

Three British Perspectives on Photography and Allegory
(1989-1997): *Other Than Itself, The Fortune Teller, Virtue & Vice*

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I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

American debates on contemporary art – and especially those attending to the photographic medium – have emphasised the role of allegory. There remains a need, however, to explore the way allegory and photography have intertwined in the British context. This thesis aims to investigate and elucidate the significance of allegory in photographic practices and theories, as they have developed in the UK context. I examine three allegory-based photographic projects: *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography* (1989), *The Fortune Teller* (1992), and *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (1997). By utilising archival research, an interview, visual literacy and rhetoric, and comparative analysis, my study explores the relationship between allegory and photography in the British context. I focus primarily on the phase when allegory emerged as an explicit theme from 1989 to 1997 (the framing dates being established by *Other Than Itself* and *Virtue & Vice*).

The theme of allegory emerged with particular vividness in the photoworks of two British-based photographers, as evidenced by their respective publications, which appeared just after the period of study: Olivier Richon's *Allegories* (2000) and Karen Knorr's *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* (2002). My study of the years leading up to these monographs uncovers three aspects of allegory in their photoworks: photography as a writing of shadow; the interrelations between text and image; the interplay of form and content. These features involve the creation and reading of a photograph potentially exhibiting allegorical features. My thesis aims to

offer fresh perspectives on British-based photography from 1989 to 1997, and to lay the groundwork for establishing the concept of ‘allegorical photography’ in future research.

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Introduction

Research Focus

In an essay from 1996, Steve Edwards suggested that there were associations between allegory and photography. Indeed, he argued that photography was regarded as ‘an allegory of labor.’¹ He also argued that during the process of ‘unpacking the allegorical nature of photography, some important relations between the world of art and that of work can be brought into focus.’² Edwards did not offer any additional explanations concerning the intricate relationship between them, but his comments sparked my curiosity as to how allegory was foregrounded historically in artistic productions, especially photographic practices. In what ways did photography serve as an allegory of labour? What aspects of photography were said to possess allegorical qualities historically? Inspired by Edwards, my research examines the exploration and explanation of allegory in British-based photographic writings and practices at the end of the twentieth century.

Only one other study – David Campany’s book *Art and Photography* – has addressed the role of allegory and photography in artistic practices from the 1960s onwards, albeit briefly. For him, it was through photography that allegory found its ideal medium. He also argued that allegory possessed ‘impure and hybrid’ qualities, and that it was characterised by that an ability to absorb and seep, indicating its

¹ Steve Edwards, ‘Photography, Allegory, and Labor’, *Art Journal*, 55.2 (1996), pp. 38-44 (p. 39).

² Ibid.

dependence and influence on other entities.³ Moreover, in Campany's view, no single domain was exclusively suited for allegory; rather, as he put it, allegory 'must always impose itself on other things.'⁴ Consequently, allegory was rarely found in isolation, and it typically depended on its relationship with other elements or things. In an image incorporating allegory, a multitude of allegorical elements might influence the interpretation of the image. Campany also pointed to the utilisation of allegory in the works of British-based photographers, namely Yve Lomax, Victor Burgin, and Olivier Richon. While Campany did not offer further analysis of the allegorical qualities of their photographs, his discussions identified the basis for a new trend in British photography at the end of the twentieth century. His research emphasised the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the period in which allegory became prevalent in the works of British-based photographers.⁵

Research Gaps

As revealed by the analysis above, the studies conducted by Edwards and Campany briefly acknowledged the existence of allegory in photography, but they did not extensively investigate photographic practices and writings. Their exploration indicated the significance of delving deeper into the intersection between allegory and photography in photographic practices and textual productions. Additionally, the

³ David Campany, *Art and Photography* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), p. 36.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The phrase 'British-based' refers to the primary site of the photographers rather than their national identity. For example, Olivier Richon, originally from Switzerland, established his artistic career mainly in England.

prevailing literature of the time lacked a thorough examination of allegory in the development of the history of British photography. With reference to the research of Edwards and Company as an important prompt, I aim to expound the developments of allegory in the evolution of British photography in the late twentieth century.

The significance of the exploration of the relationship between allegory and photography lies in two aspects: a fresh perspective on the evolution of British photography during the period, and a fuller appreciation of the conceptual establishment of a framework for allegorical photography in further research.⁶ Thus, it is critical to revisit the discourse on allegory that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, shaping the return and variations of allegory today. The use of allegory is an effective approach to observing how historical events are mirrored in the present time. Current occurrences are deeply rooted in their historical context, demonstrating an undeniable link between previous conditions and the unfolding events of the present. The historical progression of allegory in photography sets the groundwork for the interpretation of allegorical features in the contemporary photographic practices and the future conceptualisation of allegorical photography.

In particular, I focus on the period from 1989 to 1997. My investigations found that three prominent allegory-focused photographic projects took place in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s: *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography* (1989), *The Fortune*

⁶ The available literature suggests that Steve Edwards is the only person to have utilised the term ‘allegorical photography’ in the British context.

Teller (1992) and *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary*

Photography (1997). These books and group exhibitions are the primary research objects of my analyses. The main aim of investigating these projects is to examine how allegory is manifested in photography by combining theoretical and practical perspectives.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, allegory had become the main focus of the books of two British-based photographers: Olivier Richon's two publications *Allegories* (2000) and *Real Allegories* (2006), and Karen Knorr's book *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* (2002), specifically the essay 'Rewind and Fast-forward: Photography, Allegory and Palimpsest'.⁷ Appearing shortly after the period covered by my study – and clearly direct outcomes of the group exhibitions – these monographs underscore the heightened recognition of allegory in photography in the British context.

The increasing focus on allegory in the British context had precedents. The utilisation of allegorical techniques had been a fundamental aspect of American artistic and photographic practices since the 1980s, according to Craig Owens and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh.⁸ These two scholars identified as especially important the allegorical techniques of appropriation and montage – two strategies where photography played a

⁷ This thesis does not centre on Richon's book *Real Allegories* (2006) but instead mentions it to emphasise the significant presence of allegory in his works. *Real Allegories* also provides important information for reading Richon's photoworks.

⁸ Buchloh is a German-born scholar, based in the US.

prominent role. They explored the allegorical manifestations in the photoworks of American photographers, such as Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Martha Rosler. Owens's and Buchloh's investigations of appropriation art emphasised the role of photographic reproduction and raised doubts about the authority and reliability of sources of meaning. According to their research, montage works decentralised the author's role and elevated the importance of the reader or the viewer. Their discussions of montage and appropriation further revealed that certain elements of photography came in disguise, presenting themselves indirectly or allegorically.

After reviewing the investigations of Owens and Buchloh, I came to understand that the distinct social, artistic, and photographic contexts of American and British art may result in contrasting manifestations of allegory. The recognition of allegorical features in American photography has aroused my curiosity regarding the development of allegory in British-based photographic practices and writings, which reveals differences in approaches to allegory in American and British photographic discourses.

Research Questions

Based on the introductory remarks above, my research questions are as follows:

1. How did British-based discussions of allegory and photography develop in the last decade of the twentieth century?

2. How was allegory presented in the writings and photographic practices in the photography-themed projects: *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography* (1989), *The Fortune Teller* (1992) and *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (1997)?
3. What specific roles did two photographers, Olivier Richon and Karen Knorr, play in these developments?
4. What distinctive allegorical features were exemplified by the photoworks of Richon and Knorr?

Research Methodology

Archival Research

With the help of the Site Gallery, Sheffield, and The Arts and Heritage Resource Centre, Touchstones Rochdale Museum, my study had the opportunity to gain access to some valuable unpublished written and visual materials regarding the exhibitions *Virtue & Vice* and *The Fortune Teller*. The archival research supported my research methods in Chapter 1. The gathered resources provided fresh insights into the correlation between photography and allegory in the participating artists' works in these two exhibitions.

Indeed, it could be said that the process of delving into archives is itself intricately linked to the embodiment of allegory, particularly in relation to the concepts of

fragment and temporality. In Walter Benjamin's conceptual schema, the essence of allegory lies in its ability to offer a fragmented portrayal of the world, inviting the readers to decipher the intricate layers of interpretation. Both Benjamin and the literary theorist Paul de Man underscore the interplay between allegory and temporality in the relationship between allegorical signs and meanings. As per de Man's theoretical framework, allegory is situated within an ideal temporality that is barely located in the present moment but rather in a distant past or an infinite future. Engaging in archival research entails a commitment to extrapolating and synthesizing insights from fragmented content, continuously evaluating the temporality that spans across the dimensions of the historical, the contemporary, and the prospective. The process of investigating archives embodies allegorical procedures.

Interview

Along with *Virtue & Vice* and *The Fortune Teller*, the book project, and photographic exhibition *Other Than Itself* offered valuable insights into my research. The available information revealed that the archives of *Other Than Itself* were accessible through its book and a flyer stored in the archives of *Camerawork*.⁹ The book offered a broad perspective on allegory, particularly in relation to photographic techniques and theories. In addition, Camerawork's flyer provided basic information regarding the organisation and description of the exhibition although it should be noted that a more sustained period of research than was available to the timeframe of my MPhil (a

⁹ Camerawork's flyer *Other Than Itself* is now accessible in the *Four Corners Archive*. 'Organisational – Half Moon Photography Workshop/ Camerawork', *Four Corners Archive*, n.d. <<https://www.fourcornersarchive.org/archive/view/0003010>> [accessed 4 December 2023].

doctoral project, for example) might locate further archival evidence. However, for *Other Than Itself*, I had the chance to conduct an email interview with John X. Berger, one of the book's editors. The format of the email interview gave the interviewee time to reflect and formulate his responses. The interview questions revolved around the book's historical context, practices, and theories, and were designed to enable a fuller understanding of the project, its context and the editors' aims.

Visual Literacy and Visual Rhetoric

My study examines the works of ten photographers across three critical projects. The visual analysis of these photoworks helped to comprehend the role of allegory in photographs. Terminologically speaking, according to Marcel Danesi, visual rhetoric involves the skill of visual literacy and the ability to critically examine images for their form and meaning.¹⁰ Both visual literacy and visual rhetoric are significant techniques for analysing images. Visual literacy refers to one's ability to read and comprehend images, utilising established elements of composition, such as background, foreground, lighting and colour. It is a process of considering how formal elements in a photograph generate the meanings of the work. In many cases, the literal depictions cannot fully convey the complex and profound implications of the photographs. Rather than purely observing images from the perspective of aesthetics, visual rhetoric embodies the implied and interpreted messages of an artwork.

¹⁰ Marcel Danesi, 'Visual Rhetoric and Semiotic', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2017). n. p.
<https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-43>.

However, hidden and deep messages might go beyond the superficial interpretations initially ascribed to the work. Additionally, visual rhetoric particularly highlights the role of texts in the images. The portrayal of textual segments via images entails discussions of representation and connotation. As such, my research aims to conduct a thorough evaluation of the ways in which images and texts convey intricate meanings through the utilisation of visual literacy and rhetoric.

Comparative Analysis

As previously mentioned, allegory was a prominent subject in the works of Richon and Knorr. They both addressed the issues of the taxidermized animals and art academies but with distinct methods of portrayal. I will explore how allegory evolves within their practices and analyse their similarities and differences. There are three main ways in which their photoworks demonstrate common allegorical characteristics, each with its own interpretation. By engaging in a comparative study of Richon's and Knorr's photographs, both the surface and underlying meanings are brought into focus, surpassing the limitations of the traditional reading modes employed for photographs. I aim to examine the use of photographic themes in their photoworks to deepen my understanding of the shared elements and motifs and highlight their unique interpretations of allegory.

Structure of the Dissertation

The overall structure of my study comprises the introduction and two chapters.

Chapter 1 concerns the exhibitions – *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, *The Fortune Teller*, *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* – addressing each project separately. My study aims to elucidate the link between allegory and photography by examining the photoworks and writings of the participating artists, photographers, and theorists in these three projects. Their theoretical and practical contributions provide insights into the relationship between photography and allegory. After individually examining each contributor involved in three photographic projects, my study focuses heavily on the works of Richon and Knorr. Their practices are representative (both were involved in *Other Than Itself*, *The Fortune Teller*, and *Virtue & Vice*) and have played vital roles in the development of British photography since the 1980s. The brief overview of Richon's book *Allegories*, and Knorr's *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* help to narrow down my research scope. The end of Chapter 1 involves a comprehensive account of how the writings of Richon and Knorr demonstrate the emergence of allegory in their publications. The primary objective of Chapter 2 is to discern the subtle nuances of allegory in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr, as manifested in the three allegory-related photographic projects mentioned above.

Literature Review

With the exception of a few brief comments by David Company (already mentioned) and Steve Edwards's discussions of nineteenth-century photography in Britain (which I will address presently), no literature has specifically focused on allegory and photography in the British context. The role and importance of allegory were noticeably absent and not properly identified in the various examinations of the development of British photography during the 1980s and 1990s, such as Mike Weaver's book *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*, and Brian Moynahan's book *The British Century: A Photographic History of the Last 100 Years*.¹¹ (Here, I do not include my primary objects of study: the publications from 1989 to 1997, which I will discuss in Chapter 1). Despite the plethora of studies dedicated to British photography, a distinct research gap exists in the exploration of allegory. While surveying recent photographic publications, it has been observed that allegory has been mentioned, albeit in a rather restricted manner. In the book *Photography after Postmodernism: Barthes, Stieglitz and the Art of Memory*, David Bate briefly acknowledged the use of allegory in contemporary photography, albeit not specifically within Britain. Inspired by Jeff Wall's exploration of allegorical reading of the meaning of the pictures, Bate

¹¹ Olivier Richon and John X. Berger wrote a review for Mike Weaver's book *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*. The title of the review was 'Sheep in Wolf's Clothing: Myth and History'. Richon's discussion of myth revolved around the themes of grotto, ghost, hero, fetish, and demon, and the crux of Berger's discourse on history focused on the topics of projection, terror in incognito, the phallus, and the body. According to the biblical knowledge, sheep in wolves' clothing are those who believe in the advantageousness of appearing deceitful while still maintaining their honesty. Mike Weaver, *The Art of Photography 1839-1989* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). Brian Moynahan, *The British Century: A Photographic History of the Last 100 Years* (New York: Random House Inc, 1999).

argues that ‘everything in the image is already a metaphor, a substitution of one thing for the culturally associated meaning of another.’¹² Each element within the image potentially functions as a metaphorical device, symbolizing the culturally linked meaning of another. The lack of attention paid to and limited examination of allegory in the existing literature prompted in-depth research into the role of allegory in shaping British photography during the 1980s and 1990s.

To fully grasp the development of allegory in the UK, it is necessary to delve into the discussions on it that surfaced from the United States (specifically New York) in the early 1980s.¹³ The relationship between allegory and photography in the American context was examined by scholars such as Gail Day and Steve Edwards, who studied the manifestation of allegory in the photographs of American photographer Allan Sekula. Their argument was that Sekula’s challenge of the confined port and labour at sea was ‘simultaneously an allegory of this deeper epistemological or representational conundrum.’¹⁴ The word ‘this’ here refers to ‘the hiatus in metonymic contiguity’ and ‘capital’s value-form and by the riddle of the commodity’ in the previous sentence.¹⁵

To Day and Edwards, the disruption in the metonymy and the value mechanism of

¹² David Bate, *Photography after Postmodernism: Barthes, Stieglitz and the Art of Memory* (Taylor & Francis, 2022). p. 92.

¹³ Gail Day’s book *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* broadens our knowledge of the role of allegory and its relation to the symbol in the dialectical understandings of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man. Additionally, Day provides in-depth investigations of how allegory was explored in *October*’s critical debates. By incorporating Angus Fletcher’s and Edwin Honig’s literary viewpoints, she offers fresh perspectives on allegory’s evolution.

¹⁴ Gail Day and Steve Edwards, ‘Differential Time and Aesthetic Form: Uneven and Combined Capitalism in the Work of Allan Sekula’, in *Cultures of Uneven and Combined Development: From International Relations to World Literature*, eds. James Christie and Nesrin Degirmencioglu (The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), pp. 253-288 (p. 264).

¹⁵ Ibid.

capital and the enigma posed by the commodity suggested the complexities involved in the formulation of depiction and development of theories of knowledge. The allegory served as a tool for comprehending intricate epistemological or representational issues. Through their research, it was discovered that allegory played a crucial role in depicting the scenes and conveying the underlying message of the photographs. Their research held significance as they shed light on the complexity of allegory in photography. The utilisation of allegory in American photography set the stage for delving into its variations in British photography.

As I mentioned earlier, the two principal contributors focusing on the accounts of allegory in photography in the US context were Craig Owens and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. Thus, the practice of incorporating allegory in American photography could date back to 1980. In 1980, in the two-part essay 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', Owens asserted that 'an unmistakably allegorical impulse has begun to reassert itself in various aspects of contemporary culture.'¹⁶ In his view, contemporary art had witnessed a resurgence of allegorical impulses through a variety of forms. He also emphasised the connections between allegory and contemporary photography and specifically explored the allegorical elements and features in the works of American artists, such as Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Maxime Du Camp. In his 1982 essay 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', Buchloh focused on exploring and contrasting the allegorical

¹⁶ Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', Part 1, *October*, 12 (1980), pp. 67-86 (p. 68).

manifestations in photography-related techniques, such as appropriation and montage, through the works of artists and photographers, such as Levine, Martha Rosler, Louise Lawler, and Dara Birnbaum. As a result, the investigations of Owens and Buchloh were instrumental in establishing the concept of allegorical photography in the US context.

Owens and Buchloh were prime contributors to the journal *October*, which served as a significant platform for critical conversations on the emergence of postmodernism and new historicism in art history throughout the twentieth century. Founded in 1976, *October* marked a critical moment in exploring allegory in the development of contemporary art in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In addition to the two essays by Owens and Buchloh already mentioned, illuminating essays such as Owens's 'Earthwords' (1979), Joel Fineman's 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire' (1980), and Stephen Melville's 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism' (1981), addressed allegory in contemporary art from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, literature, and the medieval and modern ages. They offered unique perspectives. Owens's 'Earthwords' partly discussed the reciprocity of verbal and visual practices in allegory, inspired by Robert Smithson and Walter Benjamin. Through the literary framework, Fineman analysed how allegories were narrated temporally and spatially and how desire was reflected in the structure of allegories. In Melville's investigations, the interactions between rhetoric and hermeneutics were explored to examine the

temporal context in which medieval allegoreses associated themselves and their affinities with allegory.¹⁷ Their attention to allegory reinforced its irreplaceable values in contemporary visual culture. In contrast to Fineman and Melville, Owens and Buchloh concentrated on exploring the role of allegory in the field of aesthetics, setting the groundwork for my further research into how allegory influenced photographic practices and theories in the British context between 1989 and 1997.

The subsequent section presents an overview of how Owens and Buchloh historically approached allegory in their essays. Their essays laid the foundation for comparing the American and British contentions in the emerging debate on allegory in photography. Through my investigation, I determined that the studies conducted by Owens and Buchloh were significantly influenced by the concepts put forth by Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man and Roland Barthes, whose pivotal roles were also discussed in the section. At the end of the Literature Review, I discuss Steve Edwards's use of 'allegorical photography' in the British context. His research is the only piece of literature I have found in relation to discussions of allegory in the evolution of British photography.

¹⁷ Allegoreses (pl.); allegoresis (sing.)

Allegoresis is distinct from allegory. Allegory is a literary device that involves saying one thing while implying another. By contrast, allegoresis refers to the method of interpreting texts differently from the meaning intended by their authors.

Craig Owens

Owens's research shed light on the existence, impulses, and features of allegory within artistic practices, particularly photography. Through analysing artists' works – such as Sherrie Levine's appropriation images, Robert Longo's manipulation of film stills, and Maxime Du Camp's confusion of genres – he explored how allegory was revealed and read in contemporary visual culture. Additionally, Owens found that allegory and contemporary art were connected through various methods, such as appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization. Through his exploration, the connections between appropriation, site specificity and allegory were clear. According to him, the appropriated images were commonly represented via photographs. Site-specific artworks had a temporary presence and were documented in the form of photographs as their impermanence of performance made them unfeasible to reproduce with originally produced patterns and styles.

My view is that there is a lack of clarity in Owens's explanation of how photography and allegory are connected in accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization. I agree with his view that the strategies are intricately linked to photography, indicating their allegorical qualities. Considering the various contexts in which photography is examined, discursivity proves to be a viable strategy. The interpretation of photographs is not reliant on a specific discourse, which shifts the reader's perception of the works from one context to another. Moreover, creating the photographs

sometimes involves gathering, combining, and identifying different approaches, strategies, and discourses, possibly resulting in a hybridized image. The utilisations of the approaches above linking allegory and contemporary art are perceived as allegorical features in the production and interpretation of photography.

In Owens's research, a fundamental allegorical aspect of photography was a shift from transience to eternity. In his words, due to the impermanence of a photograph, the allegorical potential of photography was 'an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity'.¹⁸ In this sense, photography was recognised by its allegorical potential, and allegorical photography served as a powerful method for capturing and preserving transient and evanescent moments that could be kept permanently. In addition to exploring the fluctuation between transience and eternity, Owens highlighted the significance of one's desires in the photographic act. When viewing photography as an allegorical art, he added that photography was able to 'represent our desire to fix the transitory, the ephemeral, in a stable and stabilizing image.'¹⁹ Using the photographs of Walker Evans and Eugène Atget as examples, Owens further argued that it was the photographer's self-conscious desire that became the subject of the image and inscribed the meanings of the images. Owens's view suggested that the artist's consciousness was understood as an allegorical quality of photography.

¹⁸ Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse', Part 1, p. 71.

¹⁹ Ibid.

In my interpretation of Owens's analysis, the allegorical character of the artist's desire is due to its uncertainty. Artists' desires may be influenced by their strategies and the creation of meanings in their artworks. The artistic environment and visual culture in which the artist works also play a significant role in shaping his/her desire. One typical example was the artists of *The Pictures Generation*, who preferred to use montage and appropriation to reconstruct new images.²⁰ Utilising techniques such as copying, borrowing, and altering, the artists gained new perspectives on the original and the transformed images. Considering the discussions above, Owens identified photography's allegorical impulses and characteristics as a shift from ephemerality to infinity and the forces of one's desire.

In his examination of allegory, Owens was influenced by the theories of Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and Roland Barthes. Benjamin was a critical figure in the academic realms of allegory and photography. As revealed by Owens, allegory served as a means of revisiting history and witnessing how the past was re-enacted in the present. Examining the three scholars' influences on Owens's research is essential. Benjamin's analysis of the relationship between the past and present, images, and allegory served as a cornerstone for Owens's explorations of allegory. At the beginning of his essay, Owens quoted Benjamin's insights: 'Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear

²⁰ *The Pictures Generation* originated from the exhibition 'Pictures', 1977, curated by art historian and critic Douglas Crimp at Artist Space in New York. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of a group of American artists known as the *Pictures Generation*, whose work focused on critically examining media and culture. Some notable members were Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Richard Prince.

irretrievably.’²¹ In this sense, without the re-emergence of the present position, the past would disappear silently. In Owens’s view, allegory was apparent in the prevalent use of historical revivalism in modern architectural practice, as well as in the tendency of contemporary art historians to re-examine and reinterpret past events. Benjamin’s reading of images was also an asset to Owens’s exploration of allegory. Benjamin once stated that in an allegory, the image was ‘a hieroglyph’; an allegory was ‘a rebus-writing composed of concrete images.’²² Through Benjamin’s analysis of allegory, the images as hieroglyphics were not purely visual depictions because a hieroglyph is a picture or symbol that represents a word. The utilisation of images gave rise to diverse writing patterns, resulting in the formation of allegories. Benjamin’s examination revealed that neither the allegory nor the image was entirely indicative of a definite form and meaning.

Owens also highlighted how Benjamin’s perspectives on fragment, arbitrariness, and contingency could enhance the comprehension of the allegorical elements in photography, which led to more nuanced interpretations of the images. According to Benjamin, photographs took the form of a fragment and confirmed their arbitrariness and contingency. It was also common for allegory to ‘pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal.’²³ For Benjamin, photographs depicted the world in

²¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 253-264 (p. 255).

To maintain the completeness of the information, I have preserved the tense of the original text.

²² Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2009), pp. 168-169.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

ruins, thereby positioning themselves as shattered fragments. In addition, Benjamin considered randomness and inconsistency as manifestations of allegory in photographs. When reading the photographs of Evans and Atget, Owens argued that as they depicted the world, meanings had already been engraved onto it, so meanings already preceded the photographs. Following his view, specific meanings served as the underlying assumptions for understanding photographs. What the viewers perceived from photographs was part of predetermined and established knowledge. As such, taking the form of fragments, or runes or images, photographs and their meanings appeared incomplete and imperfect. The world presented by the photographs and the conveyed meanings were fragments of the world. Analysing Brauntuch's work *Untitled*, Owens argued that images simultaneously suggested and obviated meanings. The formation and depletion of meanings were not exclusive, definitive, or cohesive, and might occur simultaneously. Additionally, according to my own analysis of Owens and Benjamin, arbitrariness involves transforming an ordinary photograph into an image with a distinct artistic style, such as appropriation or parody. Moreover, interpreting photographs involves arbitrary shifts in varying discourses and contexts. Their writings indicate that the transience of photographs brings about fragmented content and interpretation. A photograph's content and meaning are subject to ambiguity and allegory, due to its inherent randomness and contingency.

Inspired by Paul de Man, Owens focused on the allegorical readings of photography.

For de Man, two distinct levels or usages of language, namely literal and rhetorical

(metaphoric), were engaged in the structural interferences in which the former asserted what the latter denied.²⁴ Influenced by de Man, Owens claimed that photographs were ‘implicated in a general thematics of reading’, which extended ‘far beyond the limits of the written text’, while reading the works of Laurie Anderson.²⁵ The readings of photographs were not identical to the meanings imagined at the moment of their creation and became more complicated. Through his analysis of de Man’s interpretations of allegory, Owens highlighted the separation between the signifier and the signified, and the differentiation between signs and their underlying meanings. The disconnection between the depicted scenes and corresponding meanings enabled the readers to assign different meanings to the photographs through diverse narrative methods. As such, the meanings produced by photographs led to their classification as signs, prompting implicit interpretations and connotations within different reading frameworks.

Roland Barthes, meanwhile, took a different point of view when he postulated that an allegorical schema had three levels of meaning: informational, symbolic and obtuse.²⁶ ‘Obtuse meaning’ investigated meanings independent of languages and could not be fully articulated. From this, ‘obtuse meaning’ was closely related to the acts of hiding and guise. In contrast to de Man’s link between the signifier and signified, Barthes posited that the language could serve as a suspended or bracketed referential function

²⁴ Paul de Man emphasised this viewpoint in his book *Allegories of Reading*, published in 1979.

²⁵ Craig Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism’, Part 2, *October*, 13 (1980), pp. 58-80 (p. 62).

²⁶ Roland Barthes highlighted this perspective in his essay ‘The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills’, included in the book *Image- Music-Text*.

without a signified. As Barthes argued, there was ‘an unresolved margin of incongruity’, within which an image could form without being governed by symbolic or referential meanings.²⁷ ‘Obtuse meaning’ contained an unaddressed area of inconsistency. In my view, with regard to ‘obtuse meaning’, disguise and an unacknowledged sphere of incongruity could potentially form allegorical features that differed from the literal and symbolic meanings. Through its disguise, allegory constantly ventured into uncharted realms and strived to reveal unarticulated expressions.

As demonstrated above, I contend that allegory plays a dual role in photography, serving as a tool for creating an image and interpreting photography. Fragments, randomness, and contingency in photography represent the potential to transform ephemerality into permanence through allegory. These allegorical elements and features influence the form and meanings of photographs. The interpretation of a photograph can be identified through three distinct levels of meaning, which ultimately produce allegorical elements. The informational, symbolic, and obtuse meanings perpetuate the fact that photographs attempt to convey something ambiguous over and above the image itself; in each, allegory comes into play. As such, the composition of a photograph potentially forms allegorical features, and develops allegorical interpretations of photography.

²⁷ Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse’, Part 2, p. 77.

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh elaborated on the allegorical features of photographic techniques, especially appropriation and montage, by examining the works of Levine, Rosler, Lawler, and Birnbaum. According to Buchloh, appropriation and montage were commonly used techniques in the creation of photographs. On this note, he introduced George Grosz's earlier definition of photomontage.²⁸ In Grosz's analysis, montage had an allegorical nature, since it expressed meanings hidden in public-accepted forms. The ability to reveal implicit and ignored meanings was an expression of allegory. Inspired by Grosz, Buchloh argued that the allegorical feature of montage lay in its functions. The montage was not merely a strategy; its representational and propagandistic functions and effects could not be neglected. In Buchloh's view, as a technique and strategy, montage dismantled the 'hierarchies.'²⁹ He also added that montage emphasised its 'tactility', thus establishing 'a new physiology of perception, anticipating and initiating transformations of the individual psyche as well as those of the larger social organization.'³⁰ In this regard, montage played a crucial role in physical and psychological perception and maintaining the social order. Under the influence of allegorical functions, the appropriated object constituted and negated itself in montage works. The act of appropriation in montage transformed the object into a fundamental part of a photograph, but its implied

²⁸ The year 1916 saw George Grosz and John Heartfield engaging in an innovative technique of piecing together images, ultimately giving rise to photomontage, an enduring form of artistic expression.

²⁹ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), p. 178.

³⁰ Ibid.

meanings might diverge from its original form and material. The montage's function and composition were consistently in a state of separation, which were considered as allegorical qualities.

In my opinion, according to Buchloh's analysis, allegorical montage has a direct impact on the viewer's perception of the work, particularly in the context of sustaining social stability. In montage works, through the juxtapositions of varied ideas, forms, and elements, the viewers can gain multiple experiences. The complex perceptions of the viewers may lead to different interpretations of the montage work, forming allegorical readings of photography. The inclusion of textual elements is also a feature of montage works. By incorporating quoted texts, readers can comprehend their reading modes and consistently re-examine their perspectives on the works. The process of deconstruction utilised in the montage technique is reminiscent of allegory. This partly explains why, in Buchloh's view, the process of montage revolved around the execution of allegorical principles, such as the appropriation and depletion of meanings. In addition to montage, in his analysis, techniques, such as superimposition, confiscation, and fragmentation were also conceived as allegorical methods. By combining one thing into another system or pattern – displaying artworks in public and associating abstract concepts with realistic imagery – certain elements were virtually borrowed from elsewhere. With inspiration from other sources, allegorical strategies evolved into different ways of conveying meanings.

Buchloh also contributed to the distinctions between the allegorical procedures in the photoworks of Levine and Rosler. Various social and political factors influenced their works in distinct ways. For Buchloh, Levine's allegorical appropriations revealed fragmentation, different representations of objects, and the author's denial; meanwhile, Rosler attempted to reveal historical, documentary, and political inadequacy behind which individual practices had been hidden. In Levine's practice, representations were fragmented, separated from the ideological discourse in which they existed. Additionally, Buchloh argued that there was a risk in taking Levine's position in that it might 'function ultimately in secret alliance with the static conditions of social life', since they were reflected in an artistic creation that was 'only concerned with the work's finite commodity structure', which considered 'the innovation of artistic product design.'³¹ Levine decreased the value of the object that was being represented by underlining its fundamental position as an image that could be replicated and duplicated through technology.

Based on Buchloh's analysis, my perspective is that Levine redefines the appropriated objects by rephotographing the historical pieces of artists like Walker Evans, Edward Weston, and Eliot Porter. The ubiquity of technology has made it possible to duplicate and reproduce works, often disregarding the issue of authorship. The confiscation of historical works provides the viewers with a unique viewing experience. When analysing nearly identical works, how should the readers consider their discrepancies?

³¹ Ibid., p. 198.

The identity of the original author does not seem to hold much weight. Therefore, the allegorical qualities constructed in Levine's photographic practice lie in her uses of fragmentation, the variations of objects, and the denial of authorship.

By contrast, for Buchloh, Rosler's works demonstrated historical significance and insufficiency for contemporary documentary production outside of photography's aesthetic conventions. Her photographs appeared to be documentary depictions of the surroundings but were full of the photographer's political and social insights. One important example was the conflict between photos and texts in her work *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-1975).³² Rosler argued that 'words would be a kind of unexpected poetry. Their ironic humour would cut against and be cut against by the deadpan photographs.'³³ The unanticipated role of words indicated a possible contradiction with photographs, especially when ironic words were placed alongside unutterable photographs. The unexpected contrast between words and photographs in the documentary presentations evoked ever-changing modes of interpretations. According to Buchloh, Rosler's works had a dual influence on the interplay between texts and photographs and argued that her work would 'engage the spectators in types of communicative action that would lead towards radical political awareness and change.'³⁴ The correlation between texts and photographs in Rosler's

³² In Steve Edwards's book *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, he contributed to understanding this work. In his examination, Edwards carefully scrutinised Rosler's work, considering its historical and cultural foundations and its links to political modernism, primarily the contributions of Jean-Luc Godard.

³³ Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity*, p. 212.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

works allowed viewers to engage with the artwork in various ways. The interaction between the viewer and work, particularly, was demonstrated in her works' capacity to enhance the viewer's understanding of political ideologies and consciousness.

Given Rosler's and Buchloh's perspectives on the complex relationship between texts and photographs, my understanding is that, for them, the photographs may not adequately depict the texts, and the texts may not entirely offer illustrative explanations for the photographs. The relationship between text and image will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 2.

From my perspective, Rosler's works pose a provoking question: if the texts and images do not adequately represent each other, what impact does their relationship have on documentary photography, whose primary purpose is to uncover reality? With the use of words, the documentary nature of photography is undermined. This criticism of the historicity of documentary photography was highlighted in Rosler's 1981 essay 'In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)'. For Rosler, documentary photography represented 'the social conscience of liberal sensibility presented in visual imagery.'³⁵ To me, social conscience is conveyed through documentary photography as a representation of one's understanding of social phenomena. However, her works demonstrate a strong sense of political consciousness, as they reveal the impact of the societal structure in which she resides.

In this sense, Rosler's project reveals the contradictions between ideology and

³⁵ Martha Rosler, 'In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)', in *Martha Rosler, 3 Works* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1981), pp. 303-325 (p. 303).

documentary photography through allegorical texts and images.

Walter Benjamin's study of the commodity served as a foundation for Buchloh's examination of allegory and montage. As Benjamin wrote, the 'devaluation of objects in allegory' was 'surpassed in the world of objects itself by the commodity.'³⁶ In this respect, the attributes of commodities influenced the object in the world of allegory. It appeared that within allegorical photographs, objects could be employed as commodities. Additionally, under the influence of advertising (Sherman's commodity-like 'film still'), language and image were allegorised by juxtaposing fragments. The commodity character of things was veiled through advertising. Benjamin's insights inspired Buchloh to illustrate how the allegorical mind resisted the object's devaluation as a mere commodity. The process of transforming objects into commodities meant a separation of the signifier and signified. Considering the above analysis, Buchloh's study is noteworthy because it not only associates allegory with montage and appropriation, but also examines the allegorical characteristics showcased in the photoworks of Levine and Rosler.

³⁶ Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity*, p. 176.

The Inclination to Allegory within the British Context

The interest in allegory could be understood as a poignant symptom of the socio-political unease within British society. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a notable emergence of dynamic, innovative and critical photographic practices. These were shaped by a multitude of interconnected historical circumstances and the emergence of social movements. Policies associated with the postwar welfare state came under challenge amidst the adoption of neoliberal economic measures by consecutive Conservative administrations (1979-97).³⁷ The political backdrop of Thatcherism introduced the privatisation of state-owned resources and commenced a sustained attack on trade unions.³⁸ The period also witnessed significant unrest provoked by state prejudices against people of colour, the growing influence of feminist campaigns³⁹, resistance to the media scaremongering of the HIV/AIDS crisis⁴⁰, and conflicts between the national government and local government administered by progressive Labour councillors.⁴¹ Struggles over funding by the

³⁷ Throughout the decades spanning from 1980s to the 1990s, the Conservative government undertook a sequence of economic transformations and policies, such as the revision of labour laws, a new mode of financing pensions, and challenged other aspects of the welfare state.

David E Card, et al. *Seeking a Premier Economy: The Economic Effects of British Economic Reforms, 1980-2000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁸ Privatisation has had a critical impact on unions, leading to a substantial drop in membership and a weakened position in negotiations.

David Marsh, 'Privatisation' in *The New Politics of British Trade Unionism: Union Power and the Thatcher Legacy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 187-188; 231-237.

³⁹ A new wave of women established a variety of feminist activities such as national networks, campaigns focusing on specific issues, like local groups, festivals, and magazines. Kristin Aune and Rose Holyoak, 'Navigating the Third Wave: Contemporary UK Feminist Activists and "Third-Wave Feminism"', *Feminist Theory*, 19.2 (2017), pp. 183-203.

⁴⁰ Matt Cook, "'Archives of Feeling': The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987", *History Workshop Journal*, 83.1 (2017), pp. 51-78.

⁴¹ David Edward Lowes, 'In Defence of Local Government: An Immanent Critique of Labour Movement Campaigns to Defend Local Democracy, Jobs, and Services in the 1980s' (doctoral

Greater London Council, for example, impacted directly on community projects and on arts organisations.⁴² The resistance to these measures was important for the work of critical artists and photographers.

In the academic realms of cultural theory, there were growing challenges to the exclusivity of high culture, which, in turn, was reflected in the transformations of cultural production. Cultural creators used their works to critique the social and political inequalities brought about by Thatcherism. The 1980s and 1990s marked a shift towards recognizing multiculturalism in Britain, resulting in more efforts to represent the diversity in culture. Artists frequently delved into topics of race, identity, and immigration, effectively mirroring the evolving demographics and societal preoccupations during that period. The dedication of the journal *Ten-8* to investigating the connections between photography and cultural, social, and political matters enriched the discourse on visual media and its wider implications for society. In the British context, cultural theory diverted its gaze away from the domains of modernist and avant-garde aesthetic movements, opting instead to concentrate its attention on artifacts of media culture and popular culture.⁴³

dissertation, Liverpool John Moores University, 1998)
<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/4994/1/286106.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2024].

⁴² Mathilde Bertrand, 'Cultural Battles: Margaret Thatcher, the Greater London Council and the British Community Arts Movement', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, XXVI-3 (2021), <<https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.8435>>.

⁴³ This differed from the Frankfurt School, which has been widely acclaimed as a collective of influential German- American theorists. Another significant difference was observed in the US context, dominated by a resistance to High Modernist theory. It was advocated by influential critics like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.

Certain observers viewed popular subcultures as significant places of resistance and struggle, so popular culture was seen as having a dual nature, with elements of conservatism and resistance. By contrast, the discourse surrounding media culture centred on the deconstruction and criticism of conservative ideologies, advocating the need to challenge and dismantle the prevailing norms and beliefs perpetuated by the media. The British perspective explored how media culture influenced people to adopt shared values and beliefs through dominant political ideologies and cultural forms. The involvement of media culture led to the democratisation of culture, by bridging the boundaries between elite cultural forms and broader populace.

British culture in the 1980s and 1990s was abundantly infused with intricate storytelling and allegorical elements, eloquently mirroring the profound social and political transformations occurring within society. In the sphere of cultural production, allegory, as an intricate and sophisticated form of expression, has traditionally been embraced by creators of high culture to effectively convey profound political, or social reflections. In my project, for example, I found that Karen Knorr made use of allusions to high culture, in the form of stately homes and connoisseurs, while also partaking in the wider critical wave of thinking.

The 1980s were notable for how art history and visual culture were closely connected to and impacted by societal changes. The publication *Block* emerged as a

manifestation of the symbiotic relationship between art history and society, which shaped the evolution and nuances of social art history.⁴⁴ The focus of *Block* was to examine and offer insightful analysis of the issues surrounding social, economic, and ideological dimensions that have shaped the arts within societies throughout history and in contemporary times.⁴⁵ *Block* also showcased moves within ‘critical theory and the relation of theory to social and cultural agendas.’⁴⁶ The intricate correlation between critical theory and various societal and cultural missions were unequivocally apparent.

The final issue of *Block* in 1989 (starting point of my research scope) reflected a time of political transformation, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of apartheid. Writing in 1996, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock reflected back on the developments of the 1970s and 80s and offered an analysis of the intersection between the avant-garde movement and historical, social, and cultural dimensions. The reflection on socially and politically historical transformation prompted visual artists to develop new approaches. The portrayal of social and political issues in art history and visual culture can be viewed as a demonstration of allegory. Such allegorical depictions allowed for a more nuanced understanding of social and political realities.

⁴⁴ *Ten-8* could be seen as the photo equivalent of *Block* due to their shared exploration of social and political contexts. They were dedicated to investigating the social and political aspects of visual culture. *Block* explored representation, identity, and power within visual arts and media. Likewise, *Ten-8* examined how photography intersected with social, political, and cultural factors, highlighting the production, circulation, and reception of images in diverse contexts.

⁴⁵ Jon Bird and Lisa Tickner, ‘Introduction’, and ‘Introduction’ in *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. xiii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. xiv.

In the realm of artistic production, especially photography, allegory served as a vehicle through which artists offered thought-provoking commentary on the social-political landscape of contemporary Britain, with a particular focus on scrutinizing the policies of the Thatcher government. We can see this in the work of Karen Knorr. She explicitly expresses the importance of allegory in her photoworks. In her words, allegory is ‘visual rhetoric’, and ‘it’s what my work is constantly dealing with both on a practical and poetic level.’⁴⁷ Moreover, the narratives of allegory enable photography to convey intricate and profound ideas and meanings. In her words, allegory ‘tells one story through another, and in photography it works as a narrative construct where an image may have literal meanings but simultaneously holds symbolic truths.’⁴⁸ With the help of allegory, Knorr cleverly satirizes the societal norms and class distinctions prevalent during the 1980s era of Thatcherism in her series: *Country Life* (1983-85), *Belgravia* (1979-81) and *Gentlemen* (1981-83).

Moreover, artistic explorations extended to broader societal themes, such as the pervasive nature of consumerism, and the nuanced facets of identity. For example, Peter Kennard, a highly influential and well-known artist specializing in the art of political photomontage, gained recognition for his bold and expressive work during the 1980s, which was characterized by its strong allegorical themes and imagery. His

⁴⁷ Rosa Maria Falvo, ‘Interview with Karen Knorr’, Karenknorr.com, June, 2014| <https://karenknorr.com/writings/interview-with-karen-knorr-by-rosa-maria-falvo-june-2014/> [accessed 3 June 2024].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

work *Haywain with Cruise Missiles* (1980) juxtaposed John Constable's (apparent) scenes of rural tranquility with contemporary military armaments, offering a critique of militarism and the presence of nuclear missiles in the modern rural landscape (notably at Greenham Common). His use of photomontage and collaged landscapes serve as visual critiques of political and social critique. By contrast, Olivier Richon's constructed landscapes tended to explore philosophical and literary questions. As I will explore later, Richon incorporated contemporary objects or anachronistic elements into aristocratic settings, disrupting the conventional imagery of historical landscapes. This method mirrors John Barrell's critique of the idealised landscapes, as Richon's juxtapositions and representation skilfully unveil the artificial nature of the staged settings. His depictions of landscapes invited viewers to reflect on their historical and social implications.⁴⁹

What is essential for this project to recognise here is that there are differences between the American and British-based examples of allegorical photography. Their primary differences revolve around the diverse photographic genres and modes of depiction. Compared to artists based in the USA, such as Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, and Robert Longo, British-based photographers had a wider range of artistic

⁴⁹ John Barrell's book *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* provided insights into Olivier Richon's photographic creations. Barrell investigated how English landscape paintings in the 18th and 19th centuries overlooked or romanticized the rural landscapes, portraying them as idealized sanctuaries that escaped from harsh realities of rural life. The book also elucidated the intricate relationship between landscape paintings and social and political structures of the time, effectively aligning with the needs and preferences of the privileged landowners and upper class by portraying peaceful rural landscapes.

John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

styles. The American photographers examined in the study of Owens and Buchloh were predominantly associated with the Pictures Generation, who drew inspiration from conceptual and pop art movements. They were devoted to exposing the constructed nature of images by using montage and appropriation techniques. Additionally, their practices extended to media, such as film, which offered critical perspectives on the authorship and originality of photographs. Within the American framework, special attention was given to the individuality of the artists, underscoring the importance of acknowledging and valuing their unique perspectives on the interpretations of photographic creations, effectively distinguishing them from the works in the British context.

By contrast, British-based photographers in the 1980s and 1990s observed photography as a dynamic medium for showcasing societal transformations, engaging in political advocacy, and exploring artistic movements. Victor Burgin was a prominent figure who utilised inventive strategies to examine the portrayal of photography through the integration of abstract concepts and material forms. His practice involved photo-text works, prints, digital video, and 3D modelling. Marie Yates explored the representation of women and sexual diversity in the media and society. Olivier Richon captured diverse photographs featuring inanimate creatures and ordinary objects infused with classical philosophy and literature elements. The focus of Karen Knorr's work was to examine the purposes and influences of photography, utilising the medium as a tool. The 1980s saw the emergence of feminist

theories, which greatly influenced the portrayal of women as a central theme in photography. Using objects with sexual connotations and creating exquisite scenes, Helen Chadwick challenged the traditional and straightforward representation of women's bodies. My study seeks to enhance the comprehension of allegory by examining the differences between American and British-based photoworks. The developments of allegory in the British context help to pose challenging questions for the broader histories of photography, such as the nature of photographic representation. The British perspective also critically evaluates how the photographic practices manifest allegory.

Steve Edwards

Until now, only Steve Edwards has given a clear account of allegorical photography within the British context. His research offered fresh perspectives on the evolution of allegorical photography in the nineteenth century. Edwards's exploration was articulated in two leading publications: *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* and *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*. He wrote an entry named 'allegorical photography', which provided insights into allegory and photography. For him, allegory was a 'twice-told tale'.⁵⁰ It meant that allegory combined literal representations in conjunction with implicit meanings. In this sense, historical representations – such as the Bible, and Romantic poetry – enabled the

⁵⁰ Steve Edwards, 'Allegorical Photography', in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 27-29 (p. 27).

narration of allegorical images to be made.

Edwards also made comparisons between the concepts of allegory and symbol, noting three distinctions between them. Firstly, in contrast to symbols, where meanings were conveyed instantly, allegories took time to be understood. This perspective suggested the temporal dimension of allegory. Secondly, symbols were considered as organic wholes, while allegories contained an apparent gap between their literal depictions and the following narratives. This feature echoed Benjamin's conception of allegory as a fragmentary art. Lastly, symbols were clearly and transparently defined, whereas allegory featured ambiguity by its nature. These differences between symbols and allegories were broadly applied to the investigation of staged photographs, such as Robert Hunt's review of Lake Price and Rejlander's 1856 photographic exhibition, and the poet and critic Charles Baudelaire's discussions of French photography. Their critiques pointed out that the allegorical pictures failed to reconcile what was depicted and what was implied by narrative allusions.

Edwards broadened our knowledge of allegorical photography through the following three aspects: the distinctions between allegorical images and moralised photographic art; the potential of everyday existence to be a basis for allegorical narratives; the difference between allegory and allegoresis. The first aspect was the distinction between allegorical images and photographic art in a moralised genre. Genre pictures were perceived to contain underlying moral or ideological meanings. By contrast,

allegorical images involved a second moment or process of reading in which “the literal, or ‘denotative,’ depiction of things, and events is complemented, or overlaid, by implied, or ‘connotative,’ associations.”⁵¹ In this regard, the reading of an image was supplementary to the portrayal of the image and even substituted the original meanings of the depicted images. The allegorical images contained numerous layers of meanings that stemmed from different levels of interpretation.

Secondly, Edwards explored the potential expressions of allegorical photographic expression in the records of everyday life. By considering their temporality, even banal or everyday photographic records could be charged with allegorical qualities. When viewed in the present, the images in daily life from the past often induced ‘a typically allegorical moment of melancholic reflection on the passing of time and the all-too-transitory character of life.’⁵² These feelings of melancholia revealed reflection on passings and suggest that all passings were moments of lives. In my understanding, the progression of time and the fleetingness of moments in life encompass intricate expressions and perceptions. These two features possess allegorical potential by virtue of their inherent connection to other elements and their ongoing generation of meaning. The final aspect highlighted by Edwards was related to the question of anachronistic interpretation regarding the distinctions between allegory and allegoresis. Some contemporary critics falsely attributed a critical self-awareness to early photographers, a level of introspection that was not achievable

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵² Ibid.

during the nineteenth century (the work of Julia Margaret Cameron should not be confused with that of Cindy Sherman). As argued by Edwards, allegory referred to ‘images intentionally designed to be read in two registers’, while allegorisis meant ‘allegorical reading, which allowed the critic to generate the second interpretation.’ (e.g. a modern update on a Biblical story).⁵³ Allegorisis was a crucial method for engaging in the debate on history and identity. More importantly, it also foregrounded ‘the interpretive act rather than the initial context of production or first use.’⁵⁴ The act of interpretation and the secondary stage of interpretation became the focus of allegoresis. For Edwards, a second-level interpretation of images might lead to a transformation in reading methods, indicating the presence of allegorical features.

Edwards’s interpretations of allegorical photography were based on his insights into the photographs and feminist theory. In his research, photographs were not only depictions of the surroundings, but also allowed the viewer to reflect on what lay beyond the photographs. On this point, Edwards introduced Geoffrey Batchen’s comment on Hippolyte Bayard’s *Self-Portrait as Drowned Man* (1840). Batchen claimed that Bayard’s work was ‘a meditation on his marginalisation in photographic culture’.⁵⁵ The ‘his’ here referred to Bayard. In this context, the ability to ponder over the photographer’s marginalisation was understood as an embodiment of allegory in photography. In my understanding, acknowledging the photographer’s disregarded sentiments is an allegorical reading of a photograph. This is mainly because the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

photographer's perspective may not be a central focus when traditionally reading images. In addition to the qualities of the photographs, Edwards pointed out that the development of feminist theory contributed to the exploration and reassessment of allegorical photography. In his thinking, Carol Armstrong's perspective on gender performance played a key role. As Armstrong argued, the multi-layered meanings generated from staged images enabled 'women to explore their ambivalent relation to the cultural conventions of femininity.'⁵⁶ The women introspectively examined their psyche to untangle their conflicting thoughts about cultural expectations. The rise of female photographers in the 1980s was attributed to women's efforts to fight for their rights and societal roles. In addition to the above discussion on the conceptual level, Edwards was also aware of the use of allegory in photographic works. He mentioned the rise of staged photography in the works of Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Olivier Richon, and Victor Burgin. Their practices echoed the allegorical works in the nineteenth century (such as those of Rejlander, Cameron and Price), which made them 'retardataire.'⁵⁷ He did not provide an in-depth analysis of the allegorical characteristics of these photographers, but he did pave the way for my further exploration of Richon.

Edwards explored how English photography developed as a twice-told tale in the nineteenth century in *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*. He argued that it was a project 'of – allegoresis – allegorical reading – because the allegory was

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

unconscious.’⁵⁸ The allegory and allegorical reading proposed possibilities for interpreting photography from multiple perspectives. In this sense, photography did not simply represent the objective reality brought about by the camera as some elements existed ‘as the fragments of an allegory of labor.’⁵⁹ The allegory implied that photography was a fusion of technical, objective aspects and imaginative, expressive features. According to Edwards, the aesthetic was regarded as a generative social form. His viewpoint was based on his explorations of the relationship between art and social history. In his view, when discussing photography, it was crucial to incorporate its social history and consider its role in art. Edwards also showed how labour groups manipulated the term ‘machine’ to express their ideological or material interests through inflection, re-inflection, emphasis, and reemphasis. Under this circumstance, reading allegorical photography was viewed as an allotropic practice, which described the ability of the same object to take on different forms.

To sum up, Craig Owens highlighted the vital role of allegory in contemporary art, especially photography. Investigating the techniques associated with allegory and contemporary art, he examined the works of several contemporary artists. Owens also provided a better understanding of the allegorical features in photography, such as transience and connections between the past and present. Additionally, Buchloh’s research centred on the features of appropriation and montage, and the distinctions between Levine’s and Rosler’s allegorical procedures. By contrast, Steve Edwards

⁵⁸ Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

focused more on exploring the development of allegorical photography in the British context, explicitly emphasising the distinctions between allegory and symbol, and between allegorical images and the genre of moralisation. Apart from Owens, Buchloh, Benjamin, and Edwards (and David Campany's limited references to allegory in British photographic practices), nobody else I have researched has addressed the topic of allegory specifically through a photography-related discussion. The above contributors have paved the way for further analysis of allegory in the practices and writings of photography (as outlined in my dissertation) and helped to create a framework for interpreting allegorical elements and features in photographic works in future research.

Chapter 1: Emergence of Allegory and Photography in Britain

The examination conducted above suggests that the use of allegory in photography has received increased attention in the US context since the 1980s. This period has also seen a growing recognition of the crucial ties between allegory and photography in Britain. The exhibitions and books *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography* (1989), *The Fortune Teller* (1992), and *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (1997) shed new light on how allegory relates to photography through the exploration of photographic practices and writings. The UK was the location for all three projects, despite the participating contributors coming from different parts of the world.

Chapter 1 takes a broader perspective on the three photographic projects related to allegory before narrowing it down to the works of British-based photographers Richon and Knorr. The chapter then introduces two publications – *Allegories* by Richon and *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* by Knorr – which appeared in 2000 and 2002 respectively, to investigate how their exploration contributed to the emergence of allegory in their photoworks. The indication of allegory in their publications revealed its significant role in shaping their photoworks in the three allegory-related photographic projects. This section aims to investigate how allegory impacts the characteristics of photography in the photoworks and

writings of photographers, artists, and theorists, drawing on insights from three photographic projects and two monographic books.

Part 1: *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography* (1989)

Other Than Itself was initiated in late 1987, when Berger shared with Richon the artwork from his MA in Fine Art studies at Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic. The encounter revealed their shared emphasis on a critical approach to photography. Both came to be employed at Derbyshire College of Education (later, University of Derby), where Richon taught the practice of photography and Berger specialised in the history of photography. In 1984, Berger established a commitment to publishing at Derby, and *Other Than Itself* was, he recalls, ‘an important step in the development of an ongoing imprint.’⁶⁰ The project demonstrated their allegorical comprehension of photography. *Other Than Itself* focused on investigating the concept of otherness in photography, which Richon and Berger considered to be a manifestation of allegory. The project was presented as a high-quality publication and in several exhibitions. Edited by Berger and Richon and published in 1989,⁶¹ the soft-cover, unpaginated book featured printed essays and exquisite colour illustrations.⁶² The cover image (Figure 1) depicted a close-up of the portrait of Erasmus Darwin, painted by Joseph Wright of Derby. Richon photographed this painting in the Derby Art Gallery, the

⁶⁰ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

⁶¹ During the creation of the project, Olivier and Berger reached a consensus on how to divide the labor. Richon was responsible for liaising with the contributors and writing a draft of the introduction. At the same time, Berger dealt with funding and the publisher.

Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

⁶² John X. Berger was a Lecturer in the History of Photography at Derbyshire College of Education. Due to his encouragement, Helmut Gernsheim’s book *Incunabula of British Photographic Literature: A Bibliography of British photographic literature, 1839-75*. It was published with the help of Derbyshire College of Higher Education, and Berger was responsible for the editing of the book. Additionally, an important photo festival was established in Derby in 1992. It was the second Derby Photography Festival ‘Beyond the Portrait’, which featured a major retrospective of work by Brian Griffin and contained ‘A Tribute to Jo Spence’ by Amanda Hopkinson and Jo Spence works. According to my research, it appeared that Berger participated in the festival, however, no concrete details were uncovered regarding his specific contributions.

town where the editors were then teaching photography. Situated on the right side of the cover photo is a list of all participating artists in the project. The book comprised five components: an introduction, essays, photographic works, notes on contributors, and acknowledgements (one of the page-spreads from the book can be seen in Figure 2).⁶³ The primary contribution of *Other Than Itself* was to consider the relationship between texts and photographs.⁶⁴ Through both theoretical and practical explorations, photography was interpreted as a form of representation and a medium that referred to something beyond itself.

⁶³ Additional materials for reproduction – and to develop the allegorical framework for the project – were sourced from Camerawork, the Berne Natural History Museum (picture research), the British Library, the Bridgeman Art Library, the National Library of Scotland, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The interactions with Cornerhouse were straightforward. Dewi Lewis had a very good reputation with the Arts Council of Great Britain, the latter was certainly very interested in doing “something different” from the prevailing models, the monographic and the thematic. The heavy lifting for the exhibition and its subsequent tour was largely the work of Camerawork.

Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

⁶⁴ According to Berger’s memory, the practical aspects of the project proceeded smoothly. The work for the accompanying exhibition was funded by John X. Berger, Karen Knorr, Olivier Richon, and Marie Yates respectively. Berger also added that ‘the selection of other work for the publication had as much to do with friendships as it did with positions.’

Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

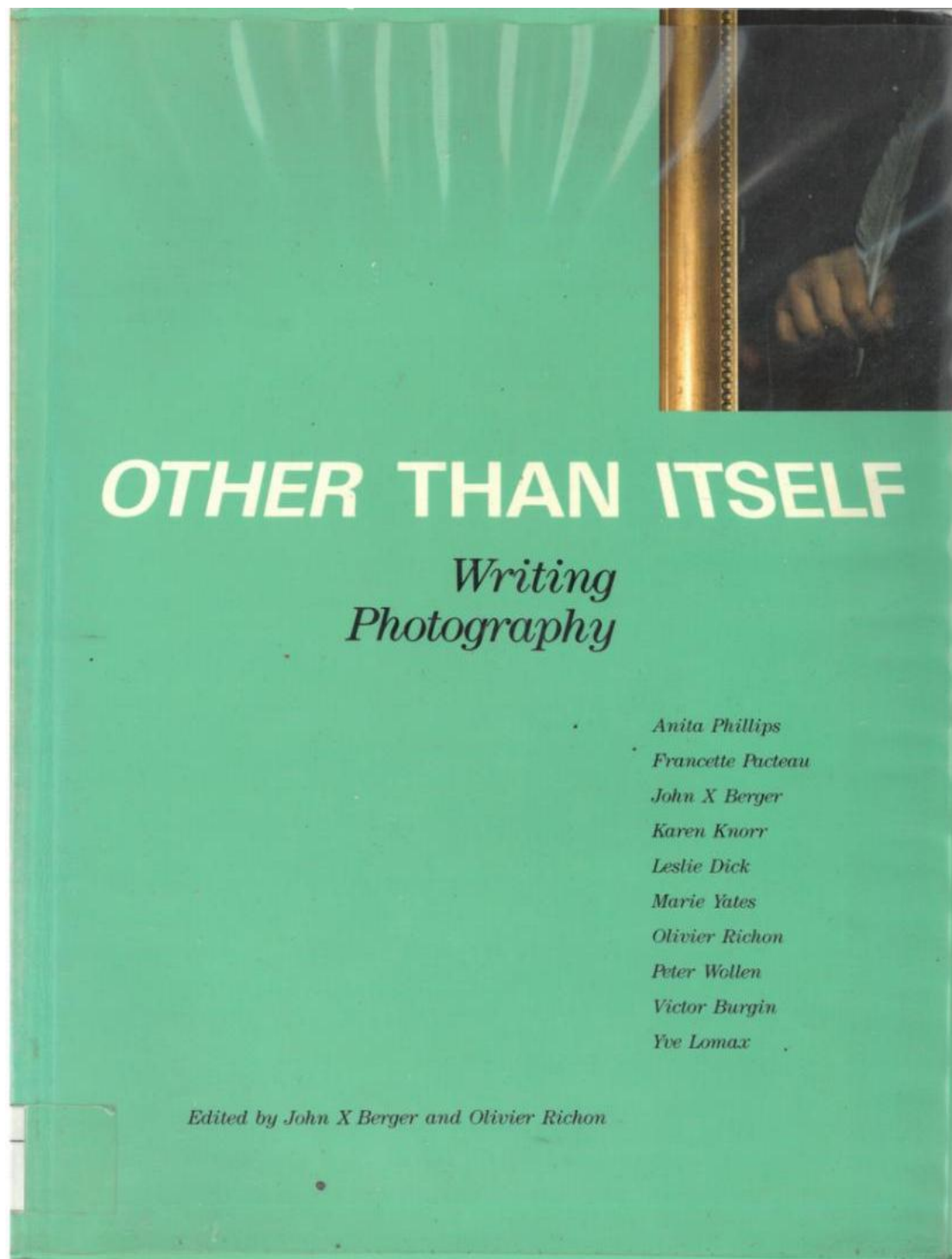


Figure 1. Cover of the book *Other Than Itself*, 1989, paper, 27.5 cm x 20.5 cm, *Other Than Itself*

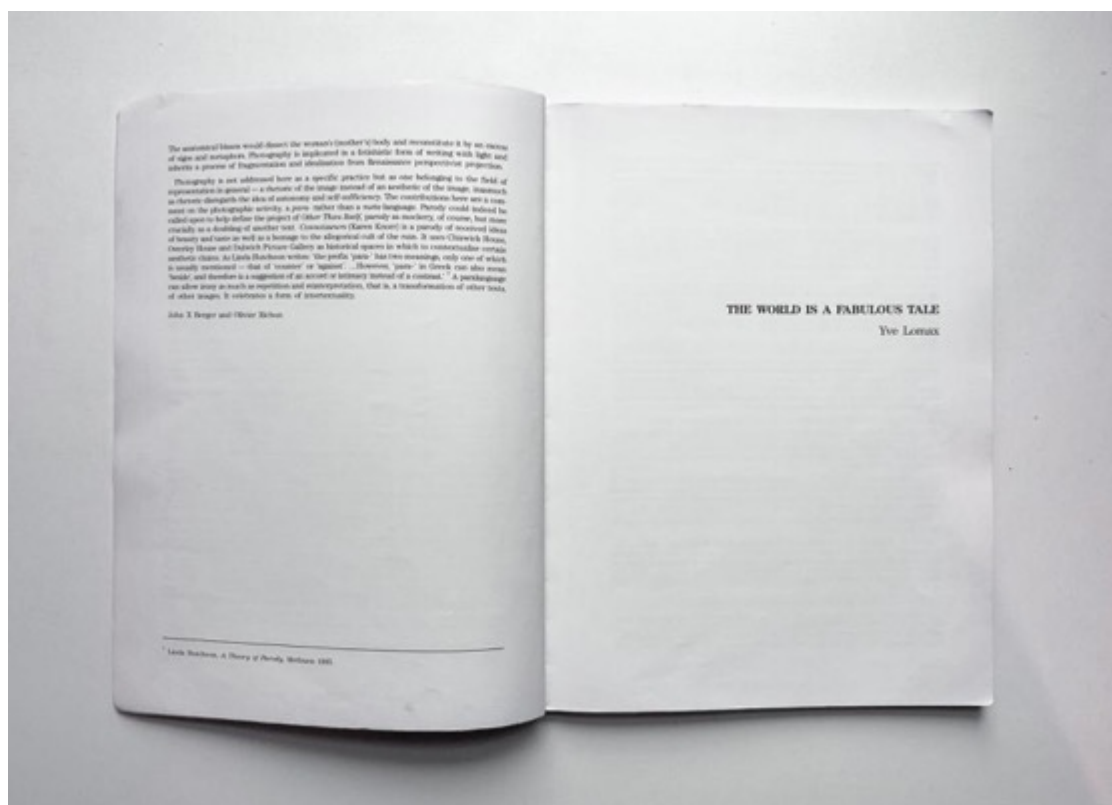


Figure 2. One of the page-spreads in the book *Other Than Itself*, 1989, paper, 27.5 cm x 20.5 cm, *Other Than Itself*

According to the information found so far, *Other Than Itself* was exhibited in five regions of the UK between 1989 and 1990, featuring the photoworks of four artists: John X. Berger, Marie Yates, Karen Knorr, and Olivier Richon.⁶⁵ The exhibition highlighted the role of allegory and the viewer in photography. As shown in the exhibition's flyer (Figure 3), *Other Than Itself* centred on 'photography's capacity for allegory and story-telling.'⁶⁶ In this sense, photography was understood as a medium for conveying a story and allegory, and both of them involved fictional narratives. The

⁶⁵ The subsequent information outlines the five exhibitions. 1989: *Other Than Itself*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England; Cambridge Dark Room, Cambridge, England; Showroom/Camerawork, London, England. 1990: *Other Than Itself*, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal, Cumbria, England.

⁶⁶ 'Organisational', *Four Corners Archive*.

flyer also suggested that the exhibition works aimed to deal with ‘emblems or fictions rather than being descriptive or illustrative.’⁶⁷ Considering this perspective, I think the emblems aimed to depict abstract concepts or notions through visual means. The fictional narratives dealt with imaginary depictions of figures, events, and scenes. The participating artists sought to dispense with the established descriptive and illustrative attributes of photography. The extension of the emblematic and fictional aspects embodied the intrinsic otherness of photography, shedding light on the ways in which this medium stood out and diverged from its traditional modes of expressions.

In addition to the photography itself, the artists’ practice directed our attention to the role of the viewer, who took ‘pleasure in interpreting and inventing meanings.’⁶⁸ In this understanding, the viewer played an active role in both producing and deciphering the meanings conveyed by the photographs. Considering the effect of photography’s ‘otherness’ and the viewer’s involvement, the photographs in the exhibition were ‘not just mirrors of the world,’ but also assistants, helping to ‘construct our understanding of it.’⁶⁹ The allegorical features of the photographs not only helped the viewers and the audience to have a comprehensive understanding of the captured world, but also shaped their perceptions of photography. The participating artists were committed to exploring photography’s capability for allegorical narratives, which involved the photographer’s intentional formation of the visual portrayal, such as the use of emblems and fictions, and the viewer’s

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

involvement in the perception of the photograph's interpretation.



Figure 3. Camerawork flyer publicising the exhibition *Other Than Itself*, 1989, paper, *Camerawork*

Participants/ Contributors:

The project featured the collaboration of ten artists, with their contributions organised into two distinct types: photo-text works and essays. The essays were Yve Lomax's 'World is a Fabulous Tale', Anita Phillips's 'Virtues, the Vices and All the Passions', Francette Pacteau's 'Beautiful Fragments', Leslie Dick's 'Skull of Charlotte Corday', and Peter Wollen's 'Fire and Ice'. Their perspectives on allegory had significant distinctions. Lomax and Wollen presented unique viewpoints on analysing allegory within photography. Meanwhile, the discursive writings of Pacteau, Philips, and Dick were related to Renaissance poetry, literary fiction, and anthropology respectively. The theoretical investigations established a conceptual structure for understanding the significance of allegory in photography, literature, and film, which paved the way for further studies on allegorical photography.

Apart from essays, the photographic practices included Marie Yates's photoworks *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*, John X. Berger's photoworks *Details from Hawthorne*, Victor Burgin's photoworks *Office at Night*, Karen Knorr's photoworks *Connoisseurs*, and Olivier Richon's photoworks *Imprese*. In the following section, I explore and distinguish the following features and approaches to allegory in *Other Than Itself*: Yates's feministic perspective, Berger's literary approach, Burgin's political insights, Richon's exploration of taxidermized animals, and Knorr's museal and aesthetical investigations. It is worth highlighting that Wollen, Phillips, and Burgin had notable reputations for their works prior to *Other Than Itself*. My analysis

includes a separate description of each participating artist and incorporates the comments on each artist provided by Berger and Richon in the book's introduction. Examining the practice of each contributor allows for investigation into whether their allegorical manifestations stem from the composition of a photograph or whether their creations introduce new ways of reading images.

Marie Yates's Photoworks *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*

Marie Yates (1940-) is a British feminist and conceptual artist. Her works are primarily concerned with feminism, sexual differences, representation, and signification. As stated on Yates's website, the series *Taking Sides and Drifting Around* was produced specifically for *Other Than Itself*.⁷⁰ Its book showcased five photographs, presented as paved pages, from Yates's series. Two pieces are shown in Figure 4 below. Through vibrant colours, the large-sized tableaux shed light on the challenges of representing women's bodies in a male-dominated society.



⁷⁰ 'Both Sides Now Project 1989', Marie Yates, n.d.
<<http://marieyates.org.uk/bothsidesnowproject.html>> [accessed 12 August 2023].



Figure 4. Two page-spreads from *Other Than Itself* of Marie Yates, *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*, 1989 (originally, the work was presented as framed photographic prints), *Other Than Itself*

Along with *Other Than Itself*, the exhibition *Both Sides Now*, held in London in 1989, also showcased Yates's series *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*. By creating the siding and drifting, Yates displayed gender-based discrepancies and conflicts between men and women. According to Yates, the 'sides' in the title referred to men and women. In her words, 'Men and women can never quite inhabit their images and only momentarily at that, shifting and hovering. Drifting around, unwilling to take sides.'⁷¹ From this viewpoint, the captured images did not accurately depict the existing realities and conventions of men and women. It appeared that both the identities and

⁷¹ Ibid.

situations of men and women were in a state of shifting and wavering. It also seemed clear that the predetermined notions of gender roles within social structures might not always align with the visual representation of men and women.

Various sources of critical commentary attributing meanings to the images and appraising their connections to the texts revealed that *Taking Sides and Drifting Around* was considered to have allegorical qualities. Upon closer scrutiny, numerous elements of the images were significantly enlarged. As Yates explained, certain images had been duplicated through communication channels, such as TV screens, newspapers, and billboards. These sources were reproduced through the act of appropriation, a widely employed technique in photography. With diverse sources, the meanings of the images became elusive. Due to the photoworks' inadequate resolutions, the resulting images were pixelated. The utilisation of pixelation by Yates presented a pre-digital means of portraying image texture. Using appropriation and pixelation, Yates's intended messages remained ambiguous. The use of textual expressions in Yates's images was interpreted as another form of allegorical manifestation. Figure 5, shown below, features an incomplete text that has been trimmed. It shows sentences, such as 'DO WE NOT MOVE TOWARDS THE SPACE BETWEEN', and 'FIGURES OF SPEECH OR POSITIONS OF POWER.'⁷²

However, the viewer might have found it hard to comprehend the sentences due to their incompleteness. It seemed that texts were slogans of social phenomena, but it

⁷² *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, eds. John X. Berger and Olivier Richon (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education and Camerawork, 1989), n. p.

needed to be clarified which specific paragraph or material they pertained to. The incompleteness in the words led to a greater challenge in interpreting the image. Yates's use of texts inspired Berger to comment that her work was 'the most hieroglyphic', as Yates presented images that had already been written.⁷³ The use of hieroglyphic features involved utilising images or symbols to represent words, indicating an inherent connection between visual depictions and linguistic units. The already-written features served as a manifestation of appropriation, which was understood as an allegorical quality in the writings of Owens and Buchloh.

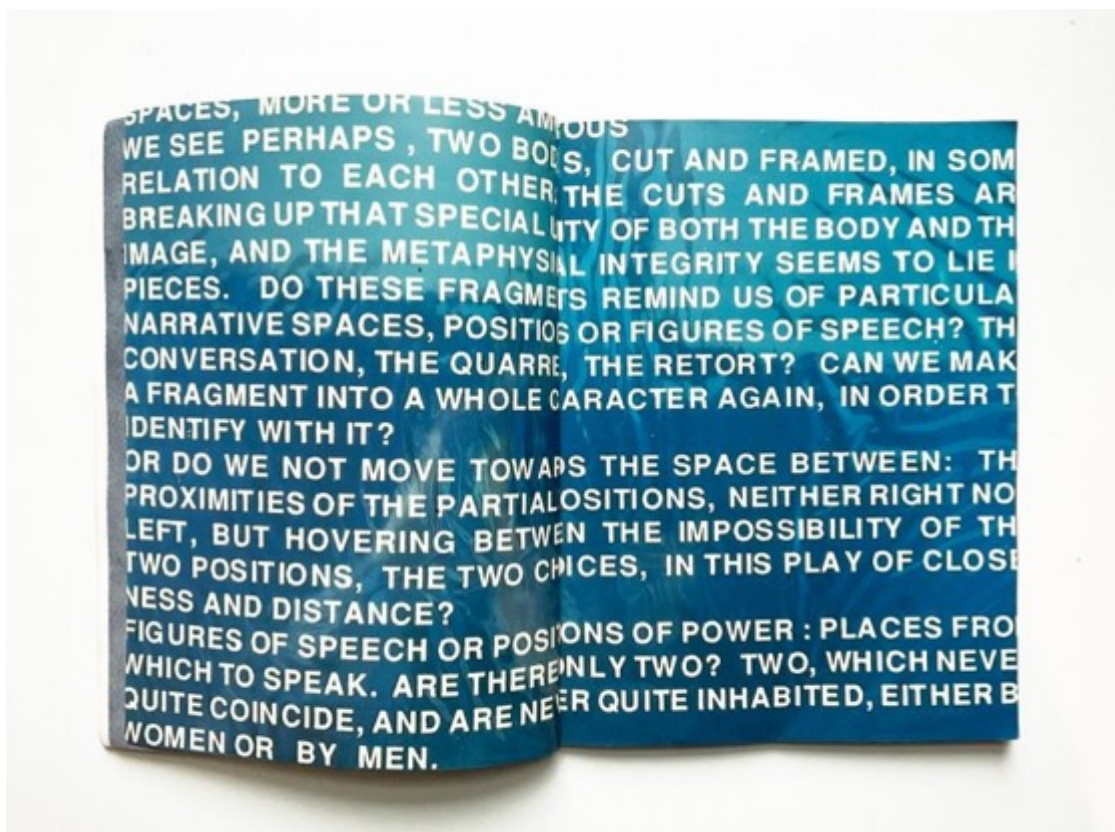


Figure 5. One page-spreads from *Other Than Itself* of Marie Yates, *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*, 1989 (originally, work presented as framed photographic prints), *Other Than Itself*

⁷³ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

I concur with Berger and Richon's evaluation of Yates's photoworks. They believed that 'the fragmented texts and bodies of mass media images' were 'silent and seductive', which suggested 'depth' disappeared and 'surface' took over.'⁷⁴ However, Berger and Richon did not offer any additional clarification. In my view, the silence did not necessarily imply a lack of speech. It could instead be a state that deliberately went beyond the constraints of language and the concealment of established cognition, making it a force to be reckoned with. The arrangement of texts highlighted the seductive feature of Yates's image. The seductive characteristic of images suggested that the dissemination of information through mass media subtly enticed the readers or the audience to interpret the presented content. Considering the interplay between words and images, Yates's photoworks portrayed a collision between the surface and depth of the image. From the etymological perspective, the term 'surface' originates from the French word *sur*, meaning 'above', combined with the word *face*. Thus, surface suggested artificiality and fabrication. Yates's display of the image was thus understood as an artifice. As such, in conjunction with gender disparities, images could convey profound meanings to the observer. By employing allegorical portrayals, combining texts and imagery, and replicating various media, Yates effectively illustrated the prevalence of violence against women in a gender-differentiated society. As such, allegorical qualities in Yates's photoworks were perceived as the source and interpretation of images, and their correlations to the written texts.

⁷⁴ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

John X. Berger's Photoworks *Details from Hawthorne*

In his sequence *Details from Hawthorne*, John X. Berger presented nine photographs showcasing various interior and exterior settings, such as drawing rooms, public buildings, civic institutions, the birdcage, the clothing studio, and potted plants.⁷⁵ Berger's photoworks were paired with excerpts from Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *Blithedale Romance*⁷⁶. The sequence was taken in Newcastle upon Tyne during 1985 and 1986. According to Berger's description, Hawthorne's novel sparked his exploration of cross-historical and cross-narratological aspects in photographs. In his words, 'both cross-historical (reading a reflection on an early C19th utopian community in relation to picturing impressions of a late C20th dystopian conurbation) and cross-narratological (a story of people in relation to a map of spaces)' perspectives provided rich sources of inspiration for his photographs.⁷⁷ His claims suggested that the cross-historical perspective provided reflections on the utopian community of the early 19th century in conjunction with imagining the dystopian conurbations of the late 20th century. The cross-narratological perspective offered insights into how people interpreted and interacted with maps of physical spaces.

In my opinion, both cross-historical and cross-narratological perspectives indicated

⁷⁵ According to the interview with Berger, the initial interest was to 'present typical, sometimes mundane views of "slow" social spaces.'

Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

⁷⁶ *Blithedale Romance* was a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne and published in 1852. Hawthorne was a founding member of Brook Farm in 1841, where the novel was set in a utopian farming commune. According to the interview with Berger, the novel was chosen by chance. Berger initially aimed to enhance his reading experience by selecting a work written by a fellow native of his hometown.

⁷⁷ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

how social and literary contexts changed meanings and narratives in the photographs. The use of cross-historical and cross-narratological perspectives contained allegorical elements, since one principle of allegory was to challenge established disciplines and categories. According to Owens, the allegorical work was ‘synthetic’, and it transcended ‘aesthetic boundaries.’⁷⁸ The extensive examination of cross-historical and cross-narratological approaches encompassed a multi-dimensional exploration of the community, dystopian metropolis, and the interplay between individuals and their environments. The combination of synthesis and cross-disciplinary exploration was understood to demonstrate allegorical qualities. Moreover, the integration of fresh perspectives in the photographs showcased the use of allegory. As argued by Owens, allegory was ‘a technique’,⁷⁹ and it can be described as ‘a single metaphor introduced in continuous series.’⁸⁰ The technique of allegory entailed the extended metaphor, where a single metaphor unfolded gradually, developing consistently throughout a series of interconnected elements. The uninterrupted narratives brought about the transformations in metaphorical significances, showcasing the function of allegory.

The role of the text was also an important manifestation of allegory. According to Owens, allegory occurred ‘when one text’ was ‘doubled by another’.⁸¹ Allegory unfolded as a text underwent a transformative process, where the narrative of one was intricately interwoven with that of another, leading to a profound and multi-faceted

⁷⁸ Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse’, Part 1, p. 75.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 68.

interpretation. Berger's photoworks revealed a clear correlation between the photographs and texts. In his sequence, each caption directly quoted several interrupted sentences from a paragraph in Hawthorne's novel. The chosen captions were shaped by the interplay between the four characters in the novel. For Berger, the novel's narratives became less interesting as the project grew. In his view, the words instead lent 'various discursive orientations to the photographs, from gender and work, to passion and humour, as well as comment on the limits of looking and knowing.'⁸² In this regard, the images were imbued with the textual dispositions as their underlying themes. By incorporating linguistic elements into the photographic depictions, a diverse array of discourses was evoked, while simultaneously shedding light on the construction of the photographs. Meanwhile, the constraints of the text had an impact on the perception and interpretation of the photographs.

The interaction between texts and images in Berger's photowork was exemplified by the consecutive display of plates 2, 1, and 9 (see Figures 6a, 6b, 6c), which provided a complete process of photo interpretation. As indicated by Berger, the monument in plate 2 was used to link to Hollingsworth, a character in the novel, which 'occasioned a further allusion (post-exposure), to the story of Leda and the Swan.'⁸³ Through allusions, an allegorical link was made between Hollingsworth and the story of Leda

⁸² According to Berger's description, the ultimate decision, often involving rigorous editing, aimed to emphasise the nature and relationships of the four primary protagonists in the novel. Inspired by Clive Scott's *The Spoken Image* (1999), Berger exercised a significant degree of license while creating the series. In his words, 'Hawthorne's narrative as such is probably largely lost in the process of enabling these details.'

Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

⁸³ According to Greek mythology, Leda and the Swan recounts the tale of Zeus seducing or forcing himself upon Leda while disguised as a swan.

and the Swan. Additionally, according to Berger's description, the bird in plate 2 flew 'in the direction of the absent Zenobia in plate 1, which contrasted with 'plate 9 visually and via the text, discursively, i.e in terms of gender and types of drawing.'⁸⁴ The presence of the bird was used to point to Zenobia, creating a visual contrast with plate 9. Regarding Berger's explanation, there was a visual and discursive contrast between these images, which suggested the sequential nature of the photographs. In my view, the texts offered hints for comprehending the photographs. The texts in the two photographs were associated with Hollingsworth, who aimed to build an edifice. Notwithstanding, the distinction between the two images was the portrayal of the external and internal surroundings. The images were indicative of the construction of an edifice and the initial conceptualization and planning of the project. In this case, the texts appeared to function as codes for reading photographs. Through Berger's work, combined with the texts, the readings of images could be either simultaneous or nonsequential. Berger's practice indicated that the introduction of cross-historical and cross-narratological perspectives and the interaction between texts and photographs were considered as allegorical qualities of his photographs.

⁸⁴ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.



Hollingsworth was fast going mad. It required all the constancy of friendship to restrain his associates from pronouncing him an intolerable bore. His specific object was to obtain funds for the construction of an edifice devoted to the reform and mental culture of criminals.

Figure 6a. John X. Berger, *Details from Hawthorne*, 1989, *Other Than Itself*



Zenobia was truly a magnificent woman. It was wronging the rest of mankind to retain her as the spectacle of only a few. Her womanliness incarnate compelled me sometimes to close my eyes, as if it were not quite the privilege of modesty to gaze at her.

Figure 6b. John X. Berger, *Details from Hawthorne*, 1989, *Other Than Itself*



Her manner bewildered me. It struck me that here was the fulfillment of every fantasy of an imagination revelling in various methods of self-indulgence and splendid ease. It cost me a bitter sense of shame, to perceive in myself a positive effort to bear up against the effect which Zenobia sought to impose.

Figure 6c. John X. Berger, *Details from Hawthorne*, 1989, *Other Than Itself*

Based on the above analysis, in my view, the allegorical feature of Berger's sequence was perceived to be the elliptical and ironic link between images and novelistic texts, which he defined as 'intertextuality'.⁸⁵ Berger did not further expound the term. I believe that Berger's images did not adequately function as illustrations of the episodes in *Blithedale Romance*. Discrepancies existed in the portrayal of images and discourse. The fragmented citations of sentences in each specific paragraph seemed to provide the context for the readings of images. After viewing Berger's texts, the readings of his images became consciously uncertain and contradictory. Readers unfamiliar with the novel may struggle to understand the link between the images and the text, as the textual narratives and visual elements did not fully align. Moreover, the separate texts could constitute autonomous units of meaning. As Berger and Richon commented, with texts and images, Berger's photoworks were regarded as producing 'an irony', in which what was said was 'not seen', and what was seen became 'silent'.⁸⁶ In this sense, the images might not accurately portray the scenes described in the texts. Likewise, the text was not purely regarded as something to decipher. There was a contradiction between the visual portrayal of an occurrence and the verbal clarification provided. From my perspective, the irony between the texts and images indicated that in addition to suppressing texts, the images might act as a complement and completion to them. The texts suppressed the readers because they established viewing contexts for the images, shaping the reader's expectations and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

ultimately restricting their understanding of the images. The images also provided additional information to fill in gaps that might not be explicitly addressed in the texts. The use of literary references in Berger's photoworks added allegorical dimensions to the interpretation of his photographs, providing fresh insights into the relationship between text and image.

Victor Burgin's Photoworks *Office at Night*

Victor Burgin's (1941-) series *Office at Night*, included in his book *Between* and showcased at the 1986 exhibition, was widely acknowledged as one of his most notable photographic creations. The set of photographs consisted of seven pieces depicting the secretary and boss working late in the workplace, and three of them were seen in Figures 7a, 7b, and 7c. Burgin's series drew inspiration from Edward Hopper's 1940 painting *Office at Night* (Figure 8).⁸⁷ Hopper's painting portrayed the dynamic between female secretaries and male bosses within bureaucratic hierarchies. Burgin's images, though having the same title, showed distinct variations in their structures, arrangements, and appearances, and tackled the difficulties confronted by women in a male-dominated capitalist society.

⁸⁷ Edward Hopper, an American artist (1882-1967), was well-known for his realistic paintings and prints.



Figure 7a. Victor Burgin, *Office at Night*, 1985-1986, gelatin silver print and plastic laminate film, 185.4 cm x 250.8 cm, Canadian Centre for Architecture



Figure 7b. Victor Burgin, *Office at Night*, 1985-1986, gelatin silver print and plastic laminate film, 185.4 cm x 250.8 cm, Canadian Centre for Architecture



Figure 7c. Victor Burgin, *Office at Night*, 1985-1986, gelatin silver print and plastic laminate film, 185.4 cm x 250.8 cm, Canadian Centre for Architecture



Figure 8. Edward Hopper, *Office at Night*, 1940, oil on canvas, 56.4 cm x 63.8 cm, Collection Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis

In *Office at Night*, Hopper emphasised the interconnection between patriarchy and capitalism, revealing a power dynamic based on gender differences. The incorporation of erotic supplements in the workplace posed a persistent threat to the productivity of the workforce, which operated within the framework of capitalism. Against this background, I argue that the allegorical aspects of Hopper's works lie in two aspects: the representation and fantasy of Hopper's painting and the alphabetical textual descriptions of the title of the series. The painting illuminated the detailed and thought-provoking explorations portrayed in the photographs, adding a layer of visual richness and depth to their content. In Hopper's painting, the viewer's attention was

drawn towards the woman, who was portrayed as a sexual object. In addition, the boss portrayed in the painting appeared indifferent towards the female secretary, making few direct allusions to sexual implications. The allegorical embodiment of the painting was perceived as its allusion to the presence of sexual undertones in the workplace.

Compared to Hopper's painting, Burgin's photoworks shifted from the women's passivity to proactivity, transforming them from objects to be looked at to subjects looking at others. The women appeared to show their curiosity, albeit with subtle and subdued attitudes. In addition, Burgin's pictograms illustrated a fantasy of a woman fulfilling her male superior's desires, drawing from the theoretical perspectives of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Through juxtapositions of various graphic elements, Burgin illustrated the connection between the pictograms and the office's interior and exterior, resulting in a process and way of generating meanings. In this sense, the pictograms were analogous to the universe surrounding the office. In Freud's interpretation of fantasy, participants and spectators, aggressors and those aggressed had contradictory relationships. These characters in the drama continuously switched their roles, akin to the function of an image. This interpretation of the image by Burgin contributed to the elucidation of his photoworks. In his words, an image 'neither changes nor remains the same.'⁸⁸ This position suggested the paradoxical nature of the image, implying a deeper level of complexity to be delved into. An

⁸⁸ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

image seemed to exist in constant flux, neither fully evolving nor completely unchanging. The interpretation of the image became increasingly elusive due to the fluctuating nature of its depiction, which was understood as an allegorical manifestation of the image. As such, Burgin's photographs depicted women as newly empowered leaders in a traditionally gendered office setting, challenging their previously 'passive' role in social and sexual hierarchies.

The other allegorical quality was the textual descriptions of the title *Office at Night* in the sequence of each alphabet. The first letter of each word was revealed, creating a full sentence and paragraph. The full texts represented by Burgin offered an account of the inspirations, and conceptions in the process of creation, which was hard to achieve with images. Through the combination of accompanying texts and visual aids, a consistent chain of substitutes was formed that lacked an original signifier. The juxtaposition of these elements resulted in a series of signifiers with varying relationships. In this regard, these signifiers with all their inherent uncertainties indicated the possibility of discerning allegorical features of the photographs.

Moreover, Berger and Richon's comment on Burgin's works was inspiring. In their view, the otherness of Burgin's work lay in a 'visual analysis of the relation between model and copy.'⁸⁹ Berger and Richon did not provide further discussions. According to my understanding, Burgin's photoworks exhibited a unique perspective that differed from the conventional replication of Hopper's celebrated artwork and the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

portrayal of women's societal roles as symbolic models. By representing the position of women in a patriarchal social structure, the photoworks redefined the shifts in their power as portrayed in historical paintings. Hopper's revolutionary painting techniques led to a diversification of Burgin's photographic compositions. The generated different perspectives on the paintings and photographs provided new ways of reading images and forming allegorical elements of photography.

Olivier Richon's Photoworks *Imprese*

Olivier Richon's (1956-) series *Imprese* was displayed in *Other Than Itself*. The collection comprised eight pieces of images, each accompanied by one or two textual sentences underneath (two pieces of photographs were shown in Figure 9). There were also Latin cards in each photo with words of which the captions were English translations.⁹⁰ The series was later collected in Richon's book *Real Allegories* (2006), with only seven photographs, and the missing one was a photograph accompanied by the text 'YOUR TRICKS PAIN ME'. As described in *Real Allegories*, the series was created in 1988 and produced as C-type prints, with the size of 75 cm x 85 cm.

Imprese portrayed exotic animals preserved by taxidermy, such as the turtle, toucan, monkey, anteater, porcupine, ostrich, and crocodile, and they seemed to roam freely in outdoor natural landscapes. The scenes depicted were in the gardens of aristocratic stately homes (or in a particular one), containing edifices or features such as a neo-classical temple, columns, an obelisk, a sculpture, a lake, and formal landscaping.

⁹⁰ *Other Than Itself* did not provide any distinct print sizes for the series.

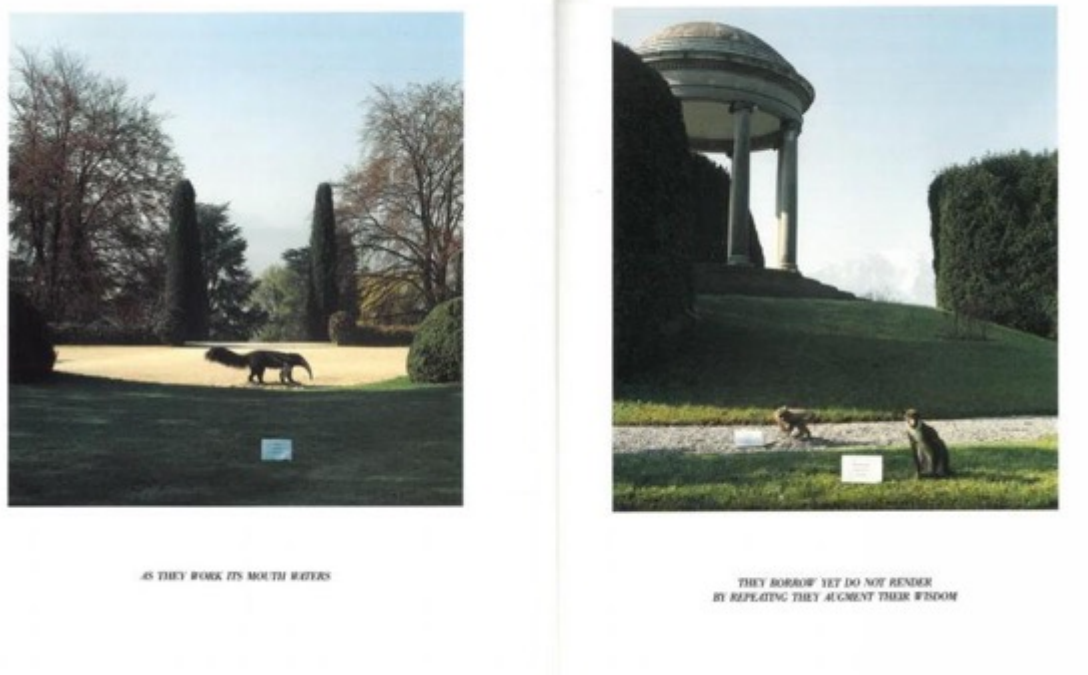


Figure 9. One of the page-spreads in the book *Other Than Itself*, 1989, paper, 27.5 cm x 20.5 cm, *Other Than Itself*

In my view, the allegorical aspect of Richon's series was understood as an enigmatic connection between the portrayed objects in the images and the accompanying textual narratives. According to Richon's description in *Real Allegories*, *Imprese* was inspired by Emanuele Tesauro's seminal work *The Aristotelian Telescope* (1654).⁹¹ Influenced by Tesauro's work, Richon argued that 'a thing called by its proper name' did not 'teach us anything but itself.' On the other hand, calling it by a metaphor taught us 'two things at the same time, one within the other.'⁹² Richon's viewpoint suggested that there was no direct correspondence between a thing and its title. An object emerged, and possibly took on a metaphorical form. The presence of two

⁹¹ Emanuele Tesauro (1592 - 1675) was a prominent figure in Italian intellectual circles known for his works as a philosopher, literary theorist, rhetorician, and historian. He played a pivotal role in the development of the culture and politics in the 17th century.

⁹² Olivier Richon, *Real Allegories*, ed. Ute Eskildsen (Göttingen: Steidl/Eskildsen, 2006), p. 174.

things further highlighted the disparity between objects and their means of depiction, specifically through metaphors. In this regard, the meanings conveyed by objects might not be in line with their physical appearance.

Richon's interpretation of exotic animals revealed the discrepancy between objects and their intended meanings. From his perspective, exotic animals were signs of nature, and they were 'elements of an opaque alphabet, a dead language, a Latin.'⁹³

The animals served as indications of the natural world. The object did not purely refer to itself, but functioned as an emblem, which served as symbols of concepts and qualities. Given Richon's viewpoint, the intricate nature of the exotic animals and things gave rise to an elusive correlation between text and image. The Latin cards in the photographs were hard to comprehend, and the captions created lifelike images of animals. The animals, though preserved taxidermy, were not lifeless beings and appeared to possess the ability to communicate with the viewer through their textual descriptions. I will return to Richon's *Imprese* in Chapter 2, which focuses on their contributions.

⁹³ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

Karen Knorr's Photoworks *Connoisseurs*

Other Than Itself exhibited eight pieces from Knorr's (1954-) series *Connoisseurs*.

The series became a landmark in Knorr's photographic career for using saturated colours. Prior to the series (*Belgravia*, 1979-1980; *Gentlemen*, 1981-1983; *Country Life*, 1983-1984), Knorr created black and white photographs. In her view, 'the aesthetics of the fine-grain black-and-white print' was a prevailing notion among most individuals, when considering exhibition photographs.⁹⁴ In this respect, the dominant role of straight photography in history led to people's preferences for black-and-white photographs, especially when viewing the exhibition. The series *Connoisseurs* was developed to contest the entrenched beliefs of fine art and straight photography, especially monochrome photographs, which prompted contemplations on the artworks and the viewer in British high culture (two items of photographs are shown in Figure 10).

⁹⁴ Karen Knorr, *Marks of Distinction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), p. 125.



Figure 10. One of the page-spreads in the book *Other Than Itself*, 1989, paper, 27.5 cm x 20.5 cm, *Other Than Itself*

The primary allegorical feature of *Connoisseurs* was understood as the revelation of historical ways of seeing artworks, along with the uses of the texts. In this series, certain historical spaces were employed as a means of contextualising certain aesthetic claims of beauty and taste, such as Chiswick House, Osterley Park House, the Sir John Soane Museum, The Dulwich Picture Gallery, and The Victoria and Albert Museum. The group of works also showed how the connoisseurs, such as artistic collectors, critics, or merchant classes, searched for authenticity and beauty, and appreciated artworks in the museums and private places. The way the connoisseurs saw the works provoked reflections on the historical and contemporary ways of appreciating artworks.

The introduction of textual elements into the photographs brought forth nuanced allegorical dimensions, inviting viewers to delve into the underlying meanings encapsulated within the images. Opting for titles, then, Knorr's photoworks deviated from the use of texts simply as captions. The observations made by Berger and Richon directed the focus towards the essential role of the texts in Knorr's photographs. In their view, Knorr's photowork functioned as a paralanguage, and the prefix 'para' had two types of meanings, and one was 'counter' or 'against'.⁹⁵ Paralanguage served as a medium of non-verbal interaction, enabling individuals to impart additional implications to their verbal expressions. The generated meanings could be oppositional. The other layer of meaning was 'beside'.⁹⁶ This perspective suggested a sense of complement. Given that photography was acknowledged as a paralanguage, the implications it conveyed could either be opposing or complementary. Berger and Richon also argued that a paralanguage acknowledged 'a form of intertextuality'.⁹⁷ In this respect, Knorr's photoworks revealed intertextuality, which represented the way texts influenced or differed from each other. Berger and Richon's analysis of the paralanguage and intertextuality indicated that the titles of Knorr's photoworks allowed for a deeper understanding.

Based on the above discussion, five artists aimed to represent the otherness of the images. The exploration of otherness could lie in Yates's dislocation in dyads,

⁹⁵ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Burgin's reversal of gender and class, Berger's use of irony, Richon's exploration of metaphor, and Knorr's contextualisations of historical places, which were understood as allegorical features. Yates's photowork, *Taking Sides and Drifting Around*, investigated how representations of women's bodies shaped the identities of gender differences. The incorporation of texts and images in social media was considered a means of expressing allegorical representations within feminine discourse. Berger's photowork *Details from Hawthorne* had a distinctive perspective on the irony between literary and visual descriptions. The inclusion of texts resulted in a blurring of the distinctions between textual and visual representations, which was perceived as an allegorical trait in photographic practices. Burgin's *Office at Night* offered a fresh perspective on the gender and class dynamics in office culture, examining and subverting the themes portrayed in Edward Hopper's painting. Two aspects were understood as having allegorical features. On the one hand, the way Burgin composed the elements in the photographs produced a distinctive interplay between painting and photography. On the other hand, the photographs heightened the power dynamics of gender disparities in the workplace setting.

By contrast, Richon's series *Imprese* showed how taxidermized animals appeared to live in harmony with (an equally artificial) nature. Functioning as metaphors, the animals seemed to create illusions of objective photographs. Knorr's series *Connoisseurs* created allegories between museums and animals, connoisseurs, and artworks, with the supplements of texts. The museum was not a place for appreciating

history, but became a part of integrating the artworks. Moreover, as patrons of art, the way that connoisseurs appreciated artworks became essential in the readings of photographs. The perspectives of the five artists were distinctive. Given their exploration, I argue, all participating artists seek to illustrate the hidden meanings underneath the physical depictions of images. Their practices expand the range of ways in which allegory functions in photography, which can be revealed in various elements, theories, and inspirations. Each element in photography has the potential of becoming an allegorical element; since no component exists in isolation, it is connected to its related elements, and surroundings, and then the metaphorical meanings of the allegory are created accordingly.

John X. Berger and Olivier Richon, Editors, Introduction

The interview with Berger revealed that the project was influenced by a 1979 exhibition and by three writers on photography, namely Allan Sekula, Walter Benjamin and Victor Burgin. The UK-based exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography: Recent British Photography* (1979) preceded, or was broadly contemporaneous with, the allegorical turn in the American context. It also served as a kind of harbinger of *Other Than Itself*. The exhibition was held in the Hayward Gallery (London). It signified a transformation in the discourse of photography: ‘broader ideas of independence and dissidence’, as Berger put it. The exhibition’s three themes revolved around the multiplicity inherent in photographic portrayal. One division predominantly interpreted photography as a contemporary manifestation of artistic expression (“Photographic Truth, Metaphor, and Individual Expression”), while the remaining two sections centred on photography’s political applications: “Feminism and Photography” and “A Socialist Perspective on Photographic Practice”. The section on feminism partly showcased Yve Lomax’s project *Recto/Verso*, while Victor Burgin’s project *US77* was shown in the latter section. Although the allegorical character of photography was not directly articulated, its otherness and distinctiveness were gradually revealed. The investigation into feminism and social practices demonstrated photography’s ability to express itself beyond its own realm.

The launch of the project was also influenced by Allan Sekula’s book *Photography Against the Grain* (1984), and Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘A Short History of Photography’ (1931). In addition, Victor Burgin’s book *Between* (1986), with its parody of ‘New Documents’ photography in his series ‘US77’ (1977), served as inspiration. Burgin was perceived as preeminent in a certain kind of critical practice

simplified contemporaneously as ‘image and text’. Moreover, *Other Than Itself* was shaped by the pioneering work of galleries, such as Camerawork (founded 1970), Stills (f. 1977), Cambridge Darkroom (f. 1984), and by critically focused publications such as *Afterimage* (US, f. 1972), *Camerawork* (UK, 1976-1985), *October* (US, f. 1976), and *Ten-8* (UK, 1979-1992).

Earlier, I began my discussion of the photoworks of *Other Than Itself* to give a better sense of the practical context for the theories advanced by Berger and Richon. Both were key members of the academic staff for the degree course in photography at Derbyshire College of Higher Education. The exploration of photography has been a key focus of their research. I have already encountered some aspects of their arguments, and here I turn to address their texts directly and in detail. Berger and Richon’s introduction brought together elaborate theoretical concepts of allegory formulated by specialists. Their elaborations could be divided into three sections. The first and second paragraphs addressed how photography related to other images and discourses. In the following section, Berger and Richon presented the critical theoretical concepts concerning allegory, as proposed by Craig Owens, Christian Metz, Charles Sanders Pierce, and Arthur Schopenhauer. These scholars’ contemporary and historical theoretical analyses contributed to establishing a conceptual framework for allegory in photography, especially in the context of the project *Other Than Itself*. The last section provided overviews of each contributor’s project, and I have integrated their evaluations into my discussion of each artist.

As analysed by Berger and Richon, the quality of otherness became intrinsic to photography, which was understood as an allegorical structure. According to their research, as a medium, photography could refer to something that existed beyond itself, such as other images, stories, and discourses. In addition, the otherness of photographs lay in their rhetorical and representational aspects, which were potential features of allegory in photography. Compared to the aesthetic of the image, the rhetoric of the image ignored the notion of self-sufficiency and autonomy, meaning that reasons or justifications were being offered, and that imagination existed within its world and was independent of the rules of the surrounding environment. Berger's evaluation of photography provided valuable insights into its allegorical nuances. In his words, photography was 'an allegorical art in that its verisimilitude [seemed] never to compensate for its inadequacy, always to initiate things other than itself.'⁹⁸

In other words, photography strove to achieve a lifelike representation and authenticity of the world but was found wanting because it was unable to entirely and accurately capture every aspect of the world. As a result, novel techniques and approaches were constantly being developed for further investigation. This state of affairs allowed photography to embody allegorical qualities, and become an allegorical art.

Otherness was also apparent in photography's writing. The subtitle *Writing Photography* indicated that photography was viewed as a form of writing.

⁹⁸ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

Etymologically, photography comprises two Latin words, *photo* and *graphy*. It involves light writing, which doubles the act of writing, and therefore becomes ‘Writing Light-Writing’. Berger and Richon did not elaborate on the relationship between writing and photography, but it can be inferred that the relationship between photography and writing can possibly take on multiple forms: writing of photography, writing by photography, writing via photography, and writing through photography. These distinct modes of writing revealed the complexities of photographic narratives and interpretations. In other words, using different writing patterns resulted in different descriptions and presentations of photography, leading to varying interpretations. As such, the characteristic of otherness has become an integral part of photography and its writing.

The otherness echoed an allegorical structure in the images, as argued by Berger and Richon. By quoting Owens’s interpretation of allegory that ‘one text’ was ‘read through another’,⁹⁹ they claimed that the expression ‘Other than itself’ shared a similar definition with allegory. In this sense, allegory and photography could refer to things that could be transformed into other things. In their words, the phrase ‘Other than itself’ ‘proposed an allegorical structure’, which destroyed the ‘putative purity of the image.’¹⁰⁰ Given the connection between allegory and otherness, the allegorical possibilities were embedded in the images, transforming the representations and

⁹⁹ This sentence has previously been cited to illustrate the connection between allegory and texts in Burgin’s section; it is now referenced to stress the significance of the phrase ‘Other Than Itself’. *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

meanings of the images, and the relationship between writing and photography.

Theoretically, when exploring the allegorical features of images, Berger and Richon discussed Christian Metz's ideas about language and images, Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic analysis of images and Arthur Schopenhauer's viewpoints on allegory. In Berger and Richon's reading, Metz asserted that the image was the expression of the ideology of pure visuals, constituting a plenitude of imagery. Metz also emphasised the hybrid nature of visual signs, which were expressions of ideology. The physical images conveyed beliefs and principles, so images were visual forms of expression and communications of ideology. Moreover, visual signs had hybrid features, and images were composed of a system of relations. A structured set of objects, subjects and their associated relations were conjured up in images. Any kind of relation could be read and interpreted through images. By utilising elements like compositions, lighting, objects, and imagery, images had the potential to establish diverse relationships. In this sense, the images were composed of languages, both of which were ways of communication through intentional dialogue based on visual creations. Given the above analysis, Metz argued that the intertwining relationship between image and language primarily constituted a 'heterology', compared to the 'purely visual'.¹⁰¹ The heterology was concerned with the existence of the 'other' or unnoticed meanings, compared to established conventional concepts or theories. Therefore, based on its hybrid nature, photography was regarded as 'an analogical

¹⁰¹ Christian Metz, 'Beyond Analogy, the Image', *Communications*, 15 (1970), n. p.

system of representation.’¹⁰² In this view, photography was not used to highlight what it represented and interpreted, but was a vehicle of how something else was showed by depicting physical objects.

By contrast, Charles Sanders Pierce contributed to the knowledge of the image as a sign, referent, and trace of nature. Even though a photograph was a physical imprint of the world, it was ‘an indexical sign’, ‘a fossilised referent’, and ‘a trace of nature.’¹⁰³ These features allowed photographs to develop into various forms, without specific definitions and a singular way of interpretation. Pierce also argued that the image was ‘characterised by allegory and parody.’¹⁰⁴ In a given work, a parody constituted a means to imitate, comment upon, or mock its subject by using satirical or ironic elements. For allegory, it sought to convey hidden or complex meanings through symbols, imagery, or events. Despite their distinction, both allegory and parody played on original references. Pierce believed that, if a fiction or a construction was the original work, then, any (other) image referred to would be ‘an intertext’, and ‘a displacement’.¹⁰⁵ From the intertext, one text was more associated with other texts, and the act of displacement involved the substitution of one element by another, both of which were at least resembling each other, usually through similarity or proximity. In this sense, with the features of allegory and parody, images were separated into other distinctive aspects.

¹⁰² *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The above two theoretical inspirations were mainly associated with the image. Berger and Richon also examined the interpretation of allegory put forth by the nineteenth-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, allegory was ‘a hieroglyphic sign.’¹⁰⁶ The hieroglyphic signs were forms of representing objects, figures, or symbols which were not depicted. With the influence of Schopenhauer’s insights, allegory was regarded as ‘a form of writing, a rebus,’ which was hard to be understood by purely visual knowledge.¹⁰⁷ From this, both allegory and photography could be viewed as a form of writing. As argued by Berger, the hieroglyph was ‘picture-writing’, and ‘to be written differently’, required ‘deciphering or translation of some sort.’¹⁰⁸ Both the process of decipherment and translation involved the reading and interpretation of picture-based writing. This was how the allegory functioned. In other words, allegory involved decoding and interpreting the writings of the picture. According to Berger and Richon, allegorical reading was influential in the interpretation of images. Following the structure within the literary field, allegory was to be found within the structure of the work itself in ‘a particular mode of reading images.’¹⁰⁹ The allegorical readings focused primarily on the interpretation and commentary of the images. An allegorical reading involved an intent, which consisted of a disjunction between what was staged and what was meant. In Berger and Richon’s view, due to the disjunction, an allegorical reading aroused a desire for

¹⁰⁶ Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1964), p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

¹⁰⁸ Dai Xiaoling, email to John X. Berger, 10 October 2023.

¹⁰⁹ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

interpretation.

The analyses conducted by Berger and Richon offered a range of approaches for capturing the concept of doubling in photography. They did not completely follow the strategies that Owens and Buchloh proposed. Compared to Owens's allegorical impulses, such as a shift from transience to eternity, and Buchloh's allegorical procedures of appropriation and montage, Berger and Richon provided valuable insights into which aspects of photography interacted with allegory. In their view, photography, as a medium of representation and reproduction, was also concerned with a form of writing, a sign system, the relationship between word and image, and boundaries between practices and theories. These aspects possibly proposed an allegorical structure in different ways, since they discarded the practice of utilising solitary visual depictions in photographic art. Considering their explorations, allegory was potentially hidden in many aspects of the creations, formations, reproductions, and interpretations of photography. In this regard, the contribution of Berger and Richon was the extension of photographic scope beyond Owens's allegorical impulses and Buchloh's allegorical procedures. By using the theories of Metz, Pierce, and Schopenhauer, they extended photography as an allegorical practice into the realm of image-making and the reading of images. Their contributions were not confined to photographic works as they introduced writings such as critical fiction. In the following section, I seek to provide an overview of the contributions of the essays in *Other Than Itself*.

Yve Lomax's Essay 'World is a Fabulous Tale'

By introducing different significations of letters, including A, F, I, L, M, Yve Lomax (1952-) addressed how things and signs generated associations with the world in her essay 'The World is a Fabulous Tale.' Lomax's narrative was more like a storytelling, rather than a philosophical or literary sermon. Her description revealed the existence of otherness in the concepts, things, and signs. The specific thing or concept contained both opposing and binary meanings. The otherness of signs was associated with the exploration of the images. Drawing from Lomax's analysis, the temporal sequence was evident. In her words, 'essence comes before appearance as reality comes before image.'¹¹⁰ Additionally, the sign followed 'after the thing, as abstraction emerged as a result of 'concrete matter.'¹¹¹ The essence denoted the underlying nature or essential attributes of an object's physical appearance. One prevailing notion was that individuals tended to distill the crux of matters based on the existing outward appearance. In Lomax's view, a reality that existed was represented in the image. As something was formed, it developed certain characteristics that led to its evolution into a sign. The act of abstraction required a complex process of deriving general concepts and principles from specific and concrete elements of the physical world. She argued that there was an attributive and temporal relationship between essence and appearance, reality and image, sign and thing, and abstraction and concrete matter. Therefore, examining a photograph's elements should not be approached in isolation,

¹¹⁰ Yve Lomax, 'The World is a Fabulous Tale', in *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, eds. John X. Berger and Olivier Richon (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education and Camerawork, 1989), n. p.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

as they may encompass associated respects and changes generated by the temporal dimension.

Lomax's investigations of the otherness of things, concepts and signs contributed to understanding the role of images in the twentieth century's image-saturated culture. Considering the conventional argument that behind a photograph, there was no essence – such as truth, reality, or referent – from which it could derive its origins and be evaluated, she critically claimed that another image existed beyond the real world that the viewer and audience could see and introduced an established theory that the real world was 'a fiction.'¹¹² Without a full explanation, I think, the interpretations of a thing could tell a new or traditional story. The things the viewers saw, from appearances and signs of images, were what fiction left. The 'fiction' here was used to denote the imaginary depiction of images in pursuit of certain specific purposes. The origins and return of the phenomenon of fiction were closely linked to the element of time. A preceding element existed outside the image's surface and resulted from the image.

Given the two features, Lomax believed that 'the thing' in the 'world' did not refer to 'the primary existence of the real thing.'¹¹³ In this regard, before being read and perceived, the 'things' already formed a secondary or even third meaning for the viewers. Her analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of compositional

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

elements within photographs. Each object or subject in a photograph was associated with other elements, concepts, or discourses. Other elements might play a role in determining the interpretation of a single element in a photograph. The photographs perceived by the viewers might be either the symbol of the object or elements with intertwined connotations, which showcased ambivalence in the composition and implication of the photographs.

Peter Wollen's Essay 'Fire and Ice'

An established left-wing cultural theorist and filmmaker, Peter Wollen's (1938-2019) essay 'Fire and Ice' was first produced for a French journal in 1984 and was later republished in *Other Than Itself*. In his essay, Wollen concentrated on time and the role of photographs in his discussion of aesthetic photography. His observations regarding the timing of photography aided the interpreter to connect the various elements of a photograph. As claimed by Wollen, photographs served as a means of stopping time and preserving fragments of the past, since photography lovers were fascinated by the past and fleeting moments. In contrast to film, this trend was more pronounced in the still photographs. Moreover, the timing of photographs was inextricably bound up with the concept of narratives within them. What still photographs represented were not narratives, but 'elements of narratives.'¹¹⁴ This meant that the photograph might only convey a partial account of the narrative being portrayed, and any component of the photographs could narrate continuously.

In Wollen's investigation, time in photography was an issue of narrative and a fiction. In his words, still photographs carried 'a fictional diegetic time, set in the future and in the present as past-of-the-future, as well as an in-between near-future from which vantage-point the story' was told.¹¹⁵ From my perspective, the fiction presented a unique viewpoint on the relationship between the images in the past, present and

¹¹⁴ Peter Wollen, 'Fire and Ice,' in *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, eds. John X. Berger and Olivier Richon (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education and Camerawork, 1989), n. p.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

future. The fictional diegetic feature of time meant that ordering and demarcating time were crucial features of still photographs. The temporal aspects of the future, including past-of-the-future and in-between near-future were emphasised. Wollen's emphasis on the relationship between the future and the past here starkly contrasted with Craig Owens's discussion of the relationship between the past and present in allegorical photography. By contrast, for Owens, the key feature of allegorical photography was his conviction of the remoteness of the past and a strong desire to redeem it for the present. Whatever the case, it can be said that Wollen's studies indicated that the use of narratives and time in photographs served as allegorical elements, as they directly alluded to the photograph's prospects, making them crucial for the interpretations of the images.

Francette Pacteau's Essay 'Beautiful Fragments'

In contrast to the photographic perspectives, the essays by Francette Pacteau and Leslie Dick focused more on the explorations of otherness within Renaissance poetry and anthropology. In 'Beautiful Fragments', she examined the glorification and inventory of the woman's body in Renaissance poetic discourse. Through symbolic characters and events, Pacteau addressed the features and factors determining feminine body representations in Renaissance poetry. Her explorations utilised allegory as a literary device to convey implicit spiritual and moral meanings, such as societal commentary on the portrayal of the women's bodies.

As outlined in Pacteau's textual descriptions, fragmentation was one essential procedure for interpreting the body of women. In some literary descriptions, the feminine body was universally depicted in its many repetitious features, and its parts were enumerated. The seemingly insignificant fragments captivated the viewer's attention and came to occupy the space of the viewed work. Pacteau also extended the issue of body fragmentation to the disciplines of painting and anatomy, showcasing its distinctiveness and diversity in varying circumstances. The idealised body was considered as a whole in anatomy, while fragmentation was a vehicle for the manifestation of a united truth. Conversely, in the field of painting, the situation was entirely different. In Pacteau's words, 'the formal pictorial construction of the painting' further enhanced 'their disjunction and isolation by presenting us with a

number of embedded frames'.¹¹⁶ In this sense, even though the painting's pictorial composition acted as a frame for the viewer, it still consistently displayed detachment and disconnection. Viewed in this way, through the precise and calculated construction of the painting's visual elements, the artist effectively emphasized the fragmented and isolated nature of the subject matter. There was a highlighted division in the issue of fragment and separation from the perspective of painting and anatomy.

Regarding Pacteau's exploration of the representation of women's bodies, as I discussed earlier, Marie Yates demonstrated a divergent approach. Yates's depictions of the women's body were closely related to visual and social aspects. The reproductions of women's images in popular culture demonstrated how the figure of women was established and disseminated. The textual descriptions on a larger page sheet, like propaganda slogans, exposed the societal inequalities. By contrast, Pacteau's exploration was based on poetic discourse, which focused on expressing ideas, such as fragmentation, through specific rhymes and rhythms. Intrinsically, the textual and visual portrayals of Yates and Pacteau displayed distinct depictions of women. Pacteau's explorations of fragmentation, a feature of allegory in literature, influenced the structural readings in the essay. As such, Pacteau's implicit investigation of allegory in poetic discourse shed light on compositional elements of reading photographs.

¹¹⁶ Francette Pacteau, 'Beautiful Fragments', in *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, eds. John X. Berger and Olivier Richon (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education and Camerawork, 1989), n. p.

Leslie Dick's Essay 'The Skull of Charlotte Corday'

Leslie Dick's (1954-) essay 'The Skull of Charlotte Corday' was an excerpt from her book *The Skull of Charlotte Corday and Other Stories*. Through the lens of literature and psychoanalysis, the book navigated the enigmatic and disconcerting routes of human history and delved into the intricacies of the human mind. The essay was divided into three sections across three separate years: 1889, 1927, and 1793. Through textual accounts, the stories of Charlotte Corday were meticulously detailed, spanning across three different temporal contexts. The first section delved into the disputes surrounding the skull of Corday, as debated by Paul Topinard and Cesare Lombroso. Topinard believed that the shape of the skull did not necessarily determine the psychology or behaviour of humans. In contrast, Lombroso relied extensively on genetic traits to establish a hierarchy and theorized about atavism and degeneracy to account for criminal behaviours. As a result, the habitual offenders were shaped by pathological and ancestral abnormalities. Moreover, in Lombroso's view, criminal behaviour was seen as a manifestation of atavism in males, while prostitution was considered a sign of atavism in women. In this way, in terms of a woman's attitude to virginity, Corday demonstrated her virility. Nevertheless, Topinard contended that the skull displayed the fragility and tenderness typically seen in a European woman. This claim disputed Lombroso's notion of the skull's masculinity, pathological asymmetry, and abnormality. Given the contrasting arguments of Topinard and Lombroso, the skull demonstrated the discrepancy in distinguishing the identifications of man and women.

The following two sections revolved around Corday, with differing descriptions. In the 1927 section, Marie Bonaparte investigated women's frigidity under the guidance of Freud, while also owning the skull of Corday. She believed that certain forms of frigidity stemmed from psychological barriers and could be addressed through psychotherapy. By contrast, the last 1793 section narrated how Corday assassinated Jean Paul Marat in the bathtub and how the funeral of Marat took place during the Great Terror of the French Revolution. Corday was, therefore, beheaded in public and autopsied to determine her virginity. Thus, these three-part historical narratives formed different interpretations of the figure of Corday.

In my opinion, the allegorical aspect of Dick's narratives was understood as the changing interpretations of Corday's skull. The image of Corday's skull was considered a symbol that represented the intersection of criminal anthropology and psychoanalysis. The shifting state of the human psyche was connected to the physical changes occurring in the skull. Through her exploration of the skull, Dick was able to symbolically divide each object into separate parts and identify its purpose in different contexts. On this note, I agree with Berger and Richon's perspective on Dick's work, when they argued that a 'trophy [was] a part detached from the whole, a fascinating relic which might inform the equally fascinating art of portraiture', and that the trophy belonged to 'the art of the bestiary.'¹¹⁷ By examining different viewpoints, the skull

¹¹⁷ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

of Corday could be seen as a historical artefact, a portrait, or an example of bestiary art, highlighting the multifaceted nature of object identity. In my view, the feature was also true for reading an image. Using allegorical imagery, the depicted objects, figures, and events could convey multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the images.

Anita Philips's Essay 'The Virtues, the Vices and All the Passions'

Anita Philips's essay 'The Virtues, the Vices and All the Passions' was an excerpt from her first novel with the same title. Unlike the contributions of Lomax, Wollen, Pacteau and Dick, Philips adopted the approach of a graphic image (with texts and an image), followed by textual narrations. The captions accompanying four images were velocity, sensual pleasure, lassitude and iconology, followed by detailed textual descriptions.

In the section on velocity, the image showed a woman throwing an arrow while running, with wings on her back and feet. Her posture was similar to Mercury's symbol of the rapidity of movement. The picture was followed by a two-page narrative describing Vira braking to avoid a danger posed by an ancient British car. The part titled sensual pleasure told the story of a flirtation between 'I' (identity of the character's name unknown) and Fell (another character's name) in the deserted land east of the city. The section on lassitude described the protagonist, Vira, and her languid state of being in her room. She enjoyed listening to the rain falling from the gutters, the rustling of the trees, and the car driving on its tyres. In contrast, Fell transitioned from idleness to being fully attired and occupied in a suit and white shirt. These textual descriptions corroborated the description of the theme as burnout. In Philips's words, the subject of lassitude was indicated by 'the eyes falling closed', whilst 'the laxity of the body' signified 'fatigue, and by the slovenliness of the

clothing.’¹¹⁸ From this depiction, different forms of expression were possible for a specific state. The tiredness can be reflected in a person’s facial expression, body shape, and attire. The final section explored iconology, as the descriptions in the texts, could be used to ‘distinguish the attributes’, and the symbols and the hieroglyphs that were used ‘to characterise the Virtues [and] the Vices’, and ‘all the Passions’ one wanted to ‘personify.’¹¹⁹ Iconology involved the analysis and interpretative inquiry of symbols or images and their contextual significance within a historical framework. By contrast, a symbol was defined as an object that represented or symbolised something else, typically an intangible concept. The hieroglyphs, as symbols for objects, figures, and events in the narratives, could identify a distinctive and contrasting set of goods, evils, and sensations. In addition, the array of sentiments, such as passions, needed to be portrayed and personified.

In my opinion, Philips’s textual descriptions implicitly demonstrated the use of allegory as a narrative technique. The visual descriptions of Vira were seen as emblems. As Berger and Richon argued, this was intended so that no ultimate meanings could be found. The seduction of the truth was meant to hide rather than to reveal. In their analysis of Philips’s essay, allegory was a form of conceit.

Additionally, in terms of Philips’s work, Berger and Richon quoted philosopher Denis Diderot’s words that allegory resembled ‘a fabric of hieroglyphs piled one on

¹¹⁸ Anita Philips, ‘The Virtues, the Vices and All the Passions’, in *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, eds. John X. Berger and Olivier Richon (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education and Camerawork, 1989), n. p.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

another.¹²⁰ In this respect, allegory represented the accumulation of multiple layers of meaning for several objects. Apart from that, concepts such as emblems and allegory became more complex with many written narratives. Therefore, through Philips's examination, conceit and disguise were the essences of allegory.

¹²⁰ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

Part 2: *The Fortune Teller* (1992)

The exhibition *The Fortune Teller* was curated by Maud Sulter at Rochdale Art Gallery in 1992. Rochdale Art Gallery, led by senior curator Jill Morgan, was committed to promoting new art during the 1990s. Since then, exhibitions, art collections, works and displays, artists' talks, and programmes have contributed to the production of issue-based works examining the development of contemporary culture. The exhibition was realised with the support of four institutions: Rochdale Art Gallery; Josh Baer Gallery, New York; Samia Saoumia Gallery, Paris; and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York. These public galleries were devoted to the development of contemporary art. Metro Rochdale, the Arts Council of Great Britain and the North West Arts Board supported *The Fortune Teller* financially. The catalogue of the exhibition also acknowledged the role of Mark Haworth-Booth of the Victoria and Albert Museum in creating a positive climate in the UK for touring photo exhibitions. The exhibition was finally presented as a palm-sized booklet of less than 50 pages (see its cover, illustrated in Figure 11). The booklet commenced with the curator Sulter's elucidation of the exhibition's inspirations, and a review of the three participating artists: Lorna Simpson, Karen Knorr, and Olivier Richon. The subsequent content of the booklet showcased the individual works of the three artists, comprising their sources of inspiration, the descriptions and presentations of works. The catalogue of the exhibition (Figure 12) displayed a list of photoworks produced by the three artists. The exhibition was also accompanied by a symposium about

radical art towards the 21st century, which occurred on 6th June 1992.¹²¹ The invited artists were Simpson, Richon, Lubaina Himid, and Mark Haworth-Booth.

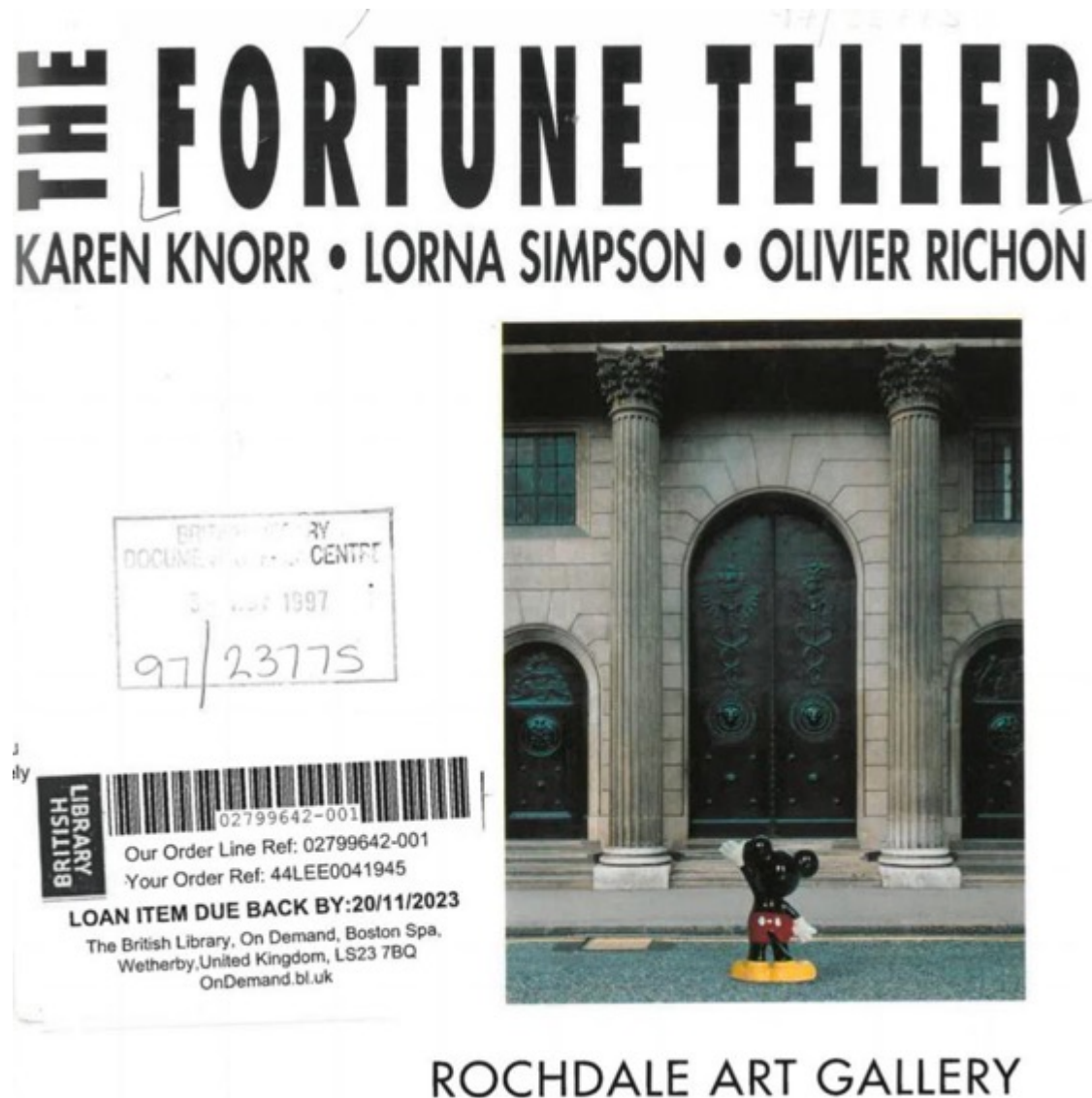


Figure 11. Cover of the book *The Fortune Teller* (with library stamp), 1992, paper, 20.5 cm x 20.5 cm, Rochdale Art Gallery

¹²¹ The conference's presentation materials were not available online.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

Catalogue of Exhibition

All works are available for sale

KAREN KNORR

1. THE END OF HISTORY
Cibachrome print
1992
Edition 1 of 5
2. HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE
Cibachrome print
1991
Edition 2 of 5
3. WHITE MAN'S BURDEN
Cibachrome print
1991
Edition 2 of 5
4. FIRST WORLD DEBTS
Cibachrome print
1991
Edition 2 of 5
5. HIS WORSHIPFUL COMPANY
Cibachrome print
1991
Edition 1 of 5
6. THE PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL
ECONOMY
Cibachrome print
1991
Edition 3 of 5

LORNA SIMPSON

1. HOLDING AND BREAKING
3 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 4
2. LANDSCAPE/BODY PARTS III
2 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 5
3. LANDSCAPE/BODY PARTS I
2 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 5
4. NERVOUS CONDITION
2 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 5
5. PRACTICAL JOKE
2 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 3
6. MAGDELENA
6 colour polaroids
1992
Edition 2 of 3

OLIVIER RICHON

1. ΔΗΜΟΚΡΙΤΟΣ
C-type print
1992
Edition 1 of 3
2. ΠΙΠΛΑΡΧΙΑ
C-type print
1992
Edition 1 of 3
3. ΑΝΤΙΣΘΕΝΗΣ
C-type print
1992
Edition 1 of 3
4. ΜΗΤΤΙΟΚΛΗΣ
C-type print
1992
Edition 1 of 3
5. ΔΙΟΓΕΝΗΣ
C-type print
1992
Edition 1 of 3

Figure 12. Catalogue of the exhibition *The Fortune Teller*, 1992, paper, Rochdale Art Gallery

As indicated by Sulter, allegory played a significant role in shaping the photographic explorations in the works of the three artists, drawing from the conventions of painting. In Sulter's words, the 'conventions of painterliness – the etiquette of the mapped canvas – the covert and overt significations of symbol, emblem and allegory', were instrumental in the showcased tableaux.¹²² The French word *ouvert* was defined as 'open', while *covert* suggested a state of being hidden or not openly revealed. From Sulter's perspective, the explicit and implicit aspects of symbol, emblem and allegory were manifested in the tableaux settings in the photoworks of the participating artists. In my view, Sulter's viewpoint raised a question regarding how the three techniques were manifested in the works, which Sulter failed to clarify. I understand that utilising the three strategies entailed the joint involvement of concrete elements and abstract notions. The symbol denoted a physical representation of an abstract concept, while an emblem signified an object serving as a symbol for a particular quality or idea. The allegory used characters or events depicted in a literary or artistic work to convey an underlying message. Each of the three methods utilised tangible objects to delve into the underlying significance of intangible concepts. The depictions and connotations of symbol, emblem and allegory were both observable and disguised in the creations and interpretations of the works.

Along with manifestations of symbol, emblem, and allegory, Sulter addressed the transformations in the viewer's perception of the works. In her view, the existence of

¹²² Maud Sulter, *The Fortune Teller: Karen Knorr; Lorna Simpson; Olivier Richon* (Rochdale: Rochdale Art Gallery, 1992), p. 3.

‘mimicry, resemblance and allusion’ led to sensational responses, such as shock, delight and fear.¹²³ She did not provide further explanation regarding allegory and these three forms of expressions. From my perspective, these three features potentially had associations with allegorical manifestations, which evoked the perceptual experience of artworks for the viewer. Mimicry was an act of imitating expressions and gestures, and resemblance signified a state of bearing similarities to something, and allusion suggested a recollection of something without mentioning it explicitly. The three methods seemed to form a continuous process, from imitation to similitude and ultimately to implication. In this regard, issues of aesthetics and materiality were engaged, since the direct and indirect representations of symbols, emblems and allegories transformed the attributes and connotations of imitated objects. In the following section, I provide a separate overview of three artists in *The Fortune Teller*.

¹²³ Ibid.

Maud Sulter, Booklet Introduction

Sulter offered a clear account of how the exhibition became a project in her introduction. Influenced by Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's painting *The Fortune Teller* (1595), the exhibition suggested there was a discrepancy between the viewer's perception and the intended meaning of the artwork. In Caravaggio's painting (Figure 13), a Romani girl was reading the palm of a foppishly dressed boy, whose model was thought to be Caravaggio's Sicilian artist companion, Mario Minniti. Upon closer scrutiny, the girl appeared to be gently stroking the young man's hand while taking off the ring, of which the young man was unaware. In this sense, the Romani girl was both wily and deceitful, with her seductive smile. The young man was captivated by her beauty, causing him to be oblivious of the subterfuge taking place. The painting served as a means of conveying a subtle moral message that a flirtatious young woman should not be readily trusted.



Figure 13. Caravaggio, *The Fortune Teller*, 1595, oil on canvas, 93 cm x 131 cm, Louvre, Paris

Inspired by Caravaggio's painting, Sulter contended that the exhibition featured 'the desire to trace, to map, to prophesy'.¹²⁴ The painting indicated the difficulty in accurately portraying a person's desires and behaviours. From my viewpoint, three manifestations embodied the temporal feature of allegory. While engaged in the activities of tracing and mapping, it was of utmost importance to deliberate on past occurrences, present circumstances, and their possible future implications.

Furthermore, the act of prophesying involved a deep and profound exploration of what was to come. Against this background, *The Fortune Teller* took 'as its theme the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

ability of photography to create narratives around history, authenticity and premonition.’¹²⁵ The three artists in the exhibition used photography to explore the discourse of art history, conventions, and unforeseen paradigms. In my understanding, these three themes of the exhibition also contained the concept of time. The examination of history or authenticity involved both past and present factors. The sense of premonition was a heightened awareness that foreshadowed a future event. As previously stated, Owens’s analysis identified a temporal dimension as a critical aspect of allegorical characteristics. In this way, the exhibition implicitly alluded to the allegorical investigation of time.

In addition to outlining the inspiration for the exhibition, Sulter presented a broad overview of how the three artists’ photographs were contextualised by a contemporary culture dominated by the interplay between materials, methods and ideas. Sulter argued that contemporary culture was ‘locked in an acrimonious tussle over the supremacy of means.’¹²⁶ A range of techniques were employed and emphasised to articulate each creator’s ideas and observations on the modern world. The various methods led to conflicts between ideas, approaches, artistic creations, and their interpretations. Caravaggio’s painting and Sulter’s observations demonstrated an incongruity between the methods employed and the underlying meaning in present-day cultural creation. Against this background, Sulter evaluated the works of Simpson, Knorr and Richon. In Sulter’s view, Simpson’s explorations of gender, race, history,

¹²⁵ The information was available at the listing information of the exhibition *The Fortune Teller*, provided by Rochdale Art Gallery.

¹²⁶ Sulter, *The Fortune Teller*, p. 3.

and feminist art in the late 1970s and early 1980s broadened the understanding of a new definition, namely, post-feminism. It referred to ‘a loss of control, loss of identity, immersion in an abstract physicality, literally disappearing into the flesh, based on an acceptance of the dominant male view.’¹²⁷ Within the established social hierarchy, male dominance led to the disregard of women’s rights and identities, relegating them to mere corporeal designations. The idea of post-feminism was therefore indicative of a relinquishment of power and erosion of individuality among female groups. Additionally, the portrayal of conceptual physiques served as manifestations of men’s examination of women in society. As such, the predominance of male authority prompted transformations in women’s roles and artistic portrayals.

Sulter’s introductions to Knorr and Richon shed light on the readings of their photoworks. With regard to Knorr’s work *The End of History* (1993), and a piece from the series *Capital* (1991-1992), she provided basic information without solid comments. As she described, the cartoon character Micky Mouse was standing in front of the Bank of England. In her view, Knorr’s *The End of History* was a satirical work. It was ‘in the tone of Hogarth’, which demonstrated ‘Anglo-Saxon anxieties’ about the diffusion of culture on a global scale.¹²⁸ Her reference to Hogarth’s articulations of Anglo-Saxon concern about the globalisation of culture was a symbol of the unanticipated effect of the arrival of European Disney. By contrast, Richon’s series, *After Diogenes Laërtius*, presented a collection of impressive still life

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

depictions. Sulter regarded Richon as ‘a master of conceit and disguise.’¹²⁹

Considering the captured objects and texts in the series, there were collisions between vegetables and fabrics, Greek texts, and images. The viewers were, therefore, caught in conflicts between Richon’s intellect and emotions, and the formed fantasy and reality of the still lives. The analyses conducted by Sulter were beneficial in revealing the straightforward and veiled expression, and the use of techniques in creating a photograph. In the following section, I examine the contributions of Simpson, Knorr, and Richon in *The Fortune Teller*, with a primary emphasis on Knorr and Richon as they will be the focus of my study.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

Lorna Simpson's Photoworks

The booklet presented Simpson's written descriptions of *Self Possession*, and three photoworks, namely *Practical Joke*, *Magdalena*, and *Self Possession*. The written material on *Self Possession* was sourced from Trevor Fairbrother's interview with Simpson in 1988. The excerpted paragraph specifically addressed the various modes of reading utilised by the viewers when appreciating photographs. According to their discussion, using facial expressions involving the eyes and mouth was an effective way for viewers to understand photographs. The reader's cultural background also played a role in developing his/her reading habits. The textual observations were followed by the photoworks *Practical Joke* and *Magdalena*, without any textual comments. The work *Practical Joke* featured a pair of shoes and a shoe box enclosed in a sectional wooden frame measuring 65.7 cm x 109.3 cm. Likewise, *Magdalena* showcased two pairs of shoes and two shoe boxes. Its composition was nearly identical to *Practical Joke*, except for an additional row of shoe boxes and shoes. The presence of accompanying texts in the form of two sentences was another distinguishing feature of *Magdalena*. They were: 'at her burial I stood under the tree next to her grave', and 'when I returned the tree was a distance from her marker.'¹³⁰ These sentences could be interpreted as follows: At the time of her burial, 'I' (specific name not given) positioned myself beneath the tree in close proximity to 'her' (perhaps someone with whom 'I' have a close relationship) final resting place, and upon my return, 'I' observed the tree had relocated itself a considerable distance from

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

‘her’ burial site. The two sentences revealed the melancholic atmosphere and temporal characteristics of someone’s burial of a corpse. As such, the photoworks alluded to deeper and sentimental emotions by portraying ordinary boxes and shoes. In this manner, the written depiction supplemented the allegorical understanding of the image by presenting additional explanations.

The booklet also represented Coco Fusco’s review of Simpson’s works.¹³¹ As argued by Fusco, Simpson’s works were highly evocative and allowed viewers to identify the complex meanings woven into them, prompting critical responses. Fusco further pointed out that Simpson’s works exhibited three key characteristics. The primary focus of Simpson’s work was to shape meanings and values, and how they were affected by the interactions between objects, artists, and viewers. This feature established the philosophical contemplation within the framework of conceptual art. Secondly, Simpson contextualised her techniques in the postmodernist examination of how photography influenced society and its implications, while juxtapositions of texts and images challenged the photograph’s perceived iconic stability. Therefore, Simpson’s practice had a significant impact on the exploration of racial and sexual identity and social phenomena, such as the constraints of cultural and ethnic differences. Finally, in Simpson’s constructed scenarios, some objects hinted at the act of observing, the perspective of the observer, and the influence of culture on their perceptions. Briefly, by presenting three aspects of interpretation, Fusco offered

¹³¹ Coco Fusco is a Black female writer and curator who lives and works in New York.

insights into the comprehension of Simpson's works. The interplay between art and philosophy, the societal perception of photographs, and the relationship between objects and viewing perspectives all contributed to the allegorical significance of Simpson's works.

Simpson's final section in the booklet featured her photowork *Self Possession*. One striking aspect of this photowork was the use of the text 'Seated on a train she realised she had been given a "Mississippi Appendectomy"'.¹³² According to the historical information found, a black woman underwent a surgical procedure in 1961 to remove a uterine tumour but was also subjected to an unconsented hysterectomy. This practice was rampant among poor African-American women and was later referred to as a 'Mississippi appendectomy'. In this sense, the presented images and words implied the presence and development of the historical occurrence. Considering the above analysis, the flexibility of the viewer and the role of texts were understood as allegorical features of Simpson's works. The observer actively explored potential ways to attribute significant interpretations to the emerging objects, building upon Simpson's previous works with unwavering intentions and procedures. The textual descriptions were crucial in understanding her works. To fully comprehend the implied meanings in Simpson's works, viewers needed to actively participate in a reciprocal process of questioning, decoding, and reconstructing every visual component.

¹³² Sulter, *The Fortune Teller*, p. 16.

Karen Knorr's Photoworks *Capital*

The Fortune Teller displayed Knorr's six pieces of works from the series *Capital*. The displayed works were cibachromes framed with gold leaf lettering, and they were *The End of History*, *His Worshipful Company*, *Hostage to Fortune*, *White Man's Burden*, *First World Debt*, and *The Principles of Political Economy*. There were two sizes in the exhibition. The former two pieces were 38cm x 38 cm, and the latter four photos measured 38cm x 47cm.¹³³ In the booklet, Knorr's section comprised four parts: two paragraphs from Benjamin Franklin's essay 'Advice to a Young Tradesman', the presentation of Knorr's series *Capital*, Knorr's explanation of the topic of capital, and a quotation from Ferdinand Kurnberger. The layout of Knorr's section was shown in Figure 14. In the following discussion, I will focus on the writings of Franklin, Knorr and Kurnberger, and the elaboration of the series *Capital* will be presented in Chapter 2.

¹³³ The dimensions of the photoworks were reported by Rochdale Art Gallery.

The beginning of Knorr's section featured two paragraphs authored by Benjamin Franklin.¹³⁴ Franklin's interpretations of money revealed that it held a deeper meaning than initially perceived. Through Franklin's introduction, money, as a tangible medium of exchange, could be formed by intangible factors, such as time and credit. Both time and credit held monetary value, and money possessed a productive and generating essence. Given Franklin's explanation, money was not merely accepted as a payment method for goods and services. In addition to money, one's time and credit served as a medium of exchange. With an adequate amount of time, people were able to produce wealth. Additionally, a key factor determining the value of credits as a currency was one's ability to use them wisely. In Franklin's words, 'the good paymaster' was 'Lord of another Man's purse.'¹³⁵ People who were reputed for their prompt and accurate payments could quickly amass any required funds from their acquaintances at any given time. Franklin's proverb conveyed the notion that one's creditworthiness remarkably determined the amount of money he/she had access to. When a person had sufficient liquidity, he/she grabbed more chances to invest and make profits. As such, money was perceived as a medium of exchange, and its acquisition possibly depended on other correlated factors, such as the credits of the individuals. From Franklin's explanation, it can be inferred that money itself was perceived to possess an allegorical quality. It was not an isolated concept, and established patterns did not constrain its formation.

¹³⁴ As one of the Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin played a significant role in the American Revolution.

¹³⁵ Sulter, *The Fortune Teller*, p. 17.

Following Franklin's analysis, Knorr delved deeper into the understanding of the concept of capital in two paragraphs, which contributed to the understanding of her series. Knorr's *Capital* featured a blend of still life and advertising photography, showcasing various artefacts, emblems, insignia, and symbols of power in banks, halls, and companies. Given the content of this group of work, in my view, Knorr's textual account of capital suggested that the primary allegorical feature was understood to be a temporal association between historical and contemporary financial institutions. In Knorr's words, the city's 'history and its links to the present' was a focus, and the 'old and the new' collided with each other.¹³⁶ This perspective indirectly established a temporal connection between the struggles of historical capital and the operations of present-day financial institutions, such as merchant banks, insurance companies, and urban development. In addition, the historical and present perspectives both showed evidence of a collision. Drawing from the correlation between temporal dimensions and the clash between past and current viewpoints, Knorr also concluded that in *Capital*, 'the objects photographed' were 'allegorical, metaphorically standing in for events and characters in the city.'¹³⁷ From this, when an object or element was placed in a different context, its meaning and character could change and take on new identities through allegorical functions. Knorr's textual description of capital validated the discrepancy between the depiction of the photographed objects and their intended significance. In addition, the temporal aspect may influence the allegorical interpretation of the photographed objects.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

What followed Knorr's two-paragraph analysis was Ferdinand Kurnberger's quotation that 'They make tallow out of cattle and money out of men', without any explanations.¹³⁸ In my view, the statement provided an allegorical reading of an ethical perspective on capital. The saying was characterised by the ideal of an honest man of sound credit and the assumption that it was a person's duty to accumulate capital as an end in itself. What Kurnberger's statement highlighted was a peculiar ethic. As abstract values, ethical features were not easily discernible in the form of the photographs. Conceptual notions also existed in class connections between people. As Jessica Evans commented on Knorr's work, by using actual city institutions in many of the images (Lloyd's Register of Shipping and Freemason's Hall as examples), Knorr expressed "the 'organic' connectedness of a class of people to their place."¹³⁹ In this regard, persons were affiliated with a specific socio-economic group and shared a bond. The manifestation of the class among people was expressed through pictorial representations. Furthermore, everyday experiences could affect the acquisition of social group rights. In Knorr's words, 'command over social space' was 'a fundamental and all-pervasive source of power in and over everyday life.'¹⁴⁰ Knorr's perspective allowed viewers to experience exclusive and secluded locations that were previously inaccessible and unseen. In this sense, access to certain spaces

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

Ferdinand Kurnberger was regarded as one of the most influential writers of Viennese literature in the 1860s and 1870s. His most notable achievement was his involvement in the French Revolution of 1848, which resulted in his seeking asylum in Dresden, Germany, and ultimately being apprehended.

¹³⁹ 'Capital', Karen Knorr, n. d. <<https://karenknorr.com/photography/capital/>> [accessed 23 July 2023].

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

served as a reflection of social power. Society's distribution of power largely dictated the individuals' ability to access different social spaces. Considering the discussions of Franklin, Knorr and Kurnberger, the concept of capital was not only about money, but also involved certain abstract or less direct expressions of moral norms, social rights, and the development of cities.

Olivier Richon's Photoworks *After Diogenes Laërtius*

Richon's section included his depictions of the series *After Diogenes Laërtius*, the group's presentation, and a mention of a conversation between Plato and Diogenes Laërtius (Figure 15). As indicated by the title, Richon presented a comprehensive summary of Laërtius. Throughout history, Laërtius's *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (1853 – originally published 3rd century AD) has been a primary source for studying ancient philosophy, with particular emphasis on the philosophy of the Cynics. The series represented low still-life genres, such as fish, radish, and squid, which were symbols pointing to the Cynics in philosophy. In terms of these depicted objects, he claimed they were 'the lowest genre within a hierarchy of subjects.'¹⁴¹ While they came from below the surface, whether on land or in the sea, this group was often overlooked in the market. They were relentlessly placed above the mantelshelf without any choices. The velvets beneath the still lives also captured the viewer's attention. As Richon argued, still lives tainted the elegance of the velvet cloth, just as 'the inscription of the names of the Cynics' were 'a stain on the geometrical and somehow platonic space of the picture.'¹⁴² Against the exquisite velvet cloth, the lowliness and inferiority of the low genre of still lives appeared more pronounced. In this sense, still lives served as a metaphor for the places of cynicism in Greek philosophy.

¹⁴¹ Olivier Richon and Parveen Adams, *After D. L.* (Graz: Ed. Camera Austria, 1995), p. 4.

¹⁴² Ibid.

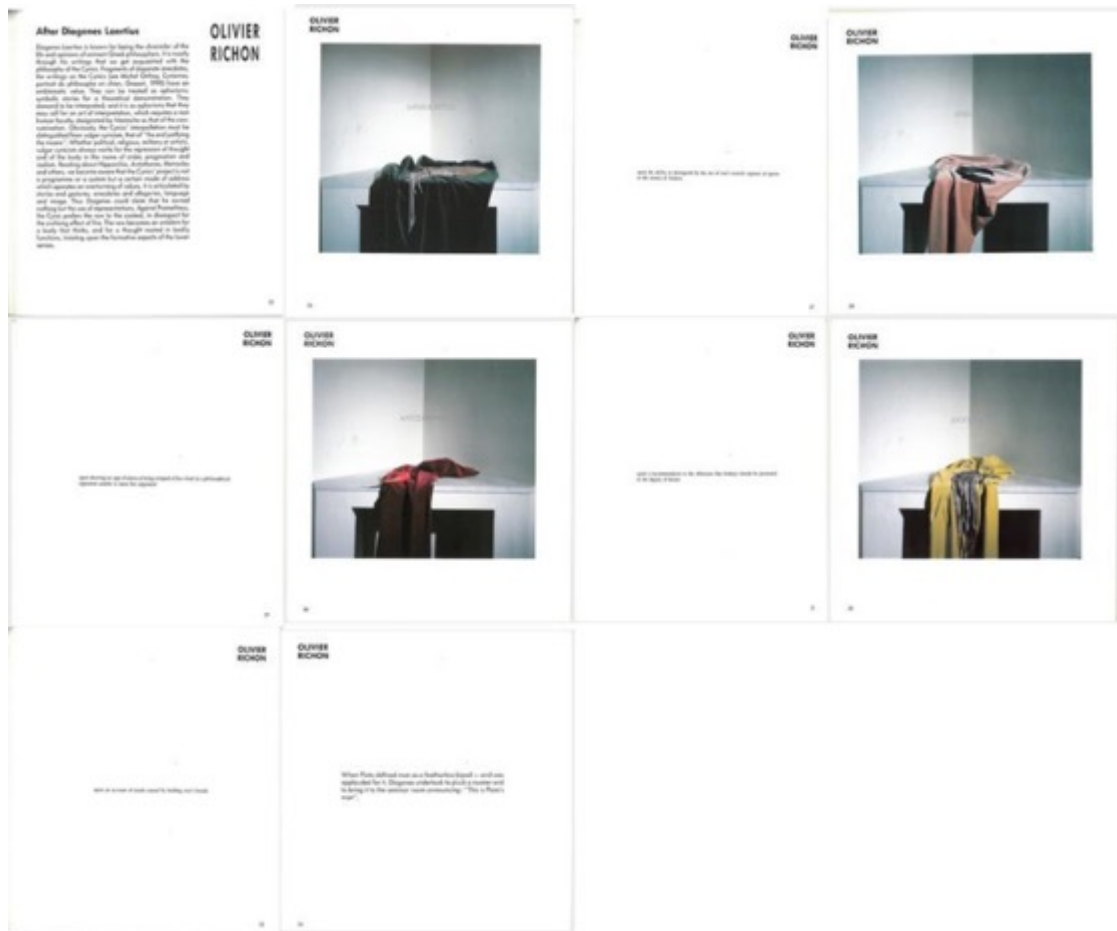


Figure 15. Layout of Olivier Richon's *After Diogenes Laërtius* in the book *The Fortune Teller*, 1992, paper, Rochdale Art Gallery

The writings about the Cynics comprised fragments of disparate anecdotes with emblematic values. In Richon's view, Cynics were viewed as 'aphorisms and allegories in the service of a theoretical demonstration.'¹⁴³ According to my understanding, aphorisms represent well-established truths and principles that withstand the test of time. With time, distinct viewpoints are established, and additional symbolic accounts generated. In this sense, the project of Cynics was a 'certain mode of address' which operated as 'an overturning of values.'¹⁴⁴ The mode here suggested flexibility of narratives, which reversed the entrenched values. Due to the varying values, in Richon's view, the Cynics project was 'articulated by stories, gestures, anecdotes and allegories, language and image.'¹⁴⁵ He provided no additional explanation. In my opinion, with regard to the Cynics project, gestures, stories, anecdotes, and allegories involved expressing ideas or thoughts using the movement of a part of the body, and imaginary or real people and events. Using language as a means of communication allowed for the visual depiction of something or an individual, ultimately creating an image. The utilisation of distinct narrative techniques and approaches led to varying interpretations. The combination of multiple interpretations contributed to the viewer's perception of the Cynics, the accuracy of which remained uncertain and served as an allegory.

Richon's section concluded with a quoted sentence, which was a conversation between Diogenes Laërtius and Plato. When Plato defined man as a featherless biped

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Sulter, *The Fortune Teller*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

– and was applauded for it – Laërtius undertook to pluck a rooster and bring it to the seminar room, announcing: “This is Plato’s man”.¹⁴⁶ In Plato’s view, humans were the most advanced species on the planet. Nevertheless, Laërtius and Plato disagreed over the definition of man, as stated in the sentence. For Plato, a human being, as a bipedal species, did not need feathers. Be that as it may, their conflicts greatly contributed to the definition of man historically. Could two-legged, featherless creatures and objects be regarded as humans? The contrast in their definitions of man added to the multiplicity of connotations for a singular entity. As such, the interpretations, techniques, and representations constituting the Cynics, and the definition of man revealed the multifaceted nature of the meanings of the Cynics.

Given the above analysis, the three artists’ works were considered to be allegorical, which sought to reveal the hidden significations of the works, with different emphases. Using allegorical shoes and texts, Simpson explored social power, class, and women’s identities. Through the incorporation of allegorical elements, Knorr explored the complex world of financial history, while Richon covertly investigated philosophical cynicism through the portrayal of still life. The emblems, symbols, and allegories were implicit representations in the three artists’ works. It is worth noting that allegory, from most aspects, was not directly indicated, since its representations were concealed and disguised in any element constituting a work. Through the exhibition *The Fortune Teller*, I have become more aware of the significance of the photoworks of Knorr and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

Richon in the development of British photography. Their extensive use of texts, the introduced reviews, and quotations made interpreting their photographs with more than one layer of meaning possible. In short, their works made possible the creation of allegories out of the original creative processes of the author and the viewer's interpretations of the photographs.

Part 3: *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (1997)

Other Than Itself was focused on investigating the otherness in photography. *The Fortune Teller* centred on the veiled and revealed interpretations of allegory in the works of Simpson, Knorr, and Richon. *Virtue & Vice* showcased a collection of renowned artists who explored the derivations of allegory in contemporary photography and media-based artworks over the previous decade. According to the bibliography of *Virtue & Vice*, Yve Lomax and Hilary Gresty's 'The World is Indeed a Fabulous Tale' in *The Postmodern Arts*, Knorr's *Connoisseurs*, Philips's essay 'The Virtues, the Vices and All the Passions' in *Other Than Itself* were significant references.¹⁴⁷ The exhibition's title suggested that the concepts of virtue and vice were used to identify standing positions, personal characteristics, and individual actions and desires. The images displayed in the exhibition, alongside written inscriptions, portrayed moral transgressions and virtues.

Virtue & Vice was curated by guest curator Mirelle Thijsen at Site Gallery from 22nd March to 3rd May 1997. Sheffield's Site Gallery is now an internationally recognised contemporary art gallery specialising in moving images, new media, and performance art. It originally began as an independent photography gallery, incorporating digital

¹⁴⁷ According to the bibliography of *Virtue & Vice*, the exploration of allegory in the American context, such as Craig Owens's essay 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', and Benjamin H. D Buchloh's essay 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art' also played key roles. The examination of allegory within the American scope carried significant ramifications for the British context.

and multimedia work alongside traditional photographic production from 1995. The name of the gallery was changed to Site Gallery in 1996. In the following year, *Virtue & Vice* showcased photoworks of several practitioners: French artist Dany Leriche, Spanish artist Paloma Navares, German artist Bernhard Prinz, Canadian artist Sorel Cohen, and three British-based artists: Helen Chadwick, Karen Knorr (American), and Olivier Richon (Swiss). *Virtue & Vice* was a follow-up to earlier exhibitions at Site Gallery's predecessors: *Hommages & Remakes* (1988), *Grotesque* (1989) and *Minimal Relics* (1992-1993), which were all curated by International Photography Research.¹⁴⁸ According to the background information (Figure 16), *Virtue & Vice* marked the first major international touring exhibition that Site Gallery had staged.¹⁴⁹ *Virtue & Vice* was also exhibited at Watershed, Bristol, 17th May-6th July, 1997; Nottingham University Arts Centre, 19th July-17th August, 1997; and Portalen Koge Bugt Kulturhus (Denmark), 26th August- 4th October, 1997. Helen Chadwick's work *Wreaths to Pleasure 1 & 10* (1993) was not included in the Nottingham and Danish iterations.

¹⁴⁸ Due to the missing archives, I cannot find any substantial evidence showing the connections between these four exhibitions. All participating photographers had a shared focus on the art historical notion with different methods and genres. International Photography Research is a photographic group in Amsterdam, located outside Sheffield.

¹⁴⁹ The exhibition collaborated with International Photography Research of Amsterdam, Carol Maund, director of Site Gallery in Sheffield, England, and Jens Hennk Sandberg, director of Portalen Koge Bugt Kulturhus Greve, Denmark. The Arts Council of England, Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board, Sheffield City Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the International Trade of Canada financially supported the project.

Virtue and Vice International Exhibition

Background to Exhibition and Budgets

The exhibition *Virtue and Vice* is the first major international touring exhibition the Site Gallery has staged. The involvement of an international independent curator is an important element of our strategy to work in collaboration with outside curators. Mirelle Thijssen's c.v. is enclosed.

The artists selected from France, Germany, Spain, Canada and Great Britain have all developed work around the theme of 'allegory'. Work will be new for this exhibition or will not have been seen in Great Britain before. In the case of several of the European artists, they have not shown in the U.K. and therefore this will be the first major exhibition bringing their work to a British audience.

The exhibition will tour to two further venues in U.K. and then will begin a tour in Europe. The dates of the tour are as follows:

Tour Exhibition Dates:

Sheffield Site Gallery	22 March - 3 May 1997
Bristol Watershed Media Centre	17 May - 6 July
Nottingham University Arts Centre	19 July - 17 August
Denmark Portalen Koge Bugt Kulturhus	26 August - 4 October

Figure 16. Background, organisation, and impact of the exhibition *Virtue & Vice*, 1997, paper, Site Gallery

The primary aim of *Virtue & Vice* was to investigate the transformations of the allegory in contemporary photographic practices – signalling the heightened consciousness of the association of allegory with photography at this point. The exhibition was inspired by Herta Wolf's comment on Bernhard Prinz's work that the 'constant allusion to allegory' was 'in fact too blatant.'¹⁵⁰ This 'too blatant' became a recurring theme. Drawing from Wolf's observation, *Virtue & Vice* investigated how allegory developed in art history and photography. It showcased a diverse collection of series and installations that drew on art historical imagery and classic philosophical concepts. As it was put by the Site Gallery, 'contemporary allegories have been derived from masterpieces in the history of art' and 'historical, philosophical concepts [were frequently] 'treated in a frivolous manner.'¹⁵¹ From this perspective, contemporary photography was saturated with derivations of the art historical concept of allegory. The photographers included were intrigued by the revival of canonical paintings from art history, resulting in a detailed exploration of incoherent amalgamations of allegorical themes.

The correlation between photography and allegory was marked by a mutual sense of ambivalence. Allegories, 'as contemporary photography has amply demonstrated,' appeared 'as an incoherent amalgamation, as various allegorical territories.'¹⁵²

Moreover, it seemed clear that 'Images appear under the guise of allegory.'¹⁵³ In this

¹⁵⁰ It was an excerpt of the unpublished manuscript of the exhibition *Virtue & Vice*, provided by Site Gallery.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

regard, allegory serves as a disguise for the depiction of images. In the realm of photography, allegories manifested themselves as – and the formulation is deliberately paradoxical – disjointed fusions. Indeed, both allegory and photography were taken to have this quality.

Virtue & Vice also offered a definition of the concept of an allegorical image. It was simplistically defined as ‘a description of one thing under the image of another’, while an allegorical image ‘embodies ideas, and makes them visible through signs and icons.’¹⁵⁴ The allegorical image employed the technique of portraying one idea through the guise of another. In addition, the participating artists’ images appeared ‘as moral transgressions, flaunting their enigmatic emblems in an allegorical puzzle.’¹⁵⁵ The essence of an allegorical image lay in its ability to encapsulate and convey complex ideas by visually translating them into recognizable symbols and meaningful icons, thus making them more comprehensible and impactful. This definition played a pivotal role in shaping and progressing the forthcoming concept of allegorical photography. Given the associations between allegory and photography, the participating artists in the exhibition were committed to ‘extracting the core content from signs’, which was an approach that obstructed ‘any conventional reading of the work.’¹⁵⁶ That is to say, using signs to extract fundamental content was a technique that challenged conventional interpretations of photography, which was perceived as an allegorical manifestation.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

In the depictions of allegorical images, words played a key role. Considering that an allegory was seen as ‘much like a pictogram’, words *per se* were ‘treated as purely visual elements,’ while images were ‘offered as “texts” which must be decoded.’¹⁵⁷ Using allegory, the initial functions of the text and imagery might undergo alteration. Words and images coexisted in a symbiotic relationship, with the former being perceived as visual components and the latter being presented as textual constructs that required interpretation. Both images and words departed significantly from the established conventions of expression. Words, images, and allegories were interconnected, since ‘images as expressions of thoughts’ did not ‘merely insinuate words, but the entire territory of an idea,’ which were ‘considered the substance of allegories.’¹⁵⁸ Images served as the manifestations of abstract concepts that went beyond mere verbal implications, which were regarded as the fundamental elements of allegories.

In conjunction with the launch of the exhibition, a one-day conference titled *I Can't Explain it All Myself* was held at the Showroom Cinema in Sheffield on March 21st, 1997. The conference provided a platform for conceptual dialogue on incorporating allegory into contemporary photographic practices. The event featured Rosemary Betterton (Chair), Fred Orton (Critic), Karen Knorr, Dany Leriche, Bernhard Prinz, and Olivier Richon as speakers. According to the conference’s flyer, the event aimed to investigate further the question of ‘What is an allegorical work?’¹⁵⁹ Unpublished

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Site Gallery provided the conference’s flyer. To preserve the whole message of the conference’s

materials from Site Gallery revealed that the conference also endeavoured to address further questions:

Is *Virtue and Vice* evidence of the return of allegory – both as a practical and theoretical tool for the artist and the audience? If so, why is it emerging at this particular moment of the 20th century, along with a complex range of the new technologies for image making? Why are these practitioners, working in photography, returning to the canonical paintings of European art history? What questions are being asked about the role of photography in Art History? How do contemporary audiences recognise and read allegory within a work – in other words, how ‘knowing’ must the viewer be?¹⁶⁰

The conference focused on investigating the definition of an allegorical work and the theoretical and practical ramifications of *Virtue and Vice*.¹⁶¹ Even though the full texts of the conference presentations were not accessible, the descriptions of participant Rosemary Betterton and reviewer Michelle McGuire provided valuable insights into the discussed issues. Betterton stated that the discussion of form and content in photography was a point of discussion. Participants also engaged in conversations about various forms of photography and reality, such as signs, texts,

purpose, the tense of the original questions has not been altered.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Given that each participating artist delved into tradition, producing varying critical implications. The conference’s intention was that ‘the combination of British and European artists will emphasise the diversity and complexity of their individual.’ It was an excerpt of the unpublished manuscript of the exhibition *Virtue & Vice*, provided by Site Gallery.

ideas, and images. Orton's presentation centred around modern allegory and what allegory was, as shown in Figure 17. In addition, as indicated by McGuire's review, Richon made a distinction between allegory and symbol at the conference. According to Richon, in contrast to symbol, allegory had hidden intentions, and it was 'pure', and opened up 'the areas of aesthetics.'¹⁶² The distinction between symbol and allegory raised here was not a fresh topic, but Richon placed a greater focus upon allegory within the field of aesthetics. In short, the conference advanced the theoretical discourse on allegory in photography.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Michelle McGuire, 'Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography', *Variant*, 3 (1997), pp. 2-3 (p. 2).

¹⁶³ The unpublished manuscript shed light on the relationship between the allegory and the reader. It wrote, 'Allegory is self-conscious play, and demands an equally self-conscious reader.'

‘I Can’t Explain it all Myself’ Virtue & Vice Conference Friday 21 March

Thankyou for your conference booking. Following is the agenda for the day and details of directions, food and accommodation.

Agenda

9.30 - 10.30 am	Registration at Site Gallery reception, 1 Brown Street, Sheffield S1 2BS 0114 272 5947
10.30 - 10.45 am (Showroom Cinema)	Welcome from <i>Carol Maund</i> , Director of Site Introduction from the Chair, <i>Rosemary Betterton</i> , Sheffield Hallam University
10.45 - 11.30 am	<i>McBelle</i> <i>Fred Orton</i> ‘What is Allegory’
11.30 - 11.45 am	Time for questions/responses
11.45 - 12.30 pm	<i>Karen Knorr</i>
12.30 - 12.45 pm	Time for questions/responses
12.45 - 1.45 pm	Lunch

Lunch is obtainable from Site Gallery Cafe but to avoid long queues we recommend that you take advantage of the pre-booking offer (see separate sheet) which will allow you to receive your food promptly in the Showroom.

1.45 - 2.30 pm	<i>Olivier Richon</i>
2.30 - 2.45 pm	Time for questions/responses
2.45 - 3.30 pm	<i>Dany Leriche</i>
3.30 - 3.45 pm	Time for questions/responses
3.45 - 4.00 pm	Tea Break
4.00 - 4.45 pm	<i>Bernard Prinz</i>
4.45 - 5.00 pm	Time for question/responses
5.00 - 5.15 pm	Closing remarks from the chair

6.00 - 9.00 pm Private View of the show *Virtue & Vice*, Site Gallery

Figure 17. Flyer of *I Can’t Explain it All Myself*, 1997, paper, Site Gallery

The content of the exhibition was finally produced as a palm-sized illustrated pamphlet, with a total of 40 pages. Its cover is shown below in Figure 18. The pamphlet contained two essays: Rosemary Betterton's 'Allegorical Impulses' and Mirelle Thijsen's 'The Aim of Allegory, Somewhere between Form and Content'. The booklet also encompassed a catalogue of chosen exhibition pieces, a biography for each participating artist that included their education, selected individual exhibitions, a bibliography, and acknowledgments. Given the above exploration, my interest in this exhibition is to understand what implications the traditional artworks bring to the photographs that constitute allegorical photography. Considering the relationship between photography and art history, what aspects of photography are considered to be allegorical? Moreover, in *Other Than Itself* and *The Fortune Teller*, the role of the viewer was actively involved in allegorical photoworks. In *Virtue & Vice*, addressing the derivations of allegory in photography, did the viewers play a role in the interaction between allegory and photography? When viewing a work of art, how does the viewer recognise and read the allegory? These questions will become the focus of my study.



Figure 18. Cover of the booklet *Virtue & Vice*, 1997, paper, Site Gallery

My analysis of *Virtue & Vice* comprises three parts. Firstly, I introduce the photo-projects for the exhibition and analyse their allegorical features separately. Secondly, curator Thijsen's essay offers valuable perspectives on allegory in photographic practices. I provide an in-depth analysis of the essays of Thijsen and Betterton, to investigate further their theoretical contributions. My focus then turns to the examination of three reviews of the exhibition. They are Michelle McGuire's review 'Virtue & Vice', Joanne Morra's review 'Shadowing Women's Feet' and John Stathatos's review 'Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography'. In addition, I incorporate relevant comments by Thijsen, Betterton and the three reviewers into my analysis of each artist. The section aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the use and exploration of allegory in photographic practices and theoretical discussions in *Virtue & Vice* by examining the perspectives of practitioners and reviewers.

Sorel Cohen's Photoworks *The Body that Talks*

Virtue & Vice exhibited Sorel Cohen's (1936-) series *The Body that Talks* (1996). The dimensions of each photo in this series were about 104 cm x 140 cm, and they were produced as Ektacolor prints. *The Body that Talks* comprised a group of diptychs and accompanying psychoanalytic texts, as shown in Figure 19. Through personal consultations with a psychoanalyst in Montreal, Cohen created two overlapping projections: one featuring the analyst's couch and the other a black-and-white negative of her body from Paris. The paragraph on the right panel of the diptych was sourced from Sigmund Freud's book *Observations on Transference and Love*. Freud's textual descriptions revealed the interpersonal dynamics between the analytic psychotherapist and his patient in Cohen's photoworks. Moreover, Cohen's works utilised the woman's body as a subject, shedding light on the ongoing critique of the nude in the discourse of art history. Cohen brought these two threads together as a focus. Therefore, the allegorical quality of Cohen's practice was considered as a correlation between the role of women in art historical issues and patient/psychoanalyst matters, especially using the combinations of texts and images.





The course the analyst must pursue is one for which there is no model in real life. He must keep firm hold of the transference-love, but treat it as something sexual, as a situation which has to be gone through in the treatment and traced back to its unconscious origins and which must assist in bringing all that is most deeply hidden in the patient's erotic life into her consciousness and therefore under her control.



But above all, one gets the impression that the resistance is acting as an "agent provocateur"; it heightens the patient's state of being in love and exaggerates her readiness for sexual surrender in order to justify the workings of repression all the more emphatically, by pointing to the dangers of such licentiousness.

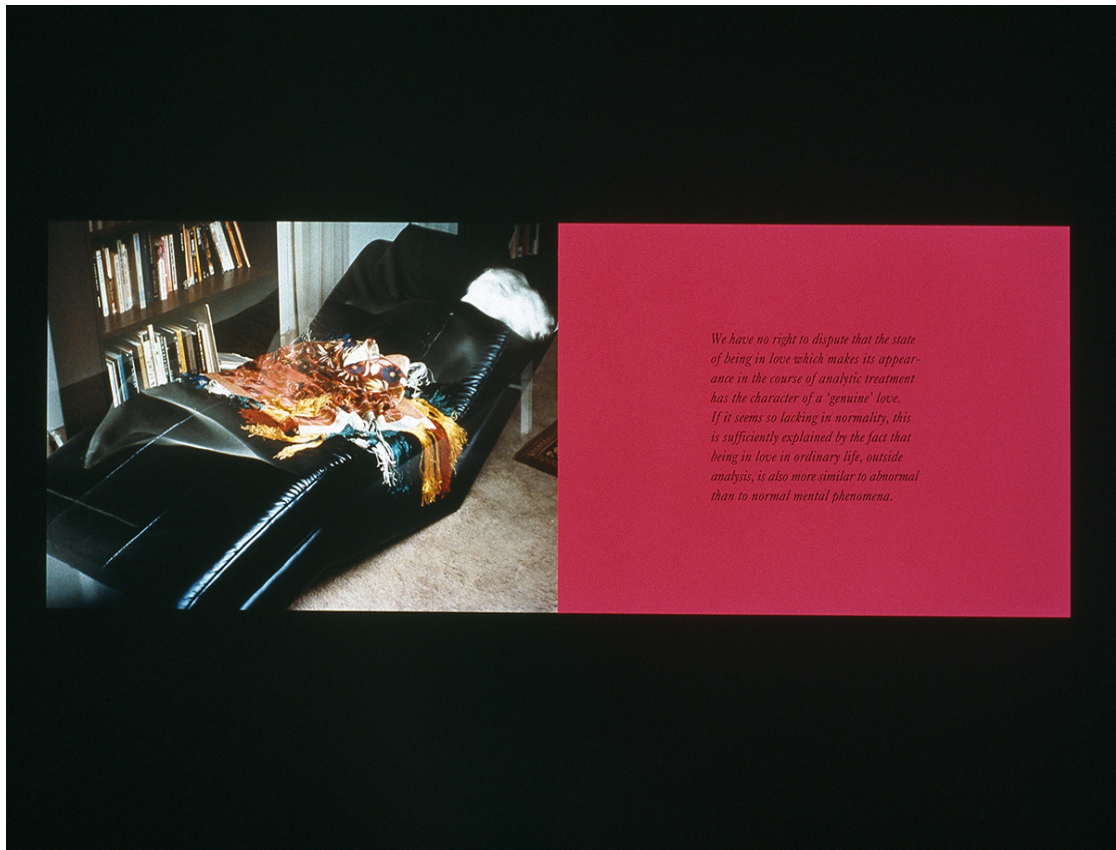


Figure 19. Sorel Cohen, *The Body that Talks*, 1996, Ektacolor print, 104 cm x 140 cm, Site Gallery

From my perspective, two aspects were understood as allegorical features of Cohen's photoworks. The psychoanalytic approach provided insights into the issue of women's representation in contrast to artistic and social perspectives. Historically, the depiction of women was constructed to establish connections between the portrayal of women and the concept of the sublime in art history and sociology. By contrast, Cohen's psychoanalytic accounts centred on a woman's awareness and promiscuity as a subject. In addition, using Freud's texts, the works created confusion between the artist, psychoanalyst, and patient. The psychoanalyst's words were presented in a third-person narrative. The texts served as a medium for understanding images, as the artist's viewpoint intertwined with the context of psychoanalysis. Importantly, the

combination of images and texts established a dialogue between the psychoanalyst and the patient. Joanne Morra's comment further uncovered the psychoanalytic associations in Cohen's photoworks. In her words, Cohen's involvement in the talking cure presented "the unconscious 'other' speaking through transference, the ultimate act of psychoanalytic love."¹⁶⁴ Transference was a psychological phenomenon marked by the shifts of emotions from one person to another, and it was a process by which the patient's feelings were redirected to the psychoanalyst. The 'other' here was likely to refer to the patient in Cohen's photoworks. Through the contextualisation of the images and texts, the psychoanalyst and patient could engage in conversation regarding the issue of unconsciousness. The manifestation of others' psychoanalytic unconsciousness in the forms of photographs was perceived as an allegorical quality. The 'psychoanalytic love' denoted a sense of endearment between the patient and psychoanalyst, according to the background information of the series. While initially behaving in a traditional patient-physician relationship, the patient later recognised the overvaluation of sexuality and became a victim of unruly social influences. In this sense, the psychoanalytic viewpoint brought to attention the unacknowledged consciousness and promiscuity of women through allegorical manifestations.

The second allegorical manifestation was considered to be how the photoworks were presented at the exhibition site and the viewer's viewing experience. The arrangement

¹⁶⁴ Joanne Morra, 'Shadowing Women's Feet', *The Magazine of Women's Art*, 76 (1997), p. 17.

of Cohen's photographs at the exhibition site is shown in Figure 20. A particular sequence was recommended in the works, starting with yellow, red, blue, green, and rose red. The viewer could obtain a complete narrative of the psychoanalyst and patient through a left-to-right sequence. The central focus of the narratives centred on a conflict over the patient's romantic feelings for the psychotherapist. The absence of interferences allowed the viewer to freely interpret the allegorical characteristics of the images in any order they chose. Additionally, not adhering to a sequential reading approach might lead to the potential for allegorical interpretation of the photographs. The absence of a fixed reading mode allowed for greater ambiguity in the readings of the photographs. The allegorical interpretations arose because the sequence of viewing affected the acquisition of the photoworks' meaning. On balance, in Cohen's photographs, the allegorical features were understood as reflections of the psychoanalytic perspective on the depiction of women, and the presentation and viewing of the photoworks at the exhibition.

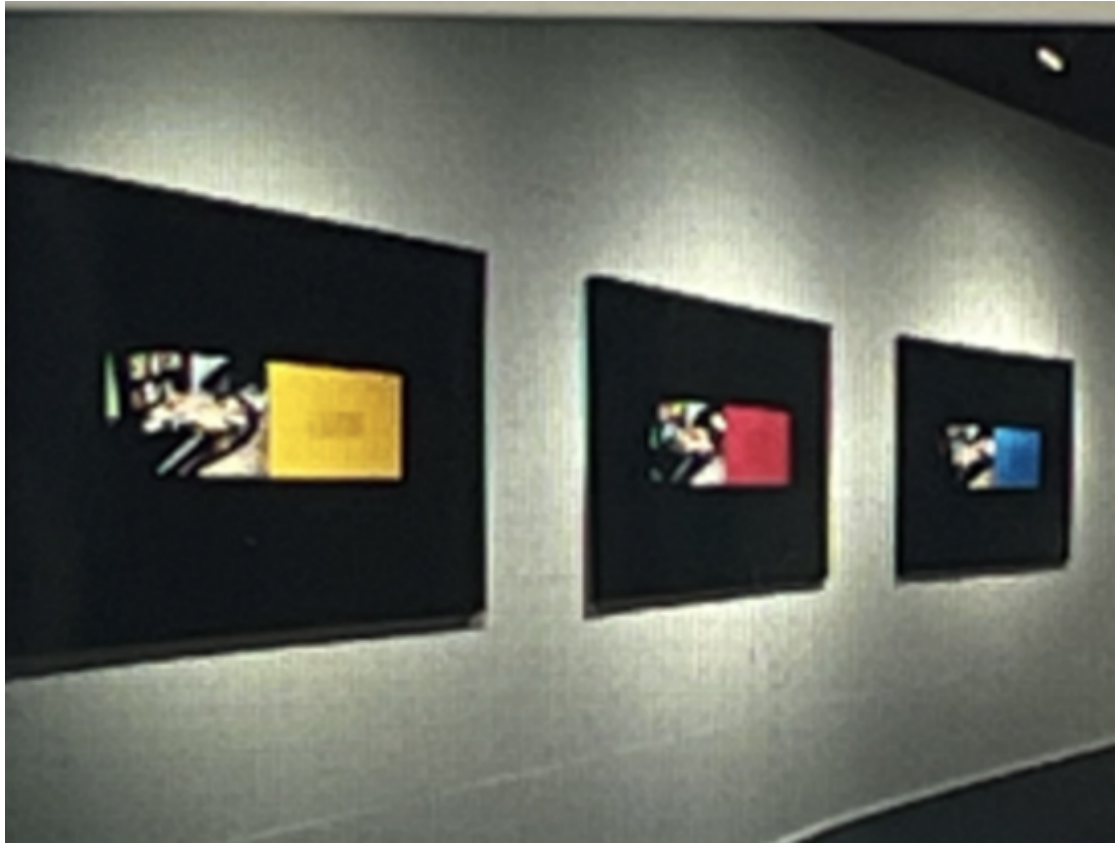


Figure 20. Installation space of Cohen's photoworks *The Body that Talks* in the exhibition *Virtue & Vice* at Site Gallery, 1997, Site Gallery (from transparency held in Site Gallery archive)

Paloma Navares's Photoworks

Virtue & Vice featured Paloma Navares's (1947-) three pieces of work: *Looking for a Dream* (1994/5), *Of Turkish Bath and Other Entertainment* (1996) and *Light of Hibernation* (1995). *Looking for a Dream* was an installation of two light boxes, measuring 104 cm x 63 cm x 54 cm x 43.5 cm. The work *Of Turkish Bath and Other Entertainment* was displayed as colour photographs along with a magnifying glass, with dimensions of 18 cm x 18 cm x 16 cm. *Light of Hibernation* (Figure 21) featured incorporated fluorescent and incandescent light sources, along with a metallic bar, plastics, a plexiglass tube, and curtain rings, measuring 210 cm x 70 cm x 30 cm. Navares's works demonstrated the utilisation of advanced graphic reproduction techniques to convey allegorical representations of the women's physique. *Looking for a Dream* explored the idolisation of women as a symbol of beauty and an object of lust. The religious reverberations were revealed in *Looking for a Dream*. By contrast, the work *Of Turkish Bath* comprised an interpretation of the Ingres-esque pretext of voyeurism, now embodied in a shrink-wrapped photograph viewed through a tiny magnifying glass mounted on a steel pedestal.



Figure 21. Paloma Navares, *Light of Hibernation*, 1995, 210 cm x 70 cm x 30 cm, b/w photograph, plexiglass tube, plastics, fluorescent and incandescent light, metallic bar, curtain rings, Site Gallery

One allegorical manifestation of Navares's works was considered an examination of women through historical and contemporary lenses. Navares's works were nourished by a wide variety of visual stereotypes in historical allegories, such as German painter Albrecht Dürer's work *Adam and Eve* and American visual artist Man Ray's nude photograph of Dora Maar. By drawing from historical references, Navares created dramatic elements that delved into the topics related to women. Her works were related 'directly to the fragmentation of the life of women in our society.'¹⁶⁵ The women possibly encountered fragmentation of their bodies, and society's view of their bodies as a public domain. The attention to women's lives and the fragmentation of women inspired Navares to revolutionise the way they were depicted in society. Joanne Morra's comment elucidated the allegorical character of Navares's works. She argued that in both *Looking for a Dream* and *Light of Hibernation*, 'the allegorical precedent' waved 'between stabilising meaning and disseminating femininity.'¹⁶⁶ The shifts in woman's identity from both historical and contemporary viewpoints were responsible for these fluctuating meanings. The 'allegorical precedent' implied the influence of historical allegory. Additionally, the allegorical paradigm created oscillates between the established interpretations of womanliness and propagation of feminine characteristics, which further confirmed the variations in meanings caused by allegory.

¹⁶⁵ Mirelle Thijsen, 'The Aim of Allegory, Somewhere Between Form and Content', in *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (Sheffield: Site Gallery, 1997), pp. 6-22 (p. 18).

¹⁶⁶ Morra, 'Shadowing Women's Feet', p. 17.

The exhibition site's arrangement (Figure 22) showcased decoration materials, such as light, magnifying glass, sound, and spotlights, which contributed to the allegorical manifestation of the fragmentation of women. These materials were essentially a by-product of the industrialisation of contemporary society. By integrating contemporary materials into the exploration of women's historical themes, novel modes of presentation were achieved. Their combinations exposed the disparities between the past and present perspectives. The incorporation of materials also produced impressive visual effects. The use of sound and lighting elements resulted in a heightened sense of engagement with the subjects. The naked woman's body was partly hidden and partly visible. Women's hands and feet, portrayed in pieces, symbolised the societal struggles and conflicts they endured in society. Importantly, the allegorical manifestation of the work was intensified by the corner space of the exhibition. Configurations and a constrained space amplified the viewer's sensory experience by featuring illuminated women's bodies and textured exhibited materials. The perceptual experience and interaction sparked profound contemplations among the viewers regarding the role of women in the society. The physical encounter with the works added allegorical interpretations of the work. In summary, the allegorical manifestations of Navares's works were viewed as a critical analysis of women, spanning from past to present, and the variations in the viewer's perception of the works influenced by decorative mediums.



Figure 22. Installation space of Navares's work *Light of Hibernation* in the exhibition *Virtue & Vice* at Site Gallery, 1997, Site Gallery (from transparency held in Site Gallery archive)

Dany Leriche's Photoworks

Dany Leriche's (1951-) artworks *Lucie* (1992), *Isabelle et Dominique* (1995), and *Florence* (1996) were shown in the exhibition. The first piece was 196 cm x 186 cm, and the following two were 186 cm x 186 cm. They were all produced as Kodak colour prints. By utilising posing, props, and predominantly women's personifications, Leriche's artworks brought to light the artistic traditions of allegory. Leriche drew inspiration from famous figures in art history, such as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Hans Holbein the Younger, and Johannes Vermeer. Inspired by historical allegories, Leriche's digitally manipulated photograph *Isabelle et Dominique* (Figure 23) utilised basic scenery, taxidermy animals, and objects to evoke medieval depictions, similar to Caravaggio's Cupid and Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Leriche's practice was a reaction to the historical interpretations of allegory.



Figure 23. Dany Leriche, *Isabelle et Dominique*, 1995, kodak colour print, 186 cm x 186 cm, Site Gallery

In my view, Leriche's works were understood to have two allegorical features: the use of 3D imagery to evaluate how women were depicted in history and the audience's emotional detachment from her artistic creations. In her work, the incorporation of 3D imagery created a clash between tangible objects in the physical world and three-dimensional illusion. By drawing on art historical references and utilising allegory, Leriche aimed to incorporate her identity and expressed her perceptions of women. Utilising digital technology, the photowork *Isabelle et Dominique* utilised 3D visual effects to showcase life-sized models of human skulls and provoked contemplations on the representation of women's bodies in the past. Betterton's comment made explicit the relationship between a woman's body and aesthetic conventions in her works. Betterton argued that her works defamiliarised 'the aesthetic canons of the female body' and exposed them 'as cultural formulae rather than as natural truths'.¹⁶⁷ There was no further clarification. Leriche effectively challenged the established aesthetic norms of the physique of women. In *Isabelle et Dominique*, by utilising their gestures, postures, and facial expressions, the two women effectively conveyed their calmness and confidence while also presenting their bodies to the audience. In contrast to historical paintings where women were portrayed as shyly revealing their bodies, the women in this artwork exuded confidence and elegance. In addition, cultural formulae encompassed the intricate and multifaceted set of traditions and ideologies that were deeply embedded in society. The cultural perspective involved multiple factors, such as behaviour, ideology, which

¹⁶⁷ Rosemary Betterton, 'Allegorical Impulses', in *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* (Sheffield: Site Gallery, 1997), pp. 2-5 (p. 4).

influenced how women were perceived, in contrast to a relatively uniform principle of natural reality. Thus, the identity and cognition of women were marked by a diverse and pluralistic state, moulded by a variety of cultural influences and societal norms.

Through the lens of contemporary technology, viewers were able to differentiate between artistic and objective depictions in the viewing process, thus generating reflections on the image of women. McGuire's evaluation of *Isabelle et Dominique* emphasised the significance of the viewer's involvement. According to McGuire, the actual physical allegory raised a question that 'whether I can really see the skull image or not and if I cannot see the 3D illusion, am I effectively excluded from the work?'¹⁶⁸ The 'I' here suggested the reader's perspective. From McGuire's viewpoint, the use of allegory challenged the observer's visual engagement with the depicted objects and 3D illusion. The generated suspicion of the depicted imagery during the viewing process caused the viewer to feel detached from the work. In other words, the viewer's exclusion of the work possibly arose from the differences in the visual spaces formed by the physical world and the three-dimensional virtual illusion in Leriche's work. To summarize, Leriche skilfully combined traditional elements with personal expression to examine the historical cultures and established contemporary portrayals of the women's bodies. The exclusion of the viewer from the depicted artwork, along with the juxtaposition of the physical world and three-dimensional image illusion, were interpreted as Leriche's allegorical portrayal of women.

¹⁶⁸ McGuire, 'Virtue & Vice', p. 2.

Bernhard Prinz's Photoworks *Blessur*

Virtue & Vice showcased four artworks by Bernhard Prinz (1953-), namely three pieces from the *Blessur* series and another Untitled piece from the *Epidemien* series.

The sizes of the former two *Untitled* were 157 cm x 126 cm, and the third one was 160 cm x 126 cm. The last work, *Untitled*, from *Epidemien*, was 123 cm x 104 cm.

These pieces were produced as Cibachrome prints with frames and glass coverings.

The incorporation of allegory into photography in Prinz's methods was demonstrated through the encounters with everyday individuals. Considering Prinz's interactions with ordinary people, McGuire asserted that Prinz's works created an 'allegory of the everyday.'¹⁶⁹ Everyday lives became significant sources of creating allegory in Prinz's photoworks.

In my view, the allegorical manifestation of Prinz's photoworks was understood as the temporality between historical references and contemporary vision. From a historical perspective, the titles and figures of Prinz's works were catchwords derived from mannerist and baroque paintings. Through Prinz's work, cultural norms as historical hieroglyphics were inscribed on the surface of one's skin in people's daily life. Regarding a contemporary lens, Prinz's approach was more centred on everyday experiences, in contrast to the viewpoints of Navares and Leriche. In the series *Blessur* (one example can be seen in Figure 24), street culture portraits depicted young men with piercings and tattoos, a black man with pigment aberrations, and a

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

woman wearing a white hooded sweatshirt. The portraits incorporated both remnants of the past and elements of contemporary culture. The technique of allegory in photography allowed for the depiction of abstract concepts through concrete subjects in Prinz's photoworks. Morra's observation lent further support to the link between historical and contemporary perspectives on Prinz's creations. She claimed that the allegorical temporality of Prinz's work was to 'invert the former temporal structure by historicizing the contemporary.'¹⁷⁰ In this regard, the focus of Prinz's work was to explore the ways in which present-day cultural conventions were linked to their past origins, which altered the established temporal arrangement. The linkage in time served as a tangible demonstration of allegory, revealing intricate layers of meanings and metaphorical interpretations. Prinz's photographs mirrored allegorical reflections of history, drawing parallels between art history and present-day advertising practices.

¹⁷⁰ Morra, 'Shadowing Women's Feet', p. 17.



Figure 24. Bernhard Prinz, *Untitled*, from the *Blessur* series, 1996, cibachrome, Site Gallery

Helen Chadwick's Photowork *Mundo Positive*

Virtue & Vice displayed Helen Chadwick's (1953-1996) artwork *Mundo Positive* (Figure 25), with dimensions of 110 cm x 221 cm x 5 cm. The photographs were created using the C-Type process and displayed in painted aluminium frames with glass. Using symbolic elements, such as plants, flowers, and red ribbons, the photowork explored complex health issues, namely AIDS and HIV. Tropical plants that contained chemicals were used allegorically in the work. The daisy was shown by microbiologists Eileen Leis and Steve Dealler to have properties that assisted in preventing the virus. The daisy embodied the potential for recovery, and the green plant was also emblematic. Red ribbons were a commonly used as a tool for promoting AIDS and HIV awareness worldwide. Therefore, the photowork aimed to promote an understanding and knowledge about AIDS and HIV by incorporating vibrant images and texts into major record releases and publications.

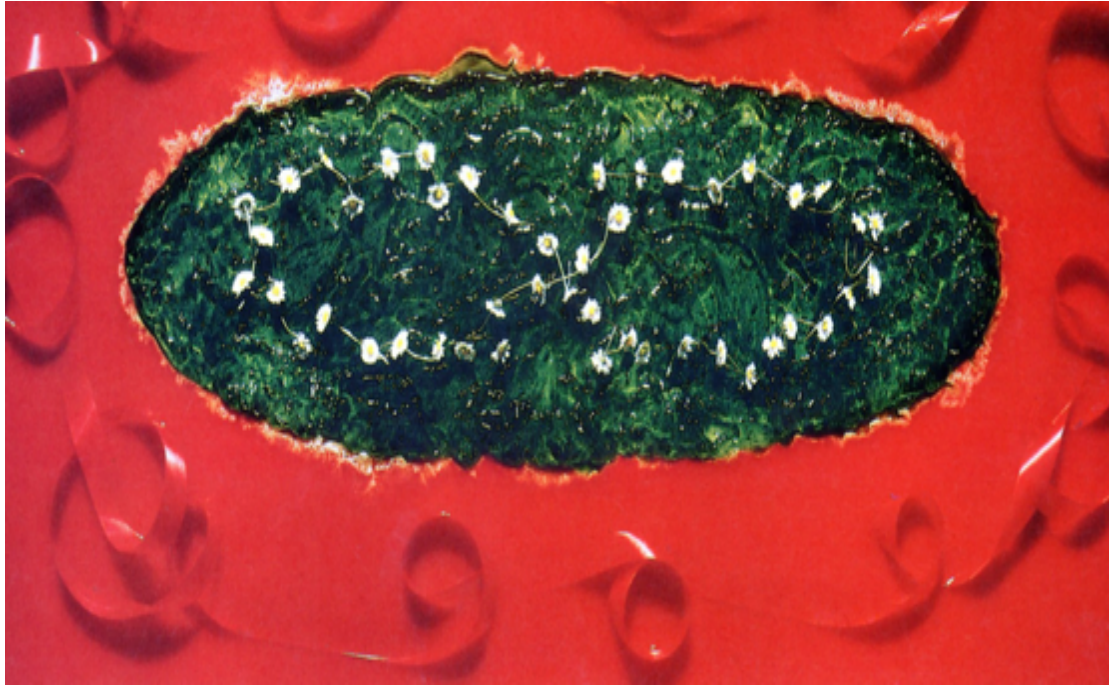


Figure 25. Helen Chadwick, *Mundo Positive*, 1994, C-type photograph in painted aluminium frame, 110 cm x 221 cm x 5 cm, Site Gallery

The allegorical attribute of objects revealing health problems was discerned through their symbolic manifestations in *Mundo Positive*. Thijsen's evaluation was enlightening, arguing that Chadwick's work was featured by 'a search for a form of allegory whose derivation' was 'always carried further away.'¹⁷¹ In Chadwick's work, there was a constant exploration of allegory that was extended further away in its derivation. According to Thijsen, in Chadwick's work, the natural continuum went beyond the understanding of binary relationships. Chadwick explored 'the value of binary oppositions such as "body-spirit," "male-female," "rational-emotional".'¹⁷² Additionally, Chadwick's practice affirmed that the 'natural continuum' could not be

¹⁷¹ Thijsen, 'The Aim of Allegory', p. 18.

¹⁷² Ibid.

‘understood simply in terms of binary relationships.’¹⁷³ With Thijsen’s analysis, Chadwick’s photowork extensively investigated the implications of binary oppositions, studying the contrasts between body versus spirit, natural versus artificial, and rational versus emotional. The way in which these binary connections were presented in Chadwick’s photograph was not elaborated upon further by Thijsen. In my view, the daisy leaves in the photograph were used to fight viruses, so they were an emotional as well as a spiritual symbol. Both men and women were susceptible to contracting AIDS and HIV. Thijsen also highlighted the ‘stratification and ambiguity’ inherent in Chadwick’s work.¹⁷⁴ In her words, ‘what is aesthetic and sensual is also repulsive, while what is repulsive in its perishability or vulgarity is aesthetically designed.’¹⁷⁵ Different layers of representation and uncertainties created a situation where the boundary between beauty and repulsiveness was blurred. The interplay between aesthetic appeal and repulsion could lead to mutual transmutation. Thus, Chadwick’s work revolved around delving into a unique form of allegory that had a more extensive derivation than its original source. In her photowork, rather than presenting itself as a personification, allegory was presented as matter.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Karen Knorr's Photoworks *Academies*

Knorr's and Richon's photographs have been previously discussed in *Other Than Itself*, and their photoworks' allegorical manifestations will be further analysed in the next chapter. Here, I will briefly set out their contributions to *Virtue & Vice*. The exhibition displayed three works from Knorr's series *Academies*: *The Pencil of Nature*, *Eve Listening to the Voice*, and *Imitation of Life*. The dimensions of her photoworks were 110 cm x 110 cm respectively, and they were mounted on aluminium with a brass plaque using the cibachrome technique. The presentation of Knorr's photoworks in the exhibition *Virtue & Vice* is shown in Figure 26.



Figure 26. Installation space of Knorr's *Academies* in the exhibition *Virtue & Vice* at Site Gallery, 1997, Site Gallery (from transparency held in Site Gallery archive)

The use of allegory was a significant element in the representation of the female body in Knorr's photoworks. She claimed that 'A repeated theme in allegory' was 'the use of the female body', which 'personified virtues.'¹⁷⁶ That is to say, a commonly recurring motif in allegorical stories was the portrayal of virtues through the embodiment of the female physique. In her series *Academies* (1994-95), Knorr explored the status of women within the Royal Academy, which was a male-dominated environment during the peak of the Enlightenment. The Royal Academy's dominance presented a barrier to achieving women's equality, as its outdated customs and protocols were a hindrance. In Knorr's practice, the exploration of females was associated with the critique of artistic institutions. With such subtlety, Knorr deconstructed the ideology of artistic institutions. The portrayal of female movements and gestures highlighted the masculinist traditions asserted by art institutions. Morra's evaluation brought attention to Knorr's distinct manner of portraying femininity. In her words, Knorr's critique of art institutions was 'accomplished through the witty use of women's bare feet and shadows'.¹⁷⁷

Women's bare feet and shadows pointed to the details of the work *The Pencil of Nature*. They were laden with implications that transcended their physical presences. They served as powerful visual cues that hinted at underlying and subtle messages, adding a nuanced layer of meaning. The disregarded elements regarding female representation were precisely the ones that art institutions neglected to consider. In this sense, the allegorical qualities in Knorr's photoworks were understood as the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷⁷ Morra, 'Shadowing Women's Feet', p. 17.

examination of female representation in historical art institutions.

Olivier Richon's Photoworks *The Academy*

In parallel with Knorr's collection *Academies*, Richon's series *The Academy* was displayed in *Virtue & Vice*. Richon's photoworks were presented as C-Type and black & white photographs in the exhibition. The photowork *The Misfortune of Imitation* was displayed in dimensions of 67 cm x 86 cm for the C-Type photograph and 67 cm x 56 cm for the black & white version. Other photoworks were *The Indecency of the Word*, *The Fettering of Lower Impulses* (Figure 27), *The Discovery of Curiosity*, *The Passion of Mourning*, and *The Anatomy of Melancholia*. They were displayed in the size of 67 cm x 86 cm and 66 cm x 56 cm respectively.¹⁷⁸ Apart from photoworks, Richon provided a text entitled *The Academy*, at a size of 66 cm x 56 cm.



Figure 27. Olivier Richon, *The Fettering of Lower Impulses*, 1985, C-Type photograph, 67 cm x 86 cm and B & W photograph, 66 cm x 56 cm, Site Gallery

¹⁷⁸ 67 cm x 86 cm was the size of C-Type photographs, and 66 cm x 56 cm was the size of black-white photographs.

The use of allegorical tropes was a distinctive feature of Richon's photoworks. Utilising textual inspirations from philosophy, rhetoric, and classical works, he incorporated unconventional elements, such as vegetables and animals, into his photographic compositions. Richon's photographs exhibited a heightened tension and disguise between emotion, fantasy, and reality. As reviewed by Thijsen, Richon's diptychs were closely associated with 'the allegorical trope'¹⁷⁹, and Richon was viewed as 'a master in the allegorical trope and of disguise.'¹⁸⁰ A trope, in its figurative sense, aimed to represent something beyond its literal definition. The perspective of allegorical trope further strengthened the examination of underlying and concealed connotations. The mastery of using allegory, trope, and disguise became a prominent feature in Richon's works. Against this background, the juxtaposition of contradictory captions and images in *The Academy* allowed the reader to engage with the text beyond its historical context.

Richon's photoworks showcased allegorical tropes, highlighting the clear differentiation between symbol and allegory. At the conference linked to the exhibition, Richon elaborated on the themes of symbol and allegory, while McGuire drew distinctions between the two based on Richon's photoworks. As McGuire argued, in photography, the symbol was 'viewed for itself and for an immediate emotive sensational response.'¹⁸¹ The immediate responses and referents can be achieved

¹⁷⁹ Thijsen, 'The Aim of Allegory', p. 20.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁸¹ McGuire, 'Virtue & Vice', p. 2.

through the symbol. The allegory was a ‘perversion of symbol, a conceptual remote unemotional commentary.’¹⁸² By contrast, allegory conveyed more ambiguous and dispersive connotations, which extended the meanings of the symbol. On the basis of their differences, when interpreting Richon’s work, McGuire argued that ‘An object as symbol, however, will always be viewed as an object, and as part of a composition an object can also be used to represent allegorical meanings.’¹⁸³ From this, while functioning as a symbol, an object maintained its identity as an object; nonetheless, within the framework of a composition, it could transcend its physical form to embody profound allegorical significance. The meaning of a symbol, in an object, was fixed. The implicit connotations, as opposed to the fixed meaning of a symbol, were understood as allegorical features of the artwork. Viewed in this way, elements in Richon’s works conveyed discontinuous and indefinite meanings.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Mirelle Thijsen, Curator's Essay, 'The Aim of Allegory, Somewhere Between Form and Content'

Mirelle Thijsen, the curator of *Virtue & Vice*, discussed the use of allegory in the essay 'The Aim of Allegory, Somewhere Between Form and Content'. She provided a detailed overview of the participating artists' allegorical photographic works under four subtitles: 'The allegorical photowork in the exhibition Virtue & Vice', 'a feminist point of view', 'matter', and 'iconologia'. In addition to commenting on the work of each participating artist, Thijsen shed light on the nuances of allegorical photography and the relationship between allegory and the artist, which further enhanced the correlation between allegory and photography.

Thijsen's insights illuminated the eclectic and contradictory qualities of allegorical photography. In her words, allegorical photography was 'eclectic by nature.'¹⁸⁴

Thijsen did not elaborate on the intricacies concerning the facets of this eclecticism.

As per my understanding, the viewpoint suggested that in photography, allegory appeared in different forms without being confined to a specific style or genre. There was a merging of styles, concepts and genres that were once considered separate. This also explained why Thijsen believed that 'contradictions' was an excellent word to describe a feature of allegorical photography.¹⁸⁵ The contradictory feature exposed conflicting or opposing elements in photography. In my view, the eclectic and contradictory qualities of allegorical photography challenged conventional reading

¹⁸⁴ Thijsen, 'The Aim of Allegory', p. 7.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

methods of representation, figuration, and established aesthetic principles in photographic practices.

Thijsen further expanded the comprehension of allegorical photography by elucidating the correlation between allegory and the artist, which indicated the diversity of allegorical interpretations in photography. In her words, allegory involved ‘a language of imagery’, which was ‘appropriated by the artist.’¹⁸⁶ In my view, the ‘language of imagery’ served as a means of conveying thoughts and ideas through the skilful and creative presentation of sensory details and imaginative imagery. From the artist’s perspective, such as Cohen’s use of psychoanalysis, significantly shaped the allegorical meaning conveyed in the photographs. Thijsen also suggested that the artist did not attempt to restore the original or historical meanings, since they had been lost or obscured through time. In her words, the artist supplied ‘a new meaning, aiming to substitute this for the old one.’¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the ‘revised, allegorical meaning’ was ‘a supplement’ to the precedent one.¹⁸⁸ Given Thijsen’s viewpoint, with the artist’s arrangements, the generated allegorical meaning potentially supplanted the meaning traditionally ascribed in the conventional reading methods of the photographs. In my understanding, the eclectic and contradictory features, and the flexibility of the role of the artist enhanced the diversity of photographic creations and interpretations, thus forming allegorical features. The allegorical implications functioned as complementary elements to the primary or commonly accepted

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

meanings of the photographs. This feature was essential for photography, as allegory was an effective way to re-examine the established aspects, such as the process of image-making and the viewing of the photographs.

Thijsen's investigations into allegorical photography were primarily influenced by Gay Clifford's writings on allegory. In Clifford's view, allegory extended beyond its initial appearance of being inflexible and unchanging. By exploring beyond the surface meaning, one could discover methods for escaping conventional interpretations. Influenced by Clifford, Thijsen pointed out that it was becoming less common to make references to theology or history – the ancient encyclopaedic quality of allegory in its role as a source of knowledge and moral device was eroding. The allegory had undergone transformations within different contexts. Against this background, Thijsen argued that contemporary uses of allegory demonstrated substantial flexibility, which was also valid for photography. For allegorical photography, it was virtually impossible to predict and 'discover its ultimate (ambiguous) meaning.'¹⁸⁹ Therefore, allegorical photoworks were gradually becoming 'a purely personal "Odyssey".'¹⁹⁰ The ambiguity revealed that allegorical photography was difficult to define with a single and definite perspective. The 'Odyssey' referred to a protracted and event-filled adventure, so the individuals taking part in the journey would encounter diverse experiences and possess unique perspectives. From this angle, it can be inferred that in allegorical photography, each

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

creator would demonstrate their individual sensibilities and expressions of photography.

Based on the analysis above, the differences in the artists' approaches and visions of photography greatly affected the formation and derivations of allegory in their works. Personal spiritual or physical experiences of artists played a role in the composition and interpretation of allegorical photographs. The photoworks of Knorr and Richon exemplified how photographers used themes, such as cultural institutions, social power, and phenomena, to convey their political and aesthetic viewpoints on the creations of photographs and photography as a medium. Therefore, contemporary photographic practices using allegorical features involved the artist's experiences and changes in artistic, historical, and cultural strategies and discourses. Through the analysis of Thijsen's explorations, I think, the ambiguous nature of a photograph's form, generated meanings, and the flexibility of the artist, were interpreted as allegorical expressions in photography.

Rosemary Betterton's Essay 'Allegorical Impulses'

Compared to Craig Owens's title 'The Allegorical Impulse,' I realise that Rosemary Betterton's title 'Allegorical Impulses' shows differences. Owens highlights the article 'the', and the impulse remains singular, while Betterton makes the impulse plural without the definitive article. Owens's definite article 'the' directly points out the role of allegory in the theory of postmodernism. The reason why Owens uses a singular form was that his argument of the allegorical impulse is an assumption. Conversely, in Betterton's analyses, Owens's exploration of the allegorical impulse in postmodern theory has become solid theoretical background, specifically with the practical investigations of the participating artists in *Virtue & Vice*.

Betterton's investigations of allegorical impulses comprised three sections: the historical review of the Renaissance, the writings on allegory of Benjamin Buchloh, Paul de Man, Craig Owens, and a general comment on the artists' works in *Virtue & Vice*. Firstly, Betterton provided a historical overview of the background and role of allegory in the European visual arts during the Renaissance. The historical allegory involved readings of allegory in allegorical paintings and distinctions between symbol and allegory. During the Renaissance, a great deal of allegory was used in European visual arts, and words and images were powerfully connected. In classically inspired secular themes, moral messages were revealed and concealed simultaneously by iconic signs of vice and virtue. The images were typically accompanied by textual commentary, understood by those who were literate and culturally sophisticated. This

was because an educated Neo-Platonic minority and the court greatly influenced the unique layering of allegory in the Italian Renaissance visual languages. In this context, Betterton used the example of the Italian painter Sandro Botticelli's notable work *Primavera*. The work was an elaborate allegorical painting commissioned for a young Medici family member and hard to fully understand without textual commentary. Therefore, according to Betterton's analysis, the relevance of history and the interrelationship between words and images were a major focus in the development of allegory.

Betterton also made a clear distinction between symbol and allegory, aligning with Steve Edwards's perspective. As argued by Betterton, the symbol was extensively used in the religious art of the Church, with the intention of making it easily comprehensible for most people. Due to its accessibility, a symbol served as a form of explicit propaganda. Betterton introduced Maud Lavin's comment on the Dada photomontage of Hannah Hoch in the 1920s. She argued that with the use of symbols, each element in the image had 'a discrete, fixed meaning,' and in allegory, 'layers of meaning' were 'read fluidly in or through a text, or by means of using one text to read another.'¹⁹¹ From this, the nuanced meanings within allegory were effortlessly uncovered either within one text or another. These differences between symbol and allegory overlapped with Steve Edwards's arguments. Given the above analysis, symbol provided definite meanings, whereas allegory offered versatility in the

¹⁹¹ Betterton, 'Allegorical Impulses', p. 2.

interpretations of photographs.

In Betterton's writings, Buchloh, de Man and Owens provided significant inspiration. Through Owens's exploration, the methods employed by Duchamp and Rauschenberg in their montage works, such as appropriation, reduction of appropriated images, and superimposition or doubling of visual elements, could be interpreted as allegorical. These insights influenced Betterton's discussion of montage. Betterton further claimed that the features demonstrated by the montage works aptly fitted 'the photographic procedures of Sorel Cohen, Dany Leriche or Olivier Richon.'¹⁹²

Betterton did not offer an in-depth analysis, but her argument suggested the allegorical features of the works of the three artists, necessitating an examination of the allegorical qualities within their creations. Additionally, by quoting de Man's viewpoint that 'allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read', Betterton raised two questions: 'what are we to make of the bafflement we initially feel on viewing works like Richon's *Iconologia*? Should we attribute this perplexity to a failing on the artist's part to communicate, or to our own inadequacy or ignorance as readers?'¹⁹³ The narrative of allegory, as de Man argued, could be difficult to fully understand due to its ambiguity. The raised questions also revealed the dilemma between artist and viewer. The artist's inability to convey a clear message and the reader's insufficiency and lack of understanding underscored their critical involvement in the interpretations of the artwork. In Betterton's discussions, the

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁹³ Ibid. To ensure the completeness of the information, I have not changed the tense of the quotations.

artists and viewers were actively engaged in the process of examining and unravelling the underlying messages and artistic expressions conveyed through the diverse artworks, which significantly determined the viewing processes. As such, besides the elusive nature of allegory, both artist and viewer can influence the allegorical qualities of the photographs.

Craig Owens shed light on the use of allegory in the modern and postmodern period, which proved to be a valuable resource for Betterton's examination of allegory. From Owens's perspective, the essential elements of contemporary allegory in modernist and postmodernist art were the relation to the incomprehensibility of symbols and the emphasis on interpretation. Furthermore, Owens posited that modernist theory suppressed the inclination towards allegory. Given Owens's investigation, Betterton asked 'why are we seeing its turn in the work of contemporary photographers?'¹⁹⁴ The 'its turn' signified the turn of the allegory. Betterton did not elucidate the intended meaning of the allegory's turn. From my perspective, it contained two distinct layers of significance: the re-emergence of allegory and the revival of allegorical use. These two aspects might explain Betterton's questioning of 'why'. As for the re-emergence of allegory, contemporary photographic practices were associated with historical concepts, and photography's engagement with history was an allegorical embodiment. The return to the use of allegory was more focused on the readings of allegory. As Owens argued, allegory superinduced 'a vertical or

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events.¹⁹⁵ The sequential and associative interpretation and the left-right horizontal and up-down vertical axis of reading objects, elements, and events indicated a resurgence in the utilisation of allegory. The use of allegorical techniques in photography and various reading methods indicated that the resurgence of allegory offered new perspectives on creating and understanding photographs.

By discussing the role of photography and allegory in the twentieth century, Betterton presented a comprehensive overview of the artists' works. The mainstream and commonplace images in the twentieth century had to reconstruct and redefine their identities due to the prevalent dissemination of mass media. The widespread use of media imagery has raised concerns about the transparency of the photographic image as a sign. Given this context, Betterton pointed out that allegory was 'a deliberate strategy for blocking the literal reading of the image,' which required 'the re-invention of photography in a more coded and complex form of image-making.'¹⁹⁶ In this sense, the incorporation of allegory would lead to a redefinition and reinterpretation of traditional perspectives on photography, resulting in changes to a process of creating images. The revival of allegory in contemporary photography would hold great significance.

¹⁹⁵ Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse', Part 1, p. 72.

¹⁹⁶ Betterton, 'Allegorical Impulse', p. 4.

Three Reviews of *Virtue & Vice*

Three researchers, namely Michelle McGuire, Joanne Morra and John Stathatos, provided reviews of the exhibition *Virtue & Vice*. McGuire gave special attention to photographic allegories in the postmodern period. Morra focused on the reading of the concept of allegory, and Stathatos provided insights into allegory, allegorical paintings, and allegorical photographs. By analysing the three reviewers' viewpoints on allegorical photography and sources of inspiration for their writings, my study contributes to the existing discussions about the relationship between allegory and photography. The following section outlines their separate evaluation of *Virtue & Vice*.

Michelle McGuire's Review 'Virtue and Vice'

Michelle McGuire's 2-page review of *Virtue & Vice* appeared in *Variant*, a Glasgow-based magazine (founded in 1984). The publication focused on the intersection of art and society and was widely disseminated across cultural institutions in the UK and Ireland. McGuire's analysis included three parts, covering the impact of postmodern context on allegory, the influences of scholars, such as Angus Fletcher, Gay Clifford, and Marina Warner and an overview of the artists participating in *Virtue & Vice*.

McGuire investigated the ways in which postmodern photographic discourse has been

influenced by the traditional use of allegory and photography, drawing on the conventions of Renaissance paintings. McGuire's analysis drew parallels between the visual allegory of the Renaissance and contemporary allegorical photography. In other words, traditional Renaissance paintings played a role in shaping contemporary visual art, specifically photography. Given the extensive prevalence of popular culture and mass media in the contemporary period, McGuire proposed two questions for reflection. They were 'Is there a need to reinvent the language of photography in a more obscure form in reaction to the consumable images of the mass media?' and 'Could this language be the form and content of visual allegory, a tradition of Renaissance painting?'¹⁹⁷ While not providing definitive answers, McGuire investigated the connections between mass media and photography, considering the influence of Renaissance paintings. As previously discussed, in McGuire's view, the content of the visual allegory drew inspiration from a Renaissance painting tradition. From my perspective, McGuire's assumption solidified the significant correlation between allegory and historical concepts and themes. The analysis of history was an indispensable expression of allegory. In addition, the obscure form suggested that the use of social media appeared to have an impact on viewers' perception of the photographs, and the process of image-making. Consumable images seemed to challenge the viewer to meticulously assess the technique and content of the photograph being portrayed. Images in the mass media also played a pivotal role in the evolution and reconstruction of the conventional language and framework of

¹⁹⁷ To ensure the completeness of the information, I have not changed the tense of the quotations. McGuire, 'Virtue & Vice', p. 2.

photography. These features further constituted the ambiguous elucidations of the photographs.

Given the correlation between allegory and history, photography and the mass media, McGuire further argued that allegorical photography involved two layers: concepts and words, which suggested a strong connection between images, abstract notions, and written narratives. In her words, photographic allegories comprised ‘visual images’, which encompassed ‘an entire entity of a concept’, and it was ‘more than just the reinterpretation of words.’¹⁹⁸ Viewed in this way, they were interconnected. The photographic allegories were embodied in the visual images. The entirety of a conceptual entity was unfolded within a diverse array of visual depictions. The elaboration of a concept did not solely hinge on simple linguistic reinterpretation, such as words. The alterations made to these elements greatly influenced the composition and understanding of allegorical photography. McGuire also believed that the inclusion of texts enhanced the stillness of the images. The visual texts in the exhibition prevailed as ‘photographic images and these texts’ fulfilled ‘a didactic function regardless of the obscurity of the allegory.’¹⁹⁹ The photographs and texts formed visual texts. The didactic function discussed in this context pertains to the use of photographs, occasionally paired with texts, in elucidating complicated issues and concepts, such as women’s identities and the evolution of allegory from both the past and present.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

The significance of the artists in bridging the gap between text and image could not be overlooked. McGuire claimed that the artists in the exhibition offered commentaries on social and political norms, which stressed ‘interpretation and a particular mode of reading images’, which was ‘found within the structure of an allegorical text.’²⁰⁰ The process of analysing images in an allegorical text required a specialised method of reading and interpretation. The structure of allegorical texts was necessary to express social and political problems in the artist’s creation. As McGuire saw in *Virtue & Vice*, the display of photographic works, the exhibition brought to the forefront the notions of ‘autonomy and self-sufficiency’, as well as the utilisation of repetition and reinterpretation in texts.²⁰¹ McGuire did not explain the two terms. In my understanding, these two words highlighted the independence of photographic expressions and conveyed meanings. The integration of textual elements also significantly contributed to portraying photographic representations and reading modes of images. The inherent independence allowed photography to assert itself as a distinct mode of visual storytelling.

McGuire’s readings of allegorical photography were greatly influenced by Angus Fletcher, Gay Clifford, and Marina Warner. A thorough examination is needed to understand the contributions of these researchers to McGuire’s enlightening insights. Fletcher argued that ‘allegorical intention’ was ‘under a high degree of authorial

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

control’, but the primary means was ‘an ironical gaze turned in upon the work itself.’²⁰² Fletcher highlighted the key role of the work in the formation of allegorical intentions. Directing one’s gaze towards the work denoted a recognition of the shifts surrounding its specific characteristics, such as, form or content. An allegorical photograph was composed of many parts, such as depicted objects. In this sense, the ironic elements in the work arose when the intended meanings of allegorical representations collided with their physical existence in the natural world. Additionally, McGuire’s interpretations of the relationship between the artist (allegorist) and the audience were greatly influenced by Gay Clifford’s research. For McGuire, the meanings of allegorical objects were determined by the allegorist, so the artist- allegorist became responsible for shaping the visual experience of the audience. Clifford assumed that an allegorist relied on their audiences to actively pursue knowledge and understanding, to address the problems encountered. Medieval writers utilised allegorical interpretations of the Bible to aid in moral contemplation and decision-making, effectively controlling their audience through sermons. Renaissance allegorists utilised the form in a highly scholastic manner influenced by the educated and cultured elite. Throughout history, allegory’s ambiguity led to its condemnation and denunciation, as it seemingly excluded and substituted meanings.

McGuire’s understanding of the female figure was enhanced by Marina Warner. By quoting Warner’s argument that ‘Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of

²⁰² Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 307-308.

women, and they often do not include who she herself is.’²⁰³ From this, there could be distinctions between women’s genuine qualities and those that were described. The multiplicity of meanings of womanhood further suggested the difficulty of characterizing women from a single perspective. In this context, McGuire made a comment on the exhibition’s participating artists, Cohen, Knorr, and Navares, who dedicated themselves to examining women. She argued that their reconstructions of historical contexts with contemporary allegories led to an ‘ambivalent neutrality’ within the figures of females.²⁰⁴ The female figures were constantly being reinvented within their practices. The ambivalence within contemporary allegory and historical portrayals of women entailed opposing elements and characteristics, while neutrality implied a sense of impartiality in both present and past depictions. Therefore, women were portrayed in an allegorical manner, showcasing both opposing and unbiased qualities.

McGuire also provided a summary of the participating artists and the exhibition. Several categories could be drawn out of the works in *Virtue & Vice*. Cohen, Knorr, and Navares explored women’s critical practices. Through their works, Prinz and Leriche demystified the use of the human body as a cultural language. Drawing from historical and literary sources, Richon reconstructed the settings for philosophical and rhetorical statements. Using contemporary photography, Chadwick brought allegorical themes from the 17th and 18th centuries to life. The exhibition investigated

²⁰³ McGuire, ‘Virtue & Vice’, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

the interplay between photography and objects. The camera created images through the absorption of objects. Given the above artists' features, McGuire quoted Terry Eagleton's statement that the 'allegorical object has undergone a kind of haemorrhage of spirit: drained of all immanent meaning,' and it was 'under the manipulative hand of the allegorist'.²⁰⁵ The established inherent connotations of allegorical objects possibly evolved into contemporary significance, resulting in a circumstance where the immanent meaning became obsolete. Additionally, the allegorists wielded the authority to transform the connotation and significance of allegorical objects. A plethora of forms and interpretations can be observed within allegorical depictions of objects. Given the above discussion, the exhibition explored the themes of representation, rhetoric, and aesthetics in photography, highlighting its significance beyond simply capturing an image. Briefly, McGuire's discussion of the relationship between allegory and history, photography, and the mass media shed light on the components of photographic allegories: visual images, concepts, and words. Moreover, the analyses conducted by Angus Fletcher, Gay Clifford, and Marina Warner uncovered multiple allegorical elements, including the author's intent, diverse methods of interpretation, and aesthetic significance.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Joanne Morra's Review 'Shadowing Women's Feet'

Joanne Morra's one-page feministic review 'Shadowing Women's Feet' appeared in *Make Magazine*. The magazine was owned by the Women's Art Library, an institution that prioritised the creative projects of female artists. Morra divided her analysis into two main sections, examining the significance of allegory and the content of the exhibition. By exploring the exhibition's title, Morra shed light on the concept of allegory. For Morra, the metaphorical qualities and distinct oppositions shown in the main title, *Virtue & Vice*, strengthened the otherness of allegory. Additionally, the subtitle *Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* extended 'allegory's moral tone through metonymic derivations.'²⁰⁶ The metonymic approach involved referencing a concept by using the name of something closely linked to it. The derivations revealed the variations of the expressions of allegory. The extension of moral aspects of allegory was primarily grounded in the historical context of allegory. Contemporary photography has utilized metonymic developments to enhance the moral implications of allegory.

Along with the exploration of allegory brought about by the exhibition's title, Paul de Man's perspective on allegory played a key role in inspiring Morra's exploration. Inspired by de Man's argument, Morra argued that allegory was 'a past-future', and the present was 'elsewhere and otherwise.'²⁰⁷ Her perspective contrasted slightly with Owens's argument. Owens focused on the association between the past and present in

²⁰⁶ Morra, 'Shadowing Women's Feet', p. 17.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

allegory. In Morra's view, however, the combination of past and future was inherently a manifestation of allegory. Exploring allegory allowed for contemplating past events and potential predictions for the future. The state of existing in a different space suggested that the present encompassed an intervening juncture. This phenomenon could be due to the complexity of accurately assessing the present moment. Despite their complete divergence as temporal dimensions, the different amalgamations of past, future, and reality may exhibit allegorical features. In this sense, the photographs were considered to have allegorical qualities because photographic representation could evoke the complex interplay between the past, present, and future.

Morra also briefly outlined the participating artists in *Virtue & Vice*. From her perspective, the exhibition showcased a diverse range of degrees and temporalities, allowing for the observation of the shadows in the past. The temporal alignment of the works of Knorr, Leriche, Navares, and Richon was evident. By displaying their photographs in the exhibition, the artists offered a contemporary lens through which to view the historical origins of western art, while also offering a critical reflection on the past. In this respect, as Morra argued, in the works of the participating artists, the engagement was 'a mimetic perversion of a historical referent.'²⁰⁸ She did not go into more depth. As per my understanding, the 'historical referent' means that a notable figure or idea from the past provided inspiration for subsequent creations. The creator held a distinctive vision for the composition of the work, and the methods utilized

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

could lead to imitative deviations from historical allusions. In this sense, while grounded in the historical context, the artists' photographs offered a one-of-a-kind interaction with the past through their mimetic techniques. Morra contributed to the understanding of the correlation between allegory and photography by investigating allegory's metonymic derivations, and its juncture of past and future.

John Stathatos's Review 'Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography'

John Stathatos's insightful review 'Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography' was published in *Portfolio* in 1997. The primary goal of Portfolio Magazine was to feature the most significant trends in contemporary British photography through partnerships with photographers and writers. Compared to the reviews by McGuire and Morra, Stathatos highlighted the overlooked aspects of allegory and allegorical photographs. According to Stathatos, allegory, 'though playing at concealment, was always meant to be deciphered, if only (in some cases) by initiates.'²⁰⁹ From this, despite its covert nature and ambiguity, allegory was inherently intended for the varying interpretations. Additionally, Stathatos broadened the understanding of the unreadability of allegory. Inspired by Betterton's and Thijsen's references to Neo-Platonic emblems in *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa, Stathatos proposed two viewpoints. On the one hand, historically, allegories were presented as relatively simple riddles or puzzles that viewers could decode to grasp their underlying moral or celebratory themes. On the other hand, understanding allegory required a cultural background, so it was partially dependent on existing knowledge. Conventional knowledge can be viewed as the clues for interpreting allegory rather than limitations.

Considering the growing focus on allegory, Stathatos paid attention to the overlooked

²⁰⁹ John Stathatos, 'Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography', *Portfolio*, 25 (1997), n. p.

relationship between allegorical painting and photography. In his words, the exhibition seemed to ‘fall back on the simplistic premise that an allegorical photograph’, which mimicked ‘the form, appearance and subject matter of traditional allegorical painting.’²¹⁰ The simulation of the arrangement and themes seen in allegorical paintings implies the profound link between photography and painting. The invention of photography was historically associated with the painting. Photography’s mimicry of painting was perceived as a manifestation of allegory since allegory revealed the connections between the past and present. Nonetheless, this ‘simplistic premise’ highlighted the possibility of the artist giving less attention to the inherent meaning of photography, namely its distinguishing features from painting. To sum up, Stathatos’s reading of allegory was constructive. The interpretations of allegory and photographs were not disconnected. A comprehensive understanding of the artist’s creations aided in interpreting their artworks and allegory. For an allegorical work, the role of the artist and elements of the work possibly contributed to developing a unique understanding, forming allegorical interpretations of the work.

In *Virtue & Vice*, the artists’ allegories in their works centred on their unique methods of producing photographs and the subsequent novel understandings of photography. The representation of women became an indispensable theme in their creations. Through light, fluorescent tubes, and curtains, Navares created an interactive experience for the viewer. Leriche’s incorporation of 3D illusion challenged the

²¹⁰ Ibid.

traditional depictions of women and prompted the audience to contemplate the differences between 2D photographs and 3D visuals. In contrast, Knorr's approach to placing women in artistic institutions highlighted the fundamental issues surrounding femininity in disseminating artwork. The remaining artists expanded our comprehension of how the photographs were constructed. Chadwick effectively tackled the issues of HIV and AIDS through her expertly composed photographs featuring vibrant flowers and colours. Richon employed allegorical tropes to construct the fictitious academy. By contrast, the introductions of new perspectives allowed for allegorical interpretations of the photographs. Cohen's incorporation of psychoanalytic principles offered fresh interpretations of the characters and perspectives portrayed in written and visual narratives. Prinz's use of street culture imagery suggested that ordinary life was a significant source of inspiration for the formation of allegorical photographs. Through their work, these artists offered unique approaches to examining the compositions of the photographs, leading to new ways of understanding the images. Their approaches, directly and indirectly, addressed the issues of allegories based on their creations and interpretations of photographs.

Part 4: The Emergence of Allegory in the Publications of Olivier Richon and Karen Knorr (2000-2002)

With the explorations of the above three projects, it is clear that allegory was recognised in photography at the end of the 20th century. There has also been a surge of interest in allegory in the context of British photography at the beginning of the 21st century. In Olivier Richon's book *Allegories* (2000) and Karen Knorr's book *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* (2002), allegory became an important subject. Richon's book *Allegories* contained two groups of photoworks and four essays written in both English and French. The two sections both contained eight pieces of work. The English ones were set in rural landscapes, while the French ones appeared to be set inside or in the yard of an old building, which appeared to be institutional environments. Richon's photographs referenced literary allegories created by Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and French novelist Gustave Flaubert.

By referring to Wilde's allegorical story, Richon's photoworks created a collision between realism and illusionism of the photographs through the gaze of animals and objects. On the theme of allegories, Richon used taxidermized animals and everyday objects to examine the dream-like nature of representation in a complicated tableau. In the English section, Wilde's statement that 'Anyone can be good in the country' was quoted above the footer of the first photograph.²¹¹ This quote suggested that every individual could exhibit goodness in the country. However, it required specific

²¹¹ Olivier Richon, *Allegories* (Valenciennes: Editions de l'aquarium agnostique, 2000), p. 27.

conditions, a lack of temptations, and a cultivated and incorruptible nature. The three underlying preconditions were likely to conflict with one another. By referring to Wilde's allegorical story, Richon's photoworks created a collision between realism and illusionism of the photographs through the gaze of animals and objects. The animals seemed to be staring towards the camera, potentially at the viewer or the photographer. For the person being observed, the gaze of animals might be alien.

By contrast, in the French section, Flaubert's statement that 'Hare: sleeps with its eyes open' was quoted.²¹² The farmyard animals were introduced to an unfamiliar setting at the art academy, utterly different from their usual habitats. Due to their unfamiliarity with the environment, their appearance and movements appeared somewhat unnatural. When confronting the camera, the animals acted as models in portraiture photography. The presence of both the animals and their surroundings seemed foreign. The alienation between the animals and the environment formed an allegorical feature in the photographs, which revealed the shifting role of objects and subjects in the photographic acts. As seen in the photographs, the farm animals were captured as objects. In this sense, animals became the subject of the photographs. Through Richon's photographic practices, the subjects and objects in the photographs could be reversed, which created an allegorical quality. Through literary allegory, Richon's photoworks revealed the allegorical representations, constructed meanings, and the realist or illusionistic natures of the photographs.

²¹² Richon, *Real Allegories*, p. 148.

The original text was in French. According to the information in *Real Allegories*, the translated English is 'Hare: sleeps with its eyes open'.

Richon chose the word ‘allegories’ as the title of the book, indicating its relevance.²¹³

The explorations of allegory in Richon’s essays were implicit, broadly encompassing the writing styles and new perspectives on the re-interpretations of features of photography. Richon’s photographic languages were seen as conveying conflicting messages in his writing style, making it challenging to fully interpret them using just one concept or perspective. This caused a shift in the way Richon perceived and understood photography, making it more allegorical. He also drew on other fields to re-discuss photography. His analysis of photographs expanded beyond the realm of aesthetics, considering both literary and psychological viewpoints. In this sense, photographs and photography evolved into multiple meanings and interpretations by introducing new perspectives.

Karen Knorr’s publication, *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr*, released in 2002, offered insights into her utilisation of allegory in photography. The book contained three essays and showcased Knorr’s series from 1990 to 2002.

Rebecca Comay’s interview with Knorr ‘Natural Histories’, and two essays: Antonio Guzman’s essay ‘Rewind and Fast-forward: Photography, Allegory and Palimpsest’, and David Campany’s essay ‘Museum and Medium: The Time of Karen Knorr’s Imagery’ were shown in the book. The three essays had distinctive emphases, which sharpened the understanding of allegorical features in Knorr’s photoworks. Comay’s

²¹³ Even though Richon’s essays were written in the past, these materials were used to talk about general the truths of allegory in photography. I choose to use the present tense in this section.

interview shed light on the inspiration of allegory in Knorr's photographic practice and the presence of allegorical references in her photowork *The Pencil of Nature*. By contrast, the essays of Guzman and Campany explicitly addressed how Knorr's photographs exhibited allegorical qualities. Guzman's investigations of allegorical features centred around the photographed objects, such as books and monkeys. In Guzman's analysis, the physical elements of a photograph, such as figures and objects, were considered to possess allegorical significance. In contrast, Campany's examinations focused on fundamental photography principles, particularly time. In his discussion, time in photography exhibited allegorical features, including the preservation and clash of time and generated sensations from viewing photographs.

The intense focus on allegory by Richon and Knorr has necessitated a thorough examination of the interplay between allegory and photography in the British context. Their contributions suggested the emergence of allegory in their focuses between 2000 and 2002, which provided a landmark role in reviewing historical developments of allegory before 2002. With their exploration as a guide, my research uncovered their engagement in three photographic projects with allegorical themes, reinforcing the key role of allegory in the development of British photography.

Chapter 2: The Allegorical Features of the Photoworks of Olivier Richon and Karen Knorr

In this chapter, I will thoroughly examine how the photoworks of Richon and Knorr exhibit allegorical features in the three projects discussed above. There is an overlap in their explorations, so I will analyse them thematically. Understanding the rationale behind choosing Richon and Knorr is a necessary first step before delving into a detailed investigation of their contributions. Three aspects play a role in shaping Richon's and Knorr's examination of allegory. Firstly, their shared educational background, exposure to diverse cultures, and collaborative working relationships in the 1970s and 1980s laid the groundwork for their photographic creations. In 1980, Richon and Knorr completed their undergraduate studies in Film and Photographic Arts at the Polytechnic of Central London under the guidance of Victor Burgin. Regarding their individual experiences, Knorr was born in Germany, and she is an American photographer who has resided chiefly in London. Born in Switzerland, Richon began his professional journey in London. Their exposures to the cultures of different countries serve as one of the reasons that led to the diversity of their photographs. More importantly, their collaborative work on a photographic project called *Punks* in 1977 marked a significant achievement in their respective photographic paths. According to Knorr's descriptions, *Punks* reveals the London music scene, centring on the Roxy in Covent Garden and the Global Village in

Charing Cross.²¹⁴ By freezing human poses in an infinite moment by the cold light of the flash, Knorr and Richon sought direct engagement with their subjects. Along with their backgrounds, the artistic context of the 1970s and 1980s was an important factor that shaped their creations. Their photographic careers began in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the confusion of different types of representation was a prevailing trend. With the influences of integrated educational, collaborative, and social backgrounds, Richon explored semiotics and psychoanalytic discourses in his photographs. Similarly, Knorr presented photographs that addressed the rise of the politics of representation in cultural studies and film theory during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Given the intricate context, their investigations into photographs go beyond just focusing on the aesthetics of photography. Instead, they encompass broader perspectives, including cultural, social, literary, historical, and philosophical contexts.

Secondly, according to the literature found, both Richon and Knorr made references to allegory in their works and writings. Richon's books *Allegories* and *Real Allegories* sparked my curiosity about why he used allegories as the titles. Allegory emerged as a significant theme or inspiration in Knorr's creations, conferences, and interviews. In the accompanying conference 'I Can't Explain it All Myself (1997)' to *Virtue & Vice*, she lectured on allegorical stories. Several references to allegory could also be seen in her works after 2002, which suggested that allegory played a key role throughout

²¹⁴ It came from the description of the published book *Punks*, which is available on Knorr's website.

Knorr's creations. In Knorr's award speech on the 5th Pilar Citoler International Contemporary Photography (2011), she described allegory as a way of subverting gender and caste distinctions.²¹⁵ In Knorr's interview with Nirita Agrawal (2012) and Rosa Maria Falvo (2014), she again emphasised the central place of allegory in her works. Additionally, in 2017, she participated in the workshop 'Narrative Turns: Allegory, Palimpsest and Storylines in Contemporary Photography and Art'. This was held by a recognised institution of photography, Kolga Tbilisi Photo, Tbilisi, Georgia. These allegory-related explorations provided robust evidence for the necessity of my research on the explorations of Richon and Knorr.

Most importantly, according to their photographic practices and writings on allegory, I find that Richon and Knorr have distinct approaches to addressing manifestations of allegory, even though the depicted objects and themes are similar. They incorporate taxidermized animals and artistic institutions into their works, as evidenced by using the academy in *Virtue & Vice*. In Richon's works, utilizing animals as the central theme, the proposed gestures and behaviour of the animals portrays a nuanced artistic and educational background within their environment. Richon's works focus on the interplay between animals and their surroundings. Having the ability to see and gaze, animals tend to exhibit the behaviour the viewer anticipates. The conflicts between the creatures and the environment reveal the shifting role of artistic institutions in art history. Knorr's photographs are distinguished by their dramatic composition and

²¹⁵ Karen Knorr, Cristina Elena and Rosa Juanes, *Karen Knorr* (Córdoba: Universidad De Córdoba, Madrid, 2011). p. 53.

vibrant colours, which combine to create dynamic tableaux and visually stunning experiences. The viewers are presented with various sensory experiences through the exquisite settings. Consequently, it is worthwhile to analyse the approaches and viewpoints of Richon and Knorr, considering their shared constitutive components and subject themes. Through studying the varying relationships between techniques, context, and meanings in their works, my argument regarding the pervasiveness of allegory in images is further strengthened. This chapter focuses on portraying allegories through photographs in their various forms, content, and interpretations.

Thematically, the photoworks of Richon and Knorr have three allegorical features: photography as a writing of shadow, the interrelations between text and image, and the interplay of form and content. Historically, photography was defined as a writing of light (*photos* + *grafi*). From the Greek roots, *photos* meant ‘light’, and *grafi* meant ‘writing’. Literally, photography meant ‘light writing’. It seemed that less attention was drawn to the shadow, considered as the antithesis of light. British photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot viewed photography as the art of ‘photogenic drawing’, which referred to ‘shadow writing’. Photography combined “*skid*” (shadow) with “*grafi*” (writing).²¹⁶ In my view, the shadow highlights the overlooked elements of a photograph, as it symbolises an unilluminated area resulting from a hindrance of light.

²¹⁶ Larry J. Schaaf, *Records of the Dawn of Photography: Talbot's Notebooks P & Q* (Cambridge England; New York, Ny, Usa: Cambridge University Press in Cooperation with The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, 1996), p. xviii.

In the section on the interrelations between text and image, I explore how Richon and Knorr have distinguishable attitudes towards the uses of texts in their manifestations of images. Richon's practice demonstrates how captions create a sense of emptiness and establish temporal connections within the works. The uses of titles establish complementary and disjunctive relationships with images, which develop into diverse modes of narrations and ways of understanding images. By contrast, Knorr's symbolic titles provide significant directions for her explorations. From my perspective, Knorr is dedicated to utilising photography to delve into intricate historical, social, financial, and philosophical matters. The shared feature of texts in their work is that texts lay the groundwork for the interpretations of images. In contrast, some texts open new spaces for explicating images that are difficult to visualise directly.

The last allegorical thematic connection that I identify is the interplay of form and content. In a conventional approach to photoworks, form and content can be divided into different aspects, but in allegorical photographs, they are interconnected. The physical form has become a factor affecting the formation of content in a photograph. Similarly, the content of a photograph can be physically developed into the dimensionality of objects, such as light or shadow. I use their shared element, taxidermized animals, as a form to explore how they form distinct articulations of content, such as Knorr's recontextualisation of history, the confrontation between the observer and the observed works, and Richon's construction of a fictitious academy. I

investigate three allegorical features of their photoworks in the following section.

Part 1: Photography As a Writing of Shadow

Through my investigation, one typical allegorical manifestation of the photoworks of Richon and Knorr is the illumination of the shadow in photography. The ‘shadow’ here does not solely indicate the darkness in a photograph but alludes to the aspects overshadowed by the captured scenes, such as historical conceptions of photography. It is generally acknowledged that photography was defined as a ‘writing of light’.²¹⁷ No matter what photographic technique or type of photography is employed, one element in a photograph remains constant: light. Nonetheless, it appears that the antithesis of light, namely shadow, is not given as much consideration. Without the inclusion of the shadows, light would not be distinguishable in a complete image depiction. In Richon’s analysis, light in the photographs is intricate, which is shaped by various factors, such as objects, techniques, and their generated meanings. He also refers to Jacques Lacan’s viewpoint that ‘the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied’.²¹⁸ The light is manifested and communicated using the gaze. In Lacan’s theory, the use of the gaze in front of the camera is essential in the process of self-identification and the construction of identities. The gaze is subject to diverse interpretations, with objects seen as its embodiment. Without objects, it is not possible to engage in the act of gazing. The incorporation of objects and gazes alters the

²¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Photography or Light Writing: Literalness of the Image’ in *Impossible Exchange*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 139-148 (p. 183).

²¹⁸ Richon, *Real Allegories*, p. 165.

Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist. In his latter works, the term ‘gaze’ referred to an uncanny feeling that the object of our gaze was somehow looking back at us on its own accord.

perceptions of light.

Considering the above discussion, Richon's investigations have revealed that the light utilised in photography is not solely a technical form, but it also has several intricate implications. It plays a crucial role in illuminating the neglected elements that comprise the photograph. The light in the image appears to embody the gaze's imagination. Considering the close connection between shadow and light, both explicitly and implicitly serve to bring attention to the unnoticed components within a photograph. My research suggests that the concept of the shadow plays a significant role in shaping historical perceptions of photography, as evidenced by the investigations of Knorr and Richon. The unseen elements probably are what cannot be retained at the moment when the photograph is taken. The utilisation of metaphors representing light and shadow draws attention to their pivotal function in capturing and perceiving photographs.

Knorr's Shadows of Photography

Knorr's use of allegory questions the historical conception of photography as a writing of light and its historical role in the academy. According to Knorr, the shadow in photography has emblematic values. In her words, the shadows are 'the lowest in the hierarchy of existing things, mimetic, indexical (much removed from the cherished universal forms which are fully real) like photographs.'²¹⁹ From my perspective, Knorr's lowest hierarchy refers to the extent to which the shadow is overlooked, as the existing elements may be the ones that the viewers are primarily focused on. Her observation offers valuable insights into the mimetic and indexical aspects of shadows, as shown in photography. It can be argued that photography's ability to present actual conditions in the natural world demonstrates its mimetic quality. Specifically, the photographs display elements and scenes are explicitly observable in the natural order. Meanwhile, the underlying meaning of particular objects is not readily explainable. In this sense, tangible elements and elusive ideas are intertwined in the illustrated scenes of photographs in the natural world. Furthermore, the indexical nature of a photograph is reflected in its physical elements, such as the frame, which are closely tied to the subject matter and function as references for the photograph's meanings. In such a manner, Knorr's analysis of the shadow can be seen as allegorical, as it aims to express the deeper connotations and implications that go beyond the composition of the photographs.

²¹⁹ Karen Knorr, 'Photography's Shadow', in *The Photographic Paradigm*, eds. Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (Brill, 1997), pp. 75-77 (p. 77).

Through my investigation, Knorr's interpretation of the shadow challenges the commonly accepted history of photography's invention in the photowork *The Pencil of Nature* (Figure 28). The photograph resonates with William Henry Fox Talbot's work with the same title. In my view, Knorr gives weight to the concept of the shadow that Talbot raises. Throughout history, Talbot was a pioneering figure in advancing photography as an artistic form in Britain. The commercially published book, *The Pencil of Nature*, was ground-breaking for its use of photographic illustrations and was released between 1844 and 1846. The book featured twenty-four plates, accompanied by a brief description of each plate and a historical overview of Talbot's inventions. One primary contribution Talbot makes is that he regards the negative-positive process of photography as 'the art of fixing a shadow'.²²⁰ In Talbot's view, photography is a medium of making a shadow visible, presenting a counterpoint to the traditional idea that photography is a form of light. The borrowing brings focus to the crucial role of the shadow in photography.

²²⁰ William Henry Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', *Philosophical Magazine Series 3*, 14.88 (1839), pp. 196-211 (p. 201).



Figure 28. Karen Knorr, *The Pencil of Nature*, 1994/95, colour cibachrome mounted on aluminium, with brass plaque, 110 cm x 110 cm, *Virtue & Vice*

Inspired by Talbot's concept of the shadow, a shadow in Knorr's *The Pencil of Nature* stands out, which further questions photography's place in the academy. According to Knorr, the photowork was taken at The Royal Academy in Stockholm.²²¹ The photograph depicts a staged scene using a large neoclassical statue of a naked man standing on a pedestal, whose head is invisible, and a medallion relief depicting the profile of another man. Despite the absence of its head, the statue is a copy of Polykleitos's Doryphoros, according to the Naples National Archaeological Museum. Two women are the main focal point in the picture. One person is seated, exuding a professional presence reminiscent of a model. The other person traces the shadow of the first person's face on the wall. Upon further observation, it becomes clear that the woman's attention is directed towards the shadow despite it being the main subject. Does it potentially suggest that the shadowy parts of the photograph are the central focus? According to Knorr's description, the photograph was influenced by Piny the Elder's explanation of the art of sculpting clay portraits.²²² This motif served as an allegory for the origins of painting and drawing, which became a well-told tale in the 18th century.

As stated in historical sources, the daughter of a potter from Sicyon fell in love with a young man while making clay model portraits. After the young man left her, the daughter sought to outline the shadow of his face cast on the wall. To assist the daughter in maintaining her memory, the potter employed clay to mould a likeness of

²²¹ Knorr, 'Photography's Shadow', p. 101.

²²² Ibid.

the young man's face. The allegory conveys the sentiments between the daughter and the youth. In her conversation with Knorr, Comay argues that Pliny's story is 'an allegory in which the link between desire, loss, memory and the image' was 'made explicit.'²²³ While Comay does not explicitly state whose desire, loss, and memory are being referenced, I contend that they pertain to the daughter's. The girl desires to be with her lover, but ultimately she loses him. The girl's fond memories of her loved one are permanently captured in clay. Her intricate emotions are now expressed and preserved through an image with allegorical manifestations.

Piny's allegory illuminates Knorr's contemplation of the role of photography in the academy. Given Piny's story, Knorr puts forward an idea that 'it was the unnamed daughter who is the inventor not only of painting but perhaps even of photography.'²²⁴ Within this context, Knorr's practice is not to challenge the inventor of photography in history, but the place of photography in the academy. My viewpoint is supported by the inspiration found in the series *Academies*. In 'Photography's Shadow: Academies', Knorr claims that 'No longer in the vanguard of technology it takes its place in the academy with its specific histories techniques and lineages.'²²⁵ This statement pertains to photography and weakens the feature of photography as a technological advancement. Photography is well-regarded for its exploration of the development of

²²³ Karen Knorr and Rebecca Comay, 'Natural Histories: Karen Knorr in Conversation with Rebecca Comay', in *Genii Loci: The Photographic Work of Karen Knorr* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2002), pp. 54-66 (p. 66).

²²⁴ Knorr, 'Photography's Shadow', p. 77.

²²⁵ Karen Knorr, 'Photography's Shadow: Academies', in *Photography, Allegory and Palimpsest*, trans. Antonio Guzman (France: Frac Basse-Normandie, 2001), pp. 99-101 (p. 100).

histories, and its evolutions in the academy. For Knorr, as with photography, the shadow casts doubt on the role and representations of photography that are non-visually depicted. In addition, Knorr argued that in her photowork *The Pencil of Nature*, ‘Photography shares with the shadow its indexical nature — the indexical sign is afterall the cornerstone of the photographic image.’²²⁶ This viewpoint demonstrates that both photography and shadow possess an indexical nature, which serves as the foundation for photography. The indexical sign of photography links the real-world object to the visual portrayal. It further verifies that the shadow reveals and confirms the existence of the captured scene in a photograph. Without the shadow, the light is unable to produce a photograph. Therefore, the allegorical quality in Knorr’s photowork is understood as a revelation of the shadow. Through contemporary representations, Knorr addresses the historical conception of photography as a writing of light and the history of photography. The shadow directs the viewer’s gaze towards the non-illuminated sides, which may not be the central subject but is crucial to a photograph.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Richon's Illuminations of Breath and Colour

Knorr's depiction of the shadow provides insights into the history of photography as a form of light-writing, while Richon's use of allegory reveals the role of elements like colour and sensory perception in creating a photograph. His unique viewpoints on colour and breath offer valuable insights into understanding the allegorical qualities of photographs. Throughout history, it has been widely recognised that colour is a crucial element of a photograph. Despite being made from the same material, the vibrant velvet clothes in Richon's *After D. L.* are exceptionally attention-grabbing. What impact do the colours of velvets have on the depictions of creatures from lower classes? Richon's interpretations of the colour are thought-provoking. In his view, the colour is not a part of the property of objects, and it 'exceeds the object and to some extent dissolves its boundaries.'²²⁷ From this, the colours of objects challenge the constitutive elements of the visual depiction, as the colours possess unique qualities that are not reliant on objects. As also argued by Richon, colour is regarded as a 'substance deprived of an essence.'²²⁸ The colours lacking an essence evolve into new substances and expressions in varying contexts. The incorporation of colours serves to supplement and amplify the meanings conveyed by the photograph, offering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of its visual message. His perspective goes against the belief that colour holds significant weight in artistic works.

Given Richon's view that colour is not a predominant property. I contend further that

²²⁷ Richon and Adams, *After D. L.*, p. 5.

²²⁸ Ibid.

in his photographs, colours supplement the depicted objects. Colour acts as a medium for adding fresh dimensions to the reading of a photograph, such as philosophical implications. In retrospect, the vivid colours in *After D.L.* seem to have associations with philosophical backgrounds, given Richon's investigations into cynicism. In the field of colour psychology, different colours can represent a range of emotions. Blue is linked to calm and relaxation, while green is often associated with nature, growth, and joy. Additionally, yellow is commonly interpreted as a symbol of optimism and happiness, while red is often seen as representing solid emotions such as passion, danger, and sacrifice. Using different colours, the creatures in the photographs metaphorically embody different sensations and states of 'life', such as fish, radish, and squid. Despite being considered as lower creatures, they are capable of experiencing a variety of emotional perceptions. In my view, Richon's uses of different colours add allegorical representations of the portrayal of still lives. The images are found to possess allegorical characteristics when examined in conjunction with Richon's analyses of colour. Furthermore, I suppose, do other components of a photograph, such as line, shape, and texture, exceed the depicted objects and break up the boundaries between objects? Put simply, each of them could potentially contain underlying implications. In such a scenario, the constituent parts of a photograph, akin to colour, could no longer function as guides for interpreting the image but instead as detachable supplements that reinstate the conventional readings of images.

In addition to examining the colour, Richon explores how a photograph evokes

sensory experiences, such as breath. Without allegorical qualities, it is difficult to imagine how a photograph can be said to breathe. As seen in Figure 29, the title is Diogenes, and the text is ‘upon an account of death caused by holding one’s breath.’²²⁹ In my opinion, the identity of the subject of death in this situation is ambiguous, as it could be Diogenes, or the octopus depicted in the image. If the sentence’s subject is Diogenes, it raises a question: what caused Diogenes’s death? Was it due to holding his breath? In this context, Richon provides three possibilities. The death of Diogenes was caused by any of three violent actions: being choked while trying to eat a raw octopus, battling with dogs for an octopus and receiving wounds, or deliberately holding his breath. It is yet to be determined which of these options was correct. One potential explanation is that the octopus has passed away. In ancient Greek mythology, the octopus was revered as a symbol of good luck and safeguarding. Despite this, how does an octopus maintain its breath? It is a misconception that the octopus must hold its breath, as it is equipped with gills and skin for respiration. The portrayal of death in this photograph suggests an enigmatic quality, marked by a sense of uncertainty. Uncertainty arises due to the absence of fixed points of reference for the emotional implications of allegorical interpretations of breath.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 26.



DIOGENES
Upon an account of death caused by holding one's breath

Figure 29. Olivier Richon, *Diogenes* in *After D.L.*, 1995, C-type print, *The Fortune Teller*

Through Richon's allegorical representation, the breath of Diogenes or the octopus is explored. The two interpretations cannot be proven and are both possible readings.

For photographs, what are the implications for breathing? Richon proposes that 'What the breath or the lack of breath or the interval between breaths does, is that it opens up a space in the picture.'²³⁰ Without any further explanation, he provides an understanding of the relationship between breathing and the picture. The photograph's space is formed by the three manifestations of the breath. In my view, in the reading of an image, breath is not merely a physical action, but something like a moment that creates a connection with components of an image and evolves into an allegorical representation. The interval between breaths might be a temporal issue, such as a steady in-and-out rhythm. The practice of breathing and not breathing is also a relative state rather than a constant one. In this sense, the practice of breathing, including breaks, can unveil uncharted spaces, which introduces fresh perspectives on the elements present in a photograph.

In Richon's investigation, the act of breath does not exist in isolation, but is closely linked to the subject. He argues that 'there is a moment where the subject finds its own consistency, in the jolt which it receives in the catching of breath, a moment where breath is present qua breath.'²³¹ The argument suggests a relationship between the subject and the breath. The subject has the possibility of forming its consistency as it goes through the process of the breath. The point in time when the breath exists as

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 8.

breath implies that the breath may not be present as its physical act. The subject's acquisition of consistency will be influenced by different states of breathing, such as, in the process of taking a breath, whether one is breathing or not. Considering the statement mentioned earlier that breath is capable of opening up a space, the breath serves as more than just an objective reaction to the body; it also significantly influences the subject's attainment of consistency. The viewpoint draws attention to the critical role of the subject's breath and the shock received during the breath. As such, through Richon's allegorical interpretations, breathing helps the viewers to recognise that factors affecting the characteristics of images, and the responses resulting from those factors, may affect the understanding of the works.

Part 2: The Interrelations between Text and Image

Through my investigation, the second allegorical feature in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr is understood as the use of images and texts. In the three projects – *Other Than Itself*, *The Fortune Teller* and *Virtue & Vice* – Richon primarily uses captions and titles, while Knorr focuses more on using titles. The relationship between text and image is illustrated by Richon using both captions (placed within the photographic frame) and titles (external to it), even though captions and titles are viewed as the same in most cases. As stated by Richon and Knorr, texts and images are closely intertwined. According to Richon, the relationship between text and image gives rise to a ‘literary image’.²³² In his words, ‘An image can be a picture and it also can be made of words.’²³³ The concept suggests a strong link between image-making and writing, so the visual needs the textual language to assert itself. Considering their relations, Richon argues that texts and images have shared attributes. Both words and images are tangible mediums, and as such, they serve as vehicles for conveying thoughts. The image can manifest as either a visual portrayal or a written composition, affirming the interchangeable nature of the two modes of expression.

Similarly, for Knorr, the functions of texts and images are interconnected. She proposes that the text is ‘literally photography, writing with light.’²³⁴ In a literal sense,

²³² Olivier Richon, ‘Introduction: On literary images’, *Photographies*, 4.1 (2011), pp. 5-15 (p. 5).

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Karen Knorr, ‘Interview: Fetishism of Black-and-White and the Vulgarly of Colour’, in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography From the 1850s to the Present*, eds. Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 403-409 (p. 406).

the text can be described as a practice of writing using light. Knorr also argues that the ‘text is image in this sense as much as the photograph is image.’²³⁵ In this respect, Knorr further proposed the possibility that the text can be regarded as an image. This approach has implications. The inclusion of textual elements in an image, and the text is categorized as an image, which contributes to the elucidation of the image. The meanings of words and images have been strengthened through their combination. Therefore, according to Richon and Knorr, texts and images are inextricably linked. The texts provide significant supplementary information and commentary for the interpretations of their images. It is worth noting that the text plays a critical role in the creation of allegory. Craig Owens once argued that ‘Allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another.’²³⁶ The role of the texts and variations in their meanings influence the interpretations of allegory. The emphasis on the text in allegory shapes and informs the exploration of the relationship between text and image. In the following section, I will investigate how Richon and Knorr address captions and titles in their works to form distinctive allegorical qualities.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse’, Part 1, p. 68.

Richon's Captions: Emptiness of Meanings and Temporal

Involvement

Richon's exploration of the relationship between text and image becomes a primarily allegorical quality. His series *Imprese* clearly illustrates the interdependence and distinctiveness between text and image. Historically, the *imprese* (singular: *impresa*) refers to an emblem or a device consisting of a picture and motto between the 15th and 17th centuries.²³⁷ The *impresa* typically uses objects, such as animals or plants, as pictorial signs. The signs convey coded messages regarding philosophy, social status, or personal feelings. For *imprese*, the existence of the figure, the motto or the word is used to explain and illustrate each other. The historical evolution of *imprese* demonstrates a close link between written words and visual representations.

In addition to the underlying relationship between text and image revealed by the title, Richon's *Impresa* attempts to challenge their established relationship in archeology. According to the introduction by Berger and Richon for *Other Than Itself*, the words and images in Richon's *Impresa* are used to 'address a fictitious archaeology of representation.'²³⁸ The term 'fictitious' here indicates that Richon's approach deviates from the conventional archaeological approach. The primary sources of historical evidence for archaeologists were usually textual descriptions and visual depictions. The written works (such as narratives, descriptions, and field notes) and the visual

²³⁷ Gordon Campbell, 'Impresa', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance*, n.d.
<<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-1910>> [accessed 23 June 2024].

²³⁸ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

materials (such as photographs, illustrations, paintings, and drawings) were combined to address different forms of human existence in the past. Richon's perspective suggests that the introduction of a fictitious element calls into question the idea of an interdependence between text and image. It is also conceivable that they hold contrasting depictions. Therefore, unlike archaeological portrayals, Richon's photographs illustrate the interdependence of text and image while highlighting their separateness.

One manifestation of Richon's exploration of the interplay between text and image is the use of captions. In his depictions of images, captions hold the primacy, and open up a space, that is, a sort of void. In Richon's words, the caption 'opens a hole, an emptiness.'²³⁹ There is no further explanation. In my view, the 'emptiness' here is more likely to refer to the meaning generated by captions. With the illumination of a hole, emptiness helps the viewer understand what is likely to be enlightened in the utilization of captions. In most cases, the captions serve as a means of providing clues for the viewer. The emptiness of meanings means that each element in an image has a metaphorical nature, possibly altering the viewer's established perception of the image. In other words, with the captions, the elements in a photograph are likely to elucidate a message or meaning that goes beyond their physical form. The generated emptiness is a challenge to the depiction of the image. The incorporation of captions and generated deconstruction of established perceptions portrayed by the image

²³⁹ Richon and Adams, *After D. L.*, p. 8.

creates a void of meaning and forms an emptiness.

In my view, the emptiness of meaning formed by the opened space within the photograph is marked by implicit historical demonstrations. The illumination of the captions elicits a connection to a reference not explicitly shown in the photograph. Figure 30 visually demonstrates how each element possesses a hidden otherness relevant to historical reflection. An ostrich and a statue of the Roman god Mercury are featured in the frame, with the caption specifying their limited flying capabilities. The caption says that 'It does not fly too high'.²⁴⁰ The identity of the subject referred to as 'it' remains unknown in the caption. As evidenced by existing knowledge, the ostrich cannot fly due to the puny wings. The ostrich experienced an increase in size due to the availability of vast lands after the extinction of dinosaurs, resulting in the loss of its ability to fly. To the left of the ostrich is the statue of Mercury.²⁴¹ Mercury is portrayed as being full of energy, as if ready to take flight. The wings on his feet are visible, giving the impression of gliding through the air as if poised to unleash his grace and energy, effectively portraying his speed and agility. To take it a step further, the statue of Mercury was vital in the development of British history. Mercury functioned as the symbol of Britain's unsurpassed global prosperity and strength, signifying the wealth and vitality of the British merchant fleet that built the empire. By utilising the captions, viewers can decipher the image and gain a deeper understanding of its historical embodiments, resulting in a fresh outlook on both the

²⁴⁰ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

²⁴¹ Representing the Ancient Roman Olympian god and messenger of the Gods, the flying statue of Mercury was depicted in motion on a blue-green wave.

captions and the images.



IT DOES NOT FLY TOO HIGH

Figure 30. Olivier Richon, 'IT DOES NOT FLY TOO HIGH' in *Imprese*, 1988, C-type prints, 75 cm x 85 cm, *Other Than Itself*

Apart from the emptiness of meanings, Richon's use of captions underscores the temporal associations. In his word, the caption 'introduces a temporal element' into the picture.²⁴² It has been noted in the preceding subsection that a temporal issue pertaining to the duration exists between breaths. I also realise that the temporal connections are evident in the depiction of taxidermized animals and staged signs of nature, especially with the descriptions of the captions. A taxidermized specimen is constructed from the corpses of the animal it represents, so it retains certain attributes of the living animals, such as appearance, skeletal infrastructure, and posture.

Preserved animals, through the art of taxidermy, act as physical representations of their past and serve as evidence of the passage of time. Due to the inactivity, the taxidermised animals do not appear to fit into the natural sceneries depicted in the photographs. The pre-arranged simulated natural environment, such as grass, seashore and neoclassical columns are intertwined with the animals' temporal movements.²⁴³

In Richon's *Imprese*, the subjects denoted in the captions point to the portrayal of taxidermized specimens.

From my perspective, Richon's images intensify the conflict between taxidermy and the natural environment, bringing attention to the temporal gaps between animals and their surroundings. As seen in Figure 31, the caption is 'from near and from afar.'²⁴⁴

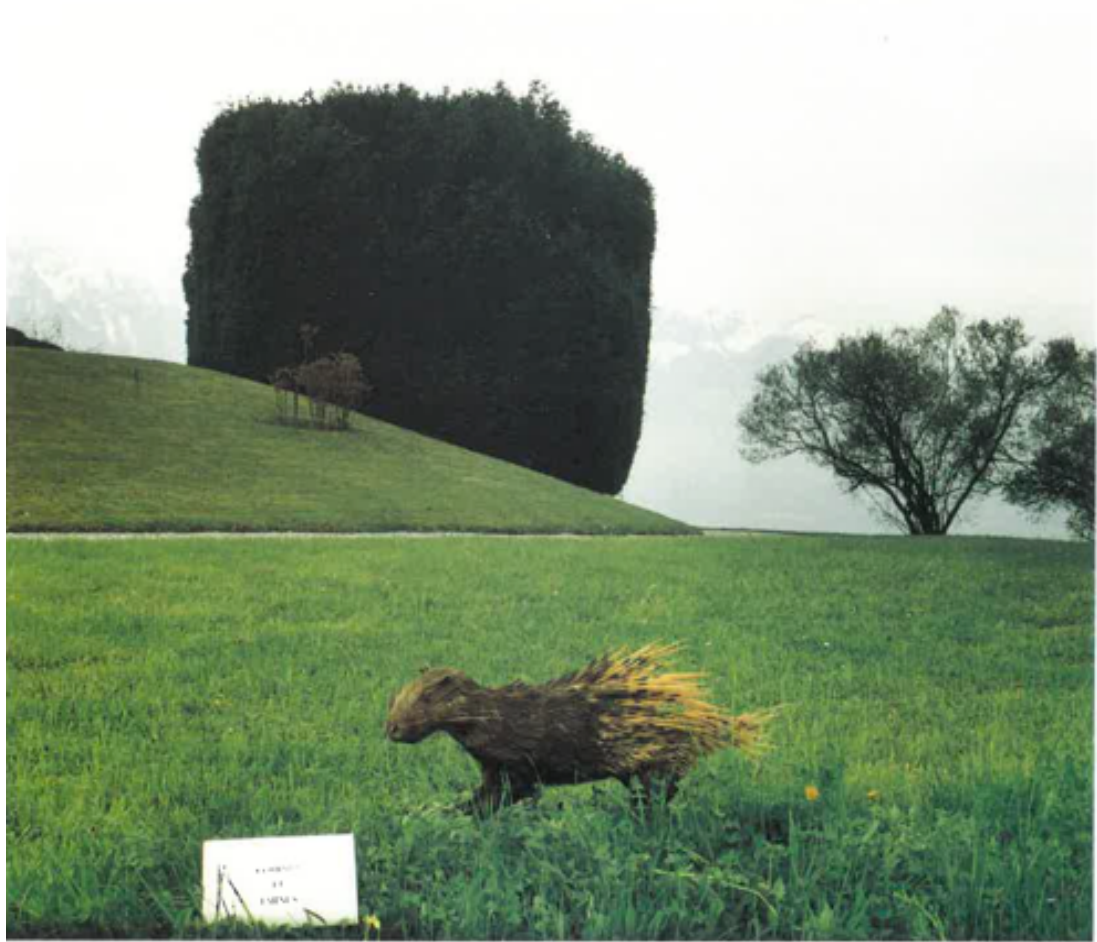
The phrase centrally suggests a shift between nearby and remote places. The configuration of the porcupine heightens its temporal features. By being preserved as

²⁴² Richon and Adams, *After D. L.*, pp. 8-9.

²⁴³ The elements related to nature were artificial.

²⁴⁴ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

a taxidermy, the porcupine is a relic of the past, yet it is depicted in a contemporary manner. The pre-adjusted meadow could represent a corner in a contemporary park, mimicking the natural surroundings of a porcupine. It is also possible that the meadow originated from a particular historical period, resulting in a temporal distinction between the porcupine's past and its present 'natural' environment. The inclusion of time in photography brings forth challenging considerations regarding the reality and illusion of the photographs, particularly when accompanied by captions. The temporal qualities of the objects shown in the images, specifically the taxidermized animals, can be easily disregarded. This is mainly because the objects described implicitly symbolise something in historical temporality.



FROM NEAR AND FROM AFAR

Figure 31. Olivier Richon, 'FROM NEAR FROM AFAR' in *Imprese*, 1988, C-type prints, 75 cm x 85 cm, *Other Than Itself*

The analysis of Richon's *Imprese* provided by Berger and Richon is enlightening as it sheds light on the historical implications of Aristotle for the photographs. Historically, Aristotle was regarded as the leading figure in the development of taxonomy. He grouped animals into two types: those with blood and those without. In their words, the taxidermized animal in *Imprese* is 'a reminder of Aristotle's classification as much as an actor in charge of the rhetorical illusionism of the photograph.'²⁴⁵ According to my understanding, the use of 'actor' here is to demonstrate that animals possess the capacity to portray various roles, much like how actors can take on different characters. In this sense, the taxidermized animals possibly act as allegorical figures, and the photographs create an impression of reality, forming rhetorical illusionism. The temporal elements have been integrated into the created rhetorical illusionism in the photographs, inviting the viewer to question the authenticity of what they see.

From my perspective, the emptiness of meanings and the involvement of temporal elements evoked by the captions reinforce the uncertainty between text and image in Richon's *Imprese*. This ambiguity is primarily demonstrated through the intricate intermingling of several layers of meaning. He argues that the *impresa* is 'a kind of rhetorical portrait, an imprint which refers to an individual better than a proper name.'²⁴⁶ In this sense, both the rhetorical portrait and an imprint are elusive. Neither can be entirely comprehended by a single conception. A name designates an individual, but for the individual, the name is not always caught up in a continuous

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Richon, *Real Allegories*, p. 174.

utterance or discourse. The rhetorical portrait is a vague notion that does not clearly outline the specific appearance of the portrait and is utilised to convey symbolic messages. The imprint cannot only refer to the identification of an individual, but it can also refer to the emblems of the individual, thus leaving distinguishable marks in an image. Neither the identifications nor emblems fully align with definitive connotations. Along with describing the information in the images, the captions express interpretations that are not originally intended, which constitutes an element of uncertainty. According to Berger and Richon, in *Impresa*, exotic animals are preserved in a similar way to how typography conserves a body of letters (as Italian typographer Giambattista Bodoni claimed, ‘with sharper outlines than the articulation of lips can give them.’)²⁴⁷ In this regard, the suggested mannerisms of the animals are possibly more identifiable than the textual descriptions of them in the images. In some cases, what is described in words does not always represent a precise meaning. The outline’s explanation presents a broad perspective, allowing for diverse interpretations.

Based on the above discussion, one example of the vagueness of *impresa* is shown in Figure 32. A crocodile is positioned as if lying on the shore of the lake, appearing to wait for something. The caption under the image is ‘The tears of concupiscence’, which possibly refers to the crocodile.²⁴⁸ In medieval theology, the phrase was commonly believed that crocodiles shed tears while feasting on their prey. The

²⁴⁷ *Other Than Itself*, n. p.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

proverb ‘crocodile tears’ depicts the insincere and inauthentic remorse or sympathy shown by someone who has harmed others. In this context, the ‘crocodile tears’ and the insincere repentance are at odds with the ‘concupiscence’ in the caption. It is widely accepted that concupiscence is an intense desire, a tendency, or an attraction, often arising out of lust or intense sexual desire. From my perspective, the caption holds two different meanings. On the one hand, the title refers to the tears of desire, which could be perceived as reasonable. It has been suggested that the tears of animals may contain pheromones that affect the sexual motivation of potential mates.²⁴⁹ In this context, the crocodile sunbathing on the riverbank could yearn for a companion in the water. Considering natural principles, the explanation appears to make sense. On the other hand, the title means the tears of false repentance (for the sin of lustfulness). In Psalm 56, the animals were incapable of realizing their sinfulness or of repenting and believing that Jesus was their Saviour. According to the above analyses, the title ‘tears of concupiscence’ reveals the crocodile’s desire to mate and reproduce with the underwater opposite sex. The reading of the image involves several references, which depend upon the powers of textual descriptions. Therefore, the relationship between text and image is marked by uncertainty in Richon’s photographs.

²⁴⁹ Patel Hardik P and Gohil Priyanshee V, ‘Pheromones in Animal World: Types, Detection and Its Application’, *South African Journal of Botany*, 2.1 (2014), pp. 22-26 (p. 22).



THE TEARS OF CONCUPISCENCE

Figure 32. Olivier Richon, 'THE TEARS OF CONCUPISCENCE' in *Imprese*, 1988, C-type prints, 75 cm x 85 cm, *Other Than Itself*

The uncertainty between text and image arises from the fact that the meanings of texts are not always clearly defined in different contexts. The inclusions of texts direct and inform the process of interpretation to lean towards allegory. The uncertainty between text and image is a historical issue. Theoretically, Walter Benjamin's essay 'A Short History of Photography' (1931) provided constructive insights into how captions work in photography. In his view, a caption was a significant component of the shot. The function of the caption was to literalise within photography, 'the relationships of life [...] without which photographic construction would remain stuck in the approximate.'²⁵⁰ The ability to transform life into literature was a way move beyond the objective and documentary nature of photography. Photographs were therefore not constrained by their association with the camera. Benjamin's description of the approximation of photographic construction involves a divide between the photograph's portrayal and the reality in the natural world. Deciphering the intended meaning of an image is a complex undertaking, and the incorporation of captions serves to complicate and cast doubt on its interpretation. The use of texts, such as captions, plays a crucial role in the narratives of allegory. In this regard, using captions indicates a split between what was on the surface (or literal) meaning and an allegorical meaning beneath the veil. In summary, Richon's emptiness of a hole in the captions illuminates the excavation of the photograph's meanings, such as historical reflections. It brings a unique viewing experience that differentiates it from a purely visual image. This process counters the initial narratives presented in the captions.

²⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', *Screen*, 13 (1972), pp. 5-26 (p. 25).

Richon's Titles: Complementary and Disjunctive Roles

Apart from captions, titles are essential in Richon's photoworks. By examining his photographs, I assert that the relationship between titles and images is complementary and disjunctive. As argued by Richon, the title serves as a means of classifying and archiving images, and it sometimes 'functions like a proper name, a signifier that enables identification and differentiation from other pictures.'²⁵¹ An individual's name is used to identify a title, and these titles can be distinguished from other images. The process of identification involves recognizing the specific characteristics of an item, while differentiation involves the ability to distinguish those characteristics from others. In addition, the signifier of an image can be understood readily through Richon's introduction of Roland Barthes's term *anchorage*, to explain the linguistic function that defines the signifier of an image in his essay 'Image and Language'.²⁵² In his view, *anchorage* retains and enhances the meaning by exerting control over the multiple interpretations within an image. In contrast to Benjamin's theory, where the captions literalise the relationships in life, Barthes's *anchorage* focuses on a signal of the fixation of meanings. In this context, preventing the loss of meaning and diversifying meanings highlight the complementary function of titles in relation to images.

From my perspective, the complements of titles to the images can be seen in *After D*.

²⁵¹ Olivier Richon, 'Image and Language', *Camerawork*, 25 (1998), 14-15 (p. 14). The earlier section featured the first part of this quote, though with a varying focus.

²⁵² Ibid.

L, which represents five still life photographs and pieces of Greek texts.²⁵³ Each photograph is associated with a corresponding panel, which consists of a translated Greek title and a caption, creating a diptych.²⁵⁴ The photographs are displayed alongside the corresponding texts, highlighting the visual-textual connections through the use of two pictorial elements. The group of works portrays the lower still lives, comprising fish head, eel, squid, and white and red radishes. The use of red, blue, and yellow velvet cloths accentuates the helplessness and inferiority of these lowly creatures.

The titles and captions of Greek texts are constructive to the readings of Richon's images. As seen in Figure 33, the title is Antisthenes. The accompanying text is 'upon a recommendation to the Athenians that donkeys should be promoted to the dignity of horses.'²⁵⁵ At first glance, the sentence seems to be too complicated to understand. Antisthenes, a former student of Socrates and rival of Plato, was known for his disinterest in democracy and focus on ethical teachings. He promoted the pursuit of virtue through an ascetic lifestyle. The written sentence shown in the photograph was used to scorn the act of voting. Antisthenes's suggestion of elevating the donkey to the level of the horse was seen as a foolish practice. From the information found, the shown sentence in the image served as the opening line in Antisthenes's dialogue with the generals. Antisthenes further explained that 'But among you there are generals

²⁵³ In the book *After D. L.*, four of them were presented. The difference between the number in the exhibition and the book *The Fortune Teller* can be found in the material provided by Rochdale Art Gallery.

²⁵⁴ The materiality and frame of the text panel were unknown.

²⁵⁵ Richon and Adams, *After D. L.*, p. 16.

who have not learned anything but have been elevated to the rank of general only by voting'.²⁵⁶ In this sense, the sentence's metaphorical implication was that individuals with limited abilities resorted to dishonourable methods to achieve their objectives. The fact that who was promoted to general through voting highlighted his/her lack of talent or ability. By examining the entire dialogue, the supplementary meanings of the texts can be readily understood. Therefore, the title provides the threads for interpreting image to obtain pluralistic meanings of the images.

²⁵⁶ P.A. Meijer, *A New Perspective on Antisthenes: Logos, Predicate and Ethics in His Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p. 21.

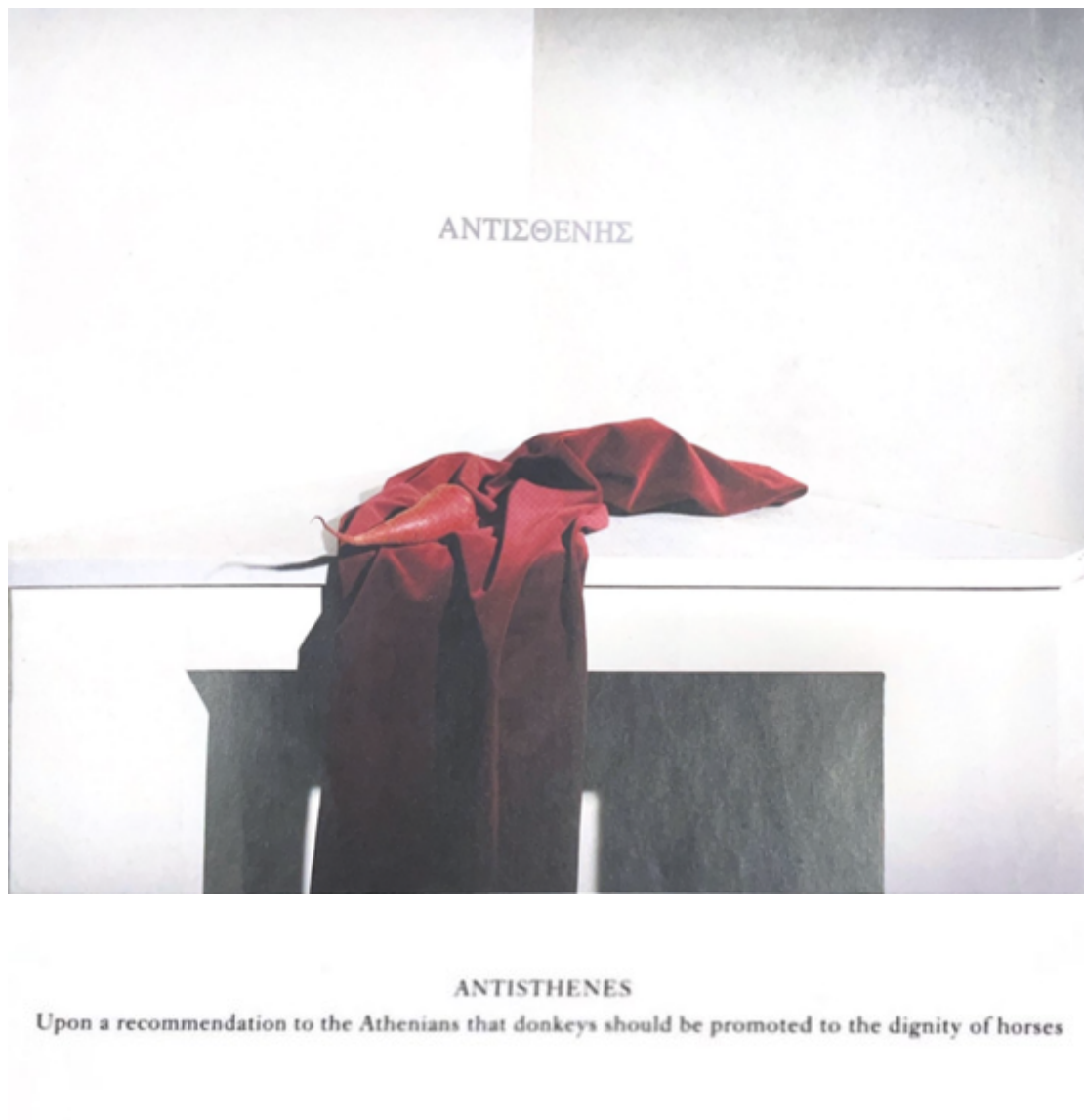


Figure 33. Olivier Richon 'ANTISTHENES' in *After D.L.*, 1995, C-type print, *The Fortune Teller*

The other relationship between titles and images is the disjunction, which means the reading of the image cannot entirely depend on the shown texts. Returning to the previous photograph, the centrally located radish is the focus. How does the radish relate to the philosopher Antisthenes? Historical evidence from the ancient Greeks suggested that radishes were highly esteemed. It was also commonly believed that the radish possessed healing properties for all ailments except those affecting the teeth. To emphasise the significance of the radish, the craftsmen selected pure gold as their medium to create intricate carvings, which were then given as a tribute to individuals with high status and authority. According to Antisthenes's statement in the shown sentence and the historical significance of radishes, it is likely that the vegetable represents the pursuit of power or status, possibly obtained through unofficial and confidential events like casting votes or giving valuable and symbolic gifts. In my opinion, the elevated position of the radish in Greek culture does not necessarily imply a connection with Antisthenes. No historical records indicated that Antisthenes made contributions to the investigation of the radish. There is a distinct separation between visual representations and textual depictions. Richon exhibits an indecisive stance towards the title shown in the image, which could potentially open up a means of interpretation. As argued by him, the associations between linguistic texts and images are not confined to titles, but also take other linguistic forms, such as captions or commentary. In his words, no matter what kinds of texts, they 'present a way to interrogate the position of an image regarding meaning.'²⁵⁷ In this regard, the 'way'

²⁵⁷ Richon, 'Image and Language', p. 14.

and ‘position’ reveal how and where meaning is formed. The interrogation suggests a two-way verification process, which indicates the likelihood of the image (not) aligning with the text. Richon’s perspective demonstrates that no definite relationship can be found between image and text.

The above analysis is grounded in an approach that separates the text and image as distinct mediums. Nevertheless, if the image itself is regarded as a text, what are the implications for the relationship between these two elements? As I previously noted, both Richon and Knorr suggest that the text can serve as an image when beginning the discourse on the correlation between text and image. As evidenced by Richon’s photograph ‘ANTISTHENES’, I argue that the texts themselves can hardly stand alone without the image. Given that the text can be utilised as an image, in Richon’s practice, both the images and texts have the ability to narrate. Knorr’s assumption and Richon’s practice both draw upon Roland Barthes’s concept of ‘relay’. According to Barthes, ‘relay’ means that ‘the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realised at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis’.²⁵⁸ In this sense, both the words and images were essential components that contribute to the overall message in a syntagmatic structure. Additionally, the story, anecdote, and diegesis were three distinctive narrative modes of storytelling that are shaped by the fusion of visual and textual elements. The common thread among these three approaches is using

²⁵⁸ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 41.

nonfictional or fictional objects, people, and events to present accounts of related events or experiences, conveying, and displaying descriptions of the objective world, abstract ideas, and worldviews. Real and virtual elements play a role in the narrative strategies and their ultimate meanings. If the image is assumed to be a text, it seems that the same two conditions arise. The image reinforces or separates the text, since both are parts of a syntagm. The two circumstances can achieve the unity of the message.

Based on Richon's exploration, I believe his practice echoes Paul de Man's argument of the allegorical reading that the text becomes 'the allegorical narrative of its own deconstruction.'²⁵⁹ From this, deconstruction breaks down the established meanings of the texts, paving the way for the formation of new meanings that establish allegorical narratives. In Richon's photographs, the integration of captions and titles accelerates the deconstruction of the traditional layout of the image, such as treating colour as a central element. Additionally, the images possess a remarkable quality in which they seem to breathe, conveying a sense of dynamism and liveliness. That is to say, the form and content (conveyed meanings) of texts are not settled but are always in a constant state of deconstruction. The changes brought about by deconstruction can result in many different modes of reading. Both the forms and meanings of the images and texts will deconstruct themselves accordingly as their varying ways of narratives and interpretations.

²⁵⁹ Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 72.

Knorr's Titles: Multi-perspective Explorations

Compared to Richon's uses of captions and titles, Knorr places more emphasis on the functions of the titles. Richon's captions and titles have straightforward purposes, such as the role of signs in their exploration of the associations between text and image. For him, the 'suspicion of transparency and use value of signs' are common features in literary and photographic texts.²⁶⁰ In this respect, the presence of doubt regarding the transparency and usefulness of signs is a common thread in both literary and photographic pieces. By contrast, for Knorr, it is 'the register of sign' that constitutes the distinction between text and image.²⁶¹ The boundaries separating textual elements from visual depictions are delineated by the symbols incorporated. The language's arbitrary nature is more noticeable than the images, as the photograph is closely tied to the captured elements that serve as referents.

Considering the role of the sign, Knorr identifies two aspects of the photograph. On the one hand, the photograph has an indexical nature, 'like a footprint, it refers to something having been there.'²⁶² That is to say, the photograph can establish associations with existing things, events, or discourses, which is an allegorical manifestation. On the other hand, as a constructed image, the photograph 'mediates and is highly conventionalized.'²⁶³ Although she does not elaborate on the aspects in which the mediating role of photographs is manifested, the conventionalisation of the

²⁶⁰ Richon, 'Introduction: On literary images', p. 6.

²⁶¹ Knorr, 'Interview', p. 406.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

photographs is likely to intersect with the tradition of photography. As such, Knorr argues that ‘a rhetoric of image’ arises and forms a genre, even though ‘there is no language of photography’.²⁶⁴ Compared to Richon’s ‘literary images’, Knorr’s concept of ‘a rhetoric of image’ is distinctive. The concept does not indicate that photography is devoid of language; rather, it signifies that the language is not inherent in the photographs but is shaped by pre-existing discourses. As previously mentioned, Barthes’s concept of *relay* serves as a constructive explanation for Knorr’s view. According to Knorr, *relay* ‘opens up the image to other meanings which are not apparent or visible.’²⁶⁵ Barthes’s viewpoint reveals that the image’s potential for multiple meanings may not be readily discernible or recognizable on the surface. From this, the absence of photography’s language results from the independent yet interconnected relationship between text and image.

In my view, using titles in Knorr’s photographs is vital in conveying messages, which is an essential aspect of the compositions in the images. Her series features photographs with two distinct styles of accompanying titles: some are restrained, while others are more provocative, emphasising the culpability of the signs. Knorr’s photoworks in the three projects demonstrate how the titles influence the formation of meanings within the images. Through my analysis, her titles employ photographs to examine historical and philosophical themes, which assumes possible interpretations of reading images. The titles do not merely provide direct and indirect information

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

about the images but are the essential to the expressive power of Knorr's images.

According to Knorr, the texts are not equated with titles and captions. It is more accurate to use the mythological connotations of the French word *légende*.²⁶⁶ She provides no justification for this perspective. The French word *légende*, functioning as a noun, encompasses three distinct meanings linked to narratives: caption, fable, and legend. These three words have various connotations, such as a brief message, an untrue story, a traditional story, or a myth. In this regard, Knorr's arguments about texts are more comprehensive than a single word, such as a title or caption. Her images do not follow a linear pattern and potentially have multiple meanings, as seen in their titles.

The polysemous meanings are manifested in Knorr's exploration of historical, financial, and philosophical issues through titles. In her series *Capital*, Knorr documents the influence of the international high finance industry within the City of London's financial district. She uncovers the forgotten and suppressed connections between financial institutions and trade and industry, both in the past and present. The series *Capital* reveals the explorations of complex symbolic objects; and how those seemingly ordinary objects embody the history of which they are a part. Likewise, the group functions to validate that history while striving to merge it into financial ideologies. The use of titles strengthens the symbolic roles of objects in *Capital*. Each visual element in the photograph – such as the character of Micky, dice, skeleton, and

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 407.

crow – exceeds its original meaning and reinforces the allegorical features. With allegorical uses of titles, Knorr’s series *Capital* uses photography as an allegorical lens to examine financial, historical, and philosophical issues.

The compositions of the works *Hostage to Fortune* (Figure 34) and *White Man’s Burden* are similar. In *Hostage to Fortune*, every ordinary object has an element of financial symbolism. The phrase ‘Hostage to Fortune’ was first put forward by English Tudor philosopher and scientist Sir Francis Bacon in his 1625 essay.²⁶⁷ In finance, this phrase was commonly used to individuals who gave up control over their future financial security and well-being by relying on luck in their decision-making. Against this background, each element in *Hostage to Fortune* holds financial significance. The background of the photograph is primarily comprised of red, with a small corner of blue. The colours red and blue hold significance in the realm of finance. Historical evidence confirms a fact that the pound or local currency has been preferred currency in the UK, Crown Dependencies (Red), and Overseas Territories (Blue). The stark contrast between red and blue suggests that Britain was dominant. In addition, financial status has a close connection with red and blue. It is commonly believed that the colour red is tied to negative outcomes, often involving losing money. It is indicative of an unproductive investment. In contrast, the colour blue is closely associated with trust, stability, and integrity within the world of finance, projecting an image of credibility and sincerity. Numerous financial institutions opt to incorporate

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth Knowles, ‘hostage to fortune, a’, *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, n.d. <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810-e-3421>> [accessed 23 June 2024].

the colour blue into their brand logos, aiming to convey a sense of solid reliability.²⁶⁸

Through the intentional selection of the title and the meticulous attention to the background colours, it is evident that there are further meanings underlying the work.

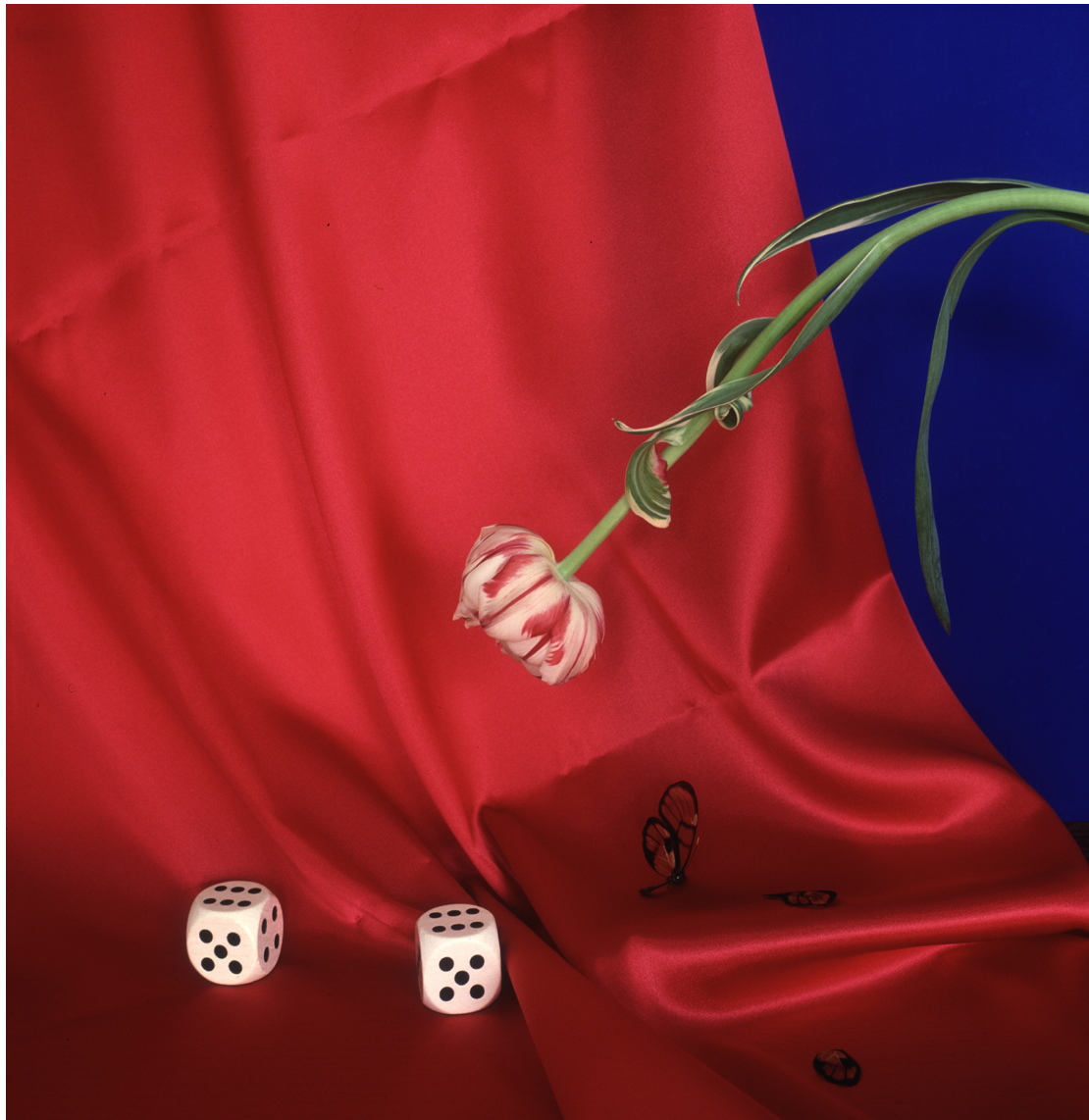


Figure 34. Karen Knorr, *Hostage to Fortune*, 1990, cibachrome print, 90.5 cm x 90.5 cm, *The Fortune Teller*

²⁶⁸ Lixun Su, Annie Peng Cui and Michael F. Walsh, 'Trustworthy Blue or Untrustworthy Red: The Influence of Colors on Trust', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 27.3 (2019), pp. 269-81.

In the photograph, the two dice, a spreading butterfly, and a parrot tulip are the main visual elements, contrasting with the vibrant red and blue cloth background. In casinos, gaming chips serve as a practical alternative to traditional currency, and dice function as a crucial element in determining the results of each game. The tulip was a prominent subject in the financial world throughout history and was a crucial element in Dutch still-life paintings during the 17th century. The year 1634 marked the start of tulip mania, a notable event in which tulips' prices skyrocketed, leading to an unexpected socio-economic effect. Tulip mania was employed as a metaphor to describe a major economic bubble marked by a deviation from the actual value of asset prices. Furthermore, during the 17th century, tulips were highly valued as luxurious items and were often featured in flower paintings for their vividly striped blooms. The allegorical interpretation of these paintings was based on the significance of tulips as a symbol of a patron's social standing and prosperity. In contrast, the black butterfly in the realm of finance evokes positive connotations. The use of a special black butterfly holds great spiritual significance, signifying renewal, and transformation.²⁶⁹ The photograph's symbolic elements hold significant historical and financial information.

Similarly, each element in *White Man's Burden* (Figure 35) has a historical reference.

The title is a reference to the poem's title by the British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899. Its subject was an exhortation to the United States to assume colonial

²⁶⁹ 'Black Butterfly Spiritual Meaning Symbolism: Comprehensive Guide', SymbolismGuide, 2023 <<https://symbolismguide.com/black-butterfly-spiritual-meaning-symbolism/>> [accessed 23 June 2024].

control over the Filipino people and nation during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). ²⁷⁰Throughout history, the concept of the white man's burden was linked to the idea of the white race's obligation to enlighten non-white societies, reflecting their economic and social dominance through colonialism. Nonetheless, the phrase was understood by American imperialists as a rationalisation for imperial conquest, which, in turn, was ideologically connected with the continental expansion philosophy of 'manifest destiny' in the early nineteenth century. It was intended to convey two opposite messages, which included the physical costs and mental challenges associated with setting up a grand enterprise.

²⁷⁰ F. Lionel Young, III, *World Christianity and the Unfinished Task: A Very Short Introduction* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021), pp. 103-104.



Figure 35. Karen Knorr, *White Man's Burden*, 1990-1991, cibachrome print, *The Fortune Teller*

By considering the historical context, the photograph's interpretation gains greater clarity. In *White Man's Burden*, the colour green signifies wealth, advancement, and overall welfare. Two other noteworthy symbols are the spoon and salt, representing the concept of controlling power in the era of war and colonialism. The tasteful spoon could be utilised by those belonging to the white race to a symbol of privilege and wealth. For those in poverty, salt may be considered a luxury in their diets. The alluring light on the spoon, which appears to be a sugar spoon or teaspoon, is intriguing. Regardless of the specific spoon, both are the results of colonialism and serve as a means for gaining wealth. Through the spoon's reflections, the viewers can discern that the person in front of the tripod is responsible for taking the photograph being examined (*White Man's Burden*), likely being the photographer. Hence, the photograph depicts symbolic objects that represent the white man's rules, dominations, and significant physical burdens. Each element in the photograph holds a unique historical significance and conveys a contemplation of the historical events.

The features captured within the photographs possess significant symbolic value, adding layers of meaning. From my perspective, a question arises: how do symbolic elements come together to create an allegorical photograph? A thorough explanation of the contrasts between symbol and allegory is required. According to Craig Owens, where the symbol is a motivated sign, allegory is 'conceived as its antithesis, and will be identified as the domain of the arbitrary, the conventional, the unmotivated.'²⁷¹ In

²⁷¹ Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse', Part 1, p. 83.

this context, the symbol takes on a physical manifestation, while allegory is marked by the traits of arbitrariness and convention. The unmotivated allegory is not a fixed concept, which constantly faces the supersedure. The symbol is typically constructed by the creator with their consciousness, reducing it to a part of the whole. The constructions of symbolic meanings are definite, while the meanings of allegory are surplus.

In contrast, Walter Benjamin's differentiation between symbol and allegory is more clear-cut. For him, the symbol is a mode of expression, and in the symbol, 'destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption'.²⁷² The idealization (poetic and philosophic) of the symbol exists because it ignores history, and seeks to claim the absolute eternal value of nature. By contrast, in allegory, Benjamin writes, 'everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death's head.'²⁷³ The argument here highlights the division between material forms and their intended messages. Facial expressions can convey untimely and melancholic emotions. Thus, the symbol is subjected to the predetermined settings in its physical manifestations. Allegorical works always strive for uninterrupted meanings. In this sense, using symbolic elements provides possible ways of interpretations of the allegorical qualities of the photograph, since allegory is subject to continual interpretation, especially in consideration of the ever-changing

²⁷² Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p.166.

²⁷³ Ibid.

nature of time.

The difference between symbol and allegory suggests that allegorical interpretation can be superimposed on symbolic meaning. The work *His Worshipful Company* (Figure 36) is indicative of its historically symbolic progression and has also assumed new allegorical implications. Historically, the term ‘worshipful company’ is a respectful designation given to a company that engages in worship. Historical records show that trade guilds, which evolved into livery companies in Britain, have existed since the 12th century. The term ‘guild’ was believed to have its roots in the Saxon word ‘gild’, indicating that members were expected to cover the expenses of the brotherhood. Most goods and services were manufactured and sold in the City of London under the control of the early guilds. The establishment of the guilds led to their increased independence and the creation of their main offices. The Guilds, renowned for their significant religious impact, opted for a Patron Saint and operated as community monasteries or churches. The influence and prestige of guild members during that period was reflected in their clothing, books, and paintings. Therefore, the concept of a ‘worshipful company’ has been introduced. As seen in *His Worshipful Company*, positioned prominently in the centre of the image are two sets of liveries, indicating the persons wearing them are of high level of power and influence, potentially as financiers or economists. The desk has a book, and the book is sitting on the clothing. The allegorical element of the photograph is the painting on the wall. The creator and intention of the painting, along with its links to the arranged clothes

and books, remain unidentified. This artwork potentially represents a gathering of these influential individuals and could also serve as a symbol of specific significance. The unclear nature of its significance leads to an allegorical interpretation. The historically symbolic meaning of 'worshipful company' offers a potential method of comprehending the predetermined motivations and meanings within an allegorical image. Allegory presents fragmented meanings through its use of symbols.



Figure 36. Karen Knorr, *His Worshipful Company*, 1990-1991, cibachrome print, *The Fortune Teller*

The titles of Knorr's photographs allude to philosophical exploration, in addition to providing historical contexts. Knorr's photograph, *The Principles of Political Economy* (Figure 37), echoes Karl Marx's investigations. To properly analyse Marx's Gothic metaphors, it is crucial to grasp his approach. A key aspect of Marx's philosophy was the critical examination of political economy. In this sense, the 'principles of political economy' are more likely to be authored by the economists (classical or contemporary) that Marx criticised. These economists (and philosophers) would tally with the other references in the series (colonialism, empire, and imperialism). As a Gothic author, Marx utilised the concept of vampires to illustrate the workings of capitalism, highlighting the significance of class in social and political contexts. Vampires and ghosts were commonly used as symbols to represent the dominance of capitalists in controlling the means of production and creating significant social class disparities.



Figure 37. Karen Knorr, *The Principles of Political Economy*, 1992, cibachrome print, 29.3 cm x 23.7 cm, *The Fortune Teller*

Upon a closer inspection, the photograph's background showcases a distinct arch that combines several overlapping compositions. The skull portrayed in the image acts as a memento mori, a motif commonly seen in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* in 1533. Holbein's painting served as an allegory that highlighted an integration of art and science, signifying a shift away from the medieval mindset.²⁷⁴ In the same vein, the skull was a common motif in 17th-century vanitas still life paintings, provoking contemplation of one's eventual death. By contrast, the skull captured in Knorr's photograph remains undistorted. A closer examination of the black cloth unveils a pattern resembling the skulls depicted in Holbein's distorted long black and white skull-splodge. When examining Holbein's painting from the side, the viewers might discover that it depicts a standard human skull. The optical illusion is responsible for the perceived distortion of the skull, according to viewers. By contrast, the use of a seemingly ordinary black cloth in Knorr's photowork suggests a visual cue for illusion.

In *The Principles of Political Economy*, the bird, a crow with a rock in its beak, also holds significant importance. This symbol echoes the story of the crow drinking water. The story of a thirsty crow discovering a vessel filled with water just beyond its reach has been retold for centuries. By dropping pebbles into the pitcher, the bird increased the water level and quenched its thirst despite its inability to tip the pitcher. In addition, Alfred Hitchcock's influential film *The Birds* offers another point of

²⁷⁴ Some knowledge of geometry helped frame the painting. A skull was depicted as a hidden image, with the term of anamorphosis. A distorted projection or drawing seems normal to the untrained eye when viewed from a particular point or with the assistance of a suitable mirror or lens.

interpretive entry. In my view, Knorr's reference to Hitchcock brings new, conflicting interpretations to the photograph. In the movie *The Birds*, Hitchcock imbues crows and other black birds with allegorical meanings and cultural importance. Throughout the film, the depiction of birds shifts continually as the themes and narrative develop. The film uses lovebirds in a pet store to represent the developing love and sexual tension between the characters Melanie and Mitch. After the birds have initiated their attack on Bodega Bay, their symbolism undergoes a transformation. As a result, the film's portrayal of birds undergoes a transformation based on shifts within the social environment, characters, and plots. In *The Principles of Political Economy*, the skull and crow, carry values associated with historical works (painting and film). They are used to demonstrate the philosophical condition of capitalism and its social and historical contexts.

Using allegorical titles, Knorr's photoworks evoke associations with financial, historical, social, and philosophical allusions. By incorporating texts, the works strengthen the distinctions between literary and photographic texts. Knorr's use of texts, specifically through titles, serves as a means of uncovering the implicit meanings beyond the image. Additionally, Knorr argues that neither image nor text precedes the other. In her words, 'Neither [text or image] explains nor completes the other. Both add to each other.'²⁷⁵ In Knorr's photoworks, the relationship between text and image should not be assumed to be inclusive or complementary. One allows

²⁷⁵ Knorr, 'Interview', p. 406.

for a more precise explanation of the other. Therefore, the interpretation of Knorr's photographs is enhanced by the inclusion of accompanying titles, which contribute to the overall meaning, but the images cannot be fully encapsulated by texts alone.

According to Richon's and Knorr's investigations, captions and titles profoundly influence how the viewer interprets images. The spectators play an important part in the examination of text and image. The inclusion of textual supplements enhances the spectator's reading experience. For Knorr, the role of the viewer has primacy in the relationship between text and image. The primary purpose of the image and text is to 'slow down the spectator's pace of consumption, creating a "slow-motion reading."²⁷⁶

In my view, the spectator's engagement pertains to their fondness and admiration for artistic works. The act of consumption allows for the creation of flexible spaces for reflection and contemplation while viewing works. Reading consciously at a slow pace enables viewers to think deeply about the meanings of texts and images.

Additionally, according to Knorr, the texts are capitalised, grouped, and laid out below the image to emphasise their ironic and constructed nature. The viewers use fragmentary information to establish a relatively comprehensive understanding of the image. In other words, with the help of texts, the photograph indicates the existences of something else. By functioning as subtexts, the titles of the photographs suggest ironic allusions and unexpected twists. The act of appreciating the images prompts viewers to make assumptions, which they then use to interpret the text below, often

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 407.

revisiting both the image and text for further evaluation.

Compared to Knorr, Richon focuses more on the psychological responses to the spectator. In Richon's photoworks, the spectator plays a key role in using captions. As he argues, the caption is 'a form of control but its effect is to release the spectator.'²⁷⁷ In other words, the spectator's observation can free the captions from controlling time and meaning. Additionally, as Richon argues, the caption helps to 'point to the illusion involved in desire.'²⁷⁸ It is likely that the depictions of images in captions can trigger the perception of illusion and desire, which are both possible psychological responses. The psychological reactions and perceptions can shape an analogy between the actions of spectators and their altered perceptions following specific analytical moments.

Based on the above analysis, my exploration of the relationship between text and image in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr points to several key distinctions. By delving into Richon's exploration, the texts offer essential hints into deciphering the meanings behind the images. Moreover, the differences between text and image introduce uncertainty and discontinuousness in the interpretation of images. From Knorr's perspective, the text can be interpreted as a form of literal writing that plays with the concept of light and its absence. The light not only concerns the technical apparatus (as might be assumed by historians of photog.) but that it (also) points to a

²⁷⁷ Richon and Adams, *After D. L.*, p. 12.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

metaphoric level. It might suggest an illumination from a cultural connotation of a phrase, to address complex social, historical, financial, or philosophical issues. Their investigations have advanced knowledge of the interplay between text and image, leading to the development of individualised allegorical interpretations in their photoworks.

Part 3: The Interplay of Form and Content

Through my exploration, the third allegorical characteristic centres on the fusion of form and content in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr. This perspective is inspired by Mirelle Thijsen's essay 'The Aim of Allegory, Somewhere Between Form and Content'. A noteworthy aspect of Thijsen's investigation is the absence of any discussion on the relationship between form and content in photography. Her explorations of the feminist perspective, matter, and iconologia suggest that form, primarily visual elements, constitute the resultant image. The content is not given much focus, which may refer to the meaning derived from the visual elements. The structure of photography, as represented by form, serves to encapsulate the formation of content. The investigation of form and content in photography can be thematically explored due to the diverse organisation of visual elements and the varied meanings they generate. In this sense, in my view, the form in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr is revealed through shared subject matter, primarily taxidermized animals and the academy, thus showcasing the distinct allegorical content of photography. The content of their photoworks shows slight discrepancies across the three projects.

The field of photography commonly acknowledges that the form and content of a photograph are separate entities, each conveying unique perspectives and meanings. A photograph's form is defined by its physical components, such as its organisation, and balance of light and shadow. The content of a photograph is centred on the values,

ideas, and emotions that the form conveys through its portrayal of objects, people, and scenery. By extensively scrutinising the writings and creations of Richon and Knorr, I argue that the technical composition does not fully act as an indicator of the differences between form and content. The division between form and content is not always clearly defined, and their distinctions may pertain to thematic elements. Compared to technical differentiations, the thematic distinctions of form and content in their photographs help to explain the allegorical manifestations.

Through further investigation, Victor Burgin's analyses of the relationship between form and content presents compelling evidence for my argument. For Burgin, form and content are mutually dependent, and 'there is no content without a form, and no form which does not shape a content.'²⁷⁹ From this, the interrelatedness between form and content weakens the full persuasiveness of their technical distinctions. From my perspective, how Richon and Knorr present their photoworks indicates their ability to effectively convey ideas and concepts utilising shared elements. The way of conveying directly impacts the intended message of a photograph. Burgin argues that the 'devices' can 'enable photography to say things.'²⁸⁰ I think, the 'device' here can be interpreted as a form. In a photograph, the physical appearance of shape and object is known as form. The device serves as a mechanism for individuals to visually observe objects. Additionally, Burgin identifies the camera and the photographer as the primary components of the device. The communicative devices of the

²⁷⁹ Victor Burgin, 'Art, Common Sense and Photography', in *The Camerawork Essays* (London, Rivers Oram Press, 1997), pp. 74-85 (p. 78).

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

photographer evolve from the multiple relationships of the visual elements in the image. The components that make up an image are interconnected and cannot be viewed separately. In this respect, according to Burgin, content may be ‘produced as deliberately as one may plan the formal composition of the photograph.’²⁸¹ In addition, content is created by ‘additional manipulations in the form of substitutions and permutations of elements.’²⁸² Burgin proposes a possibility that content, like form, can be arranged intentionally. It is like the deliberate arrangement of elements in a formal photograph. The content constituting formal elements can be substituted and permuted in various forms. The manipulation of elements determines both form and content in photographs.

Based on Burgin’s discussion, the composition and combinations of elements significantly shape the structure of a photograph and its content. The content of a photograph is greatly determined by the organisation of the form. Both form and content provide a solid basis for referencing the opposite site. In this sense, thematic distinctions provide a stronger depiction of the division between form and content in photography. In the following section, in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr, their shared uses of taxidermized animals can be viewed as a form which develops into different content. The content of Knorr’s photoworks is manifested in the recontextualisation of history and confrontation between the observer and observed artworks. Richon’s photoworks demonstrate the construction of a fictitious academy.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸² Ibid.

Using the Taxidermized Animals as a Form

Upon examining the three allegory-related photographic projects, a shared element emerges: taxidermy. The frequent use of taxidermized animals is understood as a form in the photoworks of Richon and Knorr in the three projects. Their use of stuffed animals has distinct focuses. Knorr uses taxidermized animals to prompt viewers to contemplate the connection between the presented elements, such as artworks, and their surroundings. Using stuffed animals and diverse locations, Knorr explores the relationship between the artworks and spaces in which they exist, such as museums and academies. The viewer's involvement is integral to the overall viewing experience. In contrast, Richon's photoworks focus on exploring the function of objects and the connection between reality and representation in photography, thus constructing a fictitious academy that does not exist in reality.

By utilising preserved animals, Knorr creates elusive viewing spaces for the viewer, like those found in museums and academies (One example can be seen in Figure 38). In her view, taxidermy 'represents animals as idealised representations of the live referent', and it is 'a simulacrum of "life"'.²⁸³ Taxidermy utilises the technique of mounting an animal's skin in a lifelike pose to maintain its body. The taxidermized animals are markers which denotes objects or concepts in life, and they highlight a division between realistic objectivity and artistic representation. Knorr's photographs exhibit stuffed animals seamlessly blending into pre-selected architectural locations,

²⁸³ Knorr and Comay, 'Natural Histories', p. 56.

such as museums, art establishments, and personal mansions. *The Genius of the Place* shows a chimpanzee standing in front of two statues at Osterley Park and House, facing away from the viewer. The concept of ‘the genius of the place’ denotes the presiding god or spiritual force. The use of homo erectus seems to challenge the carefully arranged art scene. Knorr’s investigations of taxidermy, objects, and spaces attempt to disrupt the institutional gaze (the viewer is not allowed simply to examine the captured objects and scenes), which constructs diverse allegorical scenes filled with imagination.



Figure 38. Karen Knorr, *The Genius of the Place*, 1986-1990, cibachrome print, 100 cm x 100 cm, *Other Than Itself*

By incorporating historical artworks and different groups of viewers, Knorr's depictions reveal that museums are characterised by an underlying sense of power and dominance, by the control of the viewing encounter and demonstrations of time. Allegory is manifested through the varying functions of the museum. Several museums are chosen as settings and scenes in *Connoisseurs*. Besides providing exhibitions, museums act as recreational hubs for family events, transforming into multifaceted institutions. The variety of functions within the exhibited spaces influences the viewing and reading of photographs accordingly. Osterley House, showcased in *Connoisseurs*, exemplifies a grand mansion with gardens, a park, and extensive farmland. Robert Adams built this elegant landmark, known as the 'palace of palaces', with the purpose of hosting and impressing the social and professional contacts of the Child family during the late 18th century. The palace also amassed significant collections from the mid-17th century, such as pieces of silver, lacquer furniture, and porcelain. The main challenge during the construction of this museum was obtaining the necessary financial support. The owner holds enough financial influence to govern the selection, portrayal, and maintenance of artefacts and collections. As Kathy Kubicki argues, Knorr's subversions of the museum can be seen "via the French philosopher Michel Foucault's writing on power and his singularity to see through the fictions of the structures of society, and the need to subvert those restrictions."²⁸⁴ Foucault investigates the complexities of power within society, with a focus on its pervasive influence as a network of interdependent relationships that

²⁸⁴ Kathy Kubicki. 'The Photographic Practice of Karen Knorr', Karenknorr.com, n.d. <<https://karenknorr.com/writings/the-photographic-practice-of-karen-knorr/>> [accessed 4 December 2023].

surpass individual or group possession and infiltrate various social structures. In this context, Knorr strives to reveal and challenge the hierarchical control of power through her museum site creations.

In addition to power and hierarchical control, the museum owners shown in *Connoisseurs* held the authority to decide which artworks would be displayed and when they would be presented to the public. The dominance of the museums played a significant role in shaping the collections visible to viewers. The configuration and ornamentation of the museum spaces significantly influenced the interpretation and appreciation of the exhibited artworks. By displaying objects and figures, the viewer could experience aristocratic refinement and aesthetic appeal through what can be considered a ‘masterpiece’. In my view, the museum’s development of new areas showcases an allegorical quality, specifically a manifestation of time. In *Connoisseurs*, the museums construct representations of the past in line with contemporary ideologies of artistic appreciation of artworks. The museum represents a carrier of time. Knorr’s practice challenges this feature of time in photography. Through her examination of the relationship between taxidermy and museums, she creates a temporal fusion of past and present. The contemplation of the structure of time and the changes in viewing the photographs lead to the formation of allegorical spaces in Knorr’s practice.

Apart from displaying different museum spaces, Knorr also explores the academy as a

significant form for allegorical reading. Her series *Academies* addresses the shifting role of artistic institutions in the developing history of artistic education in the 16th and 21st centuries. As Knorr believes, the academy is the place that provides fresh and valuable knowledge. This location also holds the potential for becoming a hub where established ideas, concepts, and academia intersect and become institutionalized. The 16th century saw the rise of academies across Europe aimed at cultivating a sense of national heritage. The encounter between the romantic revolution of the 18th century and the traditional values of the academy was a prominent feature in the history of development. As early as the 19th century, the academies critiqued Eurocentric values (which they also inculcated). Knorr's project explored the academy's status in the 21st century, including 'its exclusions, contradictions and changing formations.'²⁸⁵ From this, the academy is struggling against a vast array of restrictions, paradoxes, and constantly evolving structures throughout history. The dynamic transformation is perceived as an embodiment of allegorical features since an entity experience ongoing modification in the allegorical structure.

In comparison, Richon's projects depict taxidermized animals, objects, and indoor and outdoor environments that are less intricate and show fewer signs of post-production manipulation. The still lives in *After D.L.* and *Academies* are photographed in the studio, and the photographs in *Imprese* are taken in outdoor landscapes.

The subject being photographed, whether a studio or a landscape, has a restricted

²⁸⁵ This comment is provided by the unpublished manuscript of Karen Knorr's introduction to the exhibition *Virtue & Vice*.

level of human involvement. Through Richon's portrayal, the depicted animals and observable objects become diversified due to the introduction of new insightful perspectives, such as biological, philosophical, literary, and psychological resonances. Rather than using traditional human portraits, Richon incorporates a variety of animals into his photoworks. The animals exhibit behaviour similar to that of models in a photo shoot. The biological, philosophical, literary, and psychological aspects of animal mimicry emphasise allegorical characteristics, as animals prove challenging to comprehend from a singular viewpoint. With Richon's allegories, stuffed preserved animals and ordinary objects are used to challenge the representations of photography as artifices; that is, they behave as if they were there in reality. Through the taxidermized animals, the representation and illusionism of photography are challenged. Hence, Richon's photographs depict a constant interplay between the movements of animals and the concepts of soul, animation, and inanimation.

Richon's incorporation of animals and ordinary objects in his still life works can be understood as a form. The content is to encourage reflection on how objects play a crucial role in the evolution of photographic languages. One typical example is the establishment of a fictitious academy. The animals appear misplaced in the setting, which goes against the traditional emphasis on the subject in photography. Richon's perspectives on the objects are insightful. Influenced by Jean Baudrillard's theory of reversing the object and subject in photography, Richon believes that a represented object has priority over the observing subject. It is the objects that place us as viewing

subjects.²⁸⁶ Moreover, for Richon, objects take precedence over our gaze. Before the viewer gazes at objects, they already exist and have been gazed at by others. The gaze of others greatly determines the viewer's gaze. As a result of the gaze of the objects, the subject is eclipsed.

In my view, in Richon's allegorical world, objects perceived by viewers do not align with those found in the physical world. They are just pretending to be what they are. The three projects depict objects in a manner that deviates from their usual connotations in real life. Through Richon's artwork, objects create a sense of familiarity and strangeness. The various objects with different attributes, interpreted in words, become clues for the photographer, and builds allegorical scenes for the viewer. Richon's establishment of the academy, a fictional institution rooted in Plato's ideas, reveals his interpretation of objects. The focus of Richon's project, *The Academy*, was on academic art based on Platonic principles like truth and the ideal. The name is thought to originate from a 17th-century Dutch academic treatise that assigns symbolic value to every minute detail of Plato's 'Garden of Study'. There is no historical evidence to support the establishment of this institution. Therefore, Richon's creation of an academy can be considered fictitious.

²⁸⁶ Richon, *Real Allegories*, p. 165.

Knorr's Recontextualisation of History

By incorporating taxidermy, Knorr skilfully investigates the presentation of historical artworks in exhibition spaces. Contemporary interpretations of historical masterpieces and the environments where they are exhibited, primarily museums, demonstrate a recontextualisation of history. The main aspect of this perspective is the shift in the artworks through contemporary and historical lenses. In Knorr's view, a photograph evokes history in its double temporality, which means 'the past is in the present just as in a sci-fi sense, maybe, the present is also in the past.'²⁸⁷ From this, the past and the present are inextricably linked, demonstrating their inseparability. The 'sci-fi sense' here revolves around the ramifications of factual or imagined aspects of the past and present. In this sense, a temporal separation exists between what is visible to the viewers and its historical context, serving as a reminder of the past. The imaged aspects of the past and present serve as a recontextualisation of history, demonstrating a revisitation and reformulation.

The recontextualisation of history in Knorr's photoworks is revealed through her reimagined nature. As indicated by Knorr, the issue of history is closely linked to nature. In her words, nature can 'reveal a certain temporality or historicity'.²⁸⁸ In this sense, Knorr's depiction of nature serves as a historical reflection. Instead of simply imitating nature, her photograph *Antiquity as a Guide to Nature* (Figure 39) reveals the convergence of nature by manipulating historical artworks and settings, resulting

²⁸⁷ Knorr and Comay, 'Natural Histories', p. 56.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

in a reconstruction of natural elements. Knorr's restoration of nature offers a fresh perspective on interpreting historical artworks. *Antiquity as a Guide to Nature* showcases how the central gallery of Chiswick House has integrated an apse from the ancient Roman Temple of Venus and Roma. Except for two statues of Mercury and Venus, the photograph includes no figures. While Mercury exudes confidence, Venus appears bashful as she shields herself with her hands, indicating potential gender discrepancies in behaviour. It seems that women and men naturally demonstrate differences, regardless of the cultural milieu in which they reside. In addition, the centre of the wall features a replica of Venetian artist Sebastiano Ricci's rendition of Paolo Veronese's painting *The Defense of Scutari* (1585). English painter William Kent is widely recognised as the creator of the side paintings, which depict crusader tents adorned with double cornucopias and Turkish prisoners captured with their weapons and armour. The painting on display represents the natural conditions of history at that time. The antiquity formed by the statues of Venus and Roma and Veronese's painting.

The photowork captures all objects in a confined area of the gallery and within the frame of the photograph. Various historical works originate from different eras and nations, each exhibiting unique progressions. When moving to new surroundings, the original historical inspirations, contexts, and connotations of the artworks diminish in importance, leading to a suspension of their historical contexts. Disruption is therefore a manifestation in the portrayal of nature in historical works. This interruption of the

formation of several artworks results in the reconstruction of a single work in its historical environment, which is considered to be an allegorical quality.



Figure 39. Karen Knorr, *Antiquity as a Guide to Nature*, 1986, cibachrome print, 100 cm x 100cm, *Other Than Itself*

In my view, Knorr's recreation of nature and recontextualisation of history challenges photography's historical role in preserving nature. Since its invention, photography's primary function has been to present an objective view of the natural environment. Knorr claims that the 'whole notion of photography as slavish imitator of nature is one that plagued the beginnings of photography.'²⁸⁹ In this respect, from its inception, photography has been closely associated with mimicking nature. The slavishness suggests photography's blind imitation of the natural world. Additionally, in Comay's conversation with Knorr, Knorr argues that 'photography is part of the impulse to freeze temporality which can be found in nature petrified or preserved, whether through taxidermy or aspic.'²⁹⁰ Through this argument, the petrified and preserved features of nature are associated with the photograph's ability to freeze time. By utilising historical objects and artworks, the viewer can uncover the process of nature's petrification and preservation, as these creatures are integral components of the historical natural world. The preserved animals serve as a tangible representation of the passage of time. Through the captured images of recreated 'natural scenes', the viewer can acknowledge the power of photography in preserving and recontextualising historical artworks.

The reconstruction of the tradition also reinforces the recontextualisation of history. Traditionally, historical works are viewed and appreciated within protective methods. The recognised statues were sometimes secured in an exhibition area and labelled as

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

untouchable. The traditions of presenting artworks are discreet. Knorr's photowork *The Invention of Tradition* (Figure 40) illustrates the extensive collection of art belonging to Sir John Soane, who was buried at the site of his home, which has remained intact since his death in 1837. The crowded space reveals Soane's passion for collecting copies of artworks.²⁹¹ Throughout history, the Sir John Soane Museum has played a crucial part in developing and recognising the British Museum. In Knorr's portrayal, historical objects are shown to have their inherent meanings in relation to historical narratives. The observers are exposed to a novel approach to viewing historical sculptures through the arrangement of plaster casts and art objects on the columns at the Sir John Soane Museum.

²⁹¹ Strictly speaking, many of the objects in the museum are copies.



Figure 40. Karen Knorr, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1989, dye destruction print, mounted, 60.3 cm x 59.5 cm, *Other Than Itself*

In my view, many sculptures in *The Invention of Tradition* are piled up as if to form a ‘spectacle’, which broke the concept of the ‘invented tradition’, suggested by the photowork’s title. Knorr does not offer a thorough explanation of the concept.

According to Eric Hobsbawm, the concept means ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature.’²⁹²

The established values and behavioural norms are instilled through repeated actions, maintaining continuity with past practices. From my perspective, in Knorr’s practice, the creation of tradition could hold dual implications. On the one hand, traditionally, each statue was placed with respect in a discrete location. Nonetheless, in the interior of the Sir John Soane Museum, various statues are situated in a relatively crowded place to show the collections of Soane.²⁹³ Knorr’s practice reflects a deviation from the conventional method of presenting artworks. Additionally, the presentation of historical artworks in contemporary museums exerts an impact on their perceived significance. The museum has an impact on how historical pieces are presented and viewed. In this sense, traditional ways of presenting and seeing artworks are challenged in the context of recreations presenting history.

Knorr’s recontextualisation of history includes the revisitation and reconstruction of historical creations and significance. In the photowork *Shattering an Old Dream of Symmetry* (Figure 41), a woman in a black suit, acts like a hunter, and holds a bow firmly. The woman’s action of gripping the arrow serves as a reference to the statue of

²⁹² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.

²⁹³ The information is acquired from the Sir John Soane Museum’s official website.

Diana, the huntress, who holds her arrow high towards the sky. Roman and Greek traditions state that Artemis, also known as Diana in Roman mythology, was primarily revered as a goddess of hunting and the natural world. Throughout history, her status as a huntress defies many gender classifications that have traditionally been applied to women and men. Additionally, the grey background with black and red detailing of the photograph was taken in the Etruscan Dressing Room at Osterley Park. There are several distinctive features to the rooms at Osterley Park, such as the elaborate but restrained plasterwork; the rich, highly varied colour schemes; as well as a degree of coordination between the decor and furnishings that are relatively rare in English neoclassical interiors. A balanced layout of two chairs sits on either side of the doorway, adorned with decorative motifs from the wall's mural reliefs. The Etruscan vases inspired the oil lamps, vases, and urns on the wall in William Hamilton's collection. The portrayal of women aimed to challenge the authority and dominance of the male-centric society, disrupting the idealization of symmetry of rights between men and women. In this image, allegory creates a blurred boundary between the historical, mythical story and the figure's expression of symmetry. Therefore, Knorr's recontextualisation of history is manifested through her reimagined nature and the invented tradition.



Figure 41. Karen Knorr, *Shattering an Old Dream of Symmetry*, 1986-1988, cibachrome print, mounted on aluminium and metal, 86 cm x 86 cm, *Other Than Itself*

Knorr's Confrontation Between the Observer and Observed

Artworks

The other content Knorr considers is the role of the viewer vis-à-vis the display arrangement and the setting of the artworks they are observing, as well as the identity of the viewers. In contrast to conventional photography, which focuses on the content of an image, Knorr's pieces highlight the spaces in which artworks are displayed and the role of connoisseurs in the viewing process. The confrontation between the observer and observed artworks is understood as an allegorical quality in her practice. The emphasis on display space and the viewers provides an allegorical reading of the exhibited works since this particular way of reading rethinks what the photograph presents visually.

Knorr's photoworks *Eve Listening to the Voice* (Figure 42) and *Imitation of Life* initiate conversations between the reproduction and transmission of artworks. As seen in the photoworks, the historical works are displayed in an exhibited space, possibly a corner of a museum or a gallery. Historically, artist Edward Hodges Baily sculpted the statue *Eve Listening to the Voice* in 1842, portraying the moment from the Bible in which Eve listened to Adam's voice in the Garden of Eden, inspired by John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). Apart from the statue, the exhibited scene is adorned with two busts portraying Helen of Troy, one by Antonio Canova and the other by John Gibson. According to history, Helen of Troy was a symbol of ultimate beauty, and it was through her sufferings that the Greeks and Trojans eventually fought a war.

The confined area exacerbates Helen's sense of helplessness, which contradicts the optimism she had previously linked to her past. The photowork is perceived differently when viewed in a different space.



Figure 42. Karen Knorr, *Eve listening to the Voice*, 1994-2001, colour cibachrome mounted on aluminium, with brass plaque, 110 cm x 110 cm, *Virtue & Vice*

Similarly, *Imitation of Life* (Figure 43) features a stunning portrayal of a sleeping Nymph by Italian artist Antonio Canova (1820-1824). The figure displays a combination of opposing traits, appearing asleep and in motion, hidden and exposed, occupying a private territory while also being observable to others, and embodying elements of femininity and masculinity. In the past, the Nymphs were regarded as divine beings representing the abundance of nature, including elements like water and trees. It seems ironic to have such a vibrant figure on a leash, bound in a viewing space. The allusion to mimesis probably presents an additional interpretation of the title. The piece is titled *Imitation of Life*, and within the realm of art, the phrase is commonly associated with the concept of ‘mimesis.’ The concept of mimesis pertains to the probability of the authenticity or inauthenticity of the depicted setting. In this sense, Knorr’s photoworks reveal the limitations imposed on the reading of artworks, which presupposes the arrangement in the exhibition spaces.



Figure 43. Karen Knorr, *Imitation of Life*, 1994-2001, colour cibachrome mounted on aluminium, with brass plaque, 110 cm x 110 cm, *Virtue & Vice*

The way in which artworks are perceived is influenced by both the environment in which they are exhibited and the individuals observing them. The title of Knorr's series *Connoisseurs* alludes to her examination of the role of the observer in the interpretations of the photoworks. The term 'connoisseurs' refers to individuals who have attained their status as collectors and art enthusiasts through the acquisition of art collections. The perspectives of connoisseurs are vital in the analysis of the artworks. In the field of art connoisseurship, there is a community of individuals with exceptional abilities in the art of criticism, namely art critics. *Analysis of Beauty* (Figure 44) highlights two male figures clad in suits and ties and holding telescopes amidst a collection of paintings. The appreciation and examination of artworks involved using astronomical and maritime optics (such as telescopes, compasses, spyglasses, and other accessories). Engravings and partially open books are also positioned near the two figure's feet. The stillness of artworks does not diminish their importance for those passionate about appreciating beauty, as they represent the longing and creativity involved in the search for aesthetic beauty. The introduction of connoisseurs in the photoworks opens a new viewing space for the viewers. In the viewing process, the viewers not only focus on the depicted elements in the photoworks, but also the connection formed between the connoisseurs and the objects being depicted.



Figure 44. Karen Knorr, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 1989, cibachrome print, 88.9 cm x 88.9 cm, *Other Than Itself*

The connoisseurs are comprised not only of art critics but also of the viewer. In the photowork *Pleasures of Imagination* (Figure 45), a male figure appreciates several landscape paintings. Several encounters happen between the display of the work in the museum, the gaze of the viewer, and the settled viewing environment. These shown pieces encourage the viewer to reflect on the dynamic between the spectator and the artwork within a confined setting. Given the two artworks, the change in the viewer's identity brings about a transformation in their perception towards artistic pieces. Therefore, for those with an appreciation for artistic creations, such as art critics or spectators, the manner in which the work is displayed offers an allegorical interpretation of the viewer's viewing experience.



Figure 45. Karen Knorr, *Pleasures of Imagination*, 1990, cibachrome print, 88.3 cm x 88.3 cm, *Other Than Itself*

To conclude, the allegorical features are understood as the recontextualisation of history, and the observations of the artwork and its observers. The museum serves as more than just a venue for viewing art; it facilitates significant historical interactions. The museum setting allows Knorr to present historical artworks in a novel manner, reflecting her new interpretations. The recontextualisation of historical traditions also imposes the constraints of viewing artworks, which reveals the established power and control of these traditions. Allegory can also be observed through the various ways artworks have been displayed in the past. The allegory's enchantment lies in its ability to create varying connotations and perspectives from a singular context. Moreover, the role of connoisseurs serves as a crucial manifestation of allegory. The museum creates a space for art collectors and viewers to openly communicate their ideas, values, and reactions towards the artworks on display. Through Knorr's examination of the museum, photography serves as a tool to uncover overlooked concerns that extend beyond the presentation.

Richon's Construction of a Fictitious Academy

In contrast to Knorr's realistic methods of exhibiting artworks in traditional museums in *Academies*, Richon's portrayal of the academy is fictitious. Richon's construction of the academy draws inspiration from Plato's idea of an academy and Laurence Sterne's novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, which share a common theme of fiction. Using the taxidermized animals and various ordinary objects as a form, Richon's allegorical manifestation of the content is to create a fictitious academy. In *The Academy*, Richon shows taxidermized animals (such as a monkey, a peacock, a crocodile, a pangolin, a bird) and ordinary objects (such as a book, bookshelf, fractal geometry, glass vase, glass cup, tellurion, and sketches). The series also contains six word-as-photographs. His account indicates that six sections of texts pertain to the blank page in Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759). Richon's photographs create a fictitious academy to specifically target and discuss the meanings generated from images.

Richon's *The Academy* is seen as an exploration of fiction. According to Richon, *The Academy* is 'dealing with a work of fiction, disguised as a scholarly treatise: an allegorical mode'.²⁹⁴ From this, an extension to fiction is a feature of Richon's photoworks. Richon's construction of fiction is primarily derived from a reference to Plato's concept of academy. The establishment of Plato's academy marked a turning point in the history of higher learning in the Western world, introducing a new era in

²⁹⁴ Richon, *Real Allegories*, p. 17.

ancient Greek education. In Plato's academy, each aspect of architecture, botanical design, sculpture, and decoration within the academy holds a concealed emblematic value. Additionally, the objects and animals found in Richon's academy can be read as signs, and Richon emphasises that 'their hieroglyphic meanings are quite arbitrary'.²⁹⁵ In line with Plato's philosophy, animals are used metaphorically. They help develop an understanding of the hierarchy with humans and feature in discussions about the question of sophistry and rhetoric. The concept of the academy was employed to examine the notion of otherness, specifically in relation to the Sophist. However, no academies that cater to animals have been discovered. The depictions of animals and scenes in Plato's academy are not based on reality.

Based on the above background discussion, Richon's series *The Academy* is created in the shut-off space of the photographic studio, utilising a dark background. The constructed environments offer uninterrupted areas for placing animals and exhibited items, enabling the focal point to remain the centre of attention without disruptions.

The animals' vitality contributes to a subtle ambience in the studio setting. An opposing dynamic exists between the animate and inanimate elements, as the photographed creatures have been subjected to taxidermy. The photographs employ animals as enigmatic symbols to delve into the artificial nature of representations.

Richon highlighted that 'the reader is alerted to the arbitrary nature of the emblem.'²⁹⁶

The arbitrariness suggests that the emblem lacks any definitive guidelines or

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

justifications that would determine its form or structure. In this sense, Richon's explorations of fiction in the photoworks encourage readers to participate in the deciphering of images actively, since a definitive answer does not exist.

As previously mentioned, the texts in *The Academy* make reference to the blank pages found in Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*, where the story is frequently interrupted by digressions. Sterne is a preeminent figure in the realm of hypertext and non-linear narrative techniques. By skilfully weaving together texts and images, Richon constructs an allegorical world based on Plato and Sterne, connecting the photographed elements and the observers. Richon's photographs contain elements that convey both targeted and discursive messages. The artwork, *The Passion for Mourning* (Figure 46), serves as an example of how targeted meaning can be created. Sterne's novel contains a page filled with black ink in Chapter XII. The focus of the chapter is on the passing of the parson Yorick. As a tribute to his dear friend Yorick, Eugenius engraved these words on Yorick's tombstone: 'Alas, poor Yorick!'²⁹⁷ In this context, Richon's image depicts a crocodile lying on velvet; the accompanying text is 'the passion for mourning'. In *Imprese*, it is noted that the crocodile's tears or grief may be indicative of sexual desire or the act of praying. In this sense, combining the content of Sterne's novel, Richon's text 'The Passion for Mourning' and the depiction of a crocodile may imply that Eugenius's intense grief over the protagonist Yorick is not genuine. By analysing the description of Sterne's novel and Richon's image and

²⁹⁷ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1935), p. 32.

text, the generated meaning is targeted.



Figure 46. Olivier Richon, *The Passion of Mourning*, 1985, C-type photograph, 67 cm x 86 cm and B & W photograph, 66 cm x 56 cm, *Virtue & Vice*

The viewer plays a key role in the acquisition of meanings in both textual and visual depictions, which contributes to constructing a fictitious academy. In Sterne's novel, the characters he portrays are attached to the world using metaphor and allusion. The utilisation of a restricted vocabulary allows the reader to create interpretations and use their imagination. Likewise, Richon's analysis of the written accounts in Sterne's book captivates the viewer's imagination, transforming their gaze into allegorical interpretations of the visuals. The meanings generated from images are discursive, without definite answers. In the sixth volume of *Tristram Shandy*, 'Gentleman', the reader is given a blank page on which to paint a desirable woman according to 'his' preferences. In Sterne's words, 'as like as your mistress as you can – as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you.'²⁹⁸ The narrative of keeping away from the

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 429.

wife's description is outside the bounds of morality. Richon does not explicitly indicate which chapter his images and texts relate to, but viewers are able to infer interpretations from the visual and textual elements present in his photoworks.

The textual depictions of *Tristram Shandy*, along with Richon's caption/title, and the accompanying image, incite diverse perspectives and meanings in the reader's allegorical interpretations of the photoworks. Richon's text 'The Indecency of the Word' suits the scene described in Sterne's chapter. As shown in the accompanying image (Figure 47), a monkey stands next to an easel, and gazes at someone who looks towards it. Adjacent to the monkey is a bookshelf and a book. Like Sterne's blank page, Richon's texts and images encourage readers to reflect on the vision. The title appears to set the stage for reflections on its implications and the accompanying image, indicating a connection to Sterne's 'Description' scenario. Richon's monkey appears to be incapable of uttering indecent language. An examination of the ideas of French critic Denis Diderot in the 18th century reveals valuable insights into the nature and origins of indecency in visual depictions. He doubts that a given expression can be regarded as decent or indecent. In this sense, whether the monkey or the unknown texts on the easel can speak with indecent words is ambiguous.



Figure 47. Olivier Richon, *The Indecency of the Word*, 1985, C-type photograph, 67 cm x 86 cm and B & W photograph, 66 cm x 56 cm, *Virtue & Vice*

The representation of a fictitious academy can be divided into two aspects. The method of taking photographs differs from the traditional approach to documentation. Although inspired by reality, the scenes portrayed in the photographs are ultimately fictitious. Using a fictional approach offers fresh insights into the supposed truth presented in traditional photographic representations. In other words, Richon plays with the rhetorical power of photographic myth. In addition, the juxtaposition of bewildering titles and cryptic props demonstrates the intricate interplay between text and image in photography. The world created by Richon shows elements, including monkeys and crocodiles, that appear to separate from the framed composition. In this manner, the interpretations formed from literary and photographic depictions can be either targeted or discursive.

Richon's construction of a fictitious academy is mainly derived from his

understanding of the contradictions between reality and representation in photography. According to Richon, a photograph possesses the characteristic of indexicality, representing a distinct rhetoric within the image. In his words, the indexicality 'accounts for a reality effect, which includes details and fragments which are recorded yet do not serve communication or even signification.'²⁹⁹ The 'indexicality' creates a sense of reality, and the captured scenes lack communicative intent. The 'reality effect' also suggests a discrepancy between reality and its effects. In other words, the things in real life hold indicative significances, but there are gaps between their designated meanings and tangible existences. This feature is considered to be allegorical, so Richon's depiction of a fictitious world reveals his antagonism towards the reality in the world. In my view, the fictitious nature of Richon's work serves to disrupt traditional methods of interpretation. As previously mentioned, Betterton argues that allegory serves as a means of avoiding a literal understanding of images, thus requiring photography to be reinvented in a more intricate and coded manner. Richon's investigation into the fictitious representation of the academy is one example of the new modes that will arise in the making and interpretation of images.

²⁹⁹ Olivier Richon, 'Image and Discourse', *Images of Thought*, ed. Yve Lomax, 2 (2000), pp. 23-37.

Conclusion

The significance of allegory within American photography has been widely acknowledged but there has been less scholarship attending to how this debate translated into debates in Britain. Under the influence of the developments of the 1980s and 1990s, allegory acquired characteristic forms in the British context. Critical art and photography had a more consistent social-theoretical and historically reflective orientation and gave more attention to theories and philosophies of visual representation.

Although drawing from the same pool of inspiration (such as the work of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man), American and British scholars display discernible differences in how they approach the relationship between allegory and photography. The understanding of photography as an allegorical art varies between American and British contexts. Owens contends that photography's allegorical essence is in its acknowledgment of the fleeting nature of things and the yearning to immortalize them. The focus of this perspective revolves around the fundamental qualities of photography, highlighting its capacity to accurately record an array of subjects and moments. In contrast, John X. Berger's approach to photography's verisimilitude diverges significantly from Owens's perspective. He contends that photography's ability to mirror reality often falls short of providing a complete representation; it therefore sparks contemplation on interpretations that go beyond the surface, serving as a vehicle for allegory. In the specific examples of my project, discrepancies are

observed in the way allegory is approached within the cultural frameworks of both British and American contexts. In the realm of American photography, a significant emphasis is placed on delving into the unique individualities and distinct identities of the creators, as well as photography's diverse language of expression. In contrast, the British photographic context often showcases a deliberate incorporation of examples of historical allegory to engage with contemporary politics and social critique.

My analysis of allegory within the British framework shows that the interpretations of allegorical photography can be divided into these aspects: temporality; photography's eclectic and contradictory features; the interplay between words, images, and concepts. The most prominent aspect is probably its exploration of temporality, which itself could appear with different emphases. One manifestation of temporality is observed in the interplay between allegorical paintings and allegorical photographs. Discussing *Virtue & Vice*, John Stathatos suggests that the core principle of allegorical photography involves emulating the structure, visual characteristics, and subject matter inherent in allegorical paintings. Maud Sulter's exhibition was directly inspired by Caravaggio's iconic artwork titled *The Fortune Teller*. Her exhibition of the same name showcased how photography, as a form of reproduction and interpretation, captures a myriad of unique and evocative expressions. The connotations encapsulated within symbols, emblems, and allegory serve to enrich the communicative power inherent in the artistic traditions of paintings and photographic portrayals. The historical paintings spark creativity and ideas to produce

contemporary photographs, however, photography boasts the remarkable aptitude to go beyond the confines of its own physical constraints. In addition to traditional and widely recognized paintings, allegorical photography possesses the unique capacity to serve as a connecting link between historical works of art and philosophical ideas, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of visual representation. *Virtue & Vice* reveals the intricate web of connections between contemporary allegories and the vast resource of historical artistic and philosophical ideas, highlighting the influence of the past on contemporary interpretations. The intersections between historical painting and philosophical exploration (such as the cynics), pave the way for the convergence of allegorical themes in contemporary photography.

An additional element of the temporality of allegorical photography pertains to its relationship with future occurrences. In accordance with Peter Wollen's observations, photographs encapsulate a fictional diegetic temporality that spans the future, the present as a past-of-the-future construct, and the in-between-near future. These connections to the future are also present in allegory. In her review of *Virtue & Vice*, Joanne Morra, suggests that allegory links the past and the future, while situating the present elsewhere and making it take on a different form. Practically, Sulter's *The Fortune Teller* endeavors to demonstrate photography's ability and inclination to trace, map, and prophesise. The undertaking of tracing and mapping involves the exploration of historical events, present conditions, and potential future outcomes. Therefore, an important quality of allegorical photography is its ability to bridge the

gaps between the past, present, and future, and to reconstruct narratives of temporality.

Allegory and photography are intricately intertwined. As revealed by *Virtue & Vice*, in the realm of contemporary photography, allegories manifest as a dissonant blend of multitude of themes. Allegorical photography, as Mirelle Thijsen argues, is eclectic. It is constructed from elements collected from a range of sources, and these elements produce new significances. An illustration of this feature is that even simple photographic records of daily life can be regarded as allegorical. Steve Edwards makes a compelling case for the idea that the seemingly mundane instances that populate our everyday lives have the potential to spark contemplation on the progression of time and the ephemerality of human experience. A variety of disparate components have the potential to generate contradictory interpretations, stemming from their distinct characteristics and qualities. Allegorical photography, therefore, also has a contradictory quality. Another significant aspect of allegorical photography is its close associations between words, images, and concepts. In Michelle McGuire's review of *Virtue & Vice*, it was observed that photographic allegories are visual representations that encompass the entirety of a concept. This surpasses the mere reimagining of words in visual form, as images make independent contributions to meaning, conveying nuances of their own. As articulated by *Virtue & Vice*, it is crucial to understand that images, when seen as embodiments of thoughts, go beyond subtly implying words. This encompassing of the complete scope of an idea is seen as

fundamental to allegorical representation.

As revealed by the investigations of the three projects – *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, *The Fortune Teller*, and *Virtue & Vice: Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography* – allegory is closely associated with practices and writings on photography. The fifteen artists and theorists present a variety of approaches to employing and deciphering allegory in their investigation. The concept of allegory is understood as an implicit manifestation within the composition and interpretation of photography. Here, drawing from the three projects, I have tried to show that Richon and Knorr have distinctive focuses on the allegorical manifestations of photography. Richon focuses more on composition through literary and philosophical statements and contexts. By contrast, Knorr's explorations of photography are more implicit. In Knorr's work, the carefully staged scenes, the arrangements of vibrant colours, and the choices of objects provide the viewer with various enriching scenarios and vivid spaces. With the help of post-production techniques, her images emphasise the function of photography as a medium. Through Knorr's exploration, the issues of art institutions, financial capital and historical confrontations between nature and history are realised. Knorr uses photography to comment on contemporary culture, such as historical, institutional, and social aspects. In her allegorical world, photography is a tool to shed light on the unnoticed aspects of society, as 'shadows', just as the role of shadow is ignored in the established understanding of photography as 'light writing'. In the practices of Richon and Knorr,

each element in the formation and interpretation of photographs gradually fades and re-generates new forms and content. The purpose of allegory is to help us realise that any apparent object, figure, or scene possibly convey implicit and unnoticed connotations. In this sense, the significance of the manifestations of allegory in photography is that it helps us realise that there is always something hidden beyond the physical appearance.

The presence of allegory in photography carries significant implications, both in theory and in practice, within a visual culture society dominated by various methods. In a theoretical sense, using allegory has greatly enhanced the theoretical discussion regarding photography. Specifically, the inclusion of different perspectives, such as psychoanalytic, literary, or historical theories, has broadened the depth of photographic writings. In the realm of photographic practice, the emergence of allegory serves as a catalyst for photographers to critically evaluate the conventions driven by technology and aesthetics. Each element in a photograph can convey a subtler intention beyond its surface appearance. For individuals who view photographs, spectators or readers, there may perpetually exist a disparity between the realm they observe, and the depictions portrayed. The utilization of allegory allows for a multifaceted examination and understanding of a photograph. Therefore, the incorporation of allegory in photography holds considerable connotations, both theoretically and practically.

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