

# The Communicative Life of Images: A Philosophical Review of Cinema and Photography as Media of Meaning

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## Abstract

This review examines the communicative functions of cinema and photography through the lens of contemporary philosophy of the image. Integrating insights from phenomenology, semiotics, aesthetics, and media theory, it explores how images operate as autonomous yet relational forms of meaning-making in art and communication. By tracing conceptual trajectories from classical representation to digital mediation, the paper analyzes the ways in which visual images embody, transmit, and transform human perception and cultural understanding. The review synthesizes key philosophical debates—from Benjamin's notion of aura and Barthes' punctum to Deleuze's movement- and time-image—to reveal how the image serves not only as a reflection of reality but also as a communicative agent shaping the viewer's cognitive and affective experience. It concludes by outlining a framework for a "communicative ontology of the image," emphasizing the interdependence of visual expression, technological mediation, and interpretive participation in the age of networked visibility.

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## Introduction

In an age saturated by visual media, images have become central to how individuals perceive, interpret, and communicate meaning. From the photographic archive to the cinematic frame, images do not merely represent the world—they actively mediate human experience, social relations, and collective memory. The communicative life of images extends far beyond aesthetic appreciation: it encompasses their capacity to act, persuade, and constitute reality within cultural and technological systems. Understanding how images communicate thus requires a dialogue between philosophy and communication theory, two traditions that have often addressed similar questions through different epistemic languages.

Philosophical inquiry into the image has long been concerned with representation, perception, and truth—from Plato’s suspicion of mimetic art to Kant’s transcendental aesthetics and Heidegger’s critique of world-picture. Yet, as images increasingly circulate through digital platforms, they no longer function solely as static representations of external reality but as dynamic, networked mediators of meaning. The philosophical challenge of the twenty-first century is therefore not only to ask what an image is but what an image does—how it communicates, organizes experience, and participates in the formation of shared meaning.

Within communication studies, the visual turn has prompted renewed interest in the ontology and agency of images. Visual communication scholars have drawn on semiotics, phenomenology, and media theory to examine how cinematic and photographic forms generate affective and cognitive responses, shape public discourse, and influence social imaginaries. However, despite the growing interdisciplinary attention, there remains a gap between philosophical analyses of the image as an ontological category and communication research that treats images as empirical carriers of information or persuasion. This review aims to bridge that divide.

The purpose of this article is to synthesize key philosophical perspectives on cinema and photography and reinterpret them through a communicative framework. By integrating insights from phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, Sartre), aesthetics (Benjamin, Barthes), and media philosophy (Flusser, Deleuze), it seeks to construct a conceptual foundation for understanding images as active media of meaning rather than passive objects of perception. In doing so, the review contributes to communication scholarship by

proposing a philosophical account of visual mediation—one that situates the image within the broader ecology of human communication, technological mediation, and cultural interpretation.

## Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations of Image: Definition of Image in Philosophy and Aesthetics

The philosophical understanding of the image has evolved through a long historical trajectory, from Plato’s conception of mimesis to contemporary debates on simulation, semiotics, and phenomenology. In *The Republic*, Plato characterizes the image as imitation—mere shadows of the ideal truth—raising early concerns about its deceptive nature. This skepticism toward images reemerges in the digital and AI era, where synthetic visuals and algorithmic simulations appear as modern shadows on the cave wall, substituting for reality rather than reflecting it. From the sacred icons of medieval theology to the perspectival accuracy of Renaissance art, the image gradually became a technical instrument of representation. The nineteenth-century inventions of photography and cinema marked a paradigmatic shift: images no longer simply imitated but recorded and even constructed reality. This transformation, encapsulated by Mitchell’s (1994) notion of the “pictorial turn,” positioned the image at the center of modern thought and communication.

Walter Benjamin (1936) deepened this transformation by theorizing the aura of artworks in the age of mechanical reproduction. The reproducibility of photographs and films destroyed the singular aura of traditional art yet democratized access to meaning. Benjamin’s paradox of the “new aura” in photography—where reproducibility becomes testimony—prefigures contemporary debates on the authenticity of digital imagery. Roland Barthes (1980), in *Camera Lucida*, further individualized image reception through his distinction between *studium* (cultural context) and *punctum* (personal affect). The *punctum* pierces the viewer through the photograph’s indexical link to reality, echoing Peirce’s semiotics of the sign. Yet Barthes’ concept also reveals the subjectivity and ambiguity inherent in visual interpretation—each viewer reconstructs meaning through personal resonance.

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Jean Baudrillard's (1981) theory of simulation and hyperreality pushed this trajectory toward its postmodern conclusion. The image no longer represents but replaces reality, constructing a mediated world "more real than the real." The proliferation of AI-generated images further intensifies this condition, blurring truth and fiction and raising ethical questions regarding authenticity, manipulation, and the politics of perception. These philosophical developments collectively demonstrate that the image's communicative power lies not in representation alone but in its ability to reshape experience, emotion, and epistemology.

Semiotics, as articulated by Saussure and Peirce, reframed images as a form of language. Saussure's model of signifier and signified exposes the fluidity of meaning, while Peirce's triadic system—iconic, symbolic, and indexical—captures the complex semiotic nature of photographs and films. Photography, both iconic and indexical, offers direct causal linkage to reality yet invites interpretive plurality, bridging the objective and the affective. This semiotic foundation extends into the analysis of moving images, where montage and editing produce new syntactic meanings through juxtaposition (Eisenstein) and where Deleuze (1985) reinterprets time and perception in cinema as dynamic modes of thought.

Susan Sontag (1977) foregrounded the inherent ambiguity of images, particularly their dual capacity to reveal and obscure truth. Visual representation, unlike verbal language, retains an open texture—simultaneously factual and imaginative. Historical photographs such as Lange's *Migrant Mother* embody this tension, blending documentation with aesthetic construction. In cinema, montage and rhythm amplify this ambiguity, producing what Deleuze calls the "time-image," where temporal perception becomes subjective and affective. Finally, the phenomenological dimension of image experience situates the viewer as an embodied perceiver. Following Merleau-Ponty (1945), perception is not disembodied observation but an act rooted in bodily engagement. The stillness of photography condenses time into a single embodied instant, while cinema immerses the viewer in a synesthetic interplay of sight, sound, and rhythm (Marks, 2000). This phenomenological distinction between the contemplative observer and the immersed participant underscores the dialectic of stillness and movement as communicative modes of experience.

Across these perspectives, the image emerges not merely as a visual artifact but as an active medium of meaning. From Plato's shadows to Baudrillard's hyperreality, from

Benjamin's aura to Barthes' punctum, and from Peircean indexicality to Merleau-Pontian embodiment, the philosophical lineage of the image reveals an expanding communicative ontology. In contemporary contexts—particularly under AI mediation—the image no longer passively reflects reality but participates in its construction, negotiation, and ethical contestation.

## Image as Communication: The Role of Photography and Cinema in Forming Social Discourse

### Media as an Extension of Senses (Marshall McLuhan)

Marshall McLuhan views media as "extensions of human senses," tools that extend our sensory and perceptual capacities and transform the world into a "global village<sup>1</sup>" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7). Photography, by fixing a moment, is an extension of the visual sense and memory, freezing a moment and facilitating recollection from the past. Cinema, with the flow of frames, is the continuation of motion and story, a dynamic experience which combines time and space. Nevertheless, McLuhan cautions that every extension is accompanied by a form of "amputation" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 43): photography, with its emphasis on sight, leaves the other senses, such as touch or hearing, underdeveloped, and the amputation is filled in by cinema, with its multi-sensory experience of sound and motion. Photography is a "hot" medium (high definition) that provides dense visual information and minimizes the involvement of the viewer, such as the photos of Henri Cartier-Bresson, which freeze the decisive moment with the accuracy of geometry (Cartier-Bresson, 1952, p. 33). In contrast, cinema is a "cool" medium (low definition) with more open narratives, like Tarkovsky's long takes in the mirror that requires active participation of the viewer (Deleuze, 1985, p. 98). This dialectic of stasis and motion dictates social discourse by shrinking the world into a global village: News images spread worldwide overnight, and movies such as Schindler's List rewrite collective memory<sup>2</sup> (Sontag, 1977, p. 140).

### Framing Reality

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<sup>1</sup> Global Village: A McLuhan term used to describe the world as a global village, in which geographical distances are shrunk by electronic media.

<sup>2</sup> Collective Memory: The shared memory and stories that are possessed by a group, society, or nation regarding the past and which are reproduced through symbols, rituals, and media.

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Photography and cinema form aesthetic compositions and interpretive structures of events in the form of photographic and cinematic frames that direct popular opinion. The notion of "framing" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) and "agenda-setting"<sup>3</sup> demonstrates that media determine interpretation and topics of public attention through the selection of certain aspects of reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). By portraying the desperate face of a mother in her photo "Migrant Mother" (1936), Dorothea Lange offered a paradigm of poverty and misery during the Great Depression that aroused the empathetic feelings of people and shaped social policies (Barthes, 1980, p. 76) (See Figure 1).

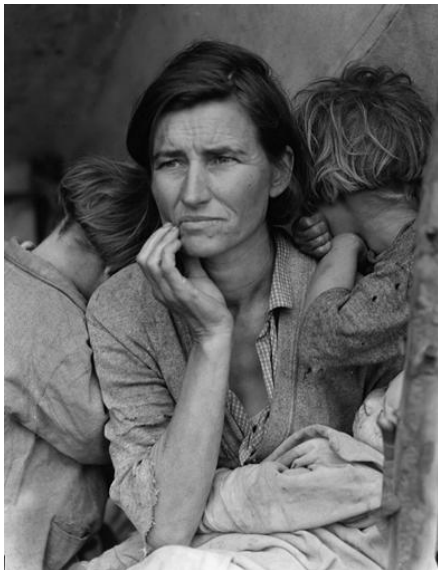


Figure 1. Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother (1936). (Library of Congress)

This photo provided a framework of poverty and suffering during the Great Depression and influenced American social policies.

In cinema, Eisenstein's fast montage in *Battleship Potemkin* emphasized violence and built a revolutionary discourse (Eisenstein, 1942, p. 46) (See Figure 2).

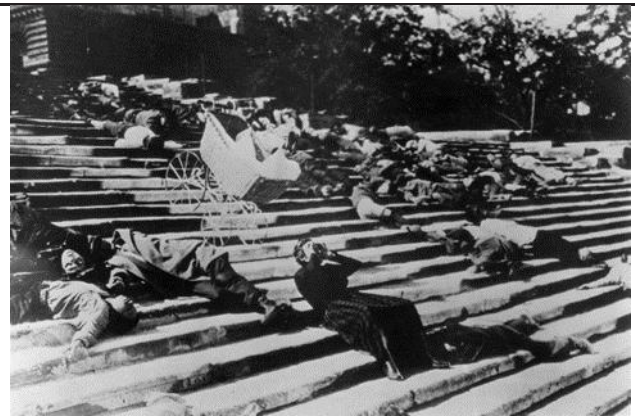


Figure 2. Sergei Eisenstein, Odessa Steps Sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). (Britannica)

Rapid montage in this sequence highlighted violence and constructed a revolutionary discourse.

Gender views have also contributed to this framing: The camera has traditionally internalized a male gaze<sup>4</sup>, whereas films such as Agnes Varda's *Beaches* disrupt this gaze with a feminist point of view and put margins in the center (Marks, 2000, p. 165). Framing puts the dialectic of stillness (fixation of reality) and movement (creation of narrative) in the service of social discourse.

#### Ritual Communications (James Carey)

James Carey divides communication into two types: transmission and ritual (Carey, 1989, p. 18). Cinema is a collective ritual that creates a feeling of belonging and identity. Audiences are immersed in a collective experience of estrangement and search by watching Wenders' *Paris, Texas*, with its wide shots and Ry Cooder's music (Marks, 2000, p. 162). Photography creates national myths and symbols by documenting historical moments. The photo of the flag-raising in Iwo Jima (1945) became an eternal symbol of national identity (Barthes, 1980, p. 43). Moreover, these images are part of collective mourning rituals: photos of terrorist attacks or natural disasters, such as 9/11, create a space for collective grieving, where the stillness of the photo fixes the moment of loss and the movement of cinema narrates it. The dialectic of stillness and movement in the making of collective identity is reinforced by these rituals, as though photography solidifies the myth and cinema breathes life into it.

<sup>3</sup> Agenda-Setting: A theory of communication that suggests that the media set the agenda of public opinion by selecting and repeating certain topics.

<sup>4</sup> Male Gaze: A concept from feminist film theory, which states that women are often objectified through the camera's gaze, which is seen as male.

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## Attention Economy<sup>5</sup> in the Image Era

The dialectic of stillness and movement reaches its climax in the attentive economy of the digital era. Apps such as Snapchat offer a temporary solution to the moment with transient images, whereas TikTok provides an endless stream of movement by means of short rhythmic videos. The phenomena of "doomscrolling" and "infinite scroll" in social networks exhaust attention and defy Kiarostami's contemplative void (Marks, 2000, p. 164). Snapchat, with its temporary stillness, is close to photography, but its instability distances it from photography's immortality. In its speed and multiplicity of images, TikTok accelerates the film movement at the expense of depth. Digital minimalism, which is inspired by the void of Kiarostami, may be an aesthetic protest, a space of contemplation against visual overload. Visual literacy, as the ability to recognize media frameworks, is important in this attention economy to resist image manipulation.

## Cultivation Theory (George Gerbner) and Media Hegemony<sup>6</sup>

Gerbner's cultivation<sup>7</sup> theory argues that the repetition of media images "cultivates" our perception of social reality in the long term (Gerbner, 1976, p. 175). Photographic images, such as the "Girl with Napalm" (1972), put a dangerous world in minds through repeated news coverage (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Nick Ut, Girl with Napalm (1972). (Associated Press)

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<sup>5</sup> Attention Economy: A digital age economy where the attention of users is a precious asset that is hard to acquire and maintain, and platforms vie to do so.

<sup>6</sup> Media Hegemony: The hegemony of dominant discourses and values that is mediated by media and naturalizes and stabilizes social power relations.

<sup>7</sup> Cultivation: George Gerbner's theory that long-term exposure to media content "shapes" the audience's perception of social reality and "cultivates" it.

This photo, repeated in the media, shaped global perception of the Vietnam War.

In cinema, Hollywood cliches stabilize social norms. This cultivation naturalizes power relations through media hegemony: News or movie images, such as gender representations, reinforce the dominant structures (Sontag, 1977, p. 140). In the digital age, "algorithmic cultivation" becomes more complex by AI: Algorithms can create a "collective artificial memory" by generating simulacra images that manipulate reality (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 143). This process is consistent with Guy Debord's notion of the "society of the spectacle"<sup>8</sup>, in which real relationships are replaced by representations and Baudrillard's hyperreality takes over (Debord, 1967, p. 12) (See Figure 4).



Figure 4. The Matrix Movie Poster (1999). (IMP Awards)

A film directly inspired by Baudrillard's simulation theory that depicted hyperreality.

Feminist works by Varda challenge this hegemony by framing margins.

## Summary

As a continuation of the senses, photography and cinema influence the social discourse through the dialectic of

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<sup>8</sup> Society of the Spectacle: A term coined by Guy Debord to describe a society in which real social relations are replaced with representational images.

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movement and stillness. Framing and highlighting, ritual communications, attention economy, and hegemonic cultivation show the role of these media in the construction of identity, memory, and truth. Visual literacy and void are required in the digital age as aesthetics due to the simulation and algorithmic cultivation issue. Photography and cinema are narrators of time and creators of social discourse by connecting moments and flow. The following table summarizes some of the most important communication theories as they relate to photography and cinema, demonstrating how these media influence social discourse.

## Photography: Stillness and Memory

### Photography as Time Suspension and Testimony to Reality: The Concept of the Decisive Moment

Instant photography has its particular strength of halting time and turning the moment into something that lasts eternally. Henri Cartier-Bresson came up with a phenomenon known as the "decisive moment": A moment when all visual, emotional, and narrative elements are combined in a single frame (Cartier-Bresson, 1952, p. 33). This moment is a deliberate decision on the part of the photographer and is often related to Barthes' *studium* (cultural and interpretive context). However, occasionally, unexpected elements enter the frame that later become a *punctum* for the viewer. These details make the photo ambiguous and personal (Barthes, 1980, pp. 26-27). The physical role of "light" in this process is vital: light, as an indexical agent, is reflected on the object and impacts the sensitive sensor surface, which is a causal connection that ensures photographic testimony (Peirce, 1903, p. 102). For instance, in Cartier-Bresson's *Man Jumping Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare*, the movement is frozen at its highest point, giving a sense of suspension (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris (1932)*. (MoMA)

An example of the "decisive moment" where movement is stopped at its peak, conveying a sense of time suspension.

This time suspension sets photography apart from painting, which is a subjective representation of reality, while photography is a physical trace of reality (Bazin, 1967, pp. 13-14). This indexical quality makes photography a means of bearing witness to reality and provides a basis on which the dialectic of stillness and movement.

#### 4.2. Aesthetics of the Moment: Roland Barthes' "It has been" (*Ça a été*) and the Melodrama of Death

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* proposes the notion of "It has been" (*Ça a été*) to describe the aesthetics of photography: Every photograph testifies that the subject was there at a particular moment before the lens (Barthes, 1980, pp. 76-77). The testimony, which is based on the physical contact of light with the subject, makes photography a medium of memory, but at the same time, it also activates a "melodrama of death" as the subject recorded is no longer what it was. Barthes feels this tension in his analysis of a photo of his mother, in which the past of living is at odds with the present of absence (Barthes, 1980, p. 96). Yet, this melodrama has a social dimension as well: Historical photographs depict not only the death of an individual, but the death of a historical moment or way of life, such as Vietnam War photographs that immortalized the death of an era. Barthes' *punctum* is

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also a part of this aesthetics: Elements such as a gaze or object that scratch the viewer and produce a deep sense of the passage of time (Barthes, 1980, p. 43). For instance, in Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" (1936), the mother's gaze is not only a sign of individual suffering, but also of the end of an economic era (See Figure 1). "It has been" reinforces the objective basis of testimony and transforms photography into a phenomenological experience that engages the viewer's body and mind by emphasizing light's role as an indexical agent (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 317).

#### 4.3. Photography Between Document, Art, and Memory: The Role of Photography in Creating Collective and Historical Memory

Photography is the intersection of document, art, and memory. Photos are documents that capture objective reality, such as the Holocaust photos or the photos of the civil rights movement that document history. According to Susan Sontag, photography creates collective memory because it captures reality and makes the past tangible (Sontag, 1977, p. 165). As an art form, photography goes beyond reality via composition and choice of moment, producing an aesthetic imagination, such as Cartier-Bresson's street photographs that are both social documents and works of art. As a form of memory, photography preserves individual and collective identity, with family photos or ritual images serving as eternal reminders of the past. This notion of "time compression" is highlighted here: A single photograph is a "single droplet" that can represent an entire ocean of an event, life, or historical period. The viewer stretches and interprets this compressed time with their eyes.

The silence of photography contributes to this experience: Silence provides a space in which internal echoes of memories and personal associations can be felt, with photography turned into an introspective medium. In contrast, the sound of cinema directs the sensory space from the outside, which reinforces the dialectic of stillness and movement (Marks, 2000, p. 162). Even in stillness, photography can simulate movement, as photographic sequences such as those of Muybridge or contemporary GIFs show proximity to cinema (See Figure 6).

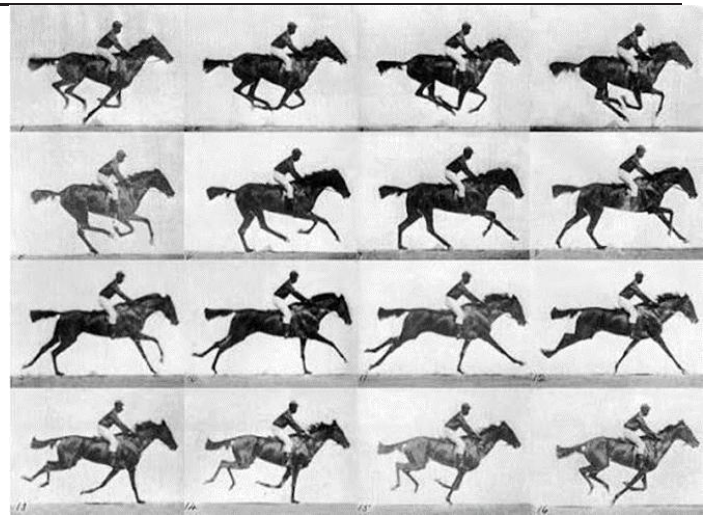


Figure 6. Edward Muybridge, The Horse in Motion Sequence (1878). (ResearchGate)

This experiment demonstrates how the stillness of sequential photos can simulate movement.

In the digital age, photography is confronted with the issue of simulation: AI images are devoid of "It has been" and drive truth towards hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 143). The stillness of photography forms the stable foundation of this dialectic, the precondition for the possibility of movement in cinema. In essence, each cinematic frame is a photograph, a silent "It has been" that only comes to life in sequence with others. This relationship will be discussed in later sections and case studies of Kiarostami and Varda. The following table summarizes the essential photographic concepts in relation to the dialectic of stillness and memory.

#### Case Studies: Five Faces of Image

The dialectic of stillness and movement is practically realized in the works of five artists, Andrei Tarkovsky, Wim Wenders, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Agnes Varda, and Abbas Kiarostami. With their own methods, these artists blur the borders of photography, cinema, and painting, reinventing the experience of time, memory, and truth. The analyses demonstrate that not only is this dialectic aesthetic, but it is also a manifestation of human mourning, politics of gaze, and a search for meaning. A short cross-reference forms a conceptual network that supports the thesis. The notion of Ma (meaningful void), as a connecting idea, is found in the silence of photographs, empty spaces, and contemplative stillness in all works.

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### **Andrei Tarkovsky (Filmmaker): Image-Time and the Spiritual Dimension of Cinema**

Andrei Tarkovsky turns cinema into an instrument of delving into the spiritual aspect of time by means of the poetic rhythm and the contemplative long takes. In the notion of "image-time," Gilles Deleuze takes Tarkovsky's cinema as a prime example, in which time is no longer dependent on movement but becomes a subjective and contemplative flux (Deleuze, 1985, pp. 98-99). In *Mirror* (1975), Tarkovsky transforms time into a mnemonic experience by using long takes, such as the wind in the grass or rain on a house, as if the viewer's body is submerged in the film's slow rhythm and his or her breathing becomes synchronized with the flow of the image (Marks, 2000, p. 164).

Mourning in Tarkovsky is metaphysical, constituting mourning for a lost spiritual unity or paradise. The time in his works is the same substance of this mourning, past and present mix up and create the feeling of loss. Sound is also of vital importance: The ambient sounds of nature, such as water drops or wind, create a "sacred space" and make void an active element, which is continued in Kiarostami's contemplative silence. The perspective of Tarkovsky is mystical and religious as he is bowing to the mystery of time. In *Stalker* (1979), the slow movement of the camera in the "Zone" appears to mimic the gaze of a spiritual witness, and variable light, such as the gleam of water, makes time palpable (Deleuze, 1985, p. 99). These shots, which sometimes border on stillness, recall Benjamin's pure moment (Benjamin, 1940, p. 261). Tarkovsky resuscitates the dialectic of stillness and movement in each frame, every frame of which could be a photograph, but achieves spiritual life in the flow of the film.

### **Henri Cartier-Bresson (Photographer): Decisive Moment and Reality Fixation**

Henri Cartier-Bresson made photography an aesthetic tool for documenting reality at its peak with the notion of the "decisive moment". The decisive moment is the point when geometry, composition, and beautiful coincidence come together in a single frame (Cartier-Bresson, 1952, p. 33). In images such as *Man Jumping Over a Puddle* (1932), movement is frozen at its peak, giving the impression of suspension, as if the raw material that Tarkovsky's cinema turns into a spiritual experience (See Figure 5).

This stillness, which is based on the indexical nature of photography (Peirce, 1903, p. 102), bears witness to Barthes' "It has been" (Barthes, 1980, p. 76). Like a child's gaze in street photography, the punctum in Cartier-Bresson's works

is a result of unexpected coincidences and penetrates the viewer (Barthes, 1980, p. 43). These facts, which are the result of the causal connection between light and subject, make photography a sensory and emotional witness. The silence of Cartier-Bresson's photographs opens up a space for the inner echo of the viewer's memories, which makes photography an introspective medium (Marks, 2000, p. 162), an emptiness that is also present in Wenders' empty spaces. However, his photographic series, such as street series, have a sense of movement and narrative, almost bordering on early cinema. Politically, Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" is a conquering, dominant gaze that takes over the world and freezes it within its frame. This is a somewhat imperialistic view that is in contrast to Varda's empathetic gaze. By freezing the moment, Cartier-Bresson places the dialectic of stillness in opposition to the cinematic flow.

### **Wim Wenders (Filmmaker and Photographer): Journey, Memory, and Place**

Wim Wenders' cinematic and photographic work is a dialectic of stillness and movement, of journey, memory, and sense of place. In *Paris, Texas* (1984), wide shots of desert landscapes and the slow movement of the camera create a sense of loneliness and the passage of time (See Figure 7).



Figure 7. Wim Wenders, *Paris, Texas* (1984). (Independent Magazine)

Wide shots of desert landscapes that convey a sense of loneliness and passage of time.

Ry Cooder's guitar sound creates a sense of "nostalgia" and fills the emotional space (Marks, 2000, p. 162). These occasionally almost still scenes remind one of Benjamin's pure moment (Benjamin, 1940, p. 261). Like the collection of written places, Wenders' photographs document the sense of presence and absence through indexically documenting abandoned places, as if

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continuing his search for "sense of place" in cinema. The photographs are stabilized frames of that cinematic search, resisting digital simulation (Benjamin, 1936, pp. 4-5) (See Figure 8).



Figure 8. Wim Wenders, the Written Places Collection. (Wim Wenders)

Recording abandoned locations with an indexical approach that conveys a sense of presence and absence.

Mourning in Wenders is for lost places, where the stillness of the photograph and the movement of film combine. Wenders' perspective is questioning and skeptical, viewing the location as a witness to the passage of time, unlike Cartier-Bresson's conquering look. The void of the large spaces of his works turns silence and stillness into a significant factor, which is also carried on in Kiarostami's minimalism. By relating place to memory, Wenders creates a link between the stillness of Cartier-Bresson and the flow of Tarkovsky.

**Abbas Kiarostami (Filmmaker, Photographer, Painter): Visual Minimalism and Media Integration**

Abbas Kiarostami blurs the lines between documentary and narrative, photography and cinema by means of minimalism and integration of media. In *Taste of Cherry* (1997), the image of a car stopping on the road produces a photographic moment that leads to a reflection on death and life and is then linked to the film's contemplative narrative (Deleuze, 1985, p. 100) (See Figure 11). Kiarostami's photographs of roads, with their empty landscapes and changing light, combine stasis with a sense of implied motion, representing a road leading to nowhere (See Figure 9).



Figure 9. Abbas Kiarostami, the Road Photo Collection. (Finarte)

Empty landscapes and variable light that integrate stillness with an implied sense of movement.

His minimalism and "void" are an Eastern equivalent to Tarkovsky's long takes, in which silence itself is an active element, the same "void" (Ma) that is filled with meaning. In *Certified Copy* (2010), Kiarostami plays with the truth of the image, oscillating between reality and simulation, as if practically realizing Baudrillard's prediction of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 143). Kiarostami's perspective is questioning and suspicious, placing the moment in ontological terms. This media convergence reinvents the dialectic of immobility and motion of the field of memory and truth, where the photographic moment becomes part of the flow of cinema to be finished with a gaze akin to the one that Wenders uses to locate, but with an Eastern minimalism.

**Agnes Varda (Filmmaker and Photographer): The Border Between Photography and Cinema Agnes**

In her documentary work, Varda, from a feminist and personal point of view, blurs the boundaries of photography and cinema. In *The Gleaners and I* (2000), she reconstructs collective and individual memory in a collage of static photographs in video format. (See Figure 20). These works provide a multi-sensory experience through sensory blending that includes the viewer's body (Marks, 2000, p. 165). In *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008), Varda makes the everyday into a poetic narrative by incorporating old photographs, films, and staged reenactments (See Figure 10).

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Figure 10. Agnes Varda, *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008). (MoMA)

Integration of old photographs, film, and staged reenactments that transform everyday life into a poetic narrative.

Sound in the works of Varda is the "narrator's voice" and the "spoken memory," which is a kind of personal dialect. Mourning in Varda is completely earthly and feminist. In this context, sound is for mourning for youth, love, and small moments of life that are washed away by the flow of time, unlike Tarkovsky's metaphysical mourning. Varda's perspective is sympathetic and anti-domination, taking back the narrative of history from male dominance. The empty space in the narrative distances of her works turns silence and stillness into social meaning. By interlacing moments into the texture of the collective memory, Varda enriches the dialectic with her own personal and feminist viewpoint between the stillness of Cartier-Bresson and the flow of Tarkovsky.

#### 8.6. Provisional Conclusion

These five artists express the dialectic of stillness and movement in different ways. All artists share a central theme: Saving the moment from the grasp of passing time. This rescue is put in a hierarchical conceptual order of importance: Material fixation (Cartier-Bresson), locationalization (Wenders), philosophical redefinition (Kiarostami), collective reproduction (Varda), and metaphysical transcendence (Tarkovsky). This represents a process of evolution from material to spiritual. Their politics of gaze are different as well: Dominant (Cartier-Bresson), mystic (Tarkovsky), questioning (Kiarostami), empathetic (Varda). The void as a central concept is found in the silence of photographs, empty spaces, and contemplative stillness in all works. Now the question is as follows: What will be the fate of these five strategies in saving the moment when faced with the fundamental challenge of imagery in the age of artificial

intelligence, which does not record a moment or save it, but creates it from pure nothingness? These pieces, which relate to digital challenges in the conclusion section, demonstrate that the dialectic of stillness and movement is a reflection of our experience of time, death, and truth.

Digital case studies, including annual reports (static) and motion graphic campaigns (dynamic), demonstrate that illustration and graphic integration have issues such as aesthetic inconsistency and technical constraints, but produce effective narrative experiences. Like the case studies of cinema and photography, these cases point to the dialectic of stillness and movement in the digital (Ceken & Turk, 2025, section 4). The following table summarizes the artist strategies for saving the moment and demonstrates how each artist embraces a different gaze politics with the dialectic of stillness and movement.

## Conclusion

The communicative life of images reveals the profound ways in which photography and cinema function not merely as aesthetic practices but as constitutive forces of social meaning, collective memory, and epistemic experience. From McLuhan's view of media as sensory extensions to Gerbner's cultivation theory, images emerge as agents that do not only reflect the world but actively construct it. Photography fixes the instant—transforming perception into monument—and cinema releases that stillness into motion, narrative, and temporality. The dialectic between stillness and movement thus forms the epistemological axis upon which modern visual communication turns.

Framing theory and agenda-setting underscore that images do not neutrally document reality but instead frame it, selecting, emphasizing, and even silencing dimensions of experience. Through rituals of communication, as Carey proposed, both film and photography become collective acts of meaning-making: they shape belonging, identity, and shared emotion. In this sense, the photograph of the Migrant Mother or the cinematic montage of Battleship Potemkin are not only artistic artifacts but communicative events that orient social consciousness.

In the contemporary attention economy, where digital platforms commodify perception and algorithmic systems mediate visibility, the communicative power of images intensifies. The endless scroll of TikTok or the transient snapshots of Snapchat expand the McLuhanesque

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extension–amputation dynamic to new cognitive and temporal levels: attention itself becomes the scarce resource. Theoretical traditions from Carey to Baudrillard remind us that these technologies reconfigure not only media but also the phenomenology of seeing and knowing. In an era of algorithmic cultivation, the boundary between representation and simulation blurs—hyperreal images and AI-generated visuals reprogram collective memory and identity.

To live within the communicative life of images is therefore to live within an ecology of meaning, one that demands visual literacy, ethical awareness, and philosophical reflection. Understanding cinema and photography as communicative media is not an antiquarian exercise but a critical necessity for navigating the aesthetics of the digital age. The still image and the moving frame continue to serve as the twin poles of human expression—between permanence and transformation, silence and discourse, memory and imagination. The task for communication research, then, is to interpret not only what images show, but what they do: how they frame, ritualize, and cultivate our shared sense of the real.

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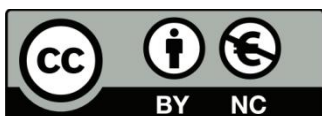
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