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Atget's Animation of Stillness: The Life of the Still

As Walter Benjamin states, the development of photography represents the most significant progression in the history of art[1]. Unlike any means of graphic representation that came before, photography provides the capture of an instant in time. The photographic image is an index of the tangible world, a physical trace of the environment imprinted on a receptive medium (the photographic negative) during an exposure period. To create an image through photography, light must first reflect off a physical object, thus situating the photograph as evidence of a singular moment and place. With photography, time appeared as an entity that could be possessed, a force that could be grasped and arrested (the conventional photographic terminology "to capture" an image illustrates this notion).

The use of photography for journalistic purposes exemplifies the capture of time, the creation of an index of an historical moment to be put in the archives of social memory. Roland Barthes refers to this explicit historical message as the "obvious meaning", a force of *studium*[2] that is contained in the photo, and synthesized in the caption. For these historical images create pictorial captions for times past.

[1] Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken, 1986. Print.
[2] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang. 2010. Print

Yet the work of French photographer Eugene Atget (1857- 1927) provides an alternative to the singular images confined with obvious meaning. For in Atget's photographic exploration of Parisian streets there is a resonating potentiality stemming from an absence of the "event" which restrains most photos in time. Across his oeuvre, Atget mobilizes myriad stylistic techniques to portray this stillness, creating a collection of photographs in which Paris itself becomes a dynamic character. Implementing asymmetry, strong contrast of shape and color, soft focus, a vast depth of field and eye-level view, Atget's images stand not just as the chronicle of a city in the face of transformation, but as an experiment in perception torn between history and modernity. During his 30 year career Atget photographed nearly every facet of the city, from the remnants of Parisian aristocracy and decaying parks to new glass department stores and fashionable cafés utilizing photographic perspective as diverse as his locations. Yet it is the very stillness, the lack of life, the absence in Atget's photographs which animate the images. The photos strike the viewer, there is a *punctum*[3] in the absence which engages the viewer of Atget's work. This stillness (or, still life), rather than capturing a single instant locked in time, creates a image that moves across time, constructing its own temporality. Atget frees his pictures from photography's conventional reliance upon the caption as the images themselves take life.

By examining the formal elements of Atget's Parisian street scenes in conjunction with Benjamin's and Barthes' theories of photography and the image, a conception of photography emerges that liberates the camera from the restrictive role of capturing time. Atget's images create an aesthetic experience which combats modernity's commoditization of time, conveying the energy of the masses while evoking the response of an individual. As opposed to the

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[3] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

arresting of a "decisive moment"[4] by photojournalists such as Cartier-Bresson, Atget's images

portray the possibility of photography to craft a unique perspective of time. This sense of time

lives within the viewer, making the image move through history as opposed to being locked in it.

And the animating, creative power of stillness in Atget's photographs derives from the infinite

potentiality of absence.

Eugène Atget's early life remains as enigmatic and intriguing as his photography. Born

into a working class family near Bordeaux in 1857, he was orphaned at age 5 before working at

sea. Fixated with the theatre, Atget entered the Paris Conservatoire d'art dramatique in 1879, but

was forced to abandon his studies to fulfill his mandatory military service. Atget continued to

pursue his career as an actor, but was unable to find work and gave up acting in 1887. Despite

his failed attempts at an acting career, theatricality remains a crucial element in Atget's portrayal

of the city. Experimenting with both painting and photography, Atget's first photographic prints

are dated to 1888. Two years later, he opened a small commercial photography studio in Paris,

with a sign which read "Documents for Artists"[5].

On his business card, Atget detailed his specialties as "landscapes, animals, flowers,

monuments, documents, foreground studies for artists, reproductions of paintings"[6]. In a period

where portraiture was still the predominate market for photography, Atget focused on

mechanically reproducing the work of art. A failed actor and painter, he was adamant that his

images were mere "documents". After eight years of specialized photography for artists, Atget

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[4] Cartier-Bresson, Henri, and E. Tériade. *The Decisive Moment;*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952. Print.
[5] Atget, Eugène, and Berenice Abbott. *The World of Atget,*. New York: Horizon, 1964. Print.
[6] Atget, Eugène, and Berenice Abbott. *The World of Atget*

commenced his documentation of Old Paris in the midst of modernity. For centuries, Paris was the location of violent revolts, yet it was at the turn of the 19th century that it underwent its most revolutionary and unprecedented cultural transformation. Modern construction of glass and steel clashed with the historical sites of Old Paris as architecture for the masses began to overtake the luxury of French aristocracy. Yet Parisian tradition was not entirely abandoned, as projects arose to restore landmarks associated with opulence and scholars, libraries, and archives sought to chronicle the historical remnants of Old Paris. This cultural tension is embodied in the simultaneous construction of the Tour Eiffel and the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur, a phallic steel testament to modernity and a marble Romano-Byzantine monument to Catholic nationalism battling over the Parisian sky[7].

From the subject matter and style to the technical means of developing the image, Atget's photographs are engrained in the Parisian milieu of cultural conflict. Working alone, Atget composed over 10,000 negatives and 25,000 prints in his small studio. Each negative was pragmatically catalogued, not by location or date but rather by theme. His camera was set on everything from antique door knockers to cabarets, and his expanded field of patrons included private art collectors, contemporary artists (prominently Man Ray and Bernice Abbott), amateur scholars and the French government (the government purchased 2,600 negatives at Atget's insistence[8]). Just as the very texture of cities was augmenting, so too was photographic technology changing how images were captured.

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[7] Newman, Karen. *Cultural Capitals: Early Modern London and Paris*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2009. Print

[8] A detailed biography of Atget is crafted in the first volume of an extensive four volume work titled "The Work of Atget", edited by Szarkowski and Hambourg and published by the Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

Less than a hundred years since photography's development, smaller and less expensive cameras emerged which greatly shortened the exposure time of an image. Coupled with the invention of more stable gelatin silver prints, photography was leaving the professional studio and becoming accessible to amateurism. For the first time, one could affordably take a "snapshot" without any photographic training. Yet for his entire career, Atget persisted to use outdated photographic technology (his camera and printing technique were obsolete even when he opened his studio). Using a simple wooden camera and tripod, the apparatus consisted of two panels, the first panel containing the optical lens and the rear panel housing ground glass for focusing and an 8- x 10-inch glass plate negative. The panels were connected by a light-tight bellows which could be used to adjust the distance between the lens and the negative, effectively altering the focal point. The entire camera (and photographer) was covered in a black cloth, and all adjustments (including adding the photographic plate and removing the shutter) had to be done by hand. The equipment weighed up to 30 pounds and required an image to be exposed over several seconds, even in sunlight, ensuring that each photograph was a carefully staged process. Each negative was then developed by hand, using a method of direct contact printing on unstable albumen silver paper which resulted in final prints of extraordinary detail the same size as the negative (8"x10"). Given the labor involved to compose a single image, the scope and ambition of Atget's project is perhaps only rivaled by Albert Kahn's "Archive of the Planet"[9]. Yet unlike Kahn's extensive archive, each of Atget's images tells its own story. Each image creates a unique world within yet separate from the bustle of modern Paris.

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[9] Paula Amad produces an illuminating and far-reaching analysis of Kahn's extensive project in her book *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de La Planete* (2010). Kahn's project presents an interesting combination of Atget's stillness with the captured historical detail in photojournalism.

Atget exemplifies this unique juxtaposition of worlds in his early photography of the heart of Paris, particularly the exemplary image of the "Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande, 47 rue Vielle-du-Temple" (1900)[10]. Even amongst the aristocratic quartier of the Marais, the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande stands as a marvel of Parisian wealth and culture. The grand entranceway's classical stone and wood reliefs were crafted by sculptor Thomas Regnaudin (1622-1706) (who created many of the works in the gardens of Versailles), and the building was once occupied by polemical author Pierre-Augstin Caron de Beaumarchais[11]. Upon initial viewing, Atget's image appears a tradition archival document of a historic location. Yet the image's compositional elements begin to unsettle the viewer, interrupting the coherent interpretation of the picture and animating mundane details into a rich interaction of opposing realities. Most strikingly, Atget ignores the amateuristic photographic drive towards symmetry and instead displays the doorway from an eye-level angle while cropping off the top of the crowning sculpture. This technique simultaneously portrays a lack of balance or purity while refusing to memorialize the structure's grandeur. In the right of the image, one discovers a small unadorned doorway, with an inconspicuous shop sign advertising a machine to construct buttonholes. Atget's photographic method yields a high color contrast, accentuating the grime and decay attacking the once grandiose façade. The doorway itself continues this disparity, standing as both a barrier and a threshold. Heavily ornamented, the entrance once stood as a frontier between social classes, and yet the open door suggestions a breach to this once unbreakable barricade. Just as Benjamin will later recognize of the Parisian *passages* in his expansive "Arcades Project"[12], this single doorway marks the distortion of boundaries as the vulgar exterior of the masses penetrates into the arcane interior of aristocracy. And all of these

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[10] See Appendix A

[11] The mansion's history is chronicled in Henri Veyrier's 1974 publication *Le Marais.*

[12] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

compositional and thematic contradictions operate under the omnipresent yet unassuming element of the photo: the lack of human presence in the midst of a busy metropolitan street. The life-less image transforms into a stage in which the contrasting elements act out a constant drama of conflict and tension.

Through this synthesis of subtle contrasts the image vibrates, and takes life. It is in this tension between modernity and history (as well as tradition's grandeur and decay), the encroachment of the exterior upon the interior, and most powerfully the absence of life where the punctum resides. During his analysis of photographs in *Camera Lucida,* Barthes describes the punctum as a "sting, speck, cut, little hole" which both "bruises" and "is poignant" to the viewer. One cannot actively seek the punctum in an image, but instead it "is an element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces" the audience. Contrasting the punctum is the studium, the factual details of an image which interests the viewer as "political testimony" or "good historical scenes"[13]. Photographs composed of studium create a coherent, unified message with which the viewer can interact on a cultural plane of "polite interest". Punctum, however, lashes out of the image, shattering the mundane lucidity of studium and engendering a trauma upon the viewer. At first, Atget's photograph hides behind the elements of studium. Although the viewer may notice the antiquity of the building (even in Atget's period) or the grace of the sculpture, these specific facts rapidly fade under the force of the punctum. The studium may "shout" at the viewer but it lacks the power to "wound" him[14], and it is this wound which perseveres with the audience. As Barthes describes, this punctum is constructed of "partial objects"; details which constantly evade the grasp and resist analysis. Punctum in a photograph is like one's reflection in a deep lake: if one attempts to seize the image it disappears, only to

[13] Barthes, *Camera Lucida* pg 26-29

[14] Barthes equates *punctum* with wound, referring back to the Latin etymology of the word.

rematerialize when the viewer steps back. Just as with the water-reflection, the punctum remains elusive on the surface but covers an infinite, unfathomable depth.

Atget's extraordinary ability to strike the viewer with his images continued throughout his career and across subject matter. Two decades after photographing the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande, Atget felt he had exhausted his exploration of the Marais and concentrated on various locations across Paris. As modern districts rapidly usurped historic neighborhoods, Atget shifted his lens away from the anachronistic tension of Old Paris and focused on photographing a burgeoning modernity. For the first time in his career, Atget overcame his resistance to the dominance of modernity and let the monuments of a new Paris take over the frame. A quintessential illustration of Atget's later style is his 1925 photograph "Le Dôme, boulevard Montparnasse". As with his images of Parisian aristocracy and history, the photograph contains elements of specific historical interest. The 1920's saw the arrival of a new intellectual and artistic culture to Paris, and Le Dôme was a fashionable hub for budding bohemians (especially Anglo-Americans). One also notices the Haussmann style apartment building presiding over the café which leads out upon a grand boulevard. These elements are concrete and discernable and yet form nothing but the "obvious meaning"[15] of the photo; they are dependent upon a relation to an outside language (through the form of a caption or prior background knowledge) to bestow them with significance in the image. However, the image

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[15] The term "obvious meaning" is taken from Barthes essay "The Third Meaning", reprinted in the collection *Image Music Text*. Barthes contrasts "obvious meaning with "obtuse meaning", which is initially hidden in the image.

vibrates[16] with punctum and thus disturbs the viewer's gaze, forcing them to move through the picture.

The underexposed right-hand foreground masks the boundary of the café as the structure thrusts out from the darkness of the city. With the atmospheric perspective and soft focus (created by an extended exposure time) Le Dôme fades into a rainy Parisian morning, slipping into an abyss of light. With contrast of the bold silhouettes of the trees, the viewer is deprived a an accurate sense of depth perception and thus café appears to continue infinitely and ethereally into a modern void. Human figures are veiled in front of the café, faceless and blurred. They sit as specters looking out upon the boulevard for a city crowd that isn't there. Turned away from the camera, the chairs refuse invitation to the viewer to sit and interact with the scene. One is unable to grasp the image as a coherent whole and yet cannot escape its punctum. The entire image remains in a state of purgatory; the empty chairs, faded people, and the Haussmann boulevard are all waiting for an event that never occurred, the contingent that was never realized. It is the stillness within the photo, the very lack of an event which creates this movement, striking the viewer and breaking free from the captured moment to move through time.

Atget's deceptively still and historic images are contrasted by the arresting action of photojournalism, exemplified in the oeuvre of French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004). Cartier-Bresson is often heralded as the seminal modern photojournalist, implementing a style of "street photography" to capture an image of events as they unfold. Similar to Atget, Cartier-Bresson had an early interest in painting but soon switched his

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[16] This vibration is a crucial component of modern art and is achieved through diverse mediums. Vibration is perhaps most profoundly experienced in the paintings of Dutchman Pieter Cornelis "Piet" Mondrian (1872-1944), in which the asymmetry prevents the eye from focusing and forces a constant movement of the viewer's gaze. Daniel Herwitz succinctly summarizes this phenomenon in *Making Theory/Constructing Art* on page 122: "The primary thing a Mondrian abstraction expresses is its perfected equilibrium, poised between dynamic vibration and total stillness of abstract part elements.

professional interests to photography. Yet Cartier-Bresson embraced the speed and convenience

which modern photography technology presented and utilized a highly portable 35mm film

camera (almost exclusively a Leica) with a fixed 50mm lens[17]. Such unobtrusive equipment

allowed Cartier-Bresson to work in a crowd (often without the attention of his subject), moving

rapidly and capturing images "on the run"[18]. Cartier-Bresson valued anonymity during his work,

refusing to shoot with a flash and covering his metallic silver cameras with matte black tape.

Thus, Cartier-Bresson was able to achieve an intimate distance with his subject, moving with the

action of the event and capturing what he deemed as the "decisive moment". Cartier-Bresson

described this decisive moment during a 1957 interview with the Washington Post.

"Photography is not like painting", he avows. "There is a creative fraction of a second when you

are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you,

and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the

photographer is creative. Oop! The Moment! Once you miss it, it is gone forever."[19]

The flash of a bicycle across an alley, the backwards glance of a jubilant child, the kiss of

young lovers outside a café; Cartier-Bresson's photographs each contain a "moment". Yet these

frozen moments only serve to temporarily arrest the spectator, providing interest through their

studium. In one of Cartier-Bresson's most reproduced works, a portrait of the sculptor Alberto

Giacometti (1901-1966), the young Swiss sculptor is captured carrying a sculpture across his

studio. With the camera's focus dominated by a characteristic elongated bronze sculpture in the

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[17] Frank Van Riper (2002). *Talking photography: viewpoints on the art, craft and business*. Allworth Communications, Inc.

[18] The term is taken from the title of his 1952 collection of photographs, *Images à la sauvette*, often translated as "images on the run" or "stolen images". The English edition of the work was titled *The Decisive Moment*, coining a term that would be forever associated with Cartier-Bresson's photographic style.

[19] Reprinted in Cartier-Bresson's obituary in the Washington Post, 2004

foreground, Giacometti is blurred by movement. Yet even as he tries to avoid the camera's gaze,

Giacometti cannot escape entombment by Cartier-Bresson's modern apparatus. Giacometti's

untidy hair, downtrodden glance and dangling cigarette are captured by the camera as an element

of history. The photograph's movement may "shout" at the viewer, but there is nothing beyond

this obvious meaning of the moment. Action is captured, made immemorial; there is no vibration

across the photo and no resonance outside the instant. Photojournalistic images are visual

testaments to Braudel's *histoire événementielle* (history of events), but have no disguised or

obtuse meaning, no slow-burning (*longue durée*) significance through time[20]. There is nothing in

the images to wound the spectator as the meaning is already decided and detained upon the

moment of capture. The moment is decisive, but finite; it is arresting but not animating.

Barthes refers to these photos laden with studium as "unary". As with a unary

mathematical operation, there is only one input. The unary photography "emphatically

transforms 'reality' without doubling it, without making it vacillate...there is no duality, no

indirection, no disturbance". Unary photographs are "interrogative" (the effect of the temporary

and temporal interest of the studium), "passive", and "negative". News photographs are unary

because there "is no *punctum*: a certain shock…but no disturbance". The photographs are

"received (all at once)" as the spectator "glances through them" but there is no detail to interrupt

the viewing[21] [22]. Cartier-Bresson's images are transformative, but it is a reductive, unary

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[20] For an elucidating synthesis of Braudel's concepts of *histoire événementielle* and *longue durée*, refer to
Ian Morris' publication *Archaeology as Cultural History*, page 4. Morris writes: "[Braudel] criticized his
predecessor for concentrating on *l'histoire événementielle*, the doings of kings and diplomats, measured
in individual time. He suggested that the fundamental temporal level was geographical, the barely
perceptible rhythms of *la longue durée*, measured in centuries…"
[21] Barthes elaborates on the relationship between the studium, the unary image, and news photography on
pages 41-42 of *Camera Lucida*. The unary photography is also a photography defined by a system of
codes. Although the concept of the unary image is only developed in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes works with
the relationship between image and code throughout his career, most prominently in his essay "The
Photographic Message", reproduced in the collection *Image Music Text*. Barthes writes on page 28:

transformation. The viewer grasps the signification embedded in the photograph just as rapidly

as the camera shutter imprints an image. Once the shock (shout) of action dissipates, there is no

lasting tension to make the image vibrate, no duality to break up coherence and shatter the

restrictive boundary of the event. Philippe Arbaïzar of the Biblioteque Nationale de France

writes that Cartier-Bresson "improvised, incorporating the effects of chance and accident as he

went along"[23]. Although Cartier-Bresson's technique allowed him to be spontaneous and

animated while shooting, the final image is one of stasis. The unary photojournalistic image

takes the singular event as its subject yet destroys its singularity through the eradication of the

contingent. Modern life is the experience of contingency, a consistent bombardment of traumas

from external stimuli without knowing what will follow. Modernity's characteristic

phantasmagoria of objects, space, and time creates an incessant montage of images. And yet the

photojournalistic image (itself a product of both modern technology and society) reduces this

phantasmagoria into individual pieces of information by transforming the event itself into a

graspable commodity. Through the news photo time itself becomes an entity to be possessed;

there is no sense of what comes after or what came before. Instead, there is only the index of a

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"Thanks to its code of connotation the reading of the photograph is thus always historical; it depends on the reader's 'knowledge' just as though it were a matter of a real language…intelligible only if one has learned the signs".

[22] For a provocative reading of Barthes theory of the unary image, refer to Fred Moten's essay "Black Mo'nin'", published in the collection *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (ed. David Eng and David Kazanjian, 2003). Moten writes: "Barthes's turn from the vulgar, unary photography of the shout and toward the refined photography of the prick or wound is tied to an ontological questioning that is founded on the unreproducibility of a photograph and the theological veiling of the original interest of a theory of photographic signification".

[23] Cartier-Bresson, Henri, Philippe Arbaizar, and Jane Brenton. *Henri Cartier-Bresson: the Man, the Image and the World: a Retrospective*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003. Print.

presence, the blunt conveyance of an instant in (and of) history[24]. In Cartier-Bresson's unary

photojournalism, there is no lasting story, no life beyond captured (stolen) image.

It is in the face of this "glum desert"[25] of unary studium that Eugène Atget's images

provide an animating aesthetic. For Atget's photographs possess the paradoxical ability of

conveying the continent without restricting it and of displaying singularity without annihilating

it. In each of Atget's frames there is a perpetual montage; an intangible montage derived from

the punctum which animates the image and the viewer. This creation of montage is profound in

Atget's late photographs of shop windows, taken right before his death. Obstinately remaining

with the same ungainly equipment, the sickly Atget finally trained his lens on the prototypical

Parisian feature of modern urbanity, the department store, to produce what would become his

most venerated images. Dominating this thematic collection is the window and reflection, as in

the 1925 photograph "Magasin, Avenue des Gobelins". Unlike Atget's other images, the

spectator is immediately struck by humanoid figures. Yet the gaze is rapidly shattered and

unfocused; the eye is unable to grasp a comfortable focal point as the viewer's sight is impeded

by glass (in fact, two layers of glass including the invisible presence of the lens). The figures

which shout at the viewer are inanimate mannequins in the simulacra of motion. It is not just the

capture of an action which will never continue (as with Cartier-Bresson's eternally frozen

Giacometti), but a movement which never began. Prices accompany the woman, forcing them

into an economy of commodity and thus into the phantasmagoria of modernity (similar to the

prostitutes in the famed Parisian brothels, another frequent subject for Atget). And yet another

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[24] The political relationship between news photographs and the creation of history (especially including a reading of Bergson and Braudels' theories) merits greater analysis than is possible in this setting. However it is significant to note that the archiving of these unary images is the foremost method constructing a sense of *histoire événementielle*. It is these frozen images that provides an "obvious" timeline of history.

[25] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pg 21

image is super imposed upon the fake plastic women; in the reflection of the store window one sees the spectral traces of old Paris[26]. The image is composed of two layers, yet each element is a replica of reality, a trace of the world substituting human life. Contrasting the coherent, static figures of unary photographs, this vacillating image animates the inanimate (instead of preserving the once living) as reality and reflection become indistinguishable.

It is this montage of punctum, this vibration of stillness, which animates the spectator. From photographs of aristocratic mansions to artistic cafés and chic department stores, the absence of incidence in Atget's work gives the images the potential for life. Atget did not steal images on the run or capture the "decisive moment". Instead, his carefully composed images create the stage for a perpetual play (the setting for an action which is absent). For the contingent is never determined, never arrested in Atget's images. There is no defining event, no index of historical "presence". In place of information there is tension, movement, and life. The spectator is always left on the verge of action, always vulnerable to the contingent. Atget's punctum is Derrida's *différance*[27]. It is neither a theory nor word, but the "infinite redoubling of a repetition of differences"[28], a structure of supplementarity portraying a singular presence without negating it. This *différance* "carries with it an unlimited power of perversion and subversion"[29], the power to resonate beyond the text. Instead of attempting to bear witness[30] to a presence or event,

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[26] This structure in the background was once a renowned textile mill, producing world renowned tapestries commissioned by Louis XIV in 1662, heightening the contrast within the image.

[27] Niall Lucy's *A Derrida Dictionary* provides a concise definition of Derrida's enigmatic term. As Lucy elaborates, *différance* is a force of movement, a vacillation between contrasts. This resonates in Atget's photographs through the tension between conflicting pairs such as interior and exterior, modernity and history, wealth and poverty.

[28] Wood, David O., and Robert Bernasconi. *Derrida and Différance*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988. Print. see especially pg 42

[29] Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978. Print.

[30] For an insightful analysis of the function of "bearing witness", refer to Derrida's essay "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing", collected in *Sovereignties in Question*. The interrelation between bearing witness, evidence, and the image is complex, and warrants further consideration in a different context.

Atget's images allow the viewer to craft their own testimony of the contingent. The images are like Winkelmann's Belvedere Torso, creating a responsibility to respond by filling in the absence. Benjamin was accurate when he compared Atget's photographs to deserted "scenes of crime"[31], but not because the images "establish evidence". Atget's work, rather, is the scene of crime because there is an infinite potentiality as to what occurred. The abandoned scenes provide no definite proof or index of an event, but instead create an open story. Overtaken by the punctum of absence, even the details of studium transcend their restrictive role and enter the cast of characters. For the movement of stillness in Atget's photography is not unary and finite information, but rather an interruption, a break, a *punctum.* As Benjamin writes of proper stories, "it is left up to [the reader] to interpret the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks". Through his camera Atget provides the spectator with the canvas to produce his own story while organizing the smallest details in an infinite arrangement to fill the absence in the photograph. Atget's photography provides an aesthetic approach which maintains the singularity of an event and the energy of the contingent. This aesthetic of absence allows the spectator to construct their own story through time; it is an aesthetic in which the image detaches itself from the finite moment and produces the "stories never told"[32].

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[31] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", pg 226

[32] As Godard said of his own extensive cinematic montage project, *Histoire(s) du Cinéma.*
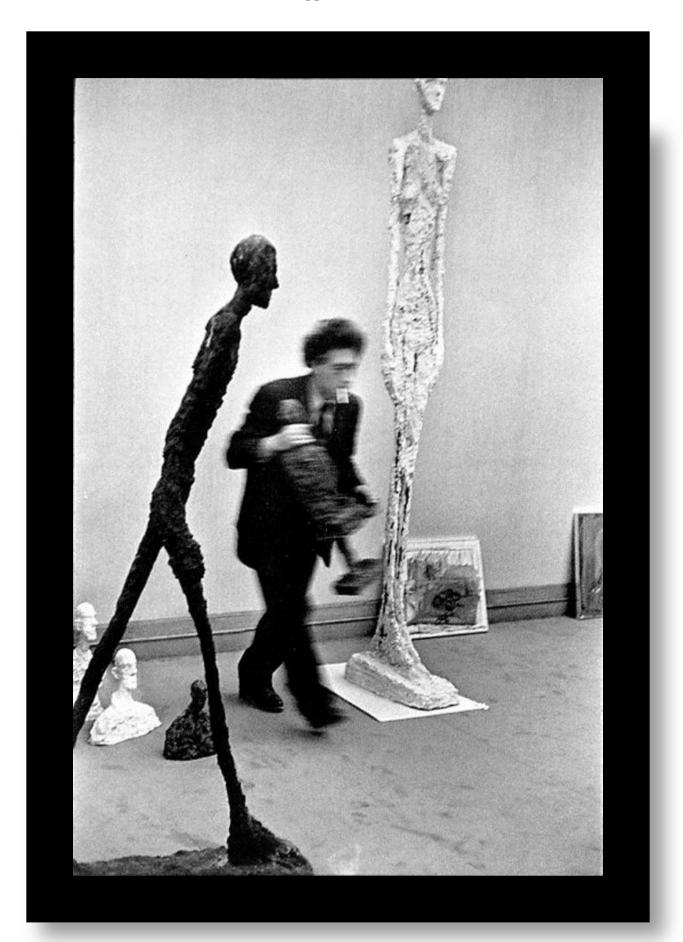
Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D