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FILM-PHILOSOPHY

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Inscribing Cinema  
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Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*

Trans. Jody Gladding

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Criticism*

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Leo Charney opens his essay 'In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity' by outlining the temporal and experiential anxieties that define post-1870 transformations of modernity: 'In the midst of this environment of fleeting sensations and ephemeral distractions, critics and philosophers sought to identify the possibility of experiencing a moment' (1995, 279). Writers who regard the 'modern as momentary' claim that movement evacuates stable presence, thereby causing a 'split between sensation, which feels the moment in the moment, and cognition, which recognizes the moment only after the moment' (1995, 279). Through the writings of Walter Pater, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, and Jean Epstein, Charney impressively reviews the sensorial and experiential moment. He helpfully puts these concepts into direct dialogue with film theories of attraction (by Tom Gunning, Sergei Eisenstein, Jacques Aumont, Eadweard Muybridge, and Etienne-Jules Marey). Charney moves toward a conclusion that directly equates 'the experience of film to the experience of daily life in modernity. The experience of cinema mirrored the wider epistemological experience of modernity. Modern subjects (re)discovered their place

as buffers between past and future by (re)experiencing this condition as film-viewers' (1995, 293). Charney equates contemplative expansion of the 'moment' with cinematic engagement; his essay connects critical theories of temporality (at least insofar as they engage with 'the moment') and theories of cinematic experience.

In comparison, Agacinski's book dwells in more the former than the latter; in other words, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* – as its title suggests – focuses on philosophical modes of regarding time's passage. Of her partial engagement with aesthetics, she makes no secret of the fact that 'photography...is [her] particular concern' (90). Though cinema figures peripherally in her argument, the book introduces many frameworks that might ably and deservedly be taken up by film scholars. We might regard this book as one comprehensive engagement with time's passage that encourages our development of her argument into cinematic realms. This review thus points to her contributions in the hopes of inspiring further work that correlates film theory with philosophies of movement and passing.

My expectations for theories of cinematic time have been created from, most significantly, Mary Ann Doane's marvelous *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*; we might claim that Doane offers the historical corollary to Agacinski's philosophical tracing of time's contingency, though Doane continually integrates cinema into her argument (whereas, for Agacinski, cinema appears tangentially, or, fittingly, in passing). This scholarly need for philosophical engagement with cinematic time (Gilles Deleuze's *Time-Image* would be an amorphous and lyrical forerunner) is only exacerbated by the many studies that weigh heavily on either the cinematic or philosophical side, either talking easily about time (e.g. mentioning a flashback without attending to the philosophical implications of temporal manipulation) or overlooking cinema's particular contributions to these issues, respectively.

In short, we need the cinematic equivalent of the comprehensive and intriguing collection *Time and the Literary* (eds. Karen Newman, Jay Clayton, and Marianne Hirsch). Even this volume points to cinema's irrefutable aesthetic and experiential contributions, though not overtly; the first essay of this anthology, Catherine Gallagher's 'Undoing' opens as follows: 'When Michael J. Fox went back to the future in 1985, Steven Spielberg produced American's most popular version of a new time-travel plot' (2002, 11). Appropriate to her field, Gallagher privileges plot over cinematicity; but certainly this introductory emergence of cinema, even within a literary engagement with time, underscores the ways in which scholars of various disciplines struggle to account for cinema's dramatic temporal and experiential affect.

Plenty of articles and reviews engage with cinematic narratives that manipulate temporal order (e.g. *Run Lola Run*, *Groundhog Day*, *Memento*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Hiroshima, mon amour*, *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams*), yet, in these examples, time often figures as an overt subject of story and less a malleable quality of the art itself. Given the rarity of texts that attend to temporal attributes within realms equivalently philosophical and cinematic, Agacinski's *Time Passing* dazzlingly provides the groundwork by which this scholarly gap might be filled.

### Passing

*Time Passing* begins with sections on 'The Western Hour' and 'Passage,' in which Agacinski introduces the following questions that frame her study: 'Is it ever possible to think about one's own time?' (3); '[c]an the idea of epoch still hold meaning for us?' (3); 'to what are we endlessly hurrying, so eager for change?' (7); 'what does *to pass* mean for us if neither eternity nor history any longer gives meaning to that passage?' (10); '[d]oes this increase in flux still leave us a time that is truly ours?' (11); '[c]an a passage make an epoch, or does it compromise even any possibility of present?' (11). Agacinski explains that modernity 'designates an experience of *passage* and of the *passing*, of movement and of the ephemeral, of fluctuation and of the mortal,' thereby renouncing not only 'eternity' but also a 'unique form of temporality and of history' (11). She argues that 'modern temporality is the endless interlacing of the irreversible and the repetitive' (12).<sup>1</sup>

Through impressive argumentative turns, she decides that value emerges within and, more importantly, with regard to everything that passes: 'the greatest beauty is called on to die, even though it has value and existence' (14). In one of several points of sheer eloquence, Agacinski lends a startling clarity to what ordinarily defies our clear thinking: 'The anticipation of death, which we cannot help thinking about, has two possible effects: melancholy, which withdraws any present from us in advance and, conversely, love for finite things or beings, all the more intense since it is hopeless' (14). I feel about this sentence in ways reminiscent of Aristotle's writings on tragedy: this bleak situation, this choice between melancholia and intense yet hopeless love, blindingly illumines our situation in a relieving articulation of mortality's difficult beauty.

From these introductory sections, Agacinski moves into her chapter-length analyses: 'Test of Time' (which includes the sections 'The Retreat of the Eternal,' 'Movement,' and '*Un passeur de temps*: Walter Benjamin'), 'The Time of Images'

<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere, all italics within quotes are Agacinski's.

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(which includes the sections 'Historical Polemic: The Modernity of Photography,' 'The Epoch of Phantoms,' and 'Anachronisms of Art: Style and Medium'), and 'Political Time' (which includes the sections 'Patience and Democracy' and 'Media Time'). Most of her writing on cinema occurs in 'The Time of Images' though – as previously mentioned – she primarily focuses upon photography.

### **Benjamin and *Passeur de temps***

Compared with Miriam Hansen's and Elissa Marder's excellent analyses of Benjamin, Agacinski's reading, in general, seems somewhat unremarkable; but what I appreciate most about this chapter, and maybe the book as a whole, is the paragraph about 'taking on the time.' In her first paragraph of the Benjamin chapter, Agacinski explains that 'the expression *passer de temps* came to [her]' upon reading Benjamin's Book of Passages – a phrase that 'Benjamin himself does not use [and] is as impossible in German as it is in English' (49). She then, somewhat repetitively, reads this phrase into Benjamin's work, though less as a rigorous engagement with than a meandering traipsing among his ideas. She happens upon a worthwhile destination, however, as she lingers with his notion of *laden*, of taking on the time: 'The one whose eyes follow the flight of a gull over the sea adopts the temporality of that flight; his time becomes the gull's time' (56). Indeed, we have encountered this concept elsewhere in other forms: Benjamin's aura ('[t]o follow with the eye – while resting on a summer afternoon – a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch'), after all, invokes such a collapse and accentuation of distance through perceptual fixation; and clichés of seeing 'through another's eyes' or walking 'in another's shoes' refer to such identification (105).

But Agacinski's metaphor stands alone in carrying a compelling literalness that eloquently describes just what might happen in a moment of identification. After all, we literally neither see through another person's eyes nor walk in his/her shoes; rather, we *imagine* such an identification, an experience of the world that externalizes our senses as if becoming subject in their alterity. Agacinski thus inserts an experience of time into an act of identification. For the extremes to which cinema creates and frustrates identification (therein influencing our relation to the art), Agacinski's insertion of time into this act directly links cinematic time to audience engagement; she importantly gives us a way to connect phenomenological and temporal film theories (a necessary connection, given phenomenological film theory's focus on embodiment and spatiality). Like Benjamin's concept of ageing in 'The

Image of Proust' this model works as a way of explaining, in profound and gorgeous possibility, that which ordinarily defies concretization.<sup>2</sup> The lyricism of this explanation might even incite our readerly marveling upon encountering this image – a marveling that crystallizes into its own punctuated temporal experience, the engagement with an idea that gives us pause and quickens our pulse at once.

### ***Time Passing and Cinema***

The section directly relevant to *Film-Philosophy* readers would be 'The Time of Images' though more for Agacinski's reading of philosophers than for her observations about cinema. As mentioned already, she does not turn to media or film theory (plenty would be appropriate here) but rather she focuses on continental philosophers. Optimistically, this framework allows us (*Film-Philosophy* readers) to apply the theories with which we're familiar to these new contexts, therein inciting our active contribution and learning.

For example, she offers the following sentence, which doesn't overtly address cinema but defines an awareness of oneself in time as equivalent to a self-reflexive spectatorial perception: 'to salvage what passes, the eye of the spirit, or the philosopher's gaze, must itself become an absolute eye, capable of seeing its own passage, simultaneously engaged in time and assembling time, simultaneously passing and not passing' (22). Passages such as this sentence, which highlight and engage philosophy's temporal underpinnings, can readily be applied to a cinematic context (not applied, as in put to use in naïve forgetting of primary source; rather as in 'made applicable,' cataloguing and pointing our contemporary investments in time and cinema toward potential enrichment from theorists far before cinema's flourishing).

For example, Agacinski casually refers to the 'shot in the park' in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) as the remaining trace of something that had existed, 'revealed afterward by an imprint-that perhaps no one had seen' (87). She neglects, however, to flesh out this example by attending to the particularity of its cinematic context – a 'shot' animated and given cinematic motion by the photographer's (David Hemmings) projections. Certainly, her argument hardly

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin writes that '*A la Recherche du temps perdu* is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost mental awareness. Proust's method is actualization, not reflection. He is filled with the insight that none of us has the time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us – this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases in our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights, that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home' (1999, 244-5).

diminishes for not developing this point; but I, for one, would have liked to learn how she regards the cinematic temporality (afforded by and apparent in, at least, scale and duration) and cause-effect movement of this example. In ways that other texts have reduced films of temporal complexity to transparent revelations of plot and story, Agacinski's passing mention of *Blow-Up* downplays cinematic time in the interest of swiftly and neatly making an argument about modernity. She uses the example without appreciating its potential to enrich her argument.

In the following passage, Agacinski introduces a lovely phrase, 'mixed memory.' Please excuse the length of this quotation in the name of conveying a sense of her strengths and weaknesses as a writer and thinker:

The image as vestige thus competes with recollection: it serves the memory less than it supplants it. It already replaces it because it is there, perceptible, real, present, whereas a memory is vague and elusive. It replaces it again when the memory of the image (and no longer the image itself) masks the memory of the thing and screens any return to the past. It is then incorporated into the whole of subjective memory, like any other recollection. This incorporation finally does not permit natural memory to be opposed to artificial memory, living internal memory to an exterior memory, confined to traces.

To take photographs is to produce a material memory capable of making up for the frailty of ordinary memory. Plato would not have failed to conclude that photography, like writing, seriously threatens memory (in the sense of a faculty of the soul). But it threatens only a naturally faltering, essentially amnesiac memory. Like all other processes of recording, drawing, or writing, it helps constitute a *mixed memory*, in which the lived merges with the traces. Thus "natural" memory incorporates artificial images that function as the equivalents of lived experience. The ghosts live among us, just as in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* the actors leave the screen and mix with the life of the viewers (103).

Were I to encounter the first paragraph in a student's paper, I'd be appalled with the repetition of 'it' that drains the meaning from the argument. Whether a shortcoming of the original or the translation, *it's* simply poor form to use pronouns with such frequency that their antecedents blur into a diffuse opacity. Simply typing that sentence to include in this review inspired my cringe. Also, the allusion to *Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1983) stands as the final sentence in the entire 'Epoch of Phantoms' section. She coyly strolls off with this allusive closure without taking up

the implications of this simile. Yet *Purple Rose's* story (not to mention its style) is more complicated than she describes: spectatorial desire compels the imaged actor's magical departure from the two-dimensional screen; human longing animates the film object, which, in Barthes's phrase, animates its viewer (1981, 20). Agacinski gets away with simplifying this film reference so as to dash off an example that, for a film scholar, points to her argument's limits instead of its attributes.

In the case of *Blow-Up* and *Purple Rose*, Agacinski thus misses the cinematic complexity (or, with regard to *Purple Rose*, she simplifies even the story). I'm not criticizing these examples to say that she should have made her book something it's not (a BFI reader on *Purple Rose*, she never claims to be writing); but I do highlight these points as places in which the film reader falls out of the argument, places where we pause-not in quickened pulse for eloquent metaphor (as in the 'taking on the time') but to contest, 'but, wait – there's more.' At the very least, these examples encourage us to apply her argument (to films that we know but she unsatisfyingly neglects to develop). Perhaps (generously) these moments comprise points of our readerly engagement, an implicit school primer of sorts: here's the new concept, now apply and develop what you know! She thus prompts our contribution to (but not overriding of) her argument; she yet ably maintains her credibility, and therein inspires both my admiration and engagement.

### **Ethics and Politics**

Early in 'Passage,' Agacinski writes: 'An ethics and a politics of the ephemeral, on the contrary [to Kantian philosophy], would require thinking about the actual effects of a choice and, in relations with others, taking account of situations and peculiarities. They would not be thinking of the moment but of the present, that is, of the relationship between movements and durations' (19). In this and other paragraphs, Agacinski frames problems of politics and philosophy (she was, one paragraph prior, describing Kantian 'estrang[ement] from the idea of modernity as we understand it') within language of ephemera and duration, movement and stasis. She thus takes philosophical models as metaphor for time, and vice-versa. Therein, she models a temporal immersion or conflation that says more than the fact that we live in and are compelled by temporal pressure and seduced by temporal overcoming.

While history and memory more readily lend themselves to inclusion of temporality, Agacinski's temporal framing of ethics and politics reveals yet another of her strengths. The ease and eloquence with which she uses the language of time to regard democracy, for example, convinces me of the viability of this equation:

democracy 'cannot be conceived of without this continual obligation to *take the time* – to develop proposals, to discuss the possible options, to persuade, to implement decisions...democracy must remain patient, even at those times when it encounters...the media's haste' (139). Agacinski emphasizes the tension between the media's impatience and democracy's patience, which 'causes...a certain number of *contretemps* between politics and the media' (139). Her concluding chapters thus take up this correlation, briefly tracing political philosophy through its historical past and drawing out its representational, theatrical, and public tenets.

She explains that 'democracy has created a new political time, punctuated by elections' whose rhythm 'does not coincide with that of other movements that articulate the history of societies' (153-4). Her subsequent engagement with judgment and rhetoric (through Aristotle's notions of plurality) helpfully sets the stage for her final section, 'Media Time,' which opens with the claim that we oppose 'the public to the *masses*,' the 'cultivated minority' to the 'undiscerning throngs' – the latter of which Agacinski equates with the 'disqualification of the audiences of audiovisual mass media...[t]his mythic *mass* that is the "general public" is always being reproached for feeling too much and not thinking enough' (161-2).

In this concluding section, Agacinski asks the following questions: 'Could the techniques of communication engender "cultural classes" in the same way as the techniques of production have defined social classes?' (161); '[w]here can we find the time [for private or semipublic work...for studying and developing ideas, for inquiry, for consultation] if the press and media claim the right to see and to know without limits and without delays?' (162); 'shouldn't we reflect on what absolutely must be public and what can, if only momentarily, remain out of the limelight?' (162-3); 'to be moved and to reason, to feel and to judge, are these necessarily contradictory?' (163); 'why must intellectual analysis be incompatible with the feelings or the image of adversity with commitment?' (163). She engages these questions within the scale of the close-up, her concluding note in which she points to a need to see 'representations that draw near' (176) while also recognizing that the 'public space of screens lacks live bodies' (176).

While any conceptual engagement with aesthetics, politics, and modernity inevitably echoes Benjamin's 'Artwork' essay, *Time Passing's* final section, in particular, seems to engage indirectly with (or move parallel to) Benjamin's argument, to such an extent that citing his work would helpfully have clarified (how she understands) this relation. Claiming that the 'masses are a matrix from which all customary behavior toward works of art is today emerging newborn,' Benjamin



argues that this 'new mode of participation' distinguishes between the 'masses' (who are 'criticized for seeing distraction in the work of art') and the art lover (who 'supposedly approaches [art] with concentration') (2002, 119). Ideally balancing distraction and concentration, a new perception, he claims, will be 'mastered gradually...through habit,' which 'finds in film its true training ground' (2002, 120). He cautiously yet firmly places faith in art, which 'will tackle the most difficult and most important tasks wherever it is able to mobilize the masses. It does so currently in film' (2002, 120).

To Agacinski's question '[c]ould the techniques of communication engender "cultural classes" in the same way as the techniques of production have defined social classes?', Benjamin would seem to answer emphatically in the affirmative, all the while that he might claim that changing participatory and perceptual modes has the potential to collapse distinctions altogether. The connection between Benjamin and Agacinski disconcertingly affirms the compounding pressure of these anxieties (of having the time, of slowing our speed) while simultaneously pointing to the constancy of this concern. Agacinski's questions (as catalogued in the previous paragraph) verge on the rhetorical and the impossible (to some of them, I shrug my shoulders in a despondent and downtrodden 'I don't know'; to others, I realize that they've been structured to elicit a clear yes or no). In her own rhetorical movements, Agacinski thus inspires our participatory and perceptual engagement by eliciting our thinking beyond these familiar and frustrating dilemmas that heighten in proportion to multivalent and hastening temporalities.

### **Value and Context**

More than merely stimulating our cinematic thought, Agacinski's actual engagement with philosophies of temporality marks one of this text's grandest achievements. In the short section 'No One Can See Oneself Dead,' for example, Agacinski moves through the writings of Montaigne, Descartes, Merleau-Ponty, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard in a whimsical, reason-defying (so many thinkers, such little room!) compression of their notions on perception and finitude. Here and throughout the text, she puts a dizzying cast of thinkers in conversation with one another by virtue of their temporal and perceptual particularities. For a reader with broad and partial knowledge in these realms, this gloss proves tremendously valuable and exhilarating in its clarity and significance.

Elsewhere, Agacinski focuses on classical texts, particularly Aristotle, in ways that more than respectfully acknowledge our historical precedent. Claiming Aristotle

to be ‘the first philosopher to liberate thought from the weight of the eternal’ (32), Agacinski explains his significance to her inquiry: ‘By examining metaphysical purity and the separation of the two worlds (the sensible and the intelligible, the temporal and the eternal) – but also of the two sexes – Aristotle plunged philosophy into the embrace of time, of the mixed, and of the heterogeneous’ (32). To foreground her chapter on ‘Movement’ she turns to Aristotle’s *Physics*, which explains ‘there is no time without movement or change, and it is in perceiving movement that we perceive time’ (34). Comparing Aristotle’s position to Kant’s (‘which tries to exclude time from experience in order to define it as an a priori form of sensibility’), Agacinski privileges Aristotle’s understanding of ‘temporality as a point of interference between the soul and movement – we would say between the subjective and the objective – and inscribes the possibility of time within the experience of movement’ (35).

Agacinski accentuates a tenet of Aristotelian thought (or, rather, she convincingly assembles and expands upon his ideas) in a *contretemps* of her own making; she revalues his work as ‘more decisive and more modern’ than later texts that unsatisfyingly conceived time as either too realistic or idealistic (35). Waxing nostalgic in its backward glance, *Time Passing*’s intertextuality thus, in T.S. Eliot’s terms, invokes ‘a sense...of the timeless and temporal together, [which] is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity’ (1932, 4). Agacinski’s emphasis upon Aristotle’s modern value accentuates her own ‘historical sense’ (‘a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’), therein rendering *Time Passing* both contemporary and traditional in its own right: multiply temporal in argumentative gesture and subject (Eliot 1932, 4).

With regard to *Time Passing*’s particular relation to film theory, this book belongs on a shelf with Martin Seel’s *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia*, and Susan Stewart’s *On Longing*: all are fairly recent texts that excitingly contribute to our understanding of what it means to long, to hope, to experience a ‘diasporic intimacy’ (Boym 252) or ‘an enduring passing away’ (Seel, 147) – none of which adequately (for the film scholar) inscribe cinema into their temporal negotiations but nonetheless enrich our understanding of cinematic time. Particularly Boym’s *Future of Nostalgia* would round out the lattermost term of *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*; Agacinski addresses time’s passage with an implicit nostalgia more than she explicitly engages the term. In a brief two-page section (entitled, aptly, ‘Nostalgia’), Agacinski cites Heidegger’s “fundamental tonality” of philosophy as nostalgia: “We who philosophize are away from home

everywhere” (17). She fixes nostalgia within a Platonic and dualist thinking that displaces the soul from body, and body from world—an irreconcilability that means ‘modern man...no longer knows how to dwell, does not know what he has lost and does not suffer from it...it is homesickness, nostalgia, that can show whether modern man, aware of his exile, still knows what “inhabiting” means’ (17). Contrary to Descartes’s or Hegel’s attempt to ‘establish...thought within its own world, excluding all nostalgia, modern man, according to Heidegger, experiences an exile and an uprooting so profound that he is not even aware of it and loses all feelings of nostalgia’ (18).

Agacinski claims that ‘all displacement, however unnerving, is not necessarily nostalgic’ (18), and concludes this section on nostalgia (her most overt engagement with this titular subject) by explaining that ‘[p]eople today can no longer feel peacefully established in a world that is their own...but they are no longer pious enough to suffer from exile’ (18). Given her clear parameters of modernity and nostalgia, Agacinski would benefit from delving more into the historical or the late capitalist tenets of her argument. Her ‘Media Time’ section briefly engages nostalgia for printed texts and political life, but these short paragraphs hardly warrant the prominence of ‘nostalgia’ in her title. Boym’s remarkable *Future of Nostalgia* divides nostalgia into two forms: ‘restorative nostalgia...proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps...[and] manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past’; ‘reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance... [reflective nostalgia] lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time’ (41). ‘More concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude,’ reflective nostalgia ‘has both elements of mourning and melancholia...has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory’ (Boym 2001, 55). Perhaps Agacinski’s promised engagement with yet shortchanging of nostalgia performs instead of explicates the subject: if ‘[r]eflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity,’ then *Time Passing* exemplifies the creative outpouring that nostalgia enables (Boym 2001, xviii).

In her nostalgic rigour, Agacinski helps us to see the value of thinkers’s relation to time in ways that are productive in articulating the implications for cinema. Her language and diction accentuate perception and temporality, and her careful reading contributes to our seeing/ sensing the machinations and particularities of cinematic time, such as are outlined in Doane’s *Emergence of Cinematic Time*. One

can thus sense the appeal of and exciting coalescence of these texts. I can personally attest to the pedagogical attributes of *Time Passing* in tandem with Doane, and complemented, for example, by Paul Ricoeur's 'Narrative Time,' Noël Burch's 'Spatial and Temporal Articulations,' among innumerable films. Agacinski writes the kind of sentences that can withstand a seminar's enduring scrutiny by provoking collaborative unpacking and speculation. Her writing also valuably inspires the academician's struggle to compose sentences into which Agacinski's lucid and lyrical argument might seamlessly fit; like placing a Gerard Manley Hopkins line as epigraph to a poem, an Agacinski passage sets high the stakes for its surrounding prose (previously-quoted repetitive 'it' sentence aside!).

Through both syntactical and intelligent seduction, *Time Passing* inexplicably creates a desire for comprehension, both hers and ours. Agacinski's achievement, in a *Film-Philosophy* realm, thus excitingly stimulates and enables the increasing profundity with which aesthetic scholars can privilege temporal concerns in their work. As mentioned before, studies of time abound, and will only increase in proportion to the world's swift digitization and virtualization. What Agacinski does, then, is encourage us to steepen our own hasty considerations of time by grounding them in philosophical traditions of time. Film scholars are not inventing, or even re-inventing the wheel; such archaic metaphor speaks to a time of vehicular wonderment, which we have dramatically surpassed. We're negotiating time and space in a speed and simultaneity that challenges the pace to which the 're-invented wheel' even refers.

### **Taking on the Time of the Text**

On her final page, Agacinski asks a question that very much echoes those with which she began: 'how do modern peoples experience their relationship to time?' (177), to which she answers by offering a one paragraph summary of the book in, appropriately, a notable shift in verb tense (she turns to the subjunctive 'would be necessary...would discover...would assume') and person (instead of considering, in first person, 'our' temporal negotiations, we've suddenly become the externalized third-person 'modern peoples'). This grammatically shifted paragraph ends only to affirm the value and endurance of passing, which essentially describes and includes the passage of time we've just experienced as readers; she succinctly equates narrative closure with acknowledgement (from a third-person distance and a subjunctive contingency) of time's passage as reading duration.

In his introduction to *The Inhuman*, Jean-Francois Lyotard explains:

[d]evelopment imposes the saving of time. To go fast is to forget fast, to retain only the information that is useful afterwards, as in 'rapid reading'. But writing and reading which advance backwards in the direction of the unknown thing 'within' are slow. One loses one's time seeking time lost' (1991, 3).<sup>3</sup>

In reading *Time Passing*, we exchange our time for the pacing inscribed in the text; to invoke Agacinski's phrase, we 'take on the time' of text, and therein lose time (perhaps otherwise spent writing a letter or taking a walk or grading papers) and gain time (in the careful contemplation of sentences and ideas rendered artfully and intelligently). A textual 'passage,' after all, colloquially refers to an *excerpt* ('look at this passage,' 'this passage suggests...'), whereas we might better regard this crucial word (especially in Agacinski's text) as movement, itself. More than just losing time by 'seeking time lost,' this process of reading about time affords an excess of temporal engagement; we glimpse the complexity of conceiving time in a simultaneity (or a sequence) that organizes these very apprehensions into a textual duration that, in Lyotard's estimation, counters a swift and speeding passage. *Time Passing*, then, combined with our readerly attention, offers one productive and pleasing antidote to the aforementioned modern woes.

Yet a textual consolation insufficiently accounts for the multiply sensual tenets of contemporary perception and stimulation. As Benjamin tells us, decades ago, '[j]ust as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized-the medium in which it occurs-is conditioned not only by nature but by history' (2002, 104). The changes in aesthetic reception that Benjamin notices in 'The Storyteller,' for example, point to the difference between a traditional community of listeners and an individuated modern readership of novels. How might we regard with precision our current imagistic plenitude, in terms other than woefully mourning the decadent demise of our worldly and contemplative sensitivity? The answers simply must be other than (or at least in addition to) the textual. Studies of temporality that highlight both our contingency to and challenging of a media-determined pace must also privilege the multiple perceptual realms that mark the parameters of this immersion. We create as much as exhibit nostalgia by imagining a time in which we had time enough, as if ever we've known an intensity and a duration that precisely fit; and if everyone from scholars to everyday passers-by throw up their

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Stephen Patrick Farrelly, for astutely reading and insightfully pointing me to this passage.

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hands to exclaim 'time flies!', then this ubiquity means we're spinning, not even reinventing, our wheels.

While some of her links between theorists and philosophers might feel familiar, Agacinski contributes her own unique strength of compression, the capacity to condense centuries of thinking about time into a clear several sentences without losing complexity. Not only does she offer an eloquent brevity but also does she express this compression within masterful syntax and diction, rendering this slim volume far more a lyrical meditation for an insatiable and curious scholar that might fulfill both a scholarly and poetic longing for reflection in time. Works like this mean that I cannot endure words like 'time' in colloquial or poetic use (no poetic verse that I've encountered recently can get away with having earned a word with so much charge). Jody Gladding's translation honors and flatters Agacinski's own packed and poetic sentences, and whether reading for a glorious afternoon in the park or for a scholarly immersion in a library, this book manages to speak of time and aesthetics in ways both recognizably, consolingly familiar and impressively contemporary. Agacinski vitalizes this pursuit of aesthetic fixation relative to time within a style that more than befits its content.

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