camera-based cinematography, the whole gamut of animation techniques, motion graphics and CGI special effects. As well as disavowing intensified continuity, slow cinema avoids any of the showy effects available through digital post-production in favour of the purely pro-filmic. The examples of stilling I’ve discussed all entailed an at least basic level of special effects (even Wavelength’s momentary light flares and negative reversals can be regarded as such). What they did, though, was to momentarily collapse the filmic and pro-filmic dimensions (with the filmic dimension in the cases of *Blade Runner* and *La Jetée* being photographic rather than cinematographic). When we see moments of film-based stilling, such as those I have discussed, in digital form (which, for most people, will be the only form such movies containing them will be available), we see not only those moments of stilling, but also digitally reanimated representations of the likeness of a filmic medium that has all but reached the end of its life. That might be felt to add certain poignancy to the moments of stilling’s appearance in digital reproduction, but it is also one that might even inflect back upon all appearance of the filmic in digital reproduction.

[17] The long, slow take may be the apotheosis of slow cinema in its attempts to engender a contemplative experience of cinema: the relative stillness of such a shot

calmingly coaxing a viewer into passive quietude. However, cinema whether film-based or digital, technically entails movement - the spooling of footage, or the sequential processing of data associated with film frames. And this technical movement proceeds at a constant pace whether or not little happens or only does so slowly 'on screen.' As opposed to a constancy of slowness, the cinematic stilling I have identified entails an actual or implied deceleration, which invokes an intimation of slowness through slowing or unstilling rather than an actual instantiation of it. The tension between the actual technical movement and the apparently stilling/unstilling one encourages a reflective accommodation of both. Stilling can offer a thoughtful relation to the cinematic image, just as, from another direction, slow cinema may.

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- ⁱ Statistics used here are taken from the Cinemetrics website (www.cinemetrics.lv/index.html), which provides such timing statistics for thousands of movies, and also publishes Barry Salt's movie statistics database. Salt began analysing movies' editing pacing statistics in the mid-1970s. Salt, B. (1974). "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures," *Film Quarterly*, 1974, 28(1), 13-22.
- ⁱⁱ James acknowledges that slow cinema exists as a clear alternative to Hollywood cinema, but he himself expresses a wish for "more active forms of [cinematic] rebellion" (James, 2010a).
- ⁱⁱⁱ A freeze frame pauses the main narrative thread to allow commentary upon it in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946), while both *400 Blows* (Truffaut, 1959) and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, 1969) end as the frame freezes.
- ^{iv} Youngblood hailed *Wavelength* as "triumph of contemplative cinema" (Youngblood, 1968).

ˆ *Blade Runner* makes another meta-image available through its postmodern references to Dutch and Flemish 17th century and earlier genre painting: that of pictorial illusionism itself. The lighting and setup of the room is the Esper photograph is redolent of interiors in Jan Vermeer's paintings; this, and the way the device 'navigates' the two dimensional spaces it reveals in the photograph, call to mind Dutch 17th perspective boxes, especially the one by Samuel van Hoogstraten, ca. 1655-60, in the collection of London's National Gallery (the Esper scanner, fittingly, has a box-like shape). The framed convex mirror visible in the Esper photograph on the wall of an adjoining room recalls the one in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding* (1434). In van Eyck's painting the mirror shows a reflection of the reverse view of the room in which the Arnolfini couple stand. In this painted reflection can be seen, between the back views of the couple, two smaller figures before a half opened door in the far wall. These figures and the far wall approximate an illusionistic equivalent of the position from which a viewer of the painting would inspect it. In the Esper photograph a reflection in the convex mirror 'enables' the device to begin to see around occluding objects as if by shifting parallax. So the mirrors in both the photograph and the painting are used to perform optical tricks.