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CHAPTER THREE

Time and the Everyday

Sleep

The beginning of *Rose Hobart*: cut straight into a scene of a crowd looking upwards, as if at the sky, many of them holding something up to their eyes – black spectacles, goggles, or binoculars most likely. The colour of the image is striking – a deep night-time blue tint, almost purple. Upbeat, cheerful, exotica plays on the soundtrack. This shot is already gone before we can resolve the nature of its crowded scene. Next we see a woman in a trench coat – whom we may or may not know as the actress Rose Hobart, here playing the role of Linda Randolph – being taken by the arm, genteelly but forcefully by a man in the robes of an oriental nobleman. As he begins to lead her out of frame-right the image also begins to fade to black. We are less than 10 seconds into the film, and already we have had two shots with different locations and characters, and a fade-to-black that marks the end of something. As we know there must be more, it also marks the approaching void before something else. The blackness changes tone (the clue that a crude cut has occurred) and a new image, of the same deep blue tint, begins to fade in. A night-time jungle scene (and a conventional establishing shot), so dark that it is difficult to tell whether it is an interior or an exterior, outside on the jungle floor or inside a jungle palace (though the foliage on the left suggests that we are likely outside) – in the background is an illuminated cube, a square grass hut, its open sides shrouded in mosquito netting, radiating luminescence, an island of light in the undefined dark, an island that might as well be adrift in the void between shots.

The camera begins to move, tracking in toward the hut, with the somewhat shaky, snaking approach of an animal, swerving slightly to the left around an obstacle and then rising up from the jungle floor for a better view. A dissolve brings us directly to the gauzy exterior of the hut. This dissolve was probably originally a functional time-saver, a matter of utility, completing the forward approach of the camera beyond the point where the dolly tracks could not go, linking two camera trajectories, but here it is also a passage through film, through virtual veils of celluloid, thin flat sheathes of photographic frames, toward the veiled cube of Rose's sleeping pod. The

camera moves forward again until the translucent veiling fills the frame and finally pauses briefly to (voyeuristically) view the sleeping figure inside (fig. 3.1). A cut to a close-up of a candle-flame interrupts this progress. Its position in the sequence leads to the impression that it holds some significance in relation to the contents of the hut, the peaceful undulation and constancy of the flame echoing the sleeping body within.

We watch as Rose's eyes open, as she slowly moves from sleep to wakefulness. Unhurried, she looks around, sits up, swings her legs to the floor. Her curious glances upwards and around are important, as they convey the sense of a body unworried by its world, eager to encounter and inhabit it. As Jean Luc Nancy observes in *The Fall of Sleep*, the state between sleep and consciousness, leaving dream and entering wakefulness, is one in which the subject briefly accesses a sense of their own awareness, but without quite knowing what they are aware of yet.¹ 'The time of wondering whether I'm dreaming or waking is the time most suited for an awareness that knows itself without knowing what it knows by knowing itself thus'.² This state has the effect of resetting a subjecthood, or at least it would if it

Figure 3.1 *Rose Hobart* (1936)

were not so temporary. It is, perhaps, a kind of temporary and blissful amnesia. However, as Rose rises from her bed and ventures through the veils and out into the exotic world of *Rose Hobart*, we may ask if she has passed through this state or if it has in fact been prolonged. We may also ask whether she is waking *from* a dream, or waking *into* a dream.

In *Jack's Dream* (c. 1938–70) too, the puppet dog, Jack, dozes by a fireplace in a fairytale castle (fig. 3.2). An intercut shot lasting ten seconds suggests an odd connection – a dog dreaming of a sinking ship (fig. 3.3). Jack raises his head, with drooping eyelids, still in the embrace of sleep, and moves it left and right, not unlike the routine we saw Rose perform. On the soundtrack (added by Larry Jordan in 1970 according to Cornell's instructions) we hear the subdued whines of an animal, reminiscent of the sounds made by dreaming dogs. We cut back to the ship – Jack is obviously suspended between wakefulness and dream, as Rose is. Next, a series of shots of seahorses, reminiscent of Jean Painlevé's Surrealist nature film *The Sea Horse* (1934), continuing the dream-associations of the sea and the fantastic. However, the main body of the dream seems to take place within the very castle in which Jack sleeps. A dragon chases a princess (or perhaps a queen – all we know is she wears a crown), and Jack attempts to save her. The shot immediately preceding the image of dozing Jack is of two puppet-humans washing dishes in a vast washtub. Bubbles encroach from the bottom of the screen, pressing against the lens of the camera, obscuring what appears to be a point of view shot. The low camera height presents these puppets, one male and one female, as potential parent figures, and the gradually encroaching bubbles suggest a drowsy haziness – the opening of sleepy eyes onto a comfortable domestic scene.

Jack's Dream sees a frightful outside force enter and threaten the domestic space. Jack, the faithful dog, attempts to protect it and its inhabitants by chasing away the intruder. But his progress is blocked or retarded at several points (he views the scene through a window, a treacherous chair falls over) – evoking the familiar dream sensation of impossibly heavy feet, and suddenly multiplying obstructions.

Likewise in *The Children's Party* (1940s – completed in 1968 by Larry Jordan, largely according to Cornell's instructions), a still image of a sleeping girl bisects the work. This film is part of a trilogy that also includes *The Midnight Party* and *Cotillion* (1940s – both completed by Larry Jordan in 1968 and 1969 respectively), a vaudeville-like collage of incidents and

Figure 3.2 *Jack's Dream* (c. 1938)

Figure 3.3 *Jack's Dream* (c. 1938)

images that make up an extravagant amusement for children. *The Children's Party* seems to function as a kind of remix of the previous two films in the trilogy. As P. Adams Sitney writes, 'the frozen image of a sleeping girl with her doll suggests that it is a dream in which elements from the imaginary parties reappear in new and stranger contexts'.³

Dream

One of those terms that writers often use to describe Cornell's work, and in particular *Rose Hobart*, is 'oneiric', and of those terms so regularly invoked it is probably the most useful, though it too is part of the critical apparatus for consigning difficult work (that is, work lacking sufficient legibility, or a sufficient component of legible substance) to the back cupboard of the lauded unspeakable. Nevertheless, it gets us some way toward articulating, and at the very least conveying, the sense of what *Rose Hobart*, and the rest of Cornell's film work, is like. *Rose Hobart* is, on at least some level, *like* a dream. This connection also supports the claims for Cornell as a Surrealist, often as *the* American Surrealist, as so much of the European Surrealist work was explicitly borne out of dreams, drew upon dream imagery, or adhered to a dream logic. *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel and Dalí, 1929), the great emblematic Surrealist film, could claim all three. Yet Cornell sat uneasily with the Surrealists. He was certainly interested in them, and his early paper collages are the most heavily Surrealism-influenced of all his work. In this respect one might suggest that, though he had been familiar with contemporary art, and particularly nineteenth century French painting, since his youth, it was his encounter with Surrealism that activated the artist in Cornell. However, he found it difficult to commit to the strong sexuality and underlying chaos of the movement, and later distanced himself from it, asserting that he did not fit into the movement, that his work lay somewhere outside of it. As Dawn Ades puts it, he was somewhat 'alarmed at the "black" side of its magic'.⁴

What I would like to propose in this section, therefore, is that it was as much the poetry of sleep that attracted Cornell, as it was the poetry of dream. He was drawn to the banality of sleep, its literal and necessary everydayness, and the privileged and peculiar interiority and subjectivity afforded by the sleep state. This distinction aids in differentiating Cornell's work from that of the Surrealists, whilst also recognizing the similarities and helping to

understand the overlap. It offers a refinement of that space that is often a dead-end for critical discussion – the point at which ‘dream-logic’ is invoked and little more can be said beyond an itemizing of dream symbols. It will become clear that Cornell was more interested in the temporality of dreams, as a subdomain of sleep, where the mind is at rest and free to play, than in dream logic as a tool for disruption. If the Surrealists hoped to use dreams as a means to disrupt the everyday, then I hope to show that Cornell harboured a utopian desire to use dreamtime as a starting point for a re-appraisal of the everyday.

Cornell versus Surrealism

So what elements drew Cornell to Surrealism? First of all there is, quite simply, the historical correspondence between the golden age of Surrealism in the 1930s, and Cornell entering his thirties and engaging more concertedly with the notion that he could be an artist. This is compounded by the impact of the movement on the New York art world, and the frequent visits of many Dada and Surrealist artists to the city throughout the first half of the century.

The early Surrealist collage works obviously made a great impression on Cornell, who had not yet exhibited anything by the time he encountered the work of Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico and Salvador Dalí. His first documented and exhibited works are meticulously crafted paper collages that very clearly betray the influence of Surrealism, with their visual incongruities and irrational juxtapositions, their seamless marriage of contradictory scale and perspective in order to construct the impossible on the plane of the virtual. Deborah Solomon suggests that, ‘the exact chronology of events may never be known, but it is clear that no “ism” would have as great and enduring an influence on Cornell as Surrealism, which provided the context in which he first started making art’.⁵ The most indicative works from this period are *Untitled (Schooner)* (1931) and *Untitled (The Pulse of Fashion)* (1931). Both collages have three main juxtaposed elements: a mechanical subject (in the former a ship, in the latter a sewing-machine), a sentient organic subject (a spider, a woman), and a vegetable subject (a rose, some sheaves of corn). I would argue that this reveals less about Cornell’s thematic concerns at this point than it does the routine way in which he learned from and adapted early Surrealist collage

style and practice. Indeed his style here conforms so firmly to the formal mode of early Surrealist collage that the influence begins to flow in the other direction. *Untitled (The Pulse of Fashion)* could be identified as a source for Oscar Dominguez's *Electrosexual Sewing Machine* of 1934 (with its own mannequin-like female body passing beneath the needle of the sewing-machine – though here the violent and sexual undertones become overtones), and more widely through its concise embodiment of the Comte de Lautréamont's dictum (famously taken up as a Surrealist battle-cry): 'beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella!'⁶

Yet Cornell would soon move away from this meticulous pictorial Surrealism. What was at first a rather straightforward borrowing of form and style became a much looser distribution of common practice and sensibility. Certain core, shared interests obtained even after the initial phase of imitation had ended. As Ades suggests, Cornell was put off by the more lurid and darker subject matter of Ernst and the rest, and at several points in his diaries, letters to curators, and in conversation with others such as Levy he expressed anxiety about being associated with them, and about the encroaching darkness in his own work.

To gloss the accepted account of Surrealist methods and aims; they used the disruption of the familiar through automatic expression, incongruity, shock and the courting of obscenity in order to provoke the eruption of unconscious recognition. At root this consisted of the peeling away of convention in order to reveal an unfiltered view of the world, psyche, and experience. Yet, in the predominant discourse around the history of Surrealism, it is fundamentally seen and articulated as the act of replacing one symbolic system with a second, more true, symbolic system.

Just as for Freud dreams were the royal road to the unconscious, they were a primary source and instrument for the Surrealists, a portal to revelation and provocation. It is perhaps this focus on automatism and dream imagery that has been taken up as a folding and unfolding of systems of language and symbol, and has maintained the perception that the surreal was fundamentally an alternate way of reading the world, but one that was predominantly subjective, self-centred and even solipsistic.

However, according to Juan Suárez, there was a great deal more to Surrealist thought and practice than the excavation of the unconscious through non sequitur and automatism. He asserts that: 'the Surrealists

themselves, and most historians and critics of the movement, have tended to emphasize the subjective dimension of notions like unconsciousness, automatism, surreality, and the image and to slight their application to the knowledge of the “objective” world. In doing so they have blunted the epistemological dimension of Surrealism. They relocate its practice within the familiar realm of expressive, subject-centred aesthetics, and they confine the movement’s revolutionary potential to an individualized, interiorized form of subversion difficult to articulate with collective social practice’.⁷

Suárez suggests that there is in fact a profound connection to be made between the Surrealists’ esteem for everyday objects and an aesthetic that could be, in contrast with the prevailing view, socially engaged, outward-facing, and in no way solipsistic. One type of Surrealist practice consisted in the selection and presentation of found objects, in singular form or more often in surprising collages, bearing an obvious connection to Cornell’s shadow boxes. The concept of the ‘Surrealist object’, as theorized by both Dalí⁸ and André Breton⁹, is read by many as yet another strategy for stirring up unconscious resonance, a way of using the external world as surreal stimulus, and therefore an extension of the subjective self into the external world of things.

However, as Suárez points out, ‘the surrealist object often resists symbolization altogether; it is a grimace of material reality that defies attempts to make it yield sense. In this respect, it is always already social and communal, the raw material of the public sphere at its most literal: the spaces, commodities, and practices that regiment public life, not as messages to be decoded but as obdurate lumps of matter we brush against in our daily doings’.¹⁰

It is with this concern for the external world of things, and this implicit interest in the social and the material, that we find the clue that allows us to make the connection between Cornell, sleep and the Surrealists. It is clear that Cornell was infatuated with the lives of objects, with the histories that can be read from them, the sense of pastness imbued in the cultural detritus of a Victorian dream-realm, a somewhat falsified ballet-obsessed epoch, or an idealized realm of cinema heroines (for instance), and the daily fantasies written onto the trinkets and accoutrements of the contemporary banal. His practice consisted of selecting objects from the collection that he accrued while on his daily travels around the environs of New York City, plucking them from the social-material ether as it were, and re-presenting them in a

form that emphasized their material shape (the thing's *thing-ness*), their social usability (though the intended and authorized use was only one among many), and their place within a romantic worldview (which consisted in an imagined cascade of potential worlds). His practice excavated the object's potential for expressive meaning rather than the viewing subject's unconscious. And in this way the Cornellian object bears a familial resemblance to the Surrealist object, whilst also maintaining a distinctive development, address and purpose.

Deborah Solomon also points out that, amongst the reasons for Cornell's affiliation with the Surrealists, paramount is the shared interest in 'humble non-art images and objects'.¹¹ Their interests converged not only on the everyday, but also on the products of popular culture as the efflorescence of public fantasy, the gaudy dreams that inhabit urban space (that which is more densely packed with dreams than the rural, which is a space in which fantasies are more sparse and therefore are allowed more space to dwell, graze and become fat).

Both Solomon and Suárez emphasize the chronological significance of Surrealism and Dada for Cornell the artist. For Solomon, without the groundbreaking advent of the Readymade and of Surrealist collage, Cornell would just have been 'another loner in Queens who happened to have a lot of books and oddments lying around his house'.¹² And for Suárez, Cornell lacked the necessary artistic talent to do anything but collect and collage objects. However, this is to lapse back into the notion of Cornell the outsider artist, the naive. It places Cornell in the position of being an effect of history, rather than a determining subject in his own right. It places him on a tier below Duchamp and Dalí, who were capable of breaking and reforming conventions (and were also skilled painters; they were able to successfully play by the rules before they willfully subverted them). I would prefer to turn this equation on its head, and see Cornell as the engaged and active rule-breaker and history-maker. Collage work and box-making were not his only choices because he could not paint, and similarly found footage film-making and proxy cinematography were not his only choices because he lacked the traditional skills of a film-maker. For one thing, Cornell certainly cannot be said to have lacked craft or artistic talent – this would be to ignore his masterful finishing work on his collages and boxes, both of which required extremely advanced skills. And secondly, it should be clear that he actively ploughed his own furrow into the unknown of twentieth century art,

designing his own oblique mode and aesthetic, rather than simply adopting the more accessible practices of Duchamp and the Surrealists.

Cornell never left New York, but he nevertheless voyaged through the everyday, in a city that was as jam-packed with culture and fantasy as any space could be. New York also offered a privileged hunting ground for evidence of the past jutting into the present, for history exuded through the pores of the concrete carapaces of urban space. He wrote that his dream of 'complete happiness' consisted in being 'plunged into a world in which every triviality becomes imbued with significance'.¹³ As I have already mentioned, the necessary adjunct to Cornell's collage practice was his walking practice. In this way he moved beyond the Surrealists and presaged the subversive strategies of the Situationists, whose heyday in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with Cornell's second phase of film-making, when he, aided by several assistants such as Stan Brakhage, Larry Jordan and Rudy Burckhardt, shot his own footage of New York City.

Cornell the Flâneur

Cornell forms a link between the Romantic, impressionist, visionary wanderer of the nineteenth century – the flâneur – and the Situationist psychogeographer, between entrancement and absorption in the spectacle of urban space and life, and the strategic subversion of the authorized usage of space via the *dérive*. In fact, the Situationist critique of the Surrealists focused upon the paucity of the self-centred model of unconscious exploration, the ultimate redundancy of this method, and the perceived silliness and lightweight nature of much Surrealist production. They chose to re-orient a similarly radical activity toward the more explicit exploration and interrogation of social organization, urban space, public spectacle, and the shape of everyday life in the terrain of a capitalist-consumerist society.

Cornell, of course, was profoundly influenced by the originators of the classic model of the flâneur, such as de Nerval, Baudelaire, Appollinaire, and Rimbaud. So infatuated was Cornell with Nerval that Deborah Solomon asserts that he 'came to regard 1930s New York in much the same way that Nerval had seen Paris a century earlier, never knowing what random sight might suddenly prompt the flow of the dream into everyday life'.¹⁴ Let us therefore examine his own walking practice in respect of both the flâneur and the *dérive*. Rebecca Solnit, in her history of walking, writes: 'What

exactly a *flâneur* is has never been satisfactorily defined, but among all the versions of the *flâneur* as everything from a primeval slacker to a silent poet one thing remains constant: the image of an observant and solitary man strolling about Paris'.¹⁵ Cornell certainly seems to fit this model of an observant and solitary man, and the milieu is easily translated to that of New York City, but 'strolling' seems somehow inaccurate. For what Cornell is about is a more active, intensive voyaging process. Cornell is a collector, and his travels take the form of a search. In contrast, the classical *flâneur* is drawn along on his (as Solnit observes, the classical *flâneur* is invariably male) path by successive spectacles. The duration and length of the trip are not prescribed, nor is the path itself predetermined. The Situationist *dérive*, on the other hand employed a random principle (an upturned wine glass inscribing a circular diagram on a city map) in order to instigate and co-ordinate a perverse path through urban spaces whose capacity for surprise and non-instrumentalized experience had been eroded by overt civic management and covert cultural conditioning, in order to enhance its potential for the authorized production of consumption.

However, walking is, as Solnit describes, fundamentally an 'amateur act'.¹⁶ It is a slow and personally invested mode of transport. The pedestrian invests their own energy into walking, their time into the sluggish pace (in comparison to car, bus or subway), and often their intention into the decision to take to the footpath. Cornell, of course, used public transport to cover longer distances – getting in and out of Manhattan for instance. But his discoveries were usually made on foot. He walked the strand at Flushing, picking up shells and other debris (including, reputedly, at least one clay pipe), he traipsed around the warehouses of New Jersey, seeking and finding discarded film prints, he visited automats, libraries, bookshops, junk shops and antique shops in Manhattan, all of which became routine. He became a regular discoverer, noting the new arrivals in a well-trodden and familiar space. He voyaged through the unfamiliar familiar. The key attribute one must have in order to do this is a keen attentiveness to experience, a constantly rejuvenating attitude of openness, and the ability to see the new in the old.

Cornell's second phase of film-making was defined by the act of consecrating the everyday, by revealing, through shared attentiveness, the contours of everyday life, the mysterious resonances of apparently banal and unremarkable spaces. He trained a focused optic on the microscopic

surface of the city, lingering upon and mythologizing the *spot* rather than the neighbourhood, the ordinary and ignored rather than the spectacular and storied.

Many of the shots in these later films often seem to last too long; they lack obvious narrative motivation or focal activity. His 'slow cinema' precedes the contemporary movement¹⁷ by fifty years. *Angel* (1957), *Gnir Rednow* and *A Legend for Fountains* lack the austerity and monadic intensity of Warhol's *Empire* (Warhol, 1964) or *Blow Job* (Warhol, 1963), but, with characteristic empathy and reverence they create impressionistic documents of special durations and qualitatively distinct timespaces.

Gnir Rednow is a prime example of this attention to the lives of spaces. Under Cornell's direction, Stan Brakhage carried out the task of documenting the Third Venue Elevated Railway (or Third Avenue 'El') before it was demolished at the behest of a mixture of real estate interests and the advancing subway system, which replaced much of the overground railway. Cornell seemingly wished not just to document, but also to capture an impression of what it was like to ride the trains, and to inhabit the stations on the route. Shot on a bright day, the footage is less a comprehensive and thorough archival capturing than a stylized and poetic account, all shadows and pools of light, graphically contrasting stairway diagonals and sunbeams.

Brakhage produced his own version – *The Wonder Ring* (1955) – soon after shooting, but Cornell took his time with the footage, completing his version, entitled *Gnir Rednow* (the title of *Wonder Ring* backwards) in 1960. His version is a compendium of detail shots, many of which are in motion – panning at a slow steady pace from left to right or right to left, intercut with short sharp blasts of static shots invigorated by the rapid, blurred, horizontal motion of trains in and out of frame. The film has, therefore, a notable structural rhythm, unlike many of his earlier found footage works.

The film is in colour, shot in Kodachrome. Cornell focuses on rectangular panels of colour – stained glass windows in the station and window frames filled with light in the trains. Each little detail is a discovery. Framing and editing are used to highlight these details, to accentuate the deep shadows that frame and mount rich patches of colour. Each detail is a found image, an almost abstract confluence of light and shape, collected by the attentive flâneur.

Many of these elements can of course be found in Brakhage's version as well. After all, he shot the footage according to Cornell's instruction (how detailed an instruction we do not know). However, the popular idea that Cornell's version is just Brakhage's version reversed (a notion undoubtedly suggested by the conceptual promise of the title, and perpetuated by the likelihood that more people talk about the film than have actually taken the time to watch it, or indeed pay attention to it – a similar situation to that of *Rose Hobart's* conceptual reputation, which was discussed in the first chapter), has been shown to be erroneous by Mark Toscano, who, after studying the original prints of both films, asserts that they do not share a single shot.¹⁸ This suggests that there is truth to the story that Cornell used what was left over after Brakhage's edit to construct his own version, which plays more freely with the footage, applying more playful manipulations, and using some of the same techniques employed in *Rose Hobart* in order to disrupt legibility. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, the goal of this strategy was to re-create and induce the conditions of a kind of intuitive, attentive looking. *Gnir Rednow*, then, applies something of the same strategy in order to recreate and induce the conditions of a kind of attentive/intuitive wandering. Des O'Rawe writes: 'In its avoidance of any narrative beyond a sequence of images of/from the El and its environs, the camera fixes on frames and framing structures, on both where and what the passenger might see on their journey: to travel on the El was to be a cinema-goer as well as a commuter'.¹⁹

As Rebecca Solnit points out, a nineteenth century edition of the *Encyclopedie Larousse* (roughly contemporary with the emergent use of the term *flâneur*) defines the *flâneur* as 'a loiterer, a fritterer away of time'.²⁰ Cornell's work in *Gnir Rednow*, and, as we will see, in *Angel*, is toward a re-evaluation of time (and assumptions about what it is to fritter away time, and what it is to spend it). It is also a guideline for a re-distribution of value across urban space (that is, value accrued according to *where* it is perceived to be worth spending one's time, as well as values accrued according to the *speeds* of life moving through a space).

Real Time

The recent past has seen the invention and valorization of the concept of 'real time'. This term is used in a number of ways, in order to refer to a

number of different things. I would like to spend a few moments considering what is common to these usages, and what this indicates about the perceived value of different kinds of time relations.

‘Real-time’ in the context of the moving image arts is often used to describe a 1:1 correspondence between the pace and duration of a film or TV show and the time of the viewer. The TV show *24* (Fox, 2001–10) is a good example of this, as each episode purports to represent one hour of action sequentially extracted from a continuous twenty-four hour campaign to thwart a terrorist plot. *24* also usefully exemplifies one effective strategy for invigorating and intensifying the banality of real-time (i.e. introduce a terrorist plot). For, as we all know, the real-time of real-life is only sporadically interesting, whereas the flow of entertainment TV must do its best to be consistently interesting.

‘Real-time’ is more commonly used in contemporary parlance to describe the rapid accumulation and transmission of data about an object to an observer. The observer may also choose to interfere, executing a command that flows in the opposite direction, thereby instigating a real-time transaction. This model emerges from the world of international trading, where the loss or gain of a fraction of second can translate to the loss or gain of vast sums of money. In this context ‘real-time’ really means ‘fast time’ – the absence of lag and the minimization of processing time.

According to this scheme, the hot spots of real-time would be the global centres of trade – New York, London, Tokyo – where the latency of exchange has been refined to the greatest degree. The cold patches of negligible time would cover vast swathes of the planet, but would by no means be confined to the lands of the Third World (a concept that is no longer satisfactorily functional anyway). In fact, the primary distinctions that are now to be made are between the rural and the urban, between the more-connected and the less-connected (to the grid of global trade rather than the Internet per se, though this is one of the instruments of delivery, execution and facilitation), between the fast and the slow. The outsourcing of cheap labour means that the apparently secondary, though fundamental layer of manufacture and production is localized at sites littered around the former Third World, where the latency between instruction, execution and export is also vital. Here we see flares and freckles of real-time illuminating sites across the planet. And yet there are cold patches of negligible time in American states like Idaho, Utah, Montana . . .

David Harvey describes the geographical tension produced by late-capitalist progress:

The necessity for continuity in the geographical flows of money, goods and people, requires that all this diversity be woven together through efficient transport and communications systems. The resultant geography of production and consumption is deeply sensitive to the time and cost of traversing space. These times and costs have been much reduced through technological and organisational innovations and the falling cost of energy. The frictions of distance now play less and less of a restraining role in capitalism's geographical mobility. This does not mean, however, that geographical differences no longer matter. Precisely the opposite: highly mobile capital pays close attention to even slight local differences in costs because these yield higher profits.²¹

Twenty-first century capitalism simultaneously requires the centralization of products, services and consumers, and the dispersal of industry and production to zones geographically, culturally, temporally and legally distant from the zone of consumption (this is why the locally produced good has become a luxury rather than a commonplace). So, just as it homogenizes sites of consumption and trade across the world (the bright spots), partly through the acceleration of communication between them, it requires that there also be a large amount of darklands, under-connected or even disconnected spaces that move more slowly, cannot keep pace. These are the fertile lands of future exploitation, of capital-farming. Even as the onward rush of capital purports to be a progressive standardizing (and civilizing) force, it requires that there be difference, that there be under-privileged workforces (accepting often vastly lower wages), under-developed locales, and under-exploited natural resources. Harvey writes that the 'geographical landscape is likewise shaped by a perpetual tension between the economies of centralization, on the one hand, and the potentially higher profits to be had from decentralization and dispersal on the other'.²²

The pervasiveness and instantaneity of contemporary communication networks also promotes the perception that everything is connected, the sense that everything is known, that inequality and wrongdoing cannot

remain hidden – a connected world is a world in which difference is progressively exposed and eliminated. The sad truth is that the primary effect of the widespread implementation of this technological ideal is that it simply allows those in developed economies to ignore those on the outside more thoroughly, and with a clearer conscience. For, apart from the fact that many do not have anything like the same level of personal access to this global web (the fallacy of access), most Western English-speaking subjects will only ever access and engage with a limited portion of the Western English-speaking web, most of which is now colonized by old and new global corporations (the fallacy of the global community).

As already mentioned, Cornell himself was a confirmed city-dweller, who never once left the environs of New York City during the course of his life. However, he was no Manhattan socialite. He lived for most of his life in the family home in Flushing, a primarily working-class neighbourhood in the borough of Queens, with his mother and younger brother Robert, who suffered from cerebral palsy. Joseph and Robert shared an exceptionally close relationship, and it is perhaps not unwarranted to suggest that one of the strongest forces anchoring Cornell to his home and hometown was his devotion to caring for his brother, which he maintained until Robert's death in 1965, when Joseph was 61.

Cornell's life was profoundly local, though his locality was one of the great global centres of the twentieth century. From his position within the rapidly beating heart of the economic world his late-period films attempted to smooth out the striated space-time of the city. In Chapter Two we saw how Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the haptic applied to the separation of space into two categories: the smooth and the striated. Time too can be striated, split into grids and discreet categories, timelines, schedules and ETAs. In *Rose Hobart* we saw how Cornell effected a radical disruption of ingrained modes of representation and organization of image material. In his late-period film work we see him extending this disruptive function to ingrained modes of perception, interpretation, and interaction within the city space.

These films are dispatches from the front line, solemnly subversive and lightheartedly playful at the same time. His film work emerges parallel to the development of techno-modernity, of mass communications, and the changeover from the primacy of industry to the primacy of the market. This period is also marked by the development of a profound, idealistic belief in

the progressive power of science and technology, a belief that saw in science the keys to a utopian future, to the gradual elimination of illness, poverty and hunger, and to the promotion of harmony, plenitude, and productivity (it is, perhaps, not a coincidence that a shifting emphasis toward the promise of a technologized future coincided with the growth of market speculation). In the name of this progress, many patterns of work and speeds of life have gradually altered, as willing participants were encouraged to adapt to the new speeds that were offered as *improvements*, as ways of cutting out the useless and uninteresting, and cutting down on wastage (however, though we waste less time, we consequently produce ever more waste). As Paul Virilio describes it, 'this techno-science becomes, then, as mass technoculture, the agent not, as in the past, of the acceleration of history, but of the dizzying whirl of *the acceleration of reality* – and that to the detriment of all verisimilitude'.²³

Though he did not travel, Cornell clearly lived a life of the imagination that indulged a desire for the exotic, the anachronistic and the romantic. It connected him to a world beyond the city, yet also strove to be in tune with the immanence of the everyday. Cornell's fantasy life seems to, at its best, have been simultaneously escapist and pragmatic. Yet the intangible links that he forged with faraway places and peoples would find a strange apotheosis in the technology and ideology of globalization, which narrows the distances between people, goods and markets, while at the same time eroding long-held understandings of space and locality. The realization of instantaneous, intangible links across the world has damaged that sense of rootedness and familiarity that underlay Cornell's relationship with the everyday time and space of New York, a situation closely related to that which Virilio diagnoses in *The Information Bomb*:

Since all presence is presence only at a distance, the tele-presence of the era of the globalization of exchanges could only be established across the widest possible gap. This is a gap which now stretches to the other side of the world, from one edge to the other of present reality. But this is a meta-geophysical reality which strictly regulates the tele-continents of a virtual reality that monopolizes the greater part of the economic activity of the nations and, conversely, destroys cultures which are precisely situated in the space of the physics of the globe.

We are not seeing an ‘end of history’, but we are seeing an end of geography.²⁴

This ‘end of geography’ is not so much an extreme enhancement of the connectivity of all points on the globe, but rather a kind of global remission that facilitates a return to the pre-Columbian perception of a world with a centre, surrounded by an invisible and mysterious perimeter. Except that now the world has a hierarchical network of centres enshrouding the globe, and it is the interstitial spaces that are the mysterious unknown. These potentially worrying spaces are for the most part made safe by the fact that the market gives us (urban and suburban dwellers) permission to ignore it (the alien rurality and its people). Its expanses are traversed by concrete and tarmac arteries tuned for speed, pumping both products and consumers between clusters of the ‘real world’ and of ‘real-time’. In this sense transit time between centres is ideally faster than real time – the empty time of transit through inconsequential space is ideally reduced as much as is safely possible (high-speed trains would ideally be replaced by an intercity teleport system, avoiding the interstitial altogether). When the country is intentionally visited, it is as a site of recreation, a place to ‘get away from it all’ implicitly confirming that where ‘it’ is not, there is nothing. In limited circumstances this nothing may be desired (as a break from all of the something).

As we will presently see, this vision of the world and its networks of life and activity is inevitably bound up with contemporary visualizations of the world on screen and online. The speed and pervasiveness of these economic and mediatic networks are facilitated by digital broadband telephony and digital compression technologies. It is worth noting that digital compression technologies themselves emblematically manifest the ideals and ideology of which they are the primary carrier. In an interesting twist on Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that ‘the medium is the message’, this is a case where the messenger has begun to look like the message.

Frames, Morphing and Activity

The Lumière brothers’ actualities demonstrated that film could take a temporal sample from a world in duration. Their now famous single shot films of factory workers and trains served a documentary purpose in that they documented and preserved an image of things happening in a certain

place at a certain time. However, unlike still photography, which allowed a certain kind of investigative/contemplative exploration of an instant sampled from a continuum, the motion picture camera instituted a substantially different relationship between the viewer and the viewed. One could only watch the film for as long as it was being projected, and one watched the recorded events at a specified pace. The film has and had a prescribed duration, whereas the photograph has no duration of its own, only that duration in which it exists as an object. The film viewing experience, from the very beginning, placed one duration within another, folded one layer of temporality into another. Laura Mulvey demonstrates that the pausing, replaying, and chapter functions of the DVD reclaim this power from the film to some degree and give it back to the viewer,²⁵ thereby instituting a quiet revolution in the way that viewers relate to movies. The proliferation of video, and of ways of using video, is one of the key effects of the digital on the world of moving images in the twenty-first century. But, for the moment, I will limit my enquiry to the fundamental question of whether, and in what ways, DVD video and related digital compression technologies have altered the ontological and aesthetic dimensions of moving images. This approach conforms to what Jonathan Sterne describes as 'Format Theory',²⁶ which focuses on the discourses, cultural contexts and histories bound up in the development of media formats and standards.

Amidst much critical anxiety, there has been some work done that attempts to examine exactly how the use of digital video and effects has changed what moving images are and how they are experienced. A fundamental change to the temporal ontology of cinema is the focus of Garrett Stewart's *Framed Time*.²⁷ To paraphrase Stewart somewhat crudely, the incursion of the digital upon the cinema screen has fundamentally altered the way that time is presented. Rather than breaking time down into twenty-four still images per second (the illusion of motion achieved through the rapid unspooling of this series of frozen excerpts) Stewart suggests that the digital film (or the celluloid film with significant digital elements) presents 'framed time' – the continual fluid change of the image within the frame. Instead of a series of frames we have a single frame, within which movement and change occurs. The fundamental difference he cites is the exchange of time as series for time as whole. This difference exhibits itself in the preponderance of time travel and memory films of the last decade, as well as in digital effects that render visible previously impossible (and, we

must infer from Stewart, unthinkable) alterations of mise-en-scène within the shot. No more will we see Dr. Jekyll change into Mr. Hyde through a series of cuts and dissolves; from now on he will morph before our eyes. This for Stewart is indicative of the way in which the incorporation of the digital, and the fundamental change that this has effected upon the presentation of time, is self-reflexively, and sometimes unconsciously, referenced and thought through by contemporary film-makers. In this sense Stewart is suggesting that the influence of the digital has inspired many contemporary film-makers to enact the shift from the Muybridgean view of time as a series of states to the Bergsonian idea of the single continuous whole.

Morphing has certainly become a very common effect, but Stewart seems to believe that the desire to use such an effect only arises after its discovery/design. The fact, however, is that this effect (and others like it) *were* designed, not discovered, and only through a lengthy and laborious development, guided always by an understanding of what it would be like to see something morph into something else. Examples of digital morphing in films like *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (Cameron, 1991) may be countered with examples such as David Kessler's (David Naughton) lycanthropic transformation in *An American Werewolf in London* (Landis, 1981), which visualizes a mutability of the body perhaps even more striking than that of contemporary digital examples, no matter that they might surpass it in terms of the grotesque and horrific. The gruesome climax of Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1982) figures the rapid liquefaction of a living (well, undead) body, the grotesque spectacle of which rests upon the fact that it occurs in front of us, within the shot, without allusion or ellipse. This is not done with digital technology (it was too early and the film-makers too poor anyway), rather it is done with stop motion – a process that relies even more directly on the breaking down of time into still images. Even the transformations of Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), which does indeed achieve its effects through a series of cuts and dissolves, betrays the urge, even at this stage in the history of cinema, to represent bodily change within the course of a single shot. The film wants to show you Jekyll's (Fredric March) body altering, reshaping, morphing, within a single shot, without recourse to cuts. This is why it uses dissolves between two versions of the same stationary shot, coupled with an ingenious use of colour filters – the closest contemporary shooting and editing methodology could come.

It is significant also that right at the heart of digital cinema's evolution is the shameful secret that conceptually it still operates much like its photographic ancestor. Digital cinema still thinks in frames. Projected film in a cinema runs at an average of 24 fps, a leap forward to 48 fps just recently heralded by Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* (2012). A PAL DVD runs at 25 fps, an NTSC DVD at 29.97 fps, and the Blu-ray standard allows for up to 24 full fps. In the case of the DVD standard the frames will be interlaced – this means that each frame is split into two 'fields', a field of all the odd horizontal lines, and a field of all the even horizontal lines. The two are shown consecutively, but because of a combination of the way our eye works and afterglow on the screen the image appears to be whole, just as, when part of a series of consecutive fields projected rapidly onto a screen, the image will appear to move. In the case of a PAL DVD interlacing results in 50 separate fields. This is the case for a celluloid film that has been converted into a digital format, like *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) for instance, as well as for an entirely digitally produced movie such as *Ratatouille* (Bird and Pinkava, 2007). When *Ratatouille* was first released in the cinema there was a good chance one would have been watching a celluloid print of the film, the digital images split into the archaic format of 24 fps. DV cameras split the moving image into frames, as do HD cameras, as do the current bleeding edge of digital cameras, where the 'cinema look', widely attributed to the specific motion effect of 24 fps capture, is the ideal. Most tellingly, the current industry standard for digital cinema projection, D-Cinema, its roll-out nearly complete in cinemas across the world, runs at either 24 or 48 fps; 24 is, in this case, not an arbitrarily chosen number.

This is not to say that the digital does not change what the moving image is or how it works, only that I believe that a focus on morphing, and on the notion of the single frame, or liquid image, leads us down an unhelpful avenue. It is clear that many of the stylistic features and thematic preoccupations that digital video makes possible had already been imagined and conceptualized long before they were finally realised. This technology sits within a long history of ways of thinking about vision, the image, and representation. If the incursion of the digital produces a rupture in the history of moving images, it is not a rupture that came from nowhere. It was, to some extent at least, imagined, designed and evolved in relation to interrelated history of older visualizing and imaging technologies, and ideas about the nature of image, time, and the senses. Technologies do not appear out of the blue and change the way that people make art, communicate, and

understand. But people may use existent technologies in new and unforeseen ways. In this way I would suggest that it is the constant to and fro play between invention and adaptation that determines the evolution of technologies as part of human culture. Technologies such as digital video compression engage with, and sometimes even embody, broader notions prevalent within society.

In this respect, Cornell was an early adopter/adaptor. He saw an alternate potential in moving image technologies, and began to use them in new and unforeseen ways. At first he very literally adapted what he could find; his early found footage works effecting a subversion of popular cinema, with its emphasis on narrative, continuity, linearity and dramatic structure, to create a non-narrative dreamtime, an open, recursive moving-image world. In his later film work he began to use other tools of the moving image, employing assistants such as Stan Brakhage and Rudy Burckhardt to shoot film of places and people around New York City for him, which he would then edit in his basement workshop. Even in this later period Cornell preferred to use an intermediary, another partner in the production process, though it is not hard to imagine that cinematography was an art he could have mastered and undertaken independently if he so wished. It is tempting to imagine that Cornell was intentionally introducing interference at the initial stage of filming, as if he could not bear too much of the responsibility of creation, or could not stomach the notion of the total authorial voice. This practice of insisting on the input of other artistic voices that he would then go to work on perhaps has parallels in what Gilles Deleuze describes as the 'diagrammatic' in the paintings of Francis Bacon. The *diagram* consists in the making of random marks, even in the scrunching or otherwise damaging of the canvas itself in order to introduce unthought-of steps in the process.²⁸ Bacon would use these random marks as stepping stones in order to get to new places, to develop new 'lines of flight' in Deleuzian terms. It also served the purpose of clearing away the encrusted and invisible clichés that crowd the canvas even before the painter has begun work. These habits of seeing, and habits of thinking can be evaded to some degree by introducing chance operations that deform the work even before it has been begun, or indeed at any stage during its development. Another artist who used chance as a guiding principle and central aesthetic element was John Cage. There is more to be said about the correspondences between Cornell's and Cage's work, which I will come to shortly.

Faster than Real Time

To return to the question of the digital: the changeover to digital distribution has had at least one significant and identifiable effect on the ontology of cinema, in that the digital compression algorithms that were designed in order to reduce the amount of binary data required to reconstitute the moving image (driven primarily by the necessity to fit a film onto a DVD, though compression also helps to squeeze a film onto a Blu-ray) have resulted in a filtering, thinning, we might even say culling, of time.

Jonathan Sterne provides an incisive definition of digital compression, here in relation to the MP3, still the dominant format of digital sound compression:

To make an MP3, a program called an encoder takes a .wav file (or some other audio format) and compares it to a mathematical model of the gaps in human hearing. Based on a number of factors – some chosen by the user, some set in the code – it discards the parts of the audio signal that are unlikely to be audible. It then reorganizes repetitive and redundant data in the recording, and produces a much smaller file – often as small as 12 percent of the original file size. The technique of removing redundant data in a file is called compression. The technique of using a model of a listener to remove additional data is a special kind of ‘lossy’ compression called perceptual coding. Because it uses both kinds of compression, the MP3 carries within it practical and philosophical understandings of what it means to communicate, what it means to listen or speak, how the mind’s ear works, and what it means to make music.²⁹

Digital video compression algorithms, such as MPEG2 and MPEG4 (both industrial standards used for encoding video on DVD and Blu-ray discs), perform a similar kind of ‘lossy’ compression, removing or reorganizing what is considered to be redundant data in a single frame and across a series of frames. To do this the encoder searches for repetition, for parts of the image that do not seem to change significantly across a number of frames. It creates a single reference frame (or keyframe), which is complete, and then algorithmically codes the following frames in reference to the keyframe, identifying only the things that change (above a set threshold of alteration). This applies to colour, contrast and luminosity.

DVDs and Blu-rays usually use what is known as Variable Bit-rate encoding. A frame with a greater amount of activity in it will have a higher bit-rate than a frame that has relatively less activity. The difference in bit-rate between two scenes in the same movie can be considerable.

One way of understanding how all this works is to imagine that the encoder has a budget of data that it can choose to allot across the duration of the movie. To make most effective use of that budget, it can choose to throw more data at the scenes that have more activity in them (which will provide a noticeable quality difference), and less at those scenes that do not contain as much activity (which is not considered to result in a noticeable degradation in quality). Put somewhat facetiously, it is something like a question of whether it is possible to notice the difference between a shot in which nothing is happening and a freeze-frame.

Digital compression algorithms strategically ignore things (or perhaps more correctly, they ignore certain dimensions or components of things), such as stillness, minor variation or difference, overlapping information, and apparent similarity. Each of these things seems at first to suffer from a lack – lack of movement, lack of variety, lack of difference, lack of individuality, lack of relative strength or loudness – but the overarching lack that groups them all together might be described as the lack of interest. There is not enough in them that is ‘of interest’ in relation to the things surrounding them. Therefore, in the context of digital distribution, where lightness, speed and efficiency are at once desirable (in many spheres necessary) and a formal prerogative (in that they are germane to the technology), they are expendable. They are expendable because they are negligible.

It should go without saying that what qualifies as interesting is culturally and historically specific, and that the ‘interestingness’ of an object is a culturally defined value, and therefore neither constant, universal, or absolute. In fact, looking at what a culture considers to be expendable can tell us much about its implicit assumptions about value, necessity and experience. In the case of video compression algorithms, which I look at here in relation to Cornell’s later phase of film-making, we begin to see, implicit in the encoding algorithms that underlie the vast majority of the moving images that we encounter every day, notions of what the very point of moving images is, what constitutes the source and substance of their appeal, what purposes they serve, and what functions they perform.

Digital compression simultaneously introduces a refinement of industrial clock-time – the homogenized, standardized, undifferentiated time of record, labour calculation, and transaction – while inflicting a new reductionism. Though compression re-institutes the notion of qualitatively defined time as opposed to purely quantitatively defined time, it also institutes a regime wherein the sole criterion for value (which translates to the amount of data allotted) is activity.³⁰ In a kind of data-budgeting, a limited amount of dataspace, or bandwidth, is allotted selectively, privileging frames and elements of frames in which there is more activity, and making data-savings in frames where there is little activity. This variable compression regime has become an industry standard, as it is considered to be more ‘efficient’ than a regime in which each frame is allotted the same amount of encoding data. In this sense Stewart’s claim that the film becomes one long undulating, morphing frame has some basis, though it is perhaps more clearly stated as a case of consecutive frames being selectively cloned. Celluloid film, in contrast, was a more egalitarian time-capturer/renderer. Each frame was absolutely individuated and the elements of each frame were therefore treated equally.

Silence on Spotify

In a post on WFMU’s Beware of the Blog, the user ‘doron’ draws attention to a wonderfully suggestive example of a mismatch between the values implicit in the compression algorithm and the values implicit in the thing being compressed.³¹ Online music streaming and download services often need to mass-convert huge catalogues of recordings automatically and rapidly, so oddities and errors can slip through unnoticed, at least until a customer identifies the problem. The curious state of John Cage’s seminal *4’33’’* (1947–48) on the streaming service Spotify is not so much an error, however, as an illustrative case of the compression algorithm not accounting for the possibility that someone might want to listen to a recording of little but low-level room noise. In the words of ‘doron’ the piece throws the Spotify encoder for a loop. Instead of a detailed recording of the room noise occurring during the four minutes and thirty-three seconds of a performance of Cage’s piece (during which a full orchestra does not play anything in front of a listening audience, thereby shifting attention to the sound of the room itself and the people in it) the

Spotify encoder produces a loudly hissing barrage of white noise, as if the silence had been amplified beyond reason. There are many variables in the process of digital compression, and it seems that the Spotify encoder had been tuned to accentuate the central sonic activity (be it music, voice, or plain sound), and make data-savings on the spectral silences around this central activity, in such a way that it reacted to the lack of discernible central activity by raising the floor of the whole recording and accentuating individual peaks of room noise, resulting in a large degree of what is known as digital artefacting. In this way Cage's piece, which is intended to reveal the underlying sound of a room, has an unforeseen, though consonant outcome in this new context; it reveals the underlying sound of the compression algorithm. In the hiss of Spotify's rendering of 4'33" we hear the sharp and thin, jagged peaks of over-compressed digital sound. Cage, like Cornell, is a bone that gets caught in the throat of contemporary time and space regimes.

Cage's collection of writings on music, entitled *Silence*,³² has had a lasting influence on many artists working in many different forms. While Cage and Cornell shared a similar goal in, and approach to, the reconfiguration of attentive regimes, Cage's thought on the everyday, duration, chance processes, and attention, has had a much greater impact. Cornell offers us something else though, something that Cage, nor the majority of experimental film-makers operating at the same time as Cage (save perhaps for James Benning and Ken Jacobs for example) succeeded in doing, which was to make moving image works that create the impression of timeless space, of recursive temporal paths through shifting space, of sleeping bodies moving out of time, durational images of non-times, the everyday banal collected and elevated to the status of the mythical, grave monuments to present and intimate experience that are at the same time wispish, throwaway fragments of quietly felt everyday experience, and all the better for it.

Mapping

Digital compression forms a further link between late-capitalist time networks and imaging technologies – look at any of the major online map services. Google Maps is perhaps the most popular of these services, but there is also Apple Maps, a newly launched service at the time of writing. Both of these services correlate maps with satellite images, allowing the user

to zoom in to street level, where cars, trees and even people can be discerned. This satellite map of the globe is a collage of individual rectangular images, more or less seamlessly joined. With this mass of images the problem of data budgets raises its head once more, and digital image compression is used to minimize transfer times from server to user by making the data-load lighter. Another possible factor is the cost of purchasing these satellite images, which are provided by third party companies such as GeoEye, Planetary Vision, Terrametrics and DigitalGlobe.

Here too, questions of implicit value assemble around the determination of where the data is spent, or, indeed, where the money is spent. Using Google Maps I can easily zoom in from a satellite image of the whole of the UK and Ireland to a street level view of the city of Birmingham, that not only shows me details such as identifiable buildings, but also traffic lights, trucks, cars and pedestrians. I can look at the gardens, sheds and conservatories that demonstrate some individuality across the sometimes grid-like, sometimes fractal-like patterning of suburban estates at the edges of Birmingham. I can even explore a three-dimensional hybrid view of the centre of the city constructed using a mixture of satellite images and crowd-sourced 3D models of individual streets and buildings. This is the case for Birmingham, and this is also the case for smaller towns such as nearby Coventry (population around three hundred thousand) and Warwick (population around twenty thousand).

However, if I zoom out and scroll across the globe to the north of Africa, and then zoom in to the same degree on a region in eastern Libya (or, indeed, anywhere across the Saharan desert region) I find that I am confronted not with a correspondingly detailed satellite image of the landscape, but rather a latticework of sand-coloured squares, the telltale indicator of intense, low bit-rate compression (possibly complicated by the fact that Google may simply not have purchased satellite images of this area at this level of detail, so that what we are zooming in on is higher level images at a lower resolution). Performing the same test on Apple Maps has a similar result, but with an even more obvious and widespread digital artefacting. This might be attributed to the fact that the service is still in the early stages of development, and so strongly prioritises the improvement of their maps of First World countries and urban centres.

The use of image compression in these digital mapping services clearly demonstrates the implicit valuation and consequent categorization

of profoundly non-Western and non-urban sites as *negligible space*. Compression artefacts blot out the detail of continuously variegated, smooth, heterogeneous space.

What we choose to look at, and the detail, diligence and attention with which we look at it, is both an indicator of, and a key factor in, the development of everyday values, goals, preferences and prejudices. Services like Google Maps and other visualizing technologies and art forms, such as film and digital moving image forms, prescribe the kinds of looking that are possible, acceptable, desirable, and normal. One key way in which artists sometimes respond to this situation, is simply to look differently, to adopt perspectives that seem to sit so far outside of mainstream discourse that they are discounted as naive or, indeed, ‘outsider’. There is a significant difference between the practice of adopting a counter-position (as Buñuel and Dalí do in *Un Chien Andalou*), which engages combatively with the mainstream discourse of the time, and the practice of adopting an alter-position, a position that manages to subvert the possibility of engagement with mainstream discourse before the opportunity even arises, a position that is often misunderstood, precisely because it elides the contemporary terms of discourse/engagement. This, I would suggest, goes some way towards explaining the silence around Cornell’s film work, which arises at least partly from the difficulty in accounting for both periods of his film work within contemporary frameworks.

Slow Cinema

In response to this much-discussed ‘speeding up’ of everyday life, culture and business, a scattered phenomenon known as the Slow Movement has emerged, consolidated in the 1990s with a series of variations on the central concept applied within different fields; Slow Food, Slow Travel, Cittaslow (Slow Cities), and the founding of the Long Now Foundation.³³

It is possible to see Cornell’s later film work as a precursor to contemporary slow cinema, Warhol’s experiments (*Empire* and *Blow Job* for instance), and the unacknowledged and acknowledged mid-century progenitors of the form within art cinema – Chantal Akerman, Andrei Tarkovsky and others. Yet there are significant differences that distinguish Cornell’s work from most of these lauded examples of a slow and contemplative approach to moving image making. What links them is a preference for long takes and

slow moving, slowly emerging, or hidden centres of attention. But the majority of post-Cornellian slow cinema wears its slowness as a primary formal and often symbolic element.

There is a moment in Carlos Reygadas' *Silent Light* (2007) that demonstrates this distinction quite well. The protagonists, a family living in a Mennonite community in Mexico, spend an afternoon by an outdoor swimming pool. A typical slow cinema scene unfolds – there is no obvious central dramatic action, little dialogue, and narrative exposition seems to give way to atmospheric exposition. The parents shampoo and wash the children at the water's edge, where tall grasses and other flora grow. Our attention is drawn to the way in which these characters inhabit their environment, and the way that they interact with each other. The editing and cinematography emphasise the quiet, taciturn pace of this communal bathing event. This extended moment of harmony conceals, and ultimately accentuates, the fact that Johan (Cornelio Wall) is having an affair with another woman, a fact that he has not kept from his wife Esther (Miriam Toews). The final shot of the scene is of Esther, watching Johan carefully shampoo their daughter's hair. The secluded bliss of this family scene is suddenly shattered for her by the memory of Johan's infidelity. We see recognition play out on her face, as a tear creeps from one eye. The camera remains static, framing her in close-up, an extremely shallow focus turns the deep green of the surrounding plant life into a liquid blur. The blurred form of their daughter stands and moves out of frame, her washing finished. Johan has noticed Esther's distress, and, standing up, takes her hand and says: 'Come Esther. Let's go swim'. She forces a smile, takes his hand and stands up, also moving out of the frame, which remains locked steadfastly in place, even after she is gone. The camera holds its position, the frame a mass of smooth de-focused greenery, though a pink shape that was obscured by Esther's body has been revealed. Though the supposed primary element of narrative interest has left the frame, we are asked to continue to look. By this stage in the film we should be unsurprised by the slow pace, but in this shot there is an unusual lack of central subject, indeed the de-focusing has stripped the frame of detail and even content, emphasizing the abstract qualities of colour and tone. However, the camera begins to track forwards, slowly and very surely. As we get nearer to the pink shape it gains detail, until, almost 20 seconds after the track began, the flower is clearly in focus, and the camera comes to a stop.

The camera knows and always knew that there is a flower behind Esther, that it will be pleasingly blurred once she moves out of the way, precisely how far it needs to track in to bring it into focus, and the precise speed at which it should do so in order to maintain the appropriate rhythm that will match the rest of the scene. Here the slowness of the film is an alternative stylistic trope, though one that is no less controlled and skillful than the rapid precision of an action film. In fact, I would suggest that it more explicitly demonstrates and promotes the virtuosity of the production, and very often that of the director as star. The stylized long take, such as this one in *Silent Light*, is a mark of virtuosity, because it is a self-clarifying statement of authorial intent and voice, and a demonstration of the ability to manage and control the pro-filmic and the poetics of cinematography, to perform the balancing act of the beautiful shot extended, endangered, and rectified.

It is also a demonstration of the ability to control duration. In this sense it is quite different from the 'slow' mode of Cornell's later films. While many contemporary slow films ask the viewer to engage with notions of time and extended duration, thereby opening up one dimension, one field of interpretation, they often do so in a way that makes control over space, action and duration a primary concern, and is self-consciously 'cinematic', thereby closing down another dimension, or field of interpretation. Cornell's cinema is more concerned with opening up, and with being open. As we have seen, Cornell employed strategies that introduced chance processes that would deface and distort his authorial voice before it had even begun to speak.

The ideological and stylistic parameters underpinning the Slow Movement are well articulated in the promotional material for the 2012 AV Festival, held in Newcastle during the UK's proud Olympic year. The theme and subtitle of the festival was 'As Slow As Possible', the promotional website explaining: 'In the run-up to London 2012 with its motto of "Faster, Higher, Stronger" we propose an alternative slower pace and relaxed rhythm to counter the accelerated speed of today'.³⁴ Implicit in this description is an adjustment in value; a subversion of what is commonly held to be valuable, and an alternative valuation proposed. The event was validated by the presence of James Benning and Sharon Lockhart, two film-makers whose work takes a more rigorously investigative approach than the stylized long-take cinema of the majority of the Slow Movement.

Cornell presages the massive shifts in the way that Western, and therefore 'global', economy and culture treat time and everyday life (in terms of speed and pace), and the resultant response from the slow cinema, slow culture movement. His films are a pre-emptive strike on the emergent forces of speed and disposable consumerism in late capitalism. In Benning and Lockhart we see the legacy of Cornell finally gaining recognition.

Angel and A Legend for Fountains

Beyond dreamtime and sleeptime, then, Cornell also provides an alternative model for citytime, elaborated over the course of a number of late-period films, including *Gnir Rednow*, *A Legend for Fountains*, *Flushing Meadows* (1965), *The Aviary*, *Angel*, *Nymphlight* (1957), and *Centuries of June* (1955). I would like to look closely at a few moments from *Angel* and *A Legend for Fountains* now, in order to say something about the ways in which Cornell offers a profoundly different ideal of time spent in urban spaces.

In my analysis of *Gnir Rednow* earlier I suggested that Cornell used formal strategies similar to those found in *Rose Hobart* in order to create a disruption in the legibility of city space. *Angel*, which was shot by Rudy Burckhardt (according to Cornell's instruction again) in 1957, is less obviously playful in its manipulation of the filmed footage. It records a bright November day in Flushing Cemetery,³⁵ and consists of seventeen relatively short shots, amounting to just over three and a half minutes of film. The subject of the film is the statue of an angel, overlooking a small circular pool, set amidst tree-lined footpaths (fig. 3.4). As in *Gnir Rednow*, the individual shots pick out details, abstracting them from their context. We are never given the wide establishing shot that would place these elements within a world, perhaps in order to avoid the danger that this would re-stabilize, indeed re-establish them, back into a world that is already known and already legible.

All but one of the shots is static, and in many, particularly those that show us the statue from a number of perspectives, there is nothing obviously moving within the frame. So what is there to distinguish any of these shots from a photograph, or from a heavily compressed digital version? In this image without any movement there are in fact a number of different kinds of movement. There is the shake and judder of the projected film going through the gate, preserved in the digital version. There is the constantly changing,

Figure 3.4 *Angel* (1957)

though perhaps imperceptible, patterning of the film-grain. There is also the unique decay and damage to the print; scratches, streaks and black blobs that flicker momentarily onto the frontal plane of the image, again preserved in the digital version. All of which are extra-diegetic factors that indicate the passage of time, the duration of the image – the fact that, though there is no obvious movement of the things within the frame, there is, nevertheless, *change*.

In some of the other shots there is movement, provided by ripples in the pool, which seem to make the very film image itself ripple, and leaves and gently swaying bushes. Even without manipulating the film in his usual freewheeling way, Cornell manages to flip the images, using the pool reflections to invert the trees so that they project down from the top of the frame, the blue backdrop of the sky also reflected in the pool, obfuscating the spatial anchor-points of the shot. These detail shots of the pool draw out the abstract qualities of the location, identifying and framing the spot where a confluence of textures, patterns and colours – such as those of the autumn-hued leaves, spindle-bare trees, cold grey stone and rippling reflective

water – occur. Cornell offers us a comparison of textures in this patch of quiet and greenery in the city.

The shots in the film are either of the pool or of the statue of the angel. As I said, we view the angel from a number of perspectives. We see a frontal mid-shot that shows us most of her form against a backdrop of dark tree branches and deep blue sky. Other shots provide perspectival variations: we see her from slightly side-on, allowing us to note her position of repose, her downcast gaze – perhaps looking inwards, or, as becomes more and more probable, looking at the pool and the many rich details of her environment. Now a shot from the other side, a medium close-up against full, billowy bushes. Her eyes are closed it seems – a vision of calm and reflection within the city. Yet the alternating editing structure of *Angel* suggests that these may be eyeline matches, that the shots of the pool and leaves are what the angel can see from her perch, or perhaps what she could see if her eyes were open, if she were alive. The sense of serenity in this scene is heightened, perhaps, by the fact that these details go unseen, do not need to be seen. But, beyond this, the statue becomes a living inanimate object, a thing that does not see, but that we can imagine having a perspective, a thing that *might* see. The statue is not an everyday object of the kind mentioned above (in relation to the notion of the Surrealist object), but it is a component of the everyday, a lasting feature of this space, with an apparently static duration. The angel is an object that waits.

We view the angel from a low angle side-on perspective, in strong contrast against the blue sky (no branches this time, but white wisps of cloud), her form becoming almost that of a silhouette. And finally we see her from behind – another low angle shot that reveals only her hunched shoulders and the tips of her wings against the sky, now full of motion as two banks of cloud pull away from the centre and move out of frame, as if the heavens are opening up for our stone protagonist.

It is difficult to imagine a more calm and quiet central figure, unmoved by the bustle of modern life. *Angel* presents an adjustment to common regimes of time economy. It offers a model of resistance to the compulsion to move on and spend one's time more efficiently by either working or playing in commonly authorized ways. It is one small scene – both geographically, and cinematically – yet it is presented as being enough. Indeed it is presented as being a special confluence of elements (a bright day with particularly pleasing light, mostly calm, colourful leaves floating

in the pool, light cloud moving through a mostly blue sky), but it is a special situation that should be available to anyone who chooses to pay attention to it.

Towards the end of *A Legend for Fountains*, another film shot with the aid of Rudy Burckhardt, we see a child pulling at some discarded rubbish in an alley, searching, hoping for a discovery – an analogue for Cornell's own scavenging activities (fig. 3.5). Perhaps what we see here is a brief glimpse of Cornell's own practice; of scavenging as the means of reconnecting and maintaining attentiveness to the everyday. The following shot is of a young girl wandering away from camera, along a busy pavement. Her speed of movement and lack of direction suggest that she is simply floating along, waiting for something to take her interest. The pace of her duration seems at odds with the adults around her, who seem to know where they want to go, and are on their way.

The film takes the basic mode of *Angel* and expands it, introducing real living people, moving outward from *Angel's* quiet spot to a busy street

Figure 3.5 *A Legend for Fountains* (1957–65)

scene. Yet this busy space is represented with the same pacing and multi-perspectival observation that we saw in *Angel*. The central protagonist is a young woman (Suzanne Miller), whom we follow as she leaves her house and wanders, holding her cat through a section of Little Italy that Cornell was particularly fond of. The woman does not seem to have a goal or purpose, other than a kind of open-ended, aimless journeying. She could be described as a stand-in for Cornell as flâneur.

We can take much of the film to be the things that she sees, or that she might see, but there are other figures who might be looking. Just as we view the young woman behind glass, the camera looking in from a position on the street, at various points during the course of the film we see a baby-doll in a box, staring fixedly out from a shop window, the frozen pose of a dress-dummy, her awkward stance locked, facing out towards the action on the streets, and a brief glimpse of a doll-like religious statue, sceptre and orb in hand. In Cornell's *Mulberry Street* (1956) a bust of Amadeus Mozart sits inside a shop window, looking out onto the street (which leads to the more explicit title of Rudy Burckhardt's version of the film, made out of the same footage: *What Mozart Saw on Mulberry Street* (1956)). These other inanimate object-figures act as the alternative sources of potential perspectives.

Much of the latter part of *A Legend for Fountains* focuses on the activities of children in the streets (just as there is a focus on the activities of children in the park in *The Aviary*. It is perhaps not going too far to say (and a similar assertion has been made elsewhere, by Suárez) that Cornell focuses on children in these spaces because they appear to experience the timespace of the everyday in a more authentic way. The activities that we see them engaged in – playing, exploring, wandering in a disinterested way – all suggest an engagement with their duration and surroundings that is simultaneously less tuned into the speed of the world, and more tuned in to the presentness of an immediate timespace. Their encounters with the world and its objects are the image of an ideal for Cornell. Indeed attributions of 'naivety' and a childlike nature to Cornell often arise from the evidence of his interest in wandering, and tinkering with things that he found, aberrant activities for an adult in an increasingly networked, efficient world.

Conclusion – The Self as Everyday Object

One of the implicit questions in *Angel* is: ‘what kinds of things might a statue see, and how might it see them?’ This seems to me to form part of a larger project of Cornell’s: mapping the lives and dreamworlds of objects (where ‘object’ refers to a category of things that includes human beings). Through the evocation of the sleeping body, the dreaming body, and even the stone body, his films indicate our place as things in these dreamworlds, and our status as equally everyday things. This has the potential effect of altering our perception of the spaces we inhabit, the kinds of attention we give them, and the ways in which we instrumentalize them.

Over the course of this study we have seen how Cornell used a variety of complementary approaches to develop this perspective shift. In Chapter One we saw how the use of minimal disruptive interventions into appropriated moving images can release the potential for interpretative play, emblemized through Cornell’s performance of the desire to return to certain film images and to look again differently. The decelerated object-body-image of Rose Hobart demonstrated how compellingly strange our physical presence is. In Chapter Two the notion of haptic visuality helped to show how the pleasures of texture breach and connect the different levels of the film image – the flat material surface and virtual depth. The intensely textural image, and the breaching of these normally separate levels, allows one to see anew the textures of everyday life.

One route to developing awareness of oneself as an object is by paying attention to the awareness of objects. However, to do even this requires the evasion of familiar regimes of seeing, regimes of attentiveness and interestingness, because bound up in those regimes and definitions are a number of assumptions about what it is to be a sentient, intending, viewing subject. In Chapter Three we saw how these assumptions are formalized and consolidated in video compression standards such as MPEG2 and MPEG4, and the ways in which these standards connect to a wider network of discourses around the speeds and economies of everyday life and media in the twenty-first century. Cornell’s late films disrupt these regimes by offering alternative ways of perceiving urban space and the body’s relation to it.

The notion of the self as everyday object underpins the argument of this final chapter, and it builds upon the work done in the previous two, extrapolating a single, driving, exploratory ideal behind the films that

have been analyzed. Cornell was an artist who moved across and between mediums, and in his approach to the everyday cinema of urban space and the object, we also find the root that links the films to his more famous work. It is clear that Cornell's film work, though long neglected, has great significance for both the history of avant-garde film and the history of twentieth century art, as well as the study of contemporary audiovisual culture. These three chapters delineate the opening stages of a potentially productive engagement, just a few avenues of thought leading away from Cornell's deceptively simple films.