

# **Declining Images**

## **Photographic Visibility, Spectatorship and the Apparatus**

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## Abstract

The thesis provides a critical framework for addressing a range of modalities of visibility within the field of photography. Such modalities are explored under the rubric of three key terms: latency, inversion and sublation. Each of these terms is deployed as a means of attending to three photographic spaces: the latent image; the photographic negative; the archived photograph. The drive of the thesis moves towards a consideration of a plurality of photographic forms, among them forms that have hitherto remained marginal within representational economies that invest in definitive images.

*Declining Images* renders the photograph in its latent state as a ground for understanding the constitution of the photographer's subjectivity in relation to libidinal attachments to the image. The photographic negative acts as a means of disinvesting critical attention away from authorized images and returning instead to the processual work that sustains image-production. Alongside this, the archived image offsets its potential for visibility through an emphasis on its assignment to sequestered space.

The photographic forms outlined above, conventionally seen as tangential to the circulation of images, proffer an occasion for a series of theorizations. The discussion of latency compares the elaboration of the term within Freudian psychoanalytic theory to the conceptual reception of latent images in the field of photography. The debate around inversion addresses the refusal of the photographic negative to deliver meaning in favour of the inconclusive and the non-normative. The arguments around sublation address archivization, foregrounding the implications that Hegelian thought might have for the role of the photograph in the archive.

The work of the thesis draws one back to the constitution of the photographic act in phenomena that have been systematically occluded in the theories and histories of art and photography: the latent, the negative and the archived. Such phenomena are integral to the exploration of the epistemological entwinements of photography and visibility.



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Introduction  
**Declining Images**

*Photography has no identity, but the photograph may, for the photograph captures meaning even as the inexhaustible openness of the photographic appears to be captured and fixed by the discursive apparatus of the frame. The workings of capture, however, clearly exceed the framing of the photograph.*

John Tagg<sup>1</sup>

*In short, the photograph cannot simply be the transcription of a thing that renders itself as natural, not least because it is flat and not three-dimensional. On the other hand, photography cannot be art as it copies mechanically. That is the twofold disaster of photography. Would one want to postulate a theory of photography, then one would have to set out from this contradiction, from this difficult situation.*

Roland Barthes<sup>2</sup>

### **Topologies: Larger Pictures of Photography**

It is commonly argued that photography is without an identity. Its many faces can show up in fields of any kind and as applications of any purpose. Indeed, we are not overstating our case when we say that photographic imaging technologies and its derivatives are everywhere, doing everything. As such, the case has been argued that to critically think photography it needs first of all to be pluralized. If we want to capture some of photography's heterogeneity, then a critical approach to photography must begin with problematizing the notion of its own body as one of incoherence. There can only be *photographies* – a plural, one should note, that English grammar does not provide all too easily.<sup>3</sup>

*Photographies*, then. Think 2009: think satellites; think CCTV; think Google's online Street View; think your mobile phone; think the laptop that generates these letters and that could take an image of my writing self at any time... All terms, we realize, which neither include a reference to the 'photo' nor to the 'graph.' And yet, they are common means of photographic technology. From its inception in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when it became possible to graph the photo-image, to stabilize its transient apparition in *phōs*, photography has mutated into so many applications and devices that we can simply afford to overlook their presence – so many that I could only fail to give a comprehensive overview of them. Indeed, to

push this argument further, we could say that the term ‘photography,’ in its most immediate image as a practice (professional, amateur or neither of the two) and in its most recognizable connotation of the camera-holding, image-taking photographer, is far from being able to cover the vast universe of photographs. This is evident in the fact that we do not need to make use of the term ‘photography’ anymore yet are still able to photograph: the laptop can take my image. That this technologically inaccurate statement is acceptable in everyday parlance attests to the thorough integration of photographic apparatuses into the materials of our technologically supported lives.

As it might become clear, the notion of photography that I employ here is required to cover large and unstable grounds – it is always one of potential *photographies*. As such, I invite the reader to think big. I issue this invitation so as to think through larger pictures of photography, the ones that only begin to emerge once we look beyond the photograph’s surface or put the camera aside. To do so we must abandon the kind of narrowing vision of photography that settles to my mind all too quickly for certain tropes of practices (journalistic, artistic, amateur, familial, etc.) or for certain professional fields (medical, juridical, geographic, astronomic, etc.) or for specific forms of photographic appearance (the digital, the analogue, the fine art print, the projected slide, the moving image, etc.) – although, admittedly, such narrowing is of course done for substantiating one’s arguments with analytical precision. While such a breaking down into analyzing particular instances is often necessary to gain a sense of their specificities (historical, material, phenomenological, sociological), I do not wish to give up the potential space of thinking photography in its more comprehensive historico-technological layering. This space is, it should be stressed, *potential*, and the writings that follow reflect this. As such, *Declining Images* is not a positing of a top-down statement of what photography is; it is not a systemic vision or media theory of photography, and neither is it a historical account of photography – even though my discussions remain in dialogue with and make use of them.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the discussions in this thesis are borne by the idea of thinking photography not by isolating (or establishing) distinctive aspects such as artistic schools, historical periods, technological positions, etc., but by trying to pursue an open path that could potentially enable links, by reading specific instances, to wider issues not immediately associated with photography.

We could call this approach a topological one. With this I mean an associative approach that works through different *topoi* where pictures, concepts, narratives, metaphors and photographs of photography might resonate with others. The motive of topology, significant in psychoanalysis which imported it from mathematics, is useful not only at the descriptive level to give an overview of the structuring of the materials I have chosen to explore but is also useful in its ‘abstracting’ sense so as to disassociate ourselves from the most apparent manifestations of photography and the discourses, *pace* art history, that are invested in their containment. What is to be gained from my claim of a topological thinking of photography? Reconsidering in this introduction what one has done – and what has been done to one in the space of writing – necessitates not only a summarizing of the materials that have been brought together in the course of this project but demands also a reflection on the motivating concerns that brought this thesis into its particular shape. And this shape is best served with circumscribing it as a topological thinking of photography. Why? First of all, in thinking photography topologically I hope to move us beyond the primary means of photography such as the ‘photographer,’ the ‘picture,’ the ‘scene,’ etc., which are most regularly considered to be locus of attention of photographic enquiry. Crucially, this ‘photographic enquiry’ can be interpreted variously: not only as our theoretical enquiry here or elsewhere into photographic issues but also as the photographer’s enquiry using the photographic instruments at her disposal. It could also be read as photography’s enquiry into itself. This potential intersection of different but photographic modes of enquiry articulates also my second argument in support of the topological – that of the photographic *act* as the wider sphere of photographic operations.

### **Sensing Remotely**

‘To photograph.’ Anyone can do it – anyone who has access to its apparatus. And even if one has no access to it, or does not want to access it, one might already be a part of its picture. This is so because to photograph is also ‘to be photographed.’ By thinking in photographic acts, this passive mode begins to achieve as much importance as the active practice of photographing; it is perhaps of even greater urgency for our present times that confront and, indeed, penetrate us with ever more

refined technological apparatuses of visual imaging, be this for purposes of political surveillance, scientific research or leisurely *laissez-faire*. Yet let us not be convinced all too quickly by my words: a self-identified anthropologist observed that my claim of everybody being potentially involved in photography would be ‘too western’ an assumption, reminding me kindly of the fact that there are ‘camera-less cultures’ or people who do not practise photography at all – either, as I would argue, because it is culturally irrelevant, economically not sustainable, or socially unacceptable. Fine. But I still feel committed to my claim so as to reinstate it because what the anthropologist’s critique overlooks is the fact that photography is not just a matter of being sufficiently equipped with the necessary technology or a matter of executing the role of the photographer. One is also photographed.<sup>5</sup>

However, we should not regard this ‘being photographed’ as a passive falling prey to the ‘photographing subject.’ Rather, ‘to be photographed’ is to *practise* photography, which is to say that practising photography entails always more positions than just those that are readily visible or considered to be in action of some sort.<sup>6</sup> To think otherwise would be to reduce photography yet again to a one-dimensional entity, thinking it reductively from the most commonly assumed positions of either ‘the photographer’ or ‘the photograph.’ However, the fact that this observation comes from the anthropological corner merits further consideration given that photography and anthropology established themselves roughly at the same time.<sup>7</sup> Photographic imaging technology was instrumental for the emerging scientific discourse of anthropology in the nineteenth century; likewise, photography was thereby given one of its first prominent scientific roles. Indeed, in its early days, anthropology was still a discipline carried out without the anthropologist’s direct involvement of what we now understand as ‘fieldwork.’ It was photography that was out there in the ‘real’ world.<sup>8</sup> Photography delivered the evidence directly to the anthropologist’s desk, which he therefore did not have to leave. It was professional photographers who did the work in the field and created the photographic data for analysis.

Anthropology’s assertive seizing of photography’s services reflects the remarkable trust given to its evidentiary force and alleged objectivity – a trust that stands firmly in the line of Enlightenment’s ‘ocular epistemology’ as well as its tireless, almost obsessive work on optical devices: Spinoza made lenses, Descartes sliced ox eyes,



Kircher designed projectors. Anthropology's photography is no exception to this ideological investment in the truth of the visible. Yet, the reciprocal dealings between photography and anthropology also enabled crossovers of professional roles. If it was possible to outsource the fieldwork to 'non-anthropological' photographers, then this attests also to a historically specific shaping of anthropological research practice – in this case a practice that is brought about and built around photography so as to benefit from its produce. But the possibility for this productive division of labour rests also in photography's ability of 'remote sensing,' both in terms of its execution (the photographer can be substituted) and in terms of its photographed subject (the subject is woven into the photographic event in any case). And it is precisely because of photography's ability of doing things remotely that it would be of critical benefit for us to think of photography as act.

Photography consists of photographic acts.<sup>9</sup> If we understand the photographic act as a topology of the entire photographic operations as they originate from and relate to a specific spatiotemporal event, then the photograph, as the most visible and appreciated outcome of this act, is only one player among others. And the photographed subject, the 'scene,' becoming the referent of this photograph, is also not of such primary importance anymore. Similarly, if needed at all, the figure of the photographer, usually seen as the creative mind behind the photograph, might also not be able to claim centre stage. At the same time, we are also relieving the 'study' of photography, and photography itself, of its image-centred approach. Having cleared the photographic stage, other players of the photographic act can begin to appear. Three of these more inconspicuous players are the subjects of this thesis: the latent photograph; the photographic negative; the archived photograph. All three are part of the photographic act but are conventionally occluded in the theories and histories of art and photography. Yet they are integral to photography's doings. No functional photographic picture without its footing in an archive; no photographic print without its negative; no photographic negative without its latent impression. As such, they attest to the in-between spaces that sustain the legitimized photograph of representation: the captured but undeveloped and hence invisible image; the developed and visible but inverted image; the authorized but archived and hence indefinitely invisible image.

## The Withouts of Photography

Given the wider silence on these three ‘images’ of photography, this thesis reflects on the reasons for this silence by exploring their material and phenomenal dimensions and the discourses that frame them into this possible silence. John Tagg’s largely Foucauldian-informed engagement with photography and its linkages with the apparatuses of surveillances and social regulation, the workings of the judiciary and the productions of evidence as well as the construction of historical epistemes through photography sets the tone for my introductory discussion here.<sup>10</sup> Photography photographs anything; and insofar as it processes whatever comes before its lens it can be said that photography has no intrinsic identity to itself. One does not need to fully go with Tagg’s claim that ‘photography has no identity,’ because photography’s often attributed lack of identity can, in itself, be understood as one of the characteristics of photography. If the uncertain and always shifting identities of photography have caused photography right from its beginnings to drift between much-contested dichotomies (scientific application or artistic form? technological invention or natural discovery? analytical instrument or creative tool?) that have shaped up over time into well-rehearsed (and often clichéd) debates, becoming in themselves significant representatives of modernist discourse, theories that go under the label of the ‘postmodern’ have been keen to settle inside photography’s ambiguous locations. The ‘lack’ of a stable or coherent identity of photography has productively resonated with the political projects assembled under the aegis of the postmodern. The uncertain and malleable identities of photography have been welcomed in the articulations of the postmodern and, indeed, have helped to give form to its critical frameworks.<sup>11</sup> Emphasis has thereby been placed on stressing photography’s inseparability of the discursive and institutional terrains that lay claim to and make use of it. Thus, one cannot examine the arena of photography without considering the political, socio-economic and historical networks in which photography not only finds itself enmeshed but through which its meanings are also determined. And, as we can understand Tagg’s proposition, a critical approach to photography unfolds within this tension: between the discursive apparatus seeking to frame the photograph’s meaning and the photograph’s image that threatens to undermine such meaning-securing framings. Perhaps one might amend Tagg’s words by saying that photography has no *fixed* identity as its *identities* are always

engendered within the scopes of photographic applications and the methodological and discursive contexts in which photography is utilized.

Yet with this premise, then, it might indeed make sense to say that photography has no identity so as to bring out more clearly its involvement in producing meanings not only alongside but also always already within certain socio-cultural practices and technological fields. Tagg's take on photography can be seen as representative of the wider critical interventions that have emerged in Anglophone scholarship in the 1970s and 80s – gathering critical momentum most notably with the publications of Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977), Roland Barthes' arrival of *La chambre claire* (1980) and Victor Burgin's edited collection *Thinking Photography* (1982).<sup>12</sup> What they come to share, one might say if we are to believe in a vantage point of retrospection, is a commitment to stretch reflections on photography beyond the formation and narration of a photographic canon, the research on technological taxonomies and applications, or the campaigning for the aesthetic legitimization of the photographic picture as art.<sup>13</sup> Absorbing the politically engaged work that came out of the then emerging fields of cultural studies and poststructuralist film and gender theories, and theoretically underpinned by semiotic, psychoanalytic and Marxian models of analysis, studying photography began to matter insofar as photography was brought into relief as a complex matter that is entangled in manifold practices serving different ideological purposes. If we were to reduce the various contributions of that time to one single message, then it would have to be the following: thinking photography is not just a matter for the practitioner or the photograph's spectator precisely because photography is adoptable and adaptable to any application and discourse.

And within this (postmodern) conception of photography it would be pointless to search for a nucleus exclusive to photography such as more formal approaches to photography have attempted to do with a view, for example, to liberate photography from its subsidiary status as reproductive tool – to bring photography into its own dimension: the Stieglitzian productions of a Pictorialist aesthetics formed one such attempt to allow for the possibility of individual expressiveness in this 'mechanical' medium and to make it into something 'else'; a Szarkowskian training to give us 'the photographer's eye' was another such attempt to help us represent our worlds by way

of bringing out an ‘essence’ that would be unique to photography.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one could evoke a history of photography as the ongoing tarrying with the question of how to best serve photography’s spirit, or conversely, of how to realize photography in photographic practice – of how to do *photography photographically*. Many more ‘positioning’ manifestos, essays, curatorial projects and photographic works could be cited in the evolving histories of photography – all of them, one could say, endeavouring to grasp the diverse ‘photographic phenomena’ as they are played out in their political, societal, aesthetic and historical realities: Baudelaire’s polemics on the societal roles of photography and its rivalry with the fine art tradition;<sup>15</sup> Moholy-Nagy’s creative flirtations with photography’s technological aspects which emphasized a representation that would take into account the conditions of the industrial era;<sup>16</sup> Benjamin’s critical highlighting of photography’s democratizing potentials, its disseminatory powers but also its ontological fraying of art;<sup>17</sup> Bazin’s belief in photography’s transference of reality without the corrupting interference of the artistic hand;<sup>18</sup> Kracauer’s professing of an ideal photographic realism;<sup>19</sup> or, more recently, Wall’s call for engaging with photography as a depicting agent as exemplified in his tableau photographs.<sup>20</sup>

While my selective summoning of some of the better-known debates on photography sidesteps, admittedly, strict distinctions between the sphere of ‘photography’ on the one hand and that of ‘art’ (or other categories) on the other, at the same time as aligning dangerously close different historical contexts, I do so not with the intention to make a claim for a historiographic model of photography. Rather, what these differing and differently motivated debates in their proximity to each other can bring into view is a fascination with photography not just as a practice to be carried out, an art to be appreciated, a technology to be understood, and so on, but a photography as a critically signifying field the meanings of which need not be treated as the exclusive issue of photography *qua* photography. To put this more clearly: what does the term photography hold that no other term could harness? Or again: what can we only think through resorting to photography – through having to think photographically as it were.

With these questions I inevitably dilute my hopes in a postmodern ideal of photography that seeks to resist the temptation of a photographic essence or of

positing some kind of ontological kernel. However, I take up this gamble here so as to facilitate a space for thinking photography *elsewhere*, in places that are not tied to photography's discourse of privileged materials, procedures, etc. – not just in mere terms of its aesthetic resonance with other forms of representation (evident in artistic concepts such as painting's photographic realism) but in terms of any of its signifying echoes, metaphorical presences, analogical appearances, in short, its displacements, anywhere.<sup>21</sup> And in this sense I will shift our 'photographic' view and contend that Sigmund Freud, for example, practises photography: his familiar photographic metaphors aimed at illuminating the dynamics between unconscious wishes and their censoring are thereby as much a matter for photography as they are for psychoanalysis. Freud *does* photography – not with a camera but with a metaphor.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one could say that he does photography with psychoanalysis. At the same time we are also prompted, in this case with Freud, to consider what psychoanalysis could contribute in (re)formulating models of photography. What kinds of problematics could only be put forth under the signs of photography? To put this more drastically: what could Freud not have thought without his detour into photography? With this we return to my earlier suggestion of a topological approach to photography that seeks to hold open spaces for imagining photography otherwise, from within and without. *Declining Images* is grounded in this non-hierarchical approach to materials, practising photography with different means including the conceiving and making of photographic works, textual study, historical reflection, performative passages, and interpretative analyses of photographs, films and artworks.

### **The Photographs of Art History**

If we, arguably, succeed in turning Freud into a photographer, then we might also risk taking on a bigger case. Let us consider the topos of photography in art history – a topos where photography evidently features. Photographic images are, of course, not the exclusive issue of art history. They are relevant to most disciplines but art history, as a disciplinary discourse, concerns itself also with trying to understand their role in the wider circuits of cultural practices of representational forms – the role of the photograph in the histories of the visual arts just the most obvious one. Art history's

case is particularly interesting because, as a discipline, it studies cultural artefacts and imageries, including selected photographic ones but, as has been acknowledged in art historiographical scholarship, also relies on photography itself to effectuate those studies.<sup>23</sup> Gombrich, for instance, in conceiving *The Story of Art* imposed on himself the rule that he would not write about works he could not show in illustrations which, he admits, in turn also limited the scope of his *Story* to ‘the number of illustrations the book could hold.’<sup>24</sup> Yet let us not forget that he must have had access to such illustrations in the first place, grounding his selection on works that could or were made to enter the circuits of photographic visibility.

Yet while Gombrich is at least confident enough to let us know about the material pragmatics involved in art historical scholarship, we are pressed to ask whether one could give the technologies of documentation and reproduction a more uninhibited role in writing art’s histories instead of simply accepting the fact that these technologies are just at one’s disposal – an acceptance that becomes manifest when we consider how much we hang on to our cameras when doing research or how ready we are in ensuring that an image be taken of our object of study. As such, art history is heavily indebted to photographic technology to get its scholarship done and whose outputs can be understood, as Tagg suggests, as a disciplinary frame that secures the meaning of the objects it has studied. And in the case of studying photographs themselves, art history would equally come to function as this unique framing device that lays itself around our photographic artefacts. However, if we begin to look more genuinely at photography’s methodical place within art history, then the very disciplinary frame of art history, seeking to keep the photograph’s meaning in a certain place, must be recognized as being in itself photographically (co-)produced.

Wölfflin owes his reputation as an original art historian not only to his solid formalism but also to his innovatory slide projections and the didactical techniques they could facilitate, further reflected in his short treatises on how to best photograph sculptures.<sup>25</sup> There is also Warburg’s think tank of a ‘Mnemosyne Atlas,’ a sort of investigational and no less experimental atlas of (photographic) images of cultural motives and artefacts through which he tried to bring into critical oscillation the historico-philosophical and the iconological – a project that makes a generative use of photography which would be difficult conceive without.<sup>26</sup> Malraux gave us the

concept of a ‘museum without walls,’ casting photography in the audacious role of making available an alternative, potentially circulatory, system that would create and display the canon of great works of art.<sup>27</sup> Coming from a more institutionally critical angle, postmodern voices such as Crimp’s critiqued the conservative stance of museums in their venture to include the photographic in their collections and their inability to purge themselves from modernist conventions of nomination and display, forcing with their practices the photograph once more into the ‘precious’ site of the original and its ideological baggage.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the ordinary academic of art history working at the beginning of the twenty-first century also deserves our attention: more than ever, art historical scholarship is conducted with photographic technology. A quick glance into a teaching session confirms this: what students are mostly given to see are photographic images so as to see art history’s artworks. Images scanned from printed photographic reproductions, personal photographic archives assembled over one’s research career, digital images downloaded from online image databanks, JPEGs (short for ‘Joint Photographic Experts Group’) cobbled together from the sources the Internet makes available – all of them brought together in the demonstrative moment of ‘PowerPoint’ teaching.

However, this is not to assert that the photographic (in whatever material form it comes) deserves primacy over what it represent. And neither is it to assert that we can study the photographically represented thing only by taking a route through the phenomenological dimensions of the photograph. To restrict oneself to such orthodoxies would simply install yet another reductive move, in this case a move that leaves us devoid of the photograph’s best assets – its organizing principles of perceived transparency and the regularity of representation through which we are able to extrapolate the diverse phenomena we call ‘objectivity.’ But what we should become more assertive of is the involvement of photography in the processings of art historical research. And that this methodological involvement, be it for evidentiary, documentary, representational or disseminatory reasons, cannot but leave its own imprints on the work of art history. Photography is so integral to the practice of art history, indeed, to the possibility of keeping the main stream of art history functionally going, that photography’s presence within it goes unquestioned at most times. Just as the photographic negative is foreclosed by photographic discourse, photography’s presence is occluded by art history’s discourse or, at least, taken for

granted. Art history does talk about categories of photography, of photographic art or of art in photography, or again of fine art photography, but it shows little interest in its own photographic practice.

Thus, the call to remind art history of its own involvement in the (re)productive apparatus of photography by way of its research work is also a reminder of art history's other work, that of maintaining the art historical categories it has established in research. And to effectuate this successfully, a considerable share of its professional endeavour is bound up with looking after the images it has produced. As such, art history's work can be understood as being just as invested in documenting works photographically (to insert them into art history) as it is in keeping the gained photographs in systemic order (to protect the art historical canon). My somewhat mean-spirited confinement of art history as a causal effect of photographic doings is not so much to prove photography's indispensability for art history as meant to raise the question of how one could imagine alternative models of art history. One, for example, that theorizes its own materiality more consciously; or one without photographic images. The latter is, admittedly, hard to imagine. It is hard to do so because it is beside the point and hence a contrived gesture. But, on the other hand, we could say that my proposition remains difficult to imagine precisely because photography has been absorbed in the methodological proceedings of art history – so much so that it has disappeared in it. Hence, to differently approach my problematization of photography's relation to art history or vice versa, we could also say that the two of them have invisibly grown together. They cannot be thought as separate beings. Yet that should not exempt us from thinking what photography does to art history, how it co-produces its knowledge: not only how it represents its objects but also how it *writes* them.<sup>29</sup>

### **Writing – Photographically and Academically**

The entwined path that I have drawn between photography and art history is not to find out who might be indebted to whom but to take seriously the writing utensils that either side provides to its other. This interlaced scenario between art history and photography, between a discourse on art (art history) and a technology of discourse



(photography) but also between a technology of art (art history) and a discourse on technology (photography) is significant because it highlights their mutual insufficiencies so as to be able to exist without the other. Photography writes art history and art history writes photography. The confidence of this statement is clearly indebted to the open-ended legacies of poststructuralism, in particular to the work of Jacques Derrida, which have left their clear mark on the ideas developed in this thesis. As such, one must also ask how one writes *this* text, how one writes academically, and how one writes about other works. This has been one of my concerns, especially since this thesis brings together words and images, or more oppressively expressed, ‘theory’ and ‘practice.’ Dissatisfied with the often clumsy and polarizing treatment that the institutional environment proffered in this regard, the arena of deconstruction and its attentiveness to textuality, the signifier and to the economies of signification as material practices has revealed itself as the arena where this thesis has found its critical place.

In this dim light of textuality, then, the arguments in this thesis are also written *with* and *from within* the concepts it seeks to explore. I have aimed at writing a text that, as Barthes says, is written intransitively. Writing, as he pointed out once, is an intransitive verb; it does not need to be about, against, on or for something.<sup>30</sup> First and foremost, we need to recognize the space of writing (including photographic writing), the dimensions of the text upon which we also rely to convey arguments. This then also entails, as deconstruction continues to show us, that one cannot convey one’s arguments without a consideration of the otherness inside language – of its incompleteness but also of its openness. As such, it allows always for an/other, for a differing space inside the text. It allows for and ‘reckons with,’ as far as such a thing is possible, the poetic, the materiality of signifier, the obliqueness of the letter. It gives breathing space to the pause. At the same time, it brings us closer, through the space of textuality, to other practices, including practices that would have been thought as not compatible to the work of writing, calling thereby into question not only the burdensome traditions of the image/text opposition but also the labour of the critic versus the labour of the artist.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Derrida often pointed out that deconstruction is not a method but can only ever be a pathway or a practice.<sup>32</sup> This is vital if we are not to fall back continually into a criticism as mastering discourse that

defines cultural practices from above or sets the agenda from a distanced outside, thereby running the risk of becoming a mere patronizing gesture.<sup>33</sup>

Since we ‘know,’ quite paradoxically so, that language cannot be exacting, that it fails to deliver the ideationally transparent crystal of analysis in academic research, I believe any such hard-fought attempts remain simply hard-fought and are ultimately of a diminishing rather than developing quality. This poststructuralist insight is of significance for any subject of the humanities, I believe, if we want to avoid packing our work into the hard case of historical or encyclopaedic compilation – as ambitious as that might be. To act responsibly with the space of Theory so as to bring into relief its textual and performative matters, I have been keeping away from such an approach. An abundance of facts might not automatically lead to a more enlightened state, which is something that has also guided me in the shaping of this research: *slightly* less is more, I believe, if we are to trust the words and allow them to do their work. However, this is not to say that we are thereby evacuating our discussions from their specific contexts. The often-heard objection that deconstruction is of little worth politically is appropriate in so far as deconstruction makes the impossible step beyond the political. It is in engendering these impossible steps that an ethics of deconstruction is performed: by showing us what it cannot do that it wants to do. And to give space to rather than override this impossible doing. In other words, by showing the costs that any claim, intellectual or else, imposes on us, it also shows us what is at stake when we are asked to produce those claims. That is at least a start to begin thinking it otherwise.

### **Intentionalities, or some Notes on Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis**

For this reason I also embrace the *relative* spaces that deconstruction continues to open while also allowing itself to not hang on to them intractably. Those who do not share my faith in poststructuralist thought may or may not be convinced of its critical endeavours, the common denominator of disassociation towards its work thereby mostly being that of a perceived lack of political effectiveness. Yet what deconstruction is keen to reveal as undecidable and thus politically ineffective is not necessarily unintelligible.<sup>34</sup> Rather, to partake in deconstructive practices is always a

matter of engaging considerably with the space of writing which entails an acceptance of the limiting and structuring work of the letter, an understanding that attests to deconstruction's immediacy to psychoanalysis – and the methodological concentration of psychoanalytic theory on the spaces of the signifier and their importance for psychic realities.

Psychoanalysis, thus, is the other significant body of theory with which this thesis entertains its discussions. And 'to introduce psychoanalytic theory is to complicate things,' as Parveen Adams underscores, 'because we have to make room for one more reality, this time psychological reality.'<sup>35</sup> It is psychoanalysis that has taught us to take seriously the space of the signifier. This respectful compliance with the signifier – one of the gifts of psychoanalysis – could be described as the 'attraction of the signifier.' On the one side, this would point us towards the signifier's relation to others and therefore to the dependence of its performance to further signifiers which it is required to attract: within the chains of signification, signifiers are always somehow cross-polluting each other. They are in need of each other. On the other side, this 'attraction' would also describe one's own attraction towards the signifier, of being attracted to and possibly inhabited by the signifier. Thus, what is potentially revealed as an autonomous and trans-historical systemic field of signifiers becomes an arena of interference where desired signifiers are 'acted out.' At the same time, the self-referential sufficiency of symbolizing systems (that is, language in the terms of structuralism) is thereby also brought into relief – despite the signifiers' self-enclosure – as irreducibly tied to historical conditions. One is given a name. And one is asked to answer to *that* name.

What is brought into relief in this attraction is ultimately an intentionality, a historically-specific positionality of embodied subjectivity – which is to say that psychoanalysis is not ahistorical just as deconstruction is not indefinite. Psychoanalysis, regardless of its status as theory or clinical practice, can only work with and is conditioned by the signifiers of a given moment, which is to say it works with certain material forms (including our fleshy bodies) and their histories. Equally, deconstruction would remind us that its performance is always caught (up) in the signs whose semiotic outlines it seeks to grasp and possibly perforate. It is not indefinite because it cannot but start with a sign already defined by a definite context,

even if a deconstructive practice of reading and writing – of making marks – makes sure that it unsettles that context, and even if that sign carries the signified of something as weighty as ‘history.’ Hence, neither in psychoanalysis nor in deconstruction is history excluded or is thinking historically made impossible. Rather, both bodies of knowledge – psychoanalysis thinking the formations of embodied and sexed subjectivity, and deconstruction thinking the instabilities of the sign and the efforts made in shoring up the meaning it is supposed to carry, are linked to historical conditions – operating *with* and *within* history. Thus, we are dealing with the production of history itself as a mediated and conditioned construct within its own historical parameters – including modernity’s ‘scientific’ venture of a History of a historicizing kind which continues to haunt us, shaping our views of the worlds we believe to inhabit.

While all this might appear as apparent anyway – materials being specific to history – deconstruction complicates things insofar as it allows itself to accept the structuring space of the signifier, a space that is limited by what it can or cannot do in a given context. Thus, while deconstruction revels in the instability and incompleteness of signifying chains, it cannot simply do whatever it likes to do. That would be a crude way of cutting through the complexly layered efforts that deconstruction is attempting to bring together in its work: a work of the relative but whose relativity constitutes itself uniquely in the context of an irreplaceably configured event – a concept that is often thought to be reflected in the spatiotemporal logics of the photograph.<sup>36</sup> What follows then is that not anything goes, or at least what goes can only go so far as the sign in its context is able to go. Writing is always an act of pointing, of attracting signifiers, as Derrida would remind us – of directing a camera, of holding a pencil, of managing a keyboard. It is thereby also an *embodied* practice. Or as Foucault puts it: ‘A sentence cannot be non-significant; it refers to something, by virtue of the fact that it is a statement.’<sup>37</sup>

This stating by pointing is what resonates in Freud’s *deuten* so well: both an interpretation of something (an analysis) and a hinting at something (an act). Hence, what deconstruction is able to bring into critical attention is the unavoidable readiness of systemic structures of symbolization into which we are subsumed (Lacan’s structuralist work making the most unforgiving case for this theoretical vision) and in

which the varying layers of a subjectivity can constitute themselves; yet, at the same time, the inexorability of these structures which open us up to the dimensions of representation, is rendered permeable in the very work of carrying out the duties of representation. Thus, while deconstruction's concession to the signifier will always remind us that we can never escape its attraction, it brings into view the incidental but historical nature of representational systems and their puncturing in the event of enunciation – an event that is differential in its corporeal and historical origins. What Lacan's *lalangue* comes to 'articulate' in written representation as the sphere of speech is inversely represented by Derrida's *différance* in writing to thereby give writing its own indeterminable 'independence' over the sphere of speech. What both iconic signifiers represent in their own unique genealogies is the complex relation between what we are able to theorize as systemic ordering of a representing structure and its always potentially disordering spaces that remain beyond our rationalizing sense.

Photographic representation partakes in this dynamic as Barthes announces in the epigraph to this introduction: the photograph is understood to be split between a *thing* and an *anything*, between a document that can be known and worked with and an image that is potentially too immediate, attesting to something *originary* that cannot be contained, evading attempts that would seek its regulation. Barthes has worked this tension convincingly into his paradigm of the *studium/punctum* – the discrepancies between the connotative and the denotative level, both conjoined in the space of the photograph. That the photograph must compete between the objective and the subjective, or even finds itself glaringly wedged between science and art, is a strand ingrained in its modern history. However, we might just bring photography much closer to a 'technology' of writing, a writing of pointing as conceived by Derridian deconstruction – photography's systematicity coming to share thereby the spaces of syntagmatic ordering while its spatio-temporal uniqueness of inscription remains outside that ordering.

## Apparatuses, Visibilities, Spectators

*Declining Images* is, ultimately, nothing else than a repeated attempt of such hopeful pointing – through and at words, photographs, signs – spurred on by an intention to explore differing photographic spaces and the subjective positions they might give rise to – the spaces of spectatorship. However, I do not put forward a consistent model of spectatorship that would formulate a particular type of spectator vis-à-vis certain imaging technologies or that would capture a spectator through a categorical framing of art practices or otherwise. And neither do I put forward a theory of spectatorship in general.<sup>38</sup> While the thesis engages with all these aspects to some degree, spectatorship is brought to bear implicitly in my discussions of latency, inversion, sublation and their respective images and materials – three modalities that give rise to particular spectatorial encounters, but equally three modalities that provide the tools for a conceptual framing of the spectator's encounter with them. It is within the appreciation of such a dialectical movement that *Declining Images* wishes to operate.

Each chapter is best understood as a performance of such a dialectics – of an image that looks at us and of us looking at the image.<sup>39</sup> The thesis does so by following the technical development of the photographic image, which is reflected in the thematic order of the chapters: from the moment of the photograph's inscription and capture (latency), we move on to the photograph's appearance in the negative (inversion) and finally consider its status as fully developed but archived image (sublation). At the same time, a trajectory of the photograph's visibility is charted. Beginning in latency, the photograph is not yet developed and its image remains invisible to the spectator. Once developed into a photographic negative, the image achieves visibility but of the peculiar, semi-visible kind of inversion. And lastly, reaching its full visibility in the photographic print legitimized for presentation, the photograph falls also into the preserving hands of the archive whose operations 'sublate' the image's visibility into uncertain status. Each chapter is further paired with a photographic work that I conceived around one of the three modalities: *444 Archives* (latency), *Facing Lacan* (inversion), *Fields* (sublation). Their presentation (technical data, conceptual outline, visual documentation) as well as the language employed in presenting them is distinct within the thesis so as to emphasize, again, the possibility for a dialectical play

between, and what I must call heavy-handedly, the synthetic and analytic – between the bringing together and the taking apart of meaning. Yet while the projects are aimed at articulating the three modalities – and they so in overlapping ways – they are neither an illustration nor a solution but should be seen as another (photographic) problematization of the issues raised around latency, inversion and sublation – topical nodal points from where we can start again.<sup>40</sup>

‘Images of Latency’ (chapter I) considers the figure of photographer caught in moments of latency – when dealing with undeveloped images or when the photographs might not appear at all, thereby destabilizing the teleological narrative of photographic development. Mainly working through Freudian themes and the major psychoanalytic concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, the chapter explores latent images and the photographer’s subjective responses to them – responses that bring out the photographer’s libidinal and economic attachment to the visible image. ‘Images of Inversion’ (chapter II) engages with the photographic negative, a material specific to photography yet one that has been largely overlooked in the theories of photography. Teasing out its peculiar phenomenal traits, the chapter explores its uses in representation and the highly ambiguous meanings that arise from its inversion – ambiguities that are further given space by engaging with the dynamics of inversion played out in Lacan’s model of subjectivization. Finally, ‘Images of Sublation’ (chapter III) thinks through the implications of archivization and the epistemological shifts that occur when a photograph is declared to be an archival document or, indeed, to be archiving in itself. The chapter does so by thinking the archival mode through the philosophical lens of sublation and its Hegelian precursor of *Aufhebung* that performs preservation and alteration at once. By tracing the genealogies of sublation, the chapter brings into focus the contradictions inherent in the logics of the photograph’s archival space: it seeks to preserve but it cannot do so without also engendering another differentiation.

The latent photograph, the photographic negative and the archived picture are of an uncertain kind – their statuses within the photographic act and the manufacturing processes of the photograph ambiguous, their visibilities *weak*. Yet it is this weakness of the image that drives this thesis so as to explore why and how we come to understand them as weak – or, to paraphrase once more Tagg: what frames them into

this weakness? If the latent image is of little concern to us, then how does this relate to established ideas underpinning photography and our expectations of its roles? If the photographer regards the photographic negative to be visually illegible or aesthetically inappropriate, then why is this so? And if the photograph can be considered as an archival document, how does that status impact on the photograph itself – what happens to the photograph’s meanings once inserted into the archival space? *Declining Images* pursues these questions by considering how we, as makers of these images in our roles as spectators, photographers, consumers, theorists, etc., cast them into their specific shapes. At the same time, the images themselves are explored in their material and phenomenal dimensions so as to think about the responses they might solicit in us – how they might cast the spectator.

This is the double act staked out in *declining images*: images of declining visibility and images declined in their visibility.



<sup>1</sup> John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> 'En résumé, la photo ne peut pas être transcription pure et simple de l'objet qui se donne comme naturel, ne serait-ce que parce qu'elle est plate et non en trois dimensions; et d'autre part, elle ne peut pas être un art, puisqu'elle copie mécaniquement. C'est là le double Malheur de la photo; si on voulait bâtir une théorie de la photo, il faudrait partir de cette contradiction, de cette situation difficile.' Roland Barthes, 'Sur la photographie: Entretien avec Angelo Schwarz et Guy Mandery' [1980], in *Roland Barthes: Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), pp.1235-240 (p.1237).

<sup>3</sup> Yve Lomax neatly summarizes this for us. 'Is there any one thing that makes photography whole? Does photography have an essence? [...] Photography is mixed up with all sorts of things – law and order, the family, the medical professions, the artmarket. Photography is involved in a diversity of practices, stories and theories. There is painting in photography. There are words in photography. There is sexuality in photography. There is money in photography. There are a host of different "photographies." When we start with photography we are already in the middle of quite a few things. Indeed, we may even argue that there is no such thing (in itself) as Photography only photographs.' Yve Lomax, *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p.78.

<sup>4</sup> Vilém Flusser's rigorous and idiosyncratic theorization of photography within a cultural history of writing and of the photographer as 'functionary' of photography's apparatus is my point of reference. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* [1983], trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). Significant are also Flusser's *Standpunkte: Texte zur Fotografie*, ed. Andreas Müller-Pohle (Göttingen: European Photography, 1998) and his *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, ed. Andreas Müller-Pohle (Göttingen: European Photography, 1996). Works that centre on outlining a model of the 'photographic,' both as theoretical paradigm and phenomenological space, include: François Soulages, *Esthétique de la photographie: La perte et le reste* (1998) (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005); Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'image précaire: Du dispositif photographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1987); Martina Dobbe, *Fotografie als theoretisches Objekt: Bildwissenschaft, Medienästhetik, Kunstgeschichte* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007); Hubert Damisch, *La Dénivelée: À l'épreuve de la photographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2001); Régis Durand, *Le temps de l'image: Essai sur les conditions d'une histoire des formes photographiques* (Paris: La Différence, 1995); François Brunet, *La naissance de l'idée de photographie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> The interplay of photography and a *certain* anthropology is evident in a deliberately spectacularizing case of ethnographic politics in Brasil. In spring 2008, the media reported widely – using thoroughly suggestive headlines – that *contact* was made, via aerial photography, with a hitherto 'unknown' Amazon tribe. Leaving aside here the ethical implications and the validity of the claim (it was later admitted that the 'tribe' was already known and the photographs served the purpose of raising public awareness), this highly publicized and politicized case attests precisely to photography's ability of 'remote sensing.' Alexander Monroe, 'Helicopter photos represent first contact with Amazon Indian tribe', *The Times* (30 May 2008), <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article4032444.ece>> [18/05/2009]; John Noble Wilford, 'Twilight for the Forest People', *The New York Times* (8 June

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2008), <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/weekinreview/08wilford.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/weekinreview/08wilford.html?_r=2)> [18/05/2009].

<sup>6</sup> For a critique of such active/passive, subject/object issues in the photographic act, see Olivier Richon, 'Thinking Things', in *Where is the Photograph?*, ed. David Green (Brighton and Maidstone: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2003), pp.71-79 (p.75).

<sup>7</sup> On the institutionally close histories of photography and anthropology, see Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and The Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> On the issue of the early anthropologist's 'desk-based' work ethics and the conjunctions of photography and anthropology see the exhibition catalogues *The Impossible Science of Being: Dialogues Between Anthropology and Photography*, ed. Ruth Charity, Christopher Pinney, Roslyn Poignant, Chris Wright (London: The Photographers' Gallery, 1995) and *In Visible Light: Photography and Classification in Art, Science and The Everyday*, ed. Chrissie Iles and Russell Roberts (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1997), particularly Elizabeth Edwards essay 'Ordering Others. Photography, Anthropologies and Taxonomies', pp.54-68.

<sup>9</sup> The ideas advanced by Hubert Damisch and collected in *La Dénivelée* are my guidance here. Theorizing photography and the writing on photography as a photographic act, he enmeshes himself in the wider photographic act as it sets itself up as an event instituted by the photographer, subject, camera, image, etc. but therefore also by the writer himself. See Hubert Damisch, *La Dénivelée*, cited above.

<sup>10</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Houndmills and London: MacMillan, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Consider, for example: Cindy Sherman's photographic arresting of staged film still portraits and the setting in motion of an identitarian regress in the image of woman; Olivier Richon's juxtaposition of the allegorical and the transparent within the photographic; Sherrie Levine's photographs of canonical photographs and the disclaiming of the idea of the photographic work; Michael Snow's articulations of the spatial interferences of the photograph's material and phenomenal aspects; Victor Burgin's semantic integrations of the typographical in the photographic; John Hilliard's interrogations of the photograph's image and the effects of its visual and discursive framings; Kenneth Josephson's indexical interlocking of the subject of the photograph and photographed subject; Dieter Appelt's multiple photographic takes of objects whose 'objective' space is stretched across time and space in the resulting image; Jeff Wall's photographic tableaux at the intersection of the accidental of documentary practice and the deliberate of artistic consideration.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982); Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 1980). The three books and their precursive and associated articles published elsewhere by their respective authors have gained historical significance for establishing interdisciplinary approaches to the critical study of photography within sociological, psychoanalytic and semiotic frameworks – extending thereby the scope of Bourdieu's rather strict, if not moralizing, sociological study of photographic practice in *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* [1965], ed. Pierre Bourdieu et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). Of further importance are special journal issues dedicated for the first time to photography and its historical study as well as its increasing significance in postwar art practices. They include: *Studio*

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*International, Special Issue: Art and Photography* (July-August 1975); *Artforum, Photography Issue* (September 1976); *October, Photography: A Special Issue* (1975). For a consideration on these writers and their historical contributions built around positions of a 'photography without identity,' see Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), particularly pp.3-20; David Company's introductory survey to the anthology *Art and Photography* charts a comprehensive overview of (mainly English) publications dedicated to photography: David Company, 'Survey', in *Art and Photography* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2003), pp.12-45.

<sup>13</sup> 'Histories' that have contributed in casting photography into a canon of its own include: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the present day* [1937] (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964); Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography: From the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era* [1955] (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969). Those with a technological emphasis include: Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography* [1932], trans. Edward Epstean (New York: Dover, 1932); Helmut Gernsheim, *The Origins of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982). Those with a focus on the relation between photography and art: Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin, 1968); Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981). For a sociological history, see Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé, eds., *A History of Photography* [1986] trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Even though Stieglitz and Szarkowski could not be more antagonistic towards each other's strategic goals (one may note that Stieglitz is not included in Szarkowski's catalogue *The Photographer's Eye*) they nonetheless work towards establishing distinguishable photographic aesthetics. As Szarkowski states in the introduction to his exhibition catalogue: 'The pictures reproduced in this book were made over almost a century and a quarter. [...] They have in fact little in common except their success, and a shared vocabulary: these pictures are unmistakably photographs. The vision they share belongs to photography itself. The character of this vision was discovered by photographers at work, as their awareness of photography's potentials grew. If it is true, it should be possible to consider the history of the medium in terms of photographers' progressive awareness of characteristics and problems that have seemed inherent in the medium.' Stieglitz, in emphasizing what he designates as the 'plastic nature' of photography also seeks to ascertain photography for itself so as to rescue its expressive properties from the indifferent realm of mechanical production. On the printing process he writes, for example, that 'the turning out of prints [...] is a plastic and not a mechanical process. It is true that it can be made mechanical by the craftsman, just as the brush becomes a mechanical agent in the hands of the mere copyist who turns out hundreds of paint-covered canvases without being entitled to be ranked as an artist; but in proper hand print-making is essentially plastic in nature.' John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* [1966] (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), n.p; Alfred Stieglitz, 'Pictorial Photography' [1899], in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp.115-23 (p.119).

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Baudelaire ruminates: 'More and more, as each day goes by, art is losing in self-respect, is prostrating itself before external reality, and the painter is becoming more and more inclined to paint, not what he dreams, but what he sees. And yet *it is a happiness to dream*, and it used to be an honour to express what one

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dreamed; but can one believe that the painter still knows that happiness? Will the honest observer declare that the invasion of photography and the great industrial madness of today are wholly innocent of this deplorable result?' Charles Baudelaire, 'The Modern Public and Photography' [1859], trans. Jonathan Mayne, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp.83-89 (pp.88-9).

<sup>16</sup> Moholy-Nagy reminds us that 'the *fact* of photography does not grow or diminish in value according to whether it is classified as a method of recording reality or as a medium of scientific investigation or as a way of preserving vanished events, or as a basis for the process of reproduction, or as "art." The photographic process has not precedent among the previously known visual media. And when photography relies on its own possibilities, its results, too, are without precedent. Just one of its features – the range of infinitely subtle gradations of light and dark that capture the phenomenon of light in what seems to be an almost immaterial radiance – would suffice to establish a new kind of seeing, a new kind of visual power. [...] In today's photographic work, the first and foremost issue is to develop an integrally photographic approach that is derived purely from the means of photography itself [...].' László Moholy-Nagy, 'Unprecedented Photography' [1927], trans. Joel Agee, in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), pp.83-5 (pp.83-4).

<sup>17</sup> Recognizing the political potentials of photographic reproduction, Benjamin's incisive remarks on photography and the artwork and the dialectics engendered between ritual and show, cult and exhibition value, the original and reproduction, etc., do not indulge in sentimentality of 'lost' values but call for a political engagement with this new mass medium. 'An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' [1936], trans. Harry Zorn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.211-44 (p.218).

<sup>18</sup> For Bazin, photography and film have given us the means to satisfy our desire for realism. He sees the triumph of photography not so much grounded in the medium's perfecting physical process; rather 'does it lie in a psychological fact, to wit, in completely satisfying our appetite for illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part.' André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' [1945], in *What is Cinema*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp.9-16 (p.12).

<sup>19</sup> Kracauer locates photography's, and by way of extension, film's purposeful task in capturing the ephemeral – in short, in showing us what the human eye could never see. His study *Theory of Film* is firmly grounded in a material study of photography to which he dedicates the opening chapter 'Photography' (p.3-23). 'Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality. Now this reality includes many phenomena which would hardly be perceived were it not for the motion picture

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camera's ability to catch them on the wing. And since any medium is partial to the things it is uniquely equipped to render, the cinema is conceivably animated by a desire to picture transient material life, life at its most ephemeral. Street crowds, involuntary gestures, and other fleeting impressions are its very meat. [...] I assume, then, that films are true to the medium to the extent that they penetrate the world before our eyes.' Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.ix.

<sup>20</sup> In his essay "Marks of Indifference" of 1995, Wall charts his own little history of photography alongside the historical trajectories of art, concluding with the argument that one cannot escape photography's powers of depiction, and, for him, even the turn towards conceptualism could not do so, or rather, inaugurated the grounds for recognizing the experiential phenomenologies of photographic pictures – as opposed to conceptualism's trend for photographic reductivism: 'A photograph [...] shows its subject by means of showing what experience is like; in that sense it provides "an experience of experience," and it defines this as the significance of depiction.' Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference:" Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art' [1995], in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), pp.143-68 (p.167).

<sup>21</sup> On the dialectics of photography and painting, see, for example, Peter Osborne, 'Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives', *October* 62 (autumn 1992), pp.102-13.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'A Note on the Unconscious' [1913], trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Vintage and The Hogarth Press, 2001), pp.257-66 (p.264).

<sup>23</sup> A number of publications have explored art history's techno-histories, mostly assessing the methodological and historiographical impact of reproductive imaging technologies on what is known and taught as 'art history': Helene Roberts, ed., *Art History Through the Camera's Lens* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1995); Frederick N. Bohrer, 'Photographic Perspectives: Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History', in *Art History and its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.246-59; Anthony J. Hamber, 'A Higher Branch of the Art:' *Photographing the Fine Arts in England, 1839-1880* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* [1950] (London: Phaidon Press, 1967), p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Wölfflin's treatises are in themselves highly interesting in that his recommendations of how to ideally display and illuminate artwork should be analyzed for his notion of art, that is, the resulting photographs should be read for their effectiveness of engendering the art he wants us to see. Heinrich Wölfflin, 'Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll', published in three parts in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* (1896/1897/1915), pp.224-28, pp.237-44, pp.294-97. For a facsimile of his publications on the best practices of photographing sculptural works, see Jean-Claude Chirollet, ed. and intr., *Heinrich Wölfflin: Comment photographier les sculptures 1896, 1897, 1915* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008). For the relations between photography and sculpture, see: Rainer Michael Mason, Hélène Pinet, Heinrich Wölfflin, *Pygmalion Photographie: La sculpture devant la caméra 1844-1936* (Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1985); Geraldine A. Johnson, ed., *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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<sup>26</sup> Deliberately using illustrations, Warburg attempted to bring about, in Gombrich's words, 'a symphony of images, part interpretation of history, part auto-biographic meditation.' Warburg himself used the metaphor of a pendulum's swing [*Pendelgang*] to describe these wanderings between the analytical attempts of historical (re)construction and the psychological impacts of personal interpretation. Warburg's idea of the Mnemosyne Atlas was transmitted into his *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek* and its changing constellations that would mark the creative spirit of his vision of *Kulturwissenschaft*. For a cursory outline of this undertaking, see Aby M. Warburg, 'Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg: Vor dem Kuratorium' [1929], in *Aby M. Warburg: Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, ed. Dieter Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1980), pp.307-09; Fritz Saxl, 'Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas' [1930], included in the same volume, pp.313-15; Gombrich considers Warburg's work in the essay 'The Ambivalence of the Classical Tradition', in E. H. Gombrich, *Tributes: Interpreters Of Our Cultural Tradition* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), pp.117-37 (p.135).

<sup>27</sup> André Malraux, *The Psychology of Art: The Museum without Walls*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949-50).

<sup>28</sup> This thesis shares much of Crimp's intellectual framing of postmodernism, photography and the institution of 'art.' Crimp gives an outline of the assimilation of photography as the museum's 'new' art in the 1980s – made possible by the earlier assembling of photographic canons and formal approaches to photography: 'As formalist theory took greater hold, however, it was not photography's imitation of painting that secured its place in the museum. Rather, it was photography's fidelity to "itself." And thus, nearly 150 years after its invention, in the 1830s, photography was *discovered*, discovered to have been art all the while.' Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1993), p.16.

<sup>29</sup> While art history's historical linkages with photography have been given some historiographical and methodological attention, little is done, I believe, in thinking up more fluid models of art scholarship that actually move beyond the critical acknowledgment of photography in the writing of art's histories and which, notwithstanding the efforts, still attests to a privileging of the ideas promoted in one's art history – instead of models that would make use of photography to make art history. Lev Manovich's project of 'Cultural Analytics' is an interesting example in this respect by expanding the uses of digital imagery. Drawing on the metadata that become available in the ongoing digitization of the canonical works of art (the digital formats of paintings or films), he uses those data for computationally analyzing formal qualities (e.g. tonal ranges) or historical figures (e.g. geographical dissemination) of these works. The resulting patterns and statistical graphs bring thereby into relief, in an almost allegorical way, the connoisseurial and institutional encryptions of art history. While this project is utterly limited in its empirical essentialism, it still provides for our present moment in time a worthwhile critique of art history by means of its own technology – the ongoing digitization of artworks is strongly driven by art history and the institutions close to it so as to build up an ever greater archive of digital imagery but that imagery is mostly used to worship their referents, that is, the artworks they represent, without reflecting on the wider epistemological implications for art history which such a technological shift might entail. 'Cultural Analytics' is available online on <<http://lab.softwarestudies.com>> [13/05/2009].

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<sup>30</sup> Barthes elaborates his theory of the Text and its metonymic structure in many essays. Key examples include: 'From Work to Text' [1971], in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.155-64; 'To the Seminar' [1974], in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp.332-42; 'Theory of the Text' [1973], trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston, MA and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.31-47.

<sup>31</sup> On deconstruction's unraveling of the ideological autonomy of the image over the text, see the collection of essays in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> On the significance of 'practice' for the work of deconstruction – a recurring concern in most of Derrida's writings – and often paralleled by a notion of 'pathway' or '*Bahnung*,' see Jacques Derrida's 'I Have a Taste for the Secret' [1995], in *A Taste for the Secret* [1997], ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp.1-92; and his 'The Almost Nothing of the Unpresentable' [1982], in *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp.78-88.

<sup>33</sup> For a fierce stance against the condescending attitude of the kind 'I know what ought to be done' that so often befalls intellectual work, see Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La fabrique, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> As with regards to the problematics of deconstruction and its purported unattainability for political practicality, I follow the argument of Elizabeth Grosz in her discussions of sexual difference and its political framings in feminist theory. 'The question [of sexual difference] remains inherently undecidable, which is not to say that it is unintelligible. One cannot opt for one side of an opposition without at the same time (whether wittingly or not) remaining implicated in and complicit with its opposite. [...] None of the binary oppositions structuring logocentric and phallogocentric thought can simply be avoided, and no compromise between them is possible. One must accept the tangible and singular irresolvability of oppositions in their concrete contexts, and in contexts to come.' See Elizabeth Grosz's section 'Ontology and Equivocation: Derrida's Politics of Sexual Difference' in her *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New and London: Routledge, 1995), pp.59-80 (p.80).

<sup>35</sup> Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* [1996] (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.27.

<sup>36</sup> One of the key texts to outline the relations between the irreducible event of inscription and the insatiable drifting of the sign is Derrida's 'Signature Event Context.' As Derrida would propose: upon inscription, the sign is left to drift because it 'possesses the characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it.' Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' [1972], trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), pp.1-23 (p.9). The photograph, conceived as being brought forth in an originary event but gaining the indifference of a sign whose representational work nonetheless continues to lead us (back) to its creating – and possibly traumatic – 'event,' embodies this conjuncture of the irreducible and reproducible. On this topic, see Régis Durand, 'Event, Trace, Intensity', trans. Lynne Kirby, *Discourse* 16 (1993), pp.118-26.

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<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p.90.

<sup>38</sup> The problematics of ‘spectatorship’ are diffuse and publications covering them are countless. Spectatorship is neither reducible to a sole topic nor is it the exclusive plane of the visual – even though spectatorship and its more formal articulations are a central concern in art history, film studies and aesthetics. Of relevance to photography in general and the arguments in this thesis in particular are those works that deal with spectatorship more comprehensively in its historical, aesthetico-technological, epistemological and subjectivizing aspects in relation to *modernity* and its specific spaces of spectatorial pleasure and consumption, as well as those works that have rearticulated spectatorship through a postmodern lens of criticality: Jacques Aumont, *The Image* [1990], trans. Claire Pajackowska (London: British Film Institute, 1997); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1990); Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* [1988] (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [1927-40], ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* [1988], trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* [1986], trans. and intr. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* [1981], trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (London: Routledge, 1992), particularly ‘Las Meninas’, pp.1-16; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Martin Heidegger, ‘The Age of the World Picture’ [1954], trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1977), pp.115-54; Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* [1973], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998); Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Psychoanalysis (particularly the notorious Lacanian ‘sardine can’ moment) and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology have made it clear that our subjectivities are configured between desired and desiring objects: we desire objects but the object, too, desires. Georges Didi-Huberman has dedicated a book to this dialectical play between spectator and gazing object. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> My point on ‘problematization’ bears the marks of the teachings of Hans Hollein, which are reflected in many of the ideas surrounding the critical tasks of making artwork.



Chapter I  
**Images of Latency**

*The photographer always acts with the desire  
of 'creating' an image that did not exist beforehand.  
That desire is the generator of hope and fear:  
'will my photograph[y] be a success?', one always asks.*  
Serge Tisseron<sup>1</sup>

*Indeed, the term latent image [...] has no significance  
except for the implied intention – or at least the possibility –  
of photographic development.*  
The Theory of the Photographic Process<sup>2</sup>

*A trick of vocabulary: we say 'to develop a photograph'; but what the  
chemical action develops is undevelopable, an essence (of a wound),  
what cannot be transformed but only repeated under the instances of  
insistence (of the insistent gaze).*  
Roland Barthes<sup>3</sup>

### **Apertures: Weakening Images**



Figure 1. Alain Fleischer, *Le regard des morts*.

To open this text, and to leave it open, we begin with an image. The above photographic image traces more photographic images. Scores of photographic images float in those trays that remind one of those typically used in darkrooms to process

the prints according to the principles of classic photographic craft: three ‘baths’ turn a latent impression into a visible photograph – develop, stop, fix. The image has appeared. Photographic education, particularly the one that is keen to attribute to itself the conceited label of ‘fine art,’ still likes to anchor students in this three-step operation, even though since the digitization of photography in the 1980s ‘darkroom photography’ has become rather a rarity.<sup>4</sup> Technological nostalgia might be one way of explaining the photographer’s fixation on processes that have hardly any techno-economic validity and/or practicality in today’s terms. At the same time, this allows the photographer to ground the ‘fine art’ photograph in a technological particularity through which the photographer can set herself romantically apart from the ‘banality’ of the undifferentiated mass production of images; or even worse, confuse conveniently technological exception with ‘artistic’ originality.

The survival – however marginal – of the ‘redundant’ analogue process as beneficial to a photographic pedagogy is often explained in terms of ‘knowing the basics,’ because this type of hand-crafted photograph allows more easily the comprehension of the developmental stages of the photograph. Digitized photographic technologies, on the other hand, have compressed the course of the image’s emergence into an instance of a few seconds or less, making it more difficult to understand how an image is formed photographically within the apparatus. Or indeed, thanks to real-time rendering, the taking of the photograph is based itself on an already displayed image, presenting the image to be taken *as* image. Moreover, the didactic emphasis of developing your own photograph in the ‘old-fashioned’ way could be seen as giving cause to an initiation rite of the photographer. I have always had doubts whether one would count as a ‘photographer’ without an introductory course in ‘darkroom photography,’ without having assisted in the emergence of the image. Then again, I do not want to place an argument for an artificial excavation of technologies past. Neither do I want to disguise the photographic image in a technological retro-look for the sake of it. Yet, there is something of interest for us in sticking to photographic tradition, at least momentarily, that is beyond historical nostalgia and the ideals of pedagogy: that is how the prolonged processual stages of image development can help us think how the photographer is invested – economically and libidinally – in the emergence of the image. The drawn out stage of developing the image, with its ritualistic bathings, builds up a momentum of expectancy that indexes the

photographer's desire to *see* the desired image. Images feed our scopic drive. But, psychically, we are equally already fed by the idea of a potential image, in particular if we can avail ourselves of its making. However, the position that the photographer takes up during the latent stages of the image is not a win-all situation. It also remains uncomfortable, as one cannot yet know whether the image will meet the photographer's expectations. At the same time, it can also be one of bliss as one can idealize the image to come and take part in the image's gradual appearance.

This chapter explores the space of an image whose appearance can be neither guaranteed nor predicted. This image, if it is an image at all, resides in the space-time between image capture and its appearance. We wish to explore the temporalities *between* 'impression' and 'expression,' two theoretical terms that resonate equally well in psychoanalysis and in photography. While we might not be able to 'focus' on this image, we might be able to encircle topologies of its space-time. Reflecting on this intermediary stage ('taken but not developed') of the photographic image – known in photographic circles as the latent image – is useful, because it can reveal how we, as photographers and spectators, are dedicated to its emergence. As the latent image withholds the image its visibility to the photographer (who is nonetheless already consciously working towards the emergence of this image), it can enable us to question, through its uncompleted status and on the grounds of its 'absence,' not only what drives us to the image but also what we expect of it.

If we have put into words so far some of the changing technological facets of photographic image productions and their technological effects *as* affects for the photographer/spectator, then it is an apt moment to return to our image. (Figure 1) What has been printed on this page could be seen as a typical example of the increased hybridity of photo-technological images of our times, bringing about not just a blurring of various image categories into each other but also a converging of the technologies and managements of image and information.<sup>5</sup> Our image, for example, is the printed result of a digitally made screen capture of a short clip on a DVD documenting the work's many black-and-white photographs that are photographic enlargements of photographic images of faces. Their eyes stare at us. Their gazes still reach us, permeating the multiple photo-reproductive layers that are accumulated in the image. Each tray holds one image and, at the same time, gives it a frame around

it. Tray after tray is lined up repetitiously on the floor so as to form a vast monotonous grid composed of 480 cells. In each cell, there swims a photograph in a transparent liquid, suggesting the development is not yet finished or it might just have been completed. We do not know.

The laboratory aesthetics of this installation by Alain Fleischer, titled *Le regard des morts*, leave us uncertain as with regards to the *state* of these images, even though the supplementary work of documentation makes certain that the faces we see on these photographic prints are established as those of soldiers of WWI – photographic prints, however, we are informed, that have not been chemically fixed.<sup>6</sup> We imagine how the soldiers' faces might slowly lose the recognizability in the eye of the spectator. They might disintegrate, thus not only qualifying the work for the formal language of contemporary art through which it can be understood as an 'installation' on the grounds of being temporarily installed but also because the images' permanence is temporarily limited. As such, the work does not need to be dated. An art historical dating procedure would do just more violence to the individual images by not respecting their mobility and fluid dis/appearances. Like memory, these images flash up briefly but cannot be kept forever. The photographer has not fixed the images so as to let them move. What appears at first as a photograph that has come out of its latency, falls yet back again into a provisional state. Not being fixed, the photographs cannot survive in visibility. Developed, the images have seen the light but were not strong enough to withstand it. Fleischer's images are situated at the threshold between appearance and disappearance. Phenomenologically – and contrary to the teleological techno-logics of established models of photographic practice – the images might as well be about to appear as they are to disappear. In these trays, photography shows us a face that is not just a representation engendered through fixing (the 'capture') or through the fixed (the 'image') but is also a face that shows its own instability by giving what we will be calling 'the latent' a tangible form.<sup>7</sup> The photographic image – though having come out of its 'period of latency' – becomes once more undetectable for us who wish/ed for it.

Fleischer's photographs bring the image into movement, a movement that has been stabilized by the long awaited innovation of chemical fixation. The history of photography, so duly for a history, begins only with the fixing of the photograph.

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce who, we are told, was the first one to do so in 1837 and, thus, finds himself also thereby inscribed in the opening sections of most photo-historical accounts. Anything before that truly history-writing moment, when images suddenly began to write themselves, could be considered through the photographic lens of pre-history. The photographs of this pre-history are still very weak materials, fragile beings that could only tolerate weak candlelight. In 'Early Researches in Photography,' Henry Fox Talbot, the other famous apprentice of early photography, is still puzzled by this instability: 'Thus I expected that a kind of image or picture would be produced, resembling to a certain degree the object from which it was derived. I expected, however, also that it would be necessary to preserve such images in a portfolio, and to view them only by candlelight; because if by daylight, the same natural process which formed the images would destroy them, by blackening the rest of the paper.'<sup>8</sup> The unfixed photograph is weak; it fades quickly. My opening photograph has put an end to Fleischer's weakening images. Fixed again, it has preserved a trace. As such, my 'illustration' can be read as symptomatic of my own insecurity to bypass the image. I could not abstain from it. As if I would suggest: better an image than none; better an image *of* latency than one *in* latency. Wishful images.

### **Appeals of the Latent**

I cannot recall when it was that the latent revealed itself to me. But how could it reveal itself? If we were to make a case for its ontology, then we could describe it as something that exists yet is outside a marked or identifiable representation. On the one hand, the latent is hidden within a manifest structure and remains invisible. It deceives any straightforward attempts of interpretation and can only be accessed indirectly or *via* a translation – such as the latent content of dreams. On the other hand, the latent may well be dormant and escape apparent representation – remaining therefore visually indeterminate – but its temporal dimension remains one of uncertainty too. It could surface at any moment, yet that moment might not be predictable, like a body that has been infected yet shows no detectable symptoms of the illness. Thus, we can already begin to 'see' how the latent, as it flashes up in the theoretical bodies of psychoanalysis, photography and medical science, for instance,

makes us go searching for it. Since sometimes there is something somewhere hidden – in a state of latency – it may also posit something incalculable sometimes somewhere. It remains outside our immediate, conscious understanding and therefore outside our control. We feel therefore, one could say, *provoked* to look for the latent. And yet, the few lines I have produced here to open this chapter, attempting to circumscribe a space about its traits, clearly show that the latent has already led us by the nose. There is an appeal that emanates from the latent. It is an appeal that calls us, but does not lead us. It is a vague call, without clear directions. It is also an appeal that seduces us, that appeals to us precisely because, being seduced, we give up our wilfully chosen directions.<sup>9</sup> Let us, then, take up this uncertain invitation.

Things that lie in latency are dormant and hidden. As such, they might awake one day and become recognizable. Not recognizable in themselves perhaps; rather, they become recognizable through the logics of the symptomatic. Indirect, the symptomatic points us to something that we could not retrieve otherwise. The production of the photographic image, as is well known, also begins with a latent image after an exposure has been made.<sup>10</sup> ‘The impression is latent and invisible,’ comments Talbot, ‘and its existence would not be suspected by any one who was not forewarned of it by previous experiment.’<sup>11</sup> Talbot’s reflection on the latent image is an indication of how the latent itself, recognized *as* latent, depends on a methodological approach that constricts the latent as invisible/undetected but existent. The spectator is (made) aware of this potential image-to-come – or at least so is the claim made for it. A ‘forewarning’ is issued to the spectator to mark the space of this image resting in latency to therefore prepare the grounds for the possibility of an emergence of something visible. Do not overlook this (invisible) image, the photographer might say. Just because it has not appeared yet does not mean it is not already an image. Of course, to make this statement we are detaching the image from its allegiance to the visible.<sup>12</sup> In the ‘image’ marked as latent, we could *see* the invisible.

Following these preliminary thoughts, we can suspend the photographer’s work between two poles. On the one hand, the photographer is an impression-maker, responding to impressions he receives. *Beeindruckt*, the photographer triggers the release button and creates in turn another impression in the form of a new

photographic image. 'The photographic process is recapitulation of a process in the mind of the photographer,' Hollis Frampton testifies, 'which must have been carried through to an end before the shutter is released. We say among ourselves of a photograph that it is "well seen."'13 And, on the other hand, the photographer is transforming the impression into a visible image by developing it. For photographers not to render visible the impressions would be a non-sense. 'Accepting impressions without visibly expressing them?', so could the photographer's paradox be formulated as a question. The latent image poses a threat to the self-understanding of the photographer. Without the successive development that makes the impression visible, that rescues the latent image from its latency as it were, the photographer's sense of self is undercut. Psychoanalytically speaking, we could apply the term castration. The photographer's self-image is thrown into crisis: no image, no photographer.

The photographer, therefore, is advised to develop the image if he is to escape the 'castrating' threat of this lacking image. In his efforts to secure the image visibly, the photographer acts as a guardian of the visible, protecting it from the corroding weakness of the latent image. In reading photo-manuals, one can observe how vital this aspect of 'rescue' is to the logics of photographic development and the photographer's affinity for perfectibility. 'The development of this latent image by means of the developer is one of the most important and interesting of all photographic processes, and upon its successful operation depends in very large measure the nature of the end product, that is, the finished photograph, which is our goal.'14 We can take the 'developer' not just as the substance enabling the development but also as the acting agent driving such a need for development. It is the photographer's ambition, his drive, to bring the image out of the indistinct spheres of latency. In what follows, we want to reflect upon the implications of this obvious 'development' that is so ingrained in the practice of photography. Does photographing necessarily imply development? Is the photographer 'obliged' to produce images as to be recognized as a photographer? Could we envisage a photography without photographs, these images that inscribe themselves in and as the visible? Or in other words, is there an identity – a self-image – of photography that could tolerate the uncertain otherness of the latent image?



## Interpreting the Latent

Let us take up again the lead proposed by the latent to find out about its image. Sigmund Freud, of course, our *interpreter* of dreams, had a lot to say about the materials relating to all things latent. Indeed, latency, as a concept, is central to Freudian theories if one is to ‘grasp’ the work of the unconscious and the belatedness of symptoms: ‘beside an emotion expressed, behind a symptom manifested, there lurks a contrary, repressed emotion. Yet this censored emotion erupts whenever repression momentarily relaxes its grip.’<sup>15</sup> Hence, dreams, Freud is confident, ‘may appear strange and senseless; but, if we examine them by a technique which differs little from the free association used in psychoanalysis, we are led from their manifest content to a secret meaning, to the latent dream-thought.’<sup>16</sup> Thus, *there is more than meets the eye*. Invisible secrets. Analysis of the manifest dream-content brings into relief the latent dream-thought. Inside the image, another image: dreaming brings about the appearing of images within which other images have disappeared.

The psychoanalyst is comparable to a translator, or more precisely, an interpreter. One *interprets* dreams.<sup>17</sup> Both are required to transform the ‘foreign,’ the radical otherness claimed by the unconscious, into something recognizable. Their space is the threshold where they bring that ‘thing’ into a recognizable relief by attributing signification to it. They also guard this threshold and therefore mediate between the spaces that it separates. At first sight, translation’s work is like ‘a mechanical game of correspondences.’<sup>18</sup> The translator’s task is that of a match-maker, working towards that ‘appropriate’ space where Freud’s German *Traum* can meet his English *dream*. (And we are reminded here that the photographer’s work, too, is often that of a match-maker: it is expected that one’s image taken will match with one’s self-image. In being photographed, Barthes asks: ‘an image – my image – will be generated: will I be born from an antipathetic individual or from a “good sort”?’<sup>19</sup>) At the threshold, and thanks to the translator’s soothing work, the sign’s contours appear to soften so that it can slip into a new shape without much effort. But that is of course our illusionary dream of the work of the translator/analyst as patching up the cracks that the work of translation or analysis causes. Thus, as so many translators restlessly speak of their precarious position in the forewords of their translated publications,

‘the translator should never be really there’ as her presence indicates precisely the impossibility of leaving things the same as it were.<sup>20</sup>

And the analyst? Her presence is similarly declared dubious. There and not there. The analyst effaces herself during the analytic session to do the work of interpretation. ‘It is interesting,’ the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas observes about the tricks of his trade, ‘that psychoanalysis, which would have us look truth in the eye, also makes use of the most powerful illusion we generate: that we convey ourselves to other people.’<sup>21</sup> The analyst conveys himself by rendering his presence into an illusion of absence so as to ‘listen out’ for the invisible signs that might reside in the latent ‘image’ that the analysand brings to the session in the face of the analyst’s mute performance. We need to slow down the impact of this image by putting it between quotation marks (a trick to which we are indebted to Derrida), because, given its latency, it remains an unattainable one: if it is brought into light by the analyst’s work, to employ a typically used metaphor, then we might well ‘see’ something but, at the same time, what is happening to this latent image as *image*? Conceptually more adequate, Freud does not speak of a latent image. Instead, he refers to the latent ‘stuff’ in dreams as ‘dream-thoughts.’ This deprives the latent of more obvious visual connotations. It is the so-called manifest content that is asked to stand in for what cannot be directly expressed, for what has to respect moral inhibitions and therefore has to undergo the distortions of censorship.<sup>22</sup> Following Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the repressive predisposition of the psychic apparatus bars that which cannot find expression – that which *ought* to be repressed – into what forms the psychological topos of the unconscious.<sup>23</sup> The dream-work is considered to transport the lingering latent into the representational, attributing visual and verbal imageries for example. The unthinkable formless is given form. The various narrative pieces of the dream’s manifest content act like remote representatives of the latent. Thus, Freud can say that the latent and the manifest ‘are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages, or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation.’<sup>24</sup>

## **Irrational Kernels**

In many ways the latent constitutes one of the basic theoretical materials of psychoanalysis. The latent is the theoretical substance around which psychoanalysis organizes its disciplinary discourses. Regardless of whether one's relation to psychoanalysis is of a loving or loathing kind, the latent is always a primer for the psychoanalytically (and we might add in our context also 'photographically') informed person, framing as it does the spatiotemporal qualities of the unconscious. Regardless of whether one believes in the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious or not, the most fantastic thing remains (in) the heart of psychoanalysis: the possibility of not knowing – and of not knowing oneself. Indeed, a disbelief in the claims of psychoanalysis tends just to enforce them. Not believing the message of psychoanalysis is a tending of its beliefs. That is the more conventional wisdom of streetwise defendants and detractors of psychoanalysis alike. In this situation, either side simply confirms its own opposing position. What is far more interesting is to approach this dividing line as a mutual and thus, shared, impasse for either side, an impasse where both sides are bound together by their very difference. In this joint space then, psychoanalysis comes to figure itself also without itself, without the possibility of taking recourse to its own, self-legitimized self – a self that is also posited as irreducibly exclusive by the other who does not believe in it. 'Who would believe in its tools anyway?' Psychoanalysis, therefore, can also not validate itself anymore with the conceptual tools that it has worked on for a century or so to be at its disposal for to defend its territory.

Given this exposure of psychoanalysis to its without, might this bring psychoanalysis to silence? Not really. Psychoanalysis, the talking cure, continues talking. Speech is the medium in which it lives. And as such, in letting it continue its discourse in open light and with its detractors, psychoanalysis might appear even more irrational. Not only assuming a groundless kernel as its primary material of investigation that it struggles to defend to those who distrust its theoretical claims, but seen from without it also appears as a disciplinary discourse gone irrational. What, after all, could it say to those who do not believe in it? Perhaps something that can only be discounted as nothing. That makes psychoanalysis outlandish. But that is its point, a significant point. The very possibility of there being such a discursive formation is extraordinary,

that is to say a discourse that allows itself the possible appearance of not knowing what *it* is talking about. In this regard it is fitting to paraphrase Lacan's unmistakable words that simply placed the field of psychoanalysis as the displaced discourse of the hysteric.<sup>25</sup> That is, unmistakably, a very Lacanian thing to say (Lacan affirming thereby his own theoretical position of a psychoanalysis underpinned by structuralist linguistics) but it is also to the point in that it is a discourse that is not afraid of its excess of unaccountability, be this of a scientific, epistemological or methodological nature. The possibility of a disciplinary space of the irrational in an analytically hard-edged age of scientification is the ethical space of psychoanalysis. Thus, to not believe in the theoretical claims posited by psychoanalysis but still to take a considerate look at it brings into relief even more drastically its significance vis-à-vis the non-signifying. That significance is enacted through the talking work done in the analytic session where the analysand can potentially accede into the 'relief of signification.'<sup>26</sup> At the same time, in psychoanalysis's ever growing expoundings on the work of the unconscious and its theoretical significance, psychoanalysis takes also away, every time anew, a little bit of its absolute secret by giving it some signification. It finds constantly new signifiers, terms and spaces to which it can attach itself in a meaningful way while holding out or on to its 'unconscious,' which it must claim as unclaimable. As such, psychoanalysis's every explanatory attempt in the face of its disbelievers deflates its most radical assertion of a methodological practice of the unaccountable by being forced to give an account of it. This can never be a direct account if psychoanalysis is to keep its own belief in the inexplicable; not a 'snapshot' of it, but only a description of topologies across psychic operations and their latent phases. And yet, in this defensive situation, psychoanalysis is also opened up anew to itself by the other, by its other who might simply not believe in it, thereby re-inscribing irrationality into the body of this 'hysteric discipline.'<sup>27</sup>

As might have become clear by now, I have chosen to defend both the defendants and detractors of psychoanalysis. I do so because I believe the reciprocal aversion of each other's position, as I have pointedly delineated their interplay for my own purpose here, can be of good use in bringing out the radical place of psychoanalysis, a place which becomes even more radical if we take the gamble in voicing our doubts about it while simultaneously making use of its professed insights. By allowing oneself to be situated in the space of courteous opposition, one must also court what one might

otherwise outright oppose. Thus, in defending both defendants and detractors of psychoanalysis I hope to avoid getting stuck between immobile fronts. At the same time, I do not only want to disarm the detractors of psychoanalysis of their resistance whenever I make use in my work of the insights proffered by psychoanalysis but I also want thereby to disarm myself of the risk of running into the closing ranks of overdetermination of the kind of psychoanalytically argued critique that can only affirm itself in turn.<sup>28</sup> What remains to be said, then, we can say with Paul de Man who makes a case – via psychoanalysis – for a dialectic of understanding as ‘as a complex interplay between knowing and not-knowing’ which he recognizes as being at work in the processes of his own research field, literary theory. As such, the situation becomes comparable to the psychoanalytical session where neither party fully needs to know what the other is talking about it. ‘But,’ as he writes, ‘this difficulty does not prevent a dialogical discourse of at least some interpretative value from taking place. The two “horizons,” that of individual experience and that of methodical understanding, can engage each other and they will undergo modifications in the process, though none of the experiences may ever become fully explicit.’<sup>29</sup> And this is what psychoanalysis, despite itself, can enable us to see.

It is the analyst/interpreter who seeks to lead us beyond the cover of conscious language. And yet, even though psychoanalytic theory has made us knowledgeable on how to interpret dreams by introducing the latent as what Freud called once ‘a new class of psychical material,’ the latent remains nevertheless of an elusive nature.<sup>30</sup> As the latent does not ‘illustrate’ the dream and thus cannot make visible its own features in immediate fashion, we also do not have direct access to it, that is to say we need to rely on deductive methods. This is of course the discovery attributed to Freud and his patients, but Freud became also aware of the ‘limits’ of interpretative work. It is the analyst/interpreter’s task ‘of investigating the relations between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts, and of tracing out the process by which the latter have been changed into the former.’<sup>31</sup> This ‘disentangling’ is made possible through recognizing the operations of condensation and displacement in the dream-work. Yet, at the same time, condensation and displacement can hinder an ultimate exposure of what may rest in latency.

### Images, *Verdichtend* and Derealizing

A dream's manifest motives behave like "nodal points" upon which a great number of the dream-thoughts' can converge.<sup>32</sup> Unravelling these nodal points can give us the leads to find out about what there might be (hidden) in latency. But the latent may, *ultimately*, evade us. Because 'each of the elements of the dream's content turns out to have been "overdetermined" – to have been represented in the dream-thoughts many times over,' the leads we were following may return us to where we started.<sup>33</sup> Instead of facing a latent image, we may have to bypass it; or, we may have already bypassed it. Who knows? Indeed, *who* could know? Standing at a crossroads that is crisscrossed by an *indefinite* number of routes, how could one decide to choose one over the other? Yet, we do not find ourselves in a 'senseless' situation in the sense of losing one's senses. Rather, it is the 'rational' in which we would like to ground our decisions, that is asked to succumb to its own determinedness and from where it aims at establishing a decision that should ultimately confirm itself as *the* decision.

The decision that Freud took was that 'the dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought.'<sup>34</sup> In branching out, we may well encounter new associatively related 'nodal points' at the crossroads of the wishful paths drawn by the unconscious. Yet, considering the un(ac)countability of this situation – indefinite number of endings – how could one ever come face to face with the latent in which our dream-thoughts are suspended? Perhaps we cannot arrest the latent like the development of the photographic image would do. And perhaps we are also always already too late for such an encounter that would make such a framing as image possible. The latent, it has been said, makes its presence felt belatedly. When tracing it back to where it might have come from, *displaced* as it were, we will stumble upon crossroads built on the condensing effects of the dream-work. Yet while condensation makes an image possible, the same image seems to acquire an indefinite depth brought about by multiple layers of dream-thoughts.<sup>35</sup> Thus, through analysis, this manifest(ed) image will disintegrate into several abstract dream-thoughts that are withdrawn from the concreteness of (visual) representation.<sup>36</sup> The ground of the image recedes, removing

thereby the image itself of its appearance. Groundless, the image slips out of its manifestation. It *derealizes*.<sup>37</sup>

We can recognize the metaphorical tone of my previous paragraph. Such is the difficulty of carrying across the latent into the firm grip of representing signs – to produce a text that renders the latent legible – that we need the support of metaphors, or rather, that the metaphorical makes itself thereby *felt*. The above text has engendered thus an appropriate context for us to remind ourselves of what Lacan had to say about condensation and its relation to the work of metaphor. He writes: ‘*Verdichtung*, “condensation,” is the superimposed structure of signifiers in which metaphor find its field; its name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, shows the mechanism’s connaturality with poetry, to the extent that it envelops poetry’s own properly traditional function.’<sup>38</sup> What is interesting, in Lacan’s account, is the stressing that the ‘metaphorical effect’ does not necessarily arise from a neat comparison between two (conceptual) images. As he writes, ‘metaphor’s creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of the image, that is, of two equally *actualized* signifiers.’<sup>39</sup> We should note Lacan’s emphasis on the discrepancy between the statuses of the two signifiers through which the metaphor is supposed to constitute itself. They form an unlike pair: not two equally fully formed signifiers as it would be the case when comparing two images. Instead, one of the two signifiers is not yet ‘there’ in its full shape. Or in other words: one of them is yet to be *realized*.

It is commonly assumed that we use metaphors to ‘say something new – or to “say the unsayable”’ to thereby create some kind of productive ‘excess’ based on a process of substituting one term for another.<sup>40</sup> Yet, we should also bear in mind, alongside Lacan, that this metaphorical process of substitution is not such a straightforward act if we recall Saussure’s linguistic model of signification based on negative differentiation.<sup>41</sup> ‘Whence,’ Lacan writes, ‘we can say it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain’s elements *consist* in the signification it can provide at that very moment.’<sup>42</sup> Thus, the element of signification (the sign) can only be ‘of meaning’ if it remains in the chain. Only when circulating in an economy of signifiers, the signifieds (meaning) can be maintained. Therefore, it is not absurd to say, with Lacan, that ‘metaphor is situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning.’<sup>43</sup> What I want to hint at, with the help of Lacan’s ‘yet to be

actualized signifier,' is a link to a latent, not yet formed, 'image' that lingers in the unconscious as 'a colourless and abstract expression.'<sup>44</sup> It is here that the photographer steps in. The photographer wants to develop the image she has taken to heave it out of its indeterminable latency; the photographer wants to overcome the latent stage of the image that, through photographic eyes, is merely seen as an inevitable part of the image's development into an *actualized* image. In that sense, by claiming a fully working signifier, the photographer masters the image, ensuring that the invisible and temporally unreliable latent form of expression is, like in the dream-work, 'exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one.'<sup>45</sup> As Freud assumes: 'The advantage, and accordingly the purpose, of such a change *jumps* to the eyes.'<sup>46</sup>

### **Photography Without Photographs**

There is a breaking moment in Hervé Guibert's book *L'image fantôme* (1982) where what we might call 'the photographer's dream' of a fecund field of photography and of a virile photographer who looks after that field, is unexpectedly interrupted.<sup>47</sup> The plot is spun within an Oedipal triangle; mother, father and their son/photographer. Indeed, the triangle is so sharply defined that one wonders to what extent Guibert has elongated it on purpose. The short story, told from the perspective of the son, centres on his venture to take a photograph – apparently his first ever – of his mother. As his father used to take 'the picture against her will while pretending to adjust the camera, so that she had no control over the image,' before even beginning with the photo-session, he preventatively removes his father from the room where the photographs would be taken.<sup>48</sup> After trying out several dresses and undoing her hairdo with her, mother and son set up in the living room that was to provide the backdrop for the photograph. And then, the photographic moment unfolds:

*I took her picture. At that moment, she was at the height of her beauty, her face completely smooth and relaxed. [...] I believe that at moment she was happy with the image that I, her son, allowed her to have and that I was capturing without my father's knowledge. In fact, it's that: the image of a woman who has always been criticized by her husband, enjoying what she could never have, a forbidden image, and the pleasure between us was even greater as the forbidden burst into pieces.*<sup>49</sup>



Having taken (secretly) the images, the father is allowed to return. Father and son proceed now together to develop the images. The technology of representation of woman is a men's business. Incidentally, the camera that the son used to capture *his* mother is his father's, 'and it was the first time I had used it.'<sup>50</sup> They 'decided to process the film right away, and the time it took to process it corresponded to the time it took my mother to remove the powder from her face, dry her hair, and restore her earlier image.'<sup>51</sup> The developing of the film, however, brings the son's idealized image of his mother and of himself as son/photographer to an abrupt end. 'Looking through the film against the bluish light of the bathroom, we saw that the entire roll of film was unexposed, blank from one end to another.'<sup>52</sup> Since the son had not attached well the film in the camera, he had photographed, it turns out, 'nothing':

*Blank, the essential moment lost, sacrificed. It was the opposite of awakening from a nightmare: the development of the film was like awakening from a dream-session, which, instead of being wiped away at once, becomes, with the reality of the absence of an image, a nightmare-session rather than a dream-session.*<sup>53</sup>

Photographers do not want to lose their images. In the photographer's dream-image of photography, the photographer is assured the circumvention of such a loss. As long as the developing of the image continues, the photographer can dream of all the images-to-come. He can still dream of all the images he has conceived or might wish to conceive. The photographic apparatus guarantees the image; not only in the actual sense that it can produce a real photograph, but also in the symbolic sense of confirming the photographer as such. In clear psychoanalytic words: the camera promises the phallus to the photographer. Yet, Guibert's photographer has been 'castrated' for his incestuous photo-session. The camera did not yield him the anticipated images – not even one. The much expected 'becoming-visible' of the image of which the photographer is in charge by commanding the photographic apparatus, is aborted. The fruits of his labour lost, it seems. We can take Guibert's 'blank moment' as indicative of the photographer's obsession with delivering images – with showing off. After all, without an image, what is there left for the photographer to show? And how would he show off himself *as* photographer?

The 'blank' is dissatisfactory for the photographer. It is distressing not because of its

formal aesthetic properties but because of its symbolic meaning – not the blankness of an underexposed photograph but the blankness of possible nothingness. Following Freud, it scares because it attests to the threat of castration, that is to say, it attests to ‘the misadventures of a fantasy, that of separation.’<sup>54</sup> That is also the lesson of Guibert’s telling tale – itself incorporating key Freudian themes which inform the story. But the photographer has the ability to fill the blank – to cover it with an image – so as to avoid, in Guibert’s words, the nightmare of the ‘reality of the absence of an image.’ The promise of a successfully developed image is such that its visibility will fill the void that stares out of the blank. Its promise is that of the fetish. For Freud, the fetish forms a workable compromise under the influence of the unconscious forms of law and is called forth by the dynamics of an ‘unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish,’ upon the (male) child’s confrontation with the reality of the mother’s genital difference.<sup>55</sup>

By taking images, the photographer can avail himself of the opportunity of creating the material that will fill the gaps. Yet this is not just a matter of availing oneself of the actual photograph that, as ‘a frozen moment, is a detachable object which acknowledges and disavows the difference between itself and what it represents, just as fetishism disavows the consequences of sexual difference.’<sup>56</sup> Rather, already the idea itself of having a tool at one’s disposal that has the potentiality of generating visibility is fetishistic. This is not a mere fetishism of equipment that underpins the photographers’ showing off – ‘do you want to see mine? – with the aid of their ‘things.’ The fascination is not just grounded in the fact that the photographer believes to have mastering control over the tool that he possesses. The photographer also draws vigour from the way he is *implicated* in the photographic apparatus, that is to say, that the photographer can always have hope in the apparatus so as to achieve an image in which visibility is made to appear. Conversely, the photographer has to accept the fears that arise from failing to produce this visibility, that is to say, from being let down by the apparatus. Thus, the camera is not only a tool that makes images but it is also a symbolic shelter to which we can retreat to seek protection from the fear of the absence of the image because it promises the substrate of visibility.

Such is the despair of Guibert's photographer that he believes that he 'had photographed nothing.'<sup>57</sup> But he forgets (or ignores?) that he had actually photographed something. He did take images of his mother – they just did not get fixed, leaving the film untouched. Just because one does not bring a photograph to completion does not mean that one has not actually photographed. But photographers assume otherwise. They have no choice. After all, one is paid for the photograph and not for a nothing. Guibert's photographer practises, against his conscious will, a photography without visible images. But that does not *undo* him as photographer. And yet, the plotting of *Ghost Image*'s narrative is based exactly on the presumption that the photographer's foremost aim is to gain the image. Everything/body anticipates the image: the simple story line flows towards that much awaited moment when the image should realize to thereby redeem the son/photographer with *the* photograph of his mother, the one not yet seen before. The image remains, however, unattainable. A latent impression without its manifest counterpart. Colourless blanks. In the blank film, we cannot see the photographed subject but we can see in it the material trace of the photographic event. The 'blank' in which the story finds its climax reveals itself as a shock moment for the photographer precisely because the photographer singles out the event of image-capture as a privileged one, disregarding thereby other aspects that also make up the practising of photography. Guibert's story falls prey to such 'photographic' thinking that desires to zoom in on the subject to-be-photographed. At the same time, this confirms the photographer – not only as the creator of the image but also as the director of it. As Serge Tisseron notes, '[t]he photographing [*prise de vue*] has only contributed to itself to confer upon the event an exceptional character and to the one who has photographed a privileged place in the heart of the event.'<sup>58</sup>

In the one-eyed vision of the photographer, it is the photograph and the event from which it originates and to which it simultaneously attests that counts. Aetiologically, this allows the photographer to put himself as a definite part of the centre of photographic practice while simultaneously also defining a concept of photographic practice as one in which the photographer is visibly implicated. This is not to say that behind every camera there has to stand a photographer. CCTV indicates otherwise. Rather, it is to say that when someone decides to take part in photography under the name 'photographer,' then the same name calls forth – it *interpellates* – a particular

role in which he is cast.<sup>59</sup> It is obvious that the photographer's goal is the developed, appeared image, the photograph. But this fact appears so obvious to us because it derives its obviousness from accepting the photographer-photograph route as the paradigmatic one. Of course, we can say that the apparatus leads the photographer onto this route; after all, the photographic apparatus is designed to generate images. But that would also imply forgetting that the apparatus is structured around our desires that invest libidinally in its design so as to produce the desired image. Or, as Lacan would dare to say: 'The essence of the image is to be invested by the libido.'<sup>60</sup> And an image-generating apparatus such as a camera provides a fine vehicle to move us towards that goal.

'I decided to take a picture of my mother,' declares the photographer in the opening paragraph of *Ghost Image*, and its closing paragraph returns to that same image, albeit it did not materialize as photograph.<sup>61</sup> The route of a photographer and his image. While this text allows us to glimpse another photograph, one that did not need to materialize in the end but to which the printed letters of the text nevertheless give testimony, it pleases itself by narrating a story that follows the route of a photographer and his image. The structure that lies in the narrative overlays itself with the one that lies etymologically in *apparatus*: 'to make ready for.' 'The photographic apparatus lies in wait for photography.'<sup>62</sup> It makes an image ready for viewing. And it makes us ready for the image. In a similar way, one can argue, Guibert's narrative is as much about the anticipated photograph as it is about the work needed to make oneself ready for the image. The story pulls the reader up to its anti-climactic peak through the preparatory scenes that the desired image demands for its realization.

### **Stories of/in *Nachträglichkeit***

Another story. In his essay 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement' of 1914, Freud reflects on the development of psychoanalysis. In the section where Freud recounts the first institutional reception of his work, notably the start of the collaboration with the scholars from Zurich at about 1907, he also remarks that the wider institutional reception remained restrained, and produced initially 'nothing but

a very emphatic repudiation.’<sup>63</sup> In a typically Freudian move, he does not discount the negative reception and sees in it nonetheless the work of psychoanalysis substantiated: ‘What had happened was that the latency period had *expired* and everywhere psychoanalysis was becoming the object of increasing interest.’<sup>64</sup> Psychoanalysis broke through its own latency period and began to shape itself as a self-conscious disciplinary field. We can imagine a spark of self-irony flaring up in Freud when he wrote this passage as he turned one of psychoanalysis’s concepts onto the psychoanalytic movement to narrate a history of it. We recall that psychoanalysis understands the latency period to be ushered in by the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and is being characterized as a momentary ‘pause’ of sexual development before puberty begins. In forming a loop, this suspension is tied to a blanking out of what brought us into the suspension: amnesia erases the early Oedipal struggles and the urges of infantile sexuality.<sup>65</sup> In latency, the past is not remembered anymore. Heaved into latency, the past expires from our consciousness.

And latency, too, *expires*. It has a temporal dimension and is not solely a phenomenon that hides inside ‘distortions,’ rendering thereby itself seemingly undetectable. It is in *retrospection* that Freud can ascribe a latency period to his psychoanalytic project. We can think this problem as a question: would he have recognized the latent constitution of his own work at a time when his work was still in a period of latency so to speak? Only in hindsight can he make out that there was something constituting itself in latency. One realizes simply later, that there was *indeed* something because that ‘something’ revealed itself only after it has come out of its latent form. *Nachträglich*, Freud can write an account of the evolution of psychoanalysis. In so doing, he catches up with what he only recognizes belatedly. In the mode of the postscript, he pins down the latent. Before that moment, it remained undetectable, either because it escapes our attention or because it cannot be detected. It is the work of latency to effect missed encounters. Whatever is latent makes its existence felt belatedly. We could say that we cannot but fall short of attending to an encounter with the latent. The photographer, on the other hand, can issue us with a forewarning that an image has inscribed itself on the camera’s memory device. But without the photographer’s forewarning we could not grasp this ‘image’ because we would not know anything about it – we could not detect it otherwise. In this instance, the photographer can elucidate the spectator about the latent because, as the maker of

the impression, she is knowledgeable about its presence. Similarly, the analyst has the methodological tools to bring out latent signifying structures from the manifest images of the analysand's dreams. The photographer looks after latent impressions. The analyst watches over latent meanings. What they share, one might say, is an investment, or indeed a belief, in the latent, which forms a critical part of their work processes.

We do not notice the image on a photograph that is undeveloped. Only when it is developed, we will see it. But then again, it lost already the quality of its latency. Photo-scientists trying to track down the characteristics of latent image formations know this all too well, because 'development is the only method of detecting the latent image, and in the process the change represented by the latent image in the individual emulsion grain is lost.'<sup>66</sup> Hence, in testing the latent image, they too, like the analyst, need to rely on deductive methods so as to find out about their subject. Yet what forms the subject of their work disappears in the very process of the work. Too late, again. Thus, we recognize the effects of *Nachträglichkeit* and the double movement inherent in its concept: when that which is latent appears to us, it ceases to be latent because it has appeared. The developed image gives up its latent form. And we, who only detect it once it has appeared, can only take ourselves after it by finding its space-time retrospectively.<sup>67</sup> Thus, what is latent *qua* latent cannot represent itself to us. It avoids us. Always circumscribing itself through something else, we are displaced spatially and temporally from it. Every time too late. Every time too little.

While we are considering the latent here, we can identify its operations and think about it by way of deducing from its veiled manifestations. We can produce metaphors, create images of the latent and give accounts of it. We can put a frame around it so as to give a rendition *of* it. Yet, like the unconscious, its actual present workings in this present moment remain oblique. We do not know what there might be *in* latency here and now. Is this the 'repression of the latent?' In the genitival ambiguity of this formulation the latent is proposed as an agent of repressive force but also as that in which the latent finds itself repressed to. Could we think of a work, a text, an image, that is not of but *in* latency without declaring any cautionary or forecasting assertions? How could we look at it? How could we read it? How could we avoid missing it, given that the latent makes itself always missing? These

questions run against an impossible uncovering of the latent *per se*: its work is erasing. And what is erasing, leaves a trace. It would be Derrida to put us on his path of the trace so as to tell us that if the alterity of the unconscious as envisaged by Freud stems from a temporalization in latency, then the unconscious has no self-presence as such. It cannot be made present but neither is it hidden. It can only ever be followed in tracing. Hence, what the ‘unconscious’ *is*, is never just present – which is precisely the force of its alterity.<sup>68</sup>

### Speaking the Unspeakable

The latent, then, resists us as much as it insists on us. We can call the latent but our call’s echo will not reach us. At least not immediately. But at some point in time it will catch up and surprise us. Perhaps. It was these phenomena that prompted Freud to write that ‘we give the name of *traumas* to those impressions, experienced early and later *forgotten*.’<sup>69</sup> The invisible scar of the traumatic impression that we could never see, makes itself manifest in symptomatic form. Disguised, unintelligible, pointless – it befalls us but we cannot make sense of it. And yet, the ‘belated effect of the trauma’ agitates our conscious surface.<sup>70</sup> Passing through the latency period, we have forgotten what it is that remains in latency. That which has been exposed but could not be developed – remaining in latency – makes its appearance in indecipherable form to us. Unlike the photographer who can expect that, after exposure, there will be a photographic impression waiting for development, the image of the traumatic impression remains concealed behind the erasing effects of the latency period. Still, once the photographer has taken an image but not yet developed it, the latent makes its *affects* felt.<sup>71</sup> The image is exposed and concealed. The photographer has to negotiate psychically this situation, accepting that the image she has taken is not yet there visibly. If the latent appears to make the image precarious, if that is its affect on us, then, conversely, that also highlights the photographer’s holding on to the image. Thus, what would it mean for the photographer to expose but not develop?

*Exposed.* What has been exposed but what does not show us its exposure, needs to be marked so as to be recognized as exposed. A film that carries latent images is marked

as 'exposed' so as to protect this vulnerable material, and one might say, protect the photographer from his vulnerability during this period. There is a scene in Atom Egoyan's film *Ararat* (2002) where we stumble upon this mark that will prompt us to look at that which cannot be seen. (Figures 2, 3, 4) The warning comes in bold letters. EXPOSED FILM EXPOSED FILM EXPOSED FILM EXPOSED FILM EXPOSED Printed repetitively on the white tape that wraps itself around the edge of film cans, the red letters stop us from seeing beyond them. The bar shaped by these warning letters is resonated by another bar, which provides the spatial setting for the scene: airport customs. The scene unfolds at a North American airport. It follows the internationalized protocols of border security of the twenty-first century. Against the cool backdrop of stainless steel fixtures, screening equipment and the silence of interrogation offices, we watch an everyday encounter between a customs officer and a young traveller returning to his country of residence. The etiquette of composed anonymity prevails. Questions are asked, bags are searched. The officer stumbles upon the film cans:

*What are these? It's film. It's motion picture film. It's for a movie. [...] It's very valuable footage. Can you open it? Well, no. It's exposed film, it'll destroy it. How? It's for a movie that's being shot here in Canada. I had to go to Turkey to get some process shots. Process shots? Shots that'll be used for digital effects ... I don't understand.*<sup>72</sup>

The film cans become the catalytic obstacle upon which a complexly layered story begins to unfold. It is woven into the wider plot of Egoyan's film whose multiple narrative lines of urban lives in the early 2000s are touched by the work of memory and the politics of history in the shadow of the traumatic events of the Armenian genocide of around 1915. The examination, pursued by the experienced customs officer with laconic politeness, forces the held up cinematographer to reveal his motives for the journey to Turkey. By having to give cause to his trip abroad, he is forced, involuntarily, not only to reflect upon his own motivations and desires to reconnect to the country of his ancestors but also to experience immediately the limits of his endeavour in the face of history's relentless passing. This face is personified by the blank face of the customs officer who remains seemingly unimpressed in spite of the cinematographer's arguments made with the eager passions of youth. The





Figures 2, 3, 4. Atom Egoyan, film stills from *Ararat* (2002).

stoicism performed by the officer becomes the screen onto which the held-up cinematographer has to project. It is the indifferent screen of the bureaucratic systems responsible for the records of history's archives. Yet, it is also a screen of the here and now, of a contemporary citizen who responds in the framework of his own historical knowledge to the 'facts' reported to him. Both customs officer and the impromptu cinematographer hold on to the four enigmatic film rolls. Their professional and personal interests intersect in this object incongruously. It is the customs officer's duty to inspect them, to check out the contents inside. And it is the cinematographer's duty to protect the images, to keep the latent imagery sealed so as to bring 'home' the valuable footage he declares are inside the cans. Moreover, we who watch this scene are given in the iconic image of the film cans a representation of the very material through which our spectatorial participation in it becomes possible. The film cans become an allegorical cipher for the vocation of photographing. Allegorical, because the cans do not show us anything – and we cannot look into them. They are blunt signs – in them, we (literally) cannot find an image. Yet they can also be seen as an allegory of the work of trauma: not being developed, they resist photographic signification, thus linking up with the notion that '[...] the trauma pertaining to an event is less an inherent aspect of the event itself than it is an effect pertaining to the impossibility of integrating the event into a knowledgeable network.'<sup>73</sup> Instead, we stare at, and with, the photographer staring at them. And yet, we do not know what we are staring at. Film cans, yes. But their content is obscured.

How does one speak the unspeakable? This not just a rhetorical question here. It is also a question of belief in that which has no voice, in that which cannot be seen but is nevertheless with us. But the question that the cinematographer is asked to answer – even in the acerbic face of border control bureaucracy – is an opportunity to recognize that my 'I' cannot just map itself out in a narration of a self-same 'I,' thus opening out a space of ethics *in relation* to the other. I am never just my 'I' because, as Judith Butler argues in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 'the narrative "I" is reconstituted at every moment it is invoked in the narrative itself.'<sup>74</sup> 'This invocation is, paradoxically, a performative and non-narrative act, even as it functions as the fulcrum for narrative itself. I am, in other words, doing something with that "I" – elaborating and positing it in relation to a real or imagined audience – which is

something other than telling a story about it, even though “telling remains part of what I do.”<sup>75</sup>

In this sense, the photographer is put to test by the customs officer. Not unlike by an analyst. However, as photographer, he cannot rely on his primary means of legitimization – photographic images. If photographers prove themselves through the images they produce thereby to attain credibility as photographers, then the photographer in this scene is symbolically disabled by the latent constitution of the film stock. The images cannot be seen but we need to believe in them nevertheless. The photographer has to convince the officer that he has indeed shot scenes in Turkey to get through customs. It is convincing without evidence. This is a promise too weak to be successful in a border politics of evidence and data retrieval. In his attempt to convince the officer of the legality of his film material, the photographer rescues himself to images that he can actually show: footage on a digital camera comes to his aid to produce the visual evidence that his latent film stock cannot. This creates an intra-narrative within the film in the style of a self-reflective video-diary of his voyage just as it should produce the images the ‘hidden’ film cannot produce. At the same time, the ‘lack’ in the form of what cannot be shown becomes even more marked. In its fragility, the undeveloped imagery keeps us at bay. In withholding its visible images, we stand beside it, watching supplementary images instead. The film cans seem to hold an irrecuperable past, a space not reachable *but* present nonetheless. In *Ararat*, the latent finds itself represented – but encrypted – in the metallic film cans, provoking a dialogue about its own condition. As in dreams, it is hidden inside other images. It will not show us its own face. Our search for latent impressions, long forgotten but nevertheless always in and with us, starts with images and demands walking through even more images. In the threshold space of airport customs, more thresholds are negotiated. For the customs officer, the film cans are his bait, yet the cinematographer must forbid him to do his examining job. The latent stretches itself between the two. How does one carry it across the threshold? How to make sense of one’s past in the present? And how to present one’s past?

In the uncertain light of the latent, the discussed scene of *Ararat* begins to reveal itself as my own ‘nodal point,’ its side-effects engendering the condensation of several motives. In the customs officer we recognize the figure of the translator who, equally,

has to guard what is and what is not allowed to enter a language sphere, or more subtly, under what conditions it might enter. And the figure of the analyst, too, appears again with his interpreting work. In the fabrication of my own 'nodal point' we can make out my struggle to 'prove' something, to make a grounded claim. If this has turned out to be my discursive 'constriction' of the latent so as to unbind the photographer from the visible image, then this has become my double bind. As Derrida writes, 'one can only unbind one of its knots by pulling on the other to make it tighter [...].'<sup>76</sup> What has become so tight in the end, speaks of my overdetermination in its attempt to develop an image of the latent so as to produce an account of it. But in the overdetermination we are also left with new multiple points of departure. Indeed, which one we decide to take, then, is another question.

Customs officer, translator, interpreter, analyst. In thinking about the latent, and the photographer through the latent, we have passed through their professional hands. It is through thinking through their work, situated in spaces of thresholds – linguistic, psychic, territorial – that the photographer can insert himself less implicitly in the logics of the apparatus, to find differing ways of entering it so as to recognize, as Barthes writes, 'what is undevelopable' – what we have to leave behind when we cross the threshold.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 'Le photograph agit toujours avec le désir de "créer" une image qui, auparavant, n'existait pas. Ce désir est générateur d'espoir and d'angoisse: "Ma photographie sera-t-elle reussie?" se demande-t-il toujours.' Serge Tisseron, *Le mystère de la chambre claire: Photographie et inconscient* (Paris: Champs-Flammarion, 1996), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> J. F. Hamilton and F. Urbach, 'The Mechanism of the Formation of the Latent Image', in *The Theory of the Photographic Process*, ed. C. E. Kenneth Mees (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp.87-119 (p.87).

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p.49.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term 'digitization' in relation to what is more commonly known as 'digital photography.' I do so to show, on the one hand, a certain historico-technological layering of photography, and on the other hand to emphasize the *digitizing* work in itself that writes and displays images in/through the binary logic of figures. *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography* dates the appearance of digitized photography with 1981: 'Electronic still photography began with the introduction of the Sony video still camera called MAVICA, an acronym for *magnetic video camera*. Announced on August 24, 1981, it was to be several years before Sony delivered a professional camera called the ProMavica.' See *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography*, ed. Leslie Stroebel and Richard Zakia (Boston and London: Focal Press, 1995), p.243.

<sup>5</sup> What is at stake in the so-called shift from analogue to digital is not so much the issue of production (from the chemical to the computational) but, as Peter Lunenfeld helps us to see more clearly, 'the composition of the output, which has shifted from the discrete photograph to the essentially unbound graphic. It is here that the "revolutionary" shift can be located. The "unique" is not forced to merge, even submerge, into the overall graphic environment. There formerly discrete photographic elements blend even further into the computer's digital soup of letters, numbers, motion graphics and sound files: what is crucial is that all of these and more are simply *different manifestations of the data maintained in binary form*.' Peter Lunenfeld, 'Digital Photography: The Dubitative Image', in *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), pp.55-69 (p.59).

<sup>6</sup> See Alain Fleischer, *La vitesse d'évasion*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Léo Scheer/Centre Georges Pompidou/La Maison Européenne de la Photographie, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> I employ the term 'latent' so as to circumscribe more generously various criteria associated with latent phenomena at the same time as keeping distinct differently theorized manifestations such as the psychoanalytic concept of the latency period or the latent photographic impression.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Fox Talbot, 'Early Researches in Photography [1877]', in *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography*, ed. Mike Weaver (Oxford: Clío Press, 1992), pp.45-55 (p.46). Talbot recounts some of the technological vicissitudes in relation to the fixing of the image in *The Pencil of Nature*. 'The process of fixation was a simple one, and it was sometimes very successful. The disadvantages to which it was liable did not manifest themselves until a later period, and arose from a new and unexpected cause, namely, that when a picture is so treated, although it is permanently secured against the *darkening* effect of solar rays, yet it is exposed to a contrary or *whitening* effect from them; so that after the lapse of some days the dark parts of the picture begin to fade, and gradually the whole picture becomes obliterated, and is reduced to

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the appearance of a uniform pale yellow sheet of paper. A good many pictures, no doubt, escape this fate, but as they all seem liable to it, the fixing process by iodine must be considered as not sufficiently certain to be retained in use as a photographic process [...].’ See *The Pencil of Nature* [1846], in *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography*, pp.75-103 (p.81).

<sup>9</sup> I allow myself the help of etymology to support my argument about the seducing and ‘calling’ effect of the latent: ‘seduce’ entails to ‘persuade someone to abandon their duty’; from Latin *seducere*, from *se-* ‘away, apart’ + *ducere* ‘to lead.’

<sup>10</sup> Photo-technologists are keen to stress the differences between the digital and chemical photograph. While the ‘digital’ truly revolutionized the taking, circulation and storage of images, I am less interested in exploring this historical break than in seeking to conceptualize the photographic image in its ongoing development. The production of a digitized image has, just as the chemical one, within itself a ‘latent’ component, confined not only between the moments of photographic exposure and visualization but also between the photograph’s digital storage and its visualization. As such, latency plays an even more prominent role in digital imaging.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Fox Talbot, quoted in Beaumont Newhall, *The Latent Image: The Discovery of Photography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), p.116.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Impression,’ with its connotations beyond the visible, including morphological, acoustic, temporal and psychical aspects, is a more elastic term to describe the traces left on some thing/body. Hence, it seems appropriate that in the cited quote Talbot speaks of ‘impression’ to describe the latent photograph. The reader will have noted that I use ‘image’ to probe the possibility of extending the notion of the latent (as an invisible impression) to the image itself.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, ‘On Forty Photographs and Consecutive Matters’ [1963], in *12 Dialogues 1962-1963*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), pp.69-74 (p.70).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Development: What it is and what it does’, in C. I. Jacobson and R. E. Jacobson, *Developing: The Negative Technique* [1940] (London: Focal Press: 1978), p.21. For a photo-scientific theory of the latent image, see Tadaaki Tani, ‘Mechanism of Latent Image Formation’, in *Photographic Sensitivity: Theory and Mechanisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.81-110.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas T. Rand, ‘Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis’, in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* [1987], vol. I, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp.1-22 (p.18).

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘A Short Account of Psycho-Analysis’ [1928], trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Vintage and The Hogarth Press, 2001), pp.190-209 (p.199). Thereafter *Standard Edition*.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Interpretation,’ itself the official translation of Freud’s *Deutung*, is quite distinctly removed in its meaning from the original German term. ‘Interpretation’ is, however, an apt term to use in this context because it has connotations of ‘translating’ as well as ‘explaining.’ The German *Deutung*, as used by Freud, is closer to ‘explaining,’ ‘indicating,’ or indeed ‘giving directions’ and implies that analysis of the dream’s manifest content cannot really be understood in the terms of translation – a point discussed at length by Derrida who elaborates his deconstructive critique of translation’s metaphysical groundings in the context of his readings of Freud’s outlines of ‘Traumdeutung’: ‘The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation

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relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And when that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry. In this sense, since the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of very dream scene, dreams are untranslatable [...].’ Jacques Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ [1966], trans. Alan Bass, in *Writing and Difference* [1967] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.196-231 (p.210).

<sup>18</sup> Eric Prenowitz, ‘Right on [à même]’, in Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* [1994], trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.105-11 (p.106). For a wider discussion of the ideal of the invisible translator within the professional circuits of translation work and the ‘violence’ of translation, see the chapter ‘Invisibility’ by Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* [1995] (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.1-34.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.11.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Prenowitz, ‘Right on [à même]’, pp.105-11 (p.105).

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Bollas, *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* [1995] (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.19.

<sup>22</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis go even further, making a terminologically problematic claim that privileges the latent content as the ‘correct’ version of the dream. ‘The manifest content [...] is as it were the abridged version, while the latent content [...] which is revealed by analysis is the correct version.’ Surely, if we theorize the psychoanalytic structures with Freud, both latent *and* manifest content are entangled into each other and so ‘make up’ the dream. The ‘correct’ speaks here of an ideological overinvestment of the analyst vis-à-vis the latent content of the dream which, at the same time, might also provide a platform of self-justification for the analyst’s work of interpretation – what would the analyst do without the incorrect version? While Freud attests that the work of primary processes arises prior to the work of the secondary processes, he does not elevate *per se* one side of the dream over the other. Instead, he stresses the chronological logic in the subject’s psychic development whereby the secondary processes superimpose themselves over the primary ones: ‘It is true that, so far as we know, no psychical apparatus exists which possess a primary process only and that such an apparatus is to that extent a theoretical fiction. But this much is a fact: the primary processes are present in the mental apparatus from the first, while it is only during the course of life that the secondary processes unfold, and come to inhibit and overlay the primary ones; [...] In consequence of the belated appearance of the secondary processes, the core of our being, consisting of unconscious wishful impulses, remains inaccessible to the understanding and inhibition of the preconscious; the part played by the latter is restricted once and for all to directing along the most expedient paths the wishful impulses that arise from the unconscious.’ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Psychology of the Dream-processes’ [1900], trans. James Strachey, in *Standard Edition*, vol. V, pp.509-622 (p.603).

See ‘Latent Content’, in Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 2006), p.235.

<sup>23</sup> The work of repression, according to Freud, is needed to avoid the unpleasing effects created by the wishful impulses of the primary processes, contradicting the secondary, ‘purposeful’ thinking: ‘Among these wishful impulses derived from infancy, which can neither be destroyed nor inhibited, there are some whose

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fulfilment would be a contradiction of the purposive ideas of secondary thinking. The fulfilment of these wishes would no longer generate an affect of pleasure but of unpleasure; and *it is precisely this transformation of affect which constitutes the essence of what we term “repression.”* Sigmund Freud, ‘The Psychology of the Dream-processes’, p.604.

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’ [1900], trans. James Strachey, in *Standard Edition*, vol. IV, pp.277-310 (p.277).

<sup>25</sup> David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), pp.121-76.

<sup>26</sup> I borrow this apt term from Griselda Pollock. Note that ‘relief of signification’ is both a psychosomatic relief (like a ‘sigh’) of being able to articulate and put into words what found itself in repression but that such a relief can only come about through the actual material *relief* of the signifier within an economy of the spoken word. Griselda Pollock, ‘Art/Trauma/Representation’, *parallax* 15:1 (2009), pp.40-54 (p.41).

<sup>27</sup> We cannot ignore to take the hysteric also by its ancient Greek meaning that designates the space of the ‘womb’ which is, however, not say that it should be seen as a discourse of or for the female (hysterics) around which psychoanalysis found its foundational bearings in the late nineteenth century. Rather, in the ‘hysteric’ the womb resurfaces as an enclosed space, the subject’s space of pre-birth (the state of pregnancy itself often described along the terms of latency) hemmed in by *it* while at the same time protected by it. This space is thus also never of an absolute closure and leaves its marks on the subject who cannot yet cognize the symbolic orders (e.g. language) while already being immersed in it. This complex and asymmetrical ‘structuring’ space – one does not master language yet but is already mastered by its structure – is variously theorized. In a sweeping move, we can mention, while granting large discrepancies between their conceptual outlooks, Kristeva’s *chora*, Ettinger’s *matrix* and Abraham/Torok’s *crypt*.

<sup>28</sup> For an astute critique – emphasizing Derridian deconstruction – of the ‘application’ of psychoanalysis in literary criticism as psychoanalysis’s own righteous reaffirmation, see Spivak’s ‘The Letter as Cutting Edge’ where she suggests, as a way beyond, that ‘[t]he Derridian move, when written into critical practice, would mean, not equating or making analogical the psychoanalytic and literary-critical situation, or the situation of the book and its reader, but a perpetual deconstruction (reversal and displacement) of the distinction between the two.’ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘The Letter as Cutting Edge’, in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.3-14 (p.13).

<sup>29</sup> Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* [1986] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.59.

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.277.

<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.277.

<sup>32</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.283.

<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.283.

<sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Psychology of the Dream-processes’, p.525.

<sup>35</sup> On the work of condensation, Freud writes: ‘Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning. Strictly speaking, then, it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation.’ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.279.

<sup>36</sup> And for the sake of clarity, I shall add here the point made by Laplanche and Pontalis that the work of ‘condensation’ should not be confused with a mere



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‘summarization.’ ‘Condensation should not, however, be looked upon as a summary: although each manifest element is determined by several latent meanings, each one of these, inversely, may be identified in several elements; what is more, manifest elements do not stand in the same relationship to each of the meanings from which they derive, and so they do not subsume them after the fashion of a concept.’ See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, ‘Condensation’, in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 82-83 (p.82).

<sup>37</sup> This is Kaja Silverman’s term to describe the work of the analytic process, turning the manifest content into the more abstract dream-thoughts. See Kaja Silverman, ‘Apparatus for the Production of an Image’, *parallax* 6:3 (2000), pp.12-28 (p.12).

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious’ [1957], trans. Bruce Fink, in *Écrits* [1966] (New York and London: Norton & Company, 2006), pp.412-41 (p.425).

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious’ (p.422) [My emphasis].

<sup>40</sup> Mieke Bal, ‘Scared to Death’, in *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp.32-47 (p.32). On the work of metaphor, see Jonathan Culler, ‘The Turns of Metaphor’, in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp.188-209.

<sup>41</sup> I can give a personal anecdote here to illuminate Saussure’s claim of negative differentiation. Being able to practise the English tongue for just over a decade, I would often encounter in writing the situation where I would suddenly remember a word (maybe overheard or read in the past), ‘knowing’ that it would fit exactly into the syntax of my textual construction but the meaning of which I would not necessarily have to know. Saussure would describe this with the following words: ‘Instead of pre-existing ideas, then, we find [...] *values* emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.’ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1915], ed. Charles Bally and Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p.117.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious’, p.419.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious’, p.423.

<sup>44</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, in *Standard Edition*, vol. V, pp.339-508 (p.339).

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.339.

<sup>46</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Dream-work’, p.339 [My emphasis].

<sup>47</sup> Hervé Guibert’s *L’image fantôme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982); *Ghost Image* [1982], trans. Robert Bononno (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer Books, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.9.

<sup>49</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.13.

<sup>50</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.13.

<sup>51</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, pp.13-14.

<sup>52</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.14.

<sup>53</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.14.

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Laplanche, *The Unconscious and the Id* [1981], trans. Luke Thurston and Lindsay Watson (London: Rebus Press, 1999), p.15.

<sup>55</sup> From a contemporary perspective, the Freudian formulations of the ‘fetish,’ with its male-affirming and woman-as-lack underpinnings, are problematic in their essentializing tendency. While I cannot contribute to this debate here, I want to avoid sexist undertones and, at the same time, base my argument on the contradicting double-movement of the fetish – its disavowing force. This explains my choice of citation. Sigmund Freud, ‘Fetishism’ [1927], trans. Joan Riviere, in *Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, pp.152-57 (p.154).

<sup>56</sup> Oliver Richon, ‘Looking and Incorporating’, *Camera Austria International* 37 (1991), pp.32-33 (p.33).

<sup>57</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.14.

<sup>58</sup> ‘La prise de vue a contribué à elle seule à donner à l’événement un caractère d’exception et à celui qui a photographié une place privilégiée au sein de l’événement.’ Serge Tisseron, *Le mystère de la chambre claire*, p.14.

<sup>59</sup> The material practice of photography is a subjectivizing one, if we follow Althusser’s insisting words: ‘I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such an individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*. Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)’ [1969], in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), pp.121-73 (p.158).

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Ego-ideal and ideal ego’ [1954], in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I* [1975], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York and London: Norton and Company, 1991), pp.129-42 (p.141).

<sup>61</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, p.8.

<sup>62</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* [1983], trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p.21.

<sup>63</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement’ [1914], trans. Joan Riviere, in *Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, pp.7-66 (pp.26-27).

<sup>64</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement’, p.27 [My emphasis].

<sup>65</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex’ [1924], trans. Joan Riviere, in *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, pp.172-79. Towards the end of the essay, Freud considers the chronology of latency, speculating on the possibility of other temporal routes: ‘I have no doubt that the chronological order and causal relations described here between the Oedipus complex, sexual intimidations (the threat of castration), the formation of the super-ego and the beginning of the latency period are of a typical kind; but I do not wish to assert that this type is the only possible one.’ (p.179).

<sup>66</sup> W. F. Berg, ‘Analytical Notes on Latent Image Theories’, in *Photographic Science*, ed. W. F. Berg (London and New York: Focal Press, 1961), p.28.

<sup>67</sup> Laplanche coined the English neologism of ‘afterwardsness’ (*après coup* in French) to render more clearly the various meanings inherent in the semantics of *Nachträglichkeit* which can be divided into three groups: 1) ‘further,’ ‘secondary,’ or ‘added later’; 2) a temporal forward-movement from the past to the future; 3) a temporal retro-movement from the present to the past. See Jean Laplanche, ‘Notes on

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Afterwardsness' [1992], in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp.260-65.

<sup>68</sup> Derrida writes: 'The alterity of the "unconscious" makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a "past" that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence.' Jacques Derrida, 'Différance' [1968], trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy* [1972] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.1-27 (p.21).

<sup>69</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* [1934-48], trans. James Strachey, in *Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, pp.3-140 (p.72) [Emphasis added].

<sup>70</sup> On the belated effect of childhood trauma, Freud writes: 'A trauma in childhood may be followed immediately by a neurotic outbreak, an infantile neurosis, with an abundance of efforts at defence, and accompanied by the information of symptoms. This neurosis may last a considerable time and cause marked disturbances, but it may also run a latent course and be overlooked. As a rule, defence retains the upper hand in it. In any case, alterations of the ego, comparable to scars, are left behind. It is only rarely that an infantile neurosis continues without interruption into an adult one. Far more often it is succeeded by a period of apparently undisturbed development – a course of things which is supported or made possible by the intervention of the physiological period of latency. Not until later does the change take place with which the definite neurosis becomes manifest as a belated effect of the trauma.' Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p.77.

<sup>71</sup> The photographer, working along in latency, that is to say, the period after the image's exposure and before its appearance, could be considered to be in an 'incubation period' in reference to Freud's own formulation of the temporality of trauma, even though, of course, the photographer remains in command of the length of this period. Freud's passage reads: 'It may happen that a man who has experienced some frightful accident – a railways collision, for example – leaves the scene of the event apparently uninjured. In the course of the next few weeks, however, he develops a number of severe psychical and motor symptoms which can only be traced to his shock, the concussion or whatever else it was. He now has a 'traumatic neurosis.' It is a quite unintelligible – that is to say, a new – fact. The time that has passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is described as the 'incubation period,' in a clear allusion to the pathology of infectious diseases.' Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p.67.

<sup>72</sup> *Ararat*, dir. Atom Egoyan (Momentumpictures, 2002), DVD: 2003. Text transcribed from DVD, scene four.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Belau, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through: Trauma and the Limit of Knowledge', in *Topologies of Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Memory*, ed. Linda Belau and Petar Ramadanovic (New York: Other Press, 2002), pp.xiii-xxvii (p.xvi). The impossibility of integrating the event into the signifying work is what the topology of trauma shares with the photograph and its paradoxical temporalities. For a discussion, see Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* [2002] (London and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p.66.

<sup>75</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p.66.

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<sup>76</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* [1996], trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.36.

## **444 Archives**

2008

Archival boxes, gelatin silver paper, masking tape,  
self-adhesive labels, metal shelving units  
Dimensions variable

*444 Archives* is an archive itself. It is an archive of archives. It explores the constitution of the concept 'archive' and our drive for archival preservation in the context of the photographic document. As a collection, it brings together 444 photographic records of 444 public archives in the Greater London area, thereby drawing attention to London as archive.

Common to all these archives is the fact that they are registered as public repositories in the United Kingdom and that they are located within the administrative space of Greater London. They comprise an eclectic mix of archives of varying sizes. They include art collections, libraries, public record offices, local study centres, community archives, museums, image libraries and corporate archives to name but a few.

*444 Archives* transforms archival collections into archival records themselves. By doing so, the artwork becomes a meta-archive that aims at classifying other archives. It introduces its own system of classification. It superimposes itself on the existing taxonomies inherent in London's archives and engenders yet another layer of classification.

The work explores the archive as being both a system of classification and a physical site for classified documents. Being an archive in its own right, *444 Archives* simultaneously images archives and archives images.

### Imaging Archives

*444 Archives* is an installation based on photographic artwork. As the title of the work indicates, *444 Archives* is a collection of 444 photographs of 444 publicly registered archives in the Greater London area. Each photograph is stored in one of the 444 archival boxes that make up the work. However, the grey cardboard archival boxes, so typical of the visual language of the archive, act in this work not solely as a protecting case for the archived record but also as a pinhole camera.

Each box contains a single, signed sheet of photographic paper. A small hole, working as an aperture, turns the box into a pinhole camera. The box/camera has two functions: it is the creator of the photographic record of the public archive (camera function); *and* it is the repository of the resulting image (archival function). Using the box/camera, photographic images were taken of each building housing one of the 444 public archives, thereby building up a collection of 444 photographic records.

## Archiving Images

Once an archive has been photographed, the box/camera is permanently sealed. The captured image is thereby 'condemned' to the space of the archive. A label on each box classifies the archival record that it contains by showing the archive's name, its location and the date of exposure. The archival box that has previously functioned as a camera, providing the 'black box' necessary for creating the photographic image, becomes the image's 'tomb'.

The photographic image becomes archived in its latent stage inside the box. The image is preserved inside the box and is thereby kept 'alive' for the future. At the same time, it is also negated in its visibility both as image and photographic artefact. As image, it remains undeveloped and therefore in the invisible realm of latency. As photographic artefact, it remains trapped inside the box and cannot be accessed as archival document.

*444 Archives* turns the archival principle of conservation against itself. While it draws up a taxonomic system like any conventional archive – the collation of 444 public London archives in the form of photographic records – it becomes subsequently the 'trap' of these newly gained photographs. *444 Archives* arrests the photographic records. It keeps them forever inside itself. Perpetually conserved.



*444 Archives* (labels)





444 Archives



*444 Archives (detail)*





*444 Archives (archival boxes)*



*444 Archives*

Chapter II  
**Images of Inversion**

*It is obvious that the invention of photography has considerably heightened the world's 'visibility' in the medium of the image, or indeed, has just actually brought it out. This gain, of course, could only take place via a detour through the negativity of the image, through an artefact that was beforehand not even imaginable [...].*  
Michel Frizot<sup>1</sup>

*The negative is in itself invisible, because when I look at it, it is already a photograph that I look at [...].*  
François Soulages<sup>2</sup>

*The reproduction of the photograph, like the reproduction of sexual difference, takes two and makes one. That one is the impression left on the photographic surface; the one left unmarked/undeveloped is the negative image.*  
Peggy Phelan<sup>3</sup>

### **In the Beginning, the Negative**

The technological rise of photography has brought something with it that was, let us speculate, not intended at first by its creators. Indeed, this thing is conventionally meant to remain out of sight: it is the photographic negative. Usually hidden in photographic archives, it hardly ever features in more prominent spots of our cultures of display. It is treated as a means to an end: the photographic negative forms the material bridge between the photographic exposure and the final photographic image. It often provides the first surface for the image's inscription and passes the same then on to its successor image, the positive. Ascribed mainly to the name of Henry Fox Talbot, one of the now almost mythic gentlemen of photography's more official beginning in the early nineteenth century, it formed a compromise in the search for perfecting the techniques of photographic representation.<sup>4</sup> The negative presented not really the photographer's desired goal of the perfect likeness – the alluring mirror with a memory – but was nonetheless unavoidable. A by-product, the result of technological and economic pragmatics, one could say. Its role might be that of a photographic Interlingua that continues to linger behind more 'official' image syntaxes. As such, it is delegated to the shady backyards of photography, in the spaces of archives, between the pages of albums, in drawers and boxes or in the

photographic lab where it might reappear briefly in dimmed light just to be ‘translated’ again into another positive image by the photographer. The negative, it seems, could not make itself understood, it could not communicate its image to the spectator directly. The negative needed translation.

In what has become known colloquially as the negative-positive process, the ‘negative’ can be read as being supplanted by the ‘positive.’<sup>5</sup> The negative finds itself hyphenated, thereby also attesting to the partial nature of its role within the procedures of photographic development – it takes two and makes one. We should consider these procedures not merely as a matter of technological concerns such as finding a way for making the negative *photographically* effective, that is, our striving for the striking qualities of photographic representation, its legendary transparency and optical accuracy. We should also consider these procedures in the light of the historical development of photography and the aesthetical and ideological formations that continue to shape our practical and theoretical dealings with photography. Textual documentations of early sightings of the photographic negative let it appear as a hurdle, an unexpected stumbling block that got in the way of photography’s aesthetic ideals. Thus, what was needed was an elegant leap over the negative.<sup>6</sup>

In the hasty search (or, at least, what photo-historical accounts always like to convey rhetorically as a sort of eagerly contested ‘rush’ towards the ‘birth’ of photography) for ‘the’ photograph during the first few decades of the nineteenth century of a progressively industrializing Europe, the negative presented itself as something of a deviation on the pioneering road to photography. Photographic images rendered in negative were sometimes seen as unintelligible, as an annoying supplement to what could have been an otherwise straightforward photographic process.<sup>7</sup> The negative does not fulfil the mimetic qualities, which photographic techno-scientists were and are still aiming for because the logics of *inversion* do their altering work to the image. The photographic negative embodies the form of inversion in a two-fold way: on the level of its spatial organization as well as on the level of the visual rendering of the image. The spatial ‘disarray’ is the consequence of the camera obscura principle that turns the projected image in its interior upside down. Caught *in camera*, I appear to myself suddenly upside down.<sup>8</sup> Yet upon leaving the camera’s space and being developed into a visible image, the negative-positive process will turn my image once



more, that is at the level of the image's tonal and colour organization. Following the *photo-grapher's* eyes, it is a sciagraphy – shadows falling where the drawing force of light is meant to prevail. White is drawn as black – hardly a mimetic outcome. Thus, what is required is another 'developmental' leap by the photographer – a 're-reversal' – so as to undo the inverting turbulences of the negative. Having followed the rules, having made the image to leap out of its inverted state, 'proper' manners are brought back to it.<sup>9</sup> My image will now stand side by side to my self, seemingly mirroring me.

It is the ontological fate, more conceptually speaking, of the 'negative' to remain in the background of things. The same, one could say, applies also to the material form of the photographic negative and its technological paraphernalia. The negative is the silent assistant of the photograph, passing on the captured image but without claiming the prominence of a representational role. It finds itself most of the time in the shadow of the (positive) photograph. Indeed, through the photographic negative, as a specific material form, we can bear witness to what in more generous psychoanalytical terms would be called a process of *Besetzung*: the negative, as a photographic manifestation of the inverted, has become invested with a particular meaning within the wider economy of representational forms. Or rather, one is tempted to say, this particular nightshade fruit of the field of photography appears to grow out of our psychic and ideological (*dis-*)investments in it.

The photographic negative could well join the ambivalent ranks of other 'inverts' as they came to light in the psycho-sexual discourses by nineteenth century sexologists and their struggle to define the sexual invert's exact 'pathological' outlines. In charting a genealogy of its epistemological traits, the 'inverted' is positioned as the abnormal, wrong-sided, out-of-order. But, as Michel Foucault has insistently shown us, the discursive positioning of the 'invert' as a sexually aberrant being served to establish a normative axis or ordering principle. 'The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.'<sup>10</sup> What is termed as disorder can only be understood in its relation to what is regarded as 'order,' which in turn works a referential, normative axis that allows the 'measuring' of all the forms that deviate from it. As such, (sexual) inversion is epistemologically paradoxical because it was seen as being contrary to a

norm that was declared ‘natural’ while, at the same time, it also had to be of an order of some sort so that it could be rationalized and studied – inversion as a ‘natural order of disorder.’<sup>11</sup>

The photographic negative is no stranger to this discourse. Like Foucault’s invert, the photographic negative is a complex material ‘being.’ The photographic image, that other great invention of the nineteenth century, could claim the ideological credits of ‘objective’ representation. However, its photographic negative could do less so. It lacks the representing powers of the ‘positive’ photograph, which has become photography’s normative axis. As such, it hardly ever entered the official circuits of visual representation but found nonetheless occasional roles in other discourses such as psychoanalysis and ideology critique where its very presence and actuality as an object has left peculiar imprints on their discursive tropes.<sup>12</sup> It was Freud who found in it the humble material to help us figure out how we could think of the topological relation between conscious and unconscious activity: ‘A rough but not inadequate analogy to this supposed relation [...] might be drawn from the field of ordinary photography. The first phase is the “negative”: every photographic picture has to pass through the “negative process”: and some of these negatives which have held good in examination are admitted to the “positive process” ending in the picture.’<sup>13</sup> Freud, though warning us not to take this as a literal analogy, seemingly found in the negative nevertheless a productive material that could help him communicate the invisible – in this case, censoring – processes of our psychic apparatus.

The Freudian analogy took advantage of the negative’s mediating function, hanging as it does between the invisible and the visible, between the latent photographic impression and the positive photographic print. At this point we should add the obvious: that the photographic negative not only works as a technical mediator of the photographic image, doubling precariously between the finished and the unfinished, but that it also has its own visibility – it is also a visible image in itself that photographers like to scrutinize a great deal. But the negative’s spectatorial potential is mostly limited to specialist *inspection* (as in Freud’s analogy) with a view to bring forth an ideational, ‘perfect’ copy. ‘Will it yield a good enough image?’, is the question that frames the negative’s field of signification, echoing thereby the question that is brought to bear phallically on the field of Woman within the triangulating

Oedipal dynamics. ‘Is “she” good enough an image?’ is the repetitively imposed frame of phallic ordering through which woman is required to appear as Beauty, if she can appear at all.<sup>14</sup> In exploiting rather than opposing this conceptual alliance of Woman and the photographic negative, Peggy Phelan has argued that ‘[e]xposing the negative has more than a technological application for photography.’<sup>15</sup> ‘Always already linked to a reproductive body, the ontologies of women and photographs are profoundly matched. [...] Founded upon the terrain of the negative, both reproduce the visible.’<sup>16</sup> Phelan’s ethics of representation circumscribe a space of plurality, of copies, of reproductivity – without phallically claiming the primacy of the visible. It is in uncovering the work of the photographic negative behind the visible picture that such an ethical space can be asserted by recognizing the reproductive openness of photographic imaging while at the same time resisting the claim to a single visibility. The configuration of the photographic apparatus allows for such a potential *if* we are to allow it. While photography in general, as Phelan suggests, can be seen as a feminized art form because it withstands the (masculinist) myth of the ‘original,’ such an ethical space must be continually reclaimed if photographic representation is not to be drowned in its own mythical singularity, especially as it emerges within the economically signifying confines of ‘fine art’: signatures, limited editions, vintage prints, etc., bring with them the grand values that will leave their unique stamp of exceptionality on the photograph’s surface and with that, accede in calculable form to a capitalist exchange system of intellectual and artistic property.<sup>17</sup>

Phelan’s ethics-through-photography entrust themselves to the conceptual realm of the photographic negative and its theoretical positioning within the systems of photographic representation. As such, the call to ‘expose the negative’ cannot be taken literally, that is to say, photographically, if we are to avoid reinstating it as phallic image. Rather, it is in thinking beyond the photograph’s surface that we may begin to realize what brought us to that surface. Behind the photograph, the negative must do its work for the photograph to emerge into visibility – which brings us to the issue of the negative’s own visibility. In photography, the materials of the negative and the positive form an unlike couple the difference of which originates not exclusively in their visual disparity – both are, after all, images if one begins to look at them – but in the circulation of their materials. In the aftermath of the capture and subsequent development of the image, the negative fulfils a specific function, which



also defines the limits of its circulation: not the presentation of an image but the back-up storage of that image. In other words, the negative has mainly an archival function. And it leaves the spaces of the archive very rarely. Or yet again, only when it can come in the guise of a positive such as was the exceptional case with ‘Ambrotypes,’ a material of the experimentally diverse infancy of photography. ‘Ambrotypes,’ as glass negatives also sometimes seen as ancestors to photographic slides, combined the unique properties of being de facto a photographic negative in the way the image inscribed itself on the surface but appeared to the eye as a positive image when placed against a dark background.<sup>18</sup> Materially a negative, phenomenally a positive: ambrotypes write the image negatively but can give the same away positively. In *Portrait of an Unidentified Couple*, Mathew B. Brady lets the positively rendering ground slip, visually divesting the seated woman of her positive appearance, yet thereby also revealing the image’s overall negative mode of inscription.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 5) The man and the woman, who pose formally in nineteenth century bourgeois fashion with its material insignia, become at the visual level encoded differently even though they share the same photographic writing mode. The work could be a textbook illustration of a society’s patriarchal structuring, attributing to the female side of this couple the image-bearing qualities of the negative (it is the negative that has captured the image and through which more copies of that image can be given out) but keeping her separate from the male side which appears photographically as positive. To the photo-normative eye, only the man would be (in) the image of signifying completion. Sexual difference runs through Brady’s photograph in a fine but defining line.

While Brady allows the negative to come to the fore, its oppositional pairing with a positive brings us back to our obstinate eyes, struggling as they do to engage with a negative image. After Derrida, we could call this a phallo-photocentrism. However, Brady’s *Portrait* reveals a certain material truthfulness by exposing the negative inscription of this image. Brady’s work shows the work of material layering necessary to achieve this image in what could have been otherwise hidden by rendering everything in the positive; or, as in other photographic processes where negative and positive have become separate material entities, what could have been completely kept out of representing frameworks altogether and shut instead into the archive. Few photographic negatives come to light outside their dedicated archival spaces. Most of them remain unidentified as pictures. Negatives are studied,

retouched, archived. For the photographically trained eye, there is little visual pleasure in them. They remain at odds with the positive photograph. It should not come as a surprise then that the photographic negative has also been largely overlooked in the scholarly discourses of art and photographic history and visual culture.<sup>20</sup> What stands in the way for the spectator, we could say, is precisely the negative's inverted state: neither a fully photographically legitimated image (the photographic print) nor a completely undetectable image (the latent photograph). The negative image, offsetting itself from the mirroring plenitude of the positive print, but at the same time also not of a completely invisible kind, negotiates through its aesthetics a complex phenomenological space. This chapter explores this space.



Figure 5. Mathew B. Brady, *Portrait of an Unidentified Couple* (1860).

## History in the Aftermath of the Negative

We can interpret the beginning of photographic history also as a problem of the negative, this moment when an image began to split itself into two halves. Not content with the visual language of the inverted that the negatives had to offer, the photographers moved on with their converting work ‘in order to bring them back into their proper positions,’ as Talbot would describe it.<sup>21</sup> The properly turned image, then, returns in ‘proper’ form to the photographer-spectator. Thus, a specific *modus operandi* began to inscribe itself in the empirically tailored work processes of the photographer. Because of the aesthetic ‘limitations’ that the photographic materials of the negative-positive processes imposed on the photographer, one of the jobs of the photographer was now to undo the ‘negative’ in the photograph. The various steps of photographic labour inherent in the production of the photograph, this more or less prescriptive trajectory from ‘taking’ to ‘making’ to which photographers are supposed to adhere, came thus to entail another step: reversal.

After all, there has also been the breakthrough innovation of the photographic process that carries the same name, bringing about to our contemporary ears still familiar sounding materials such as *Kodachrome*, which is part of a group of films intriguingly classified as ‘non-substantive.’<sup>22</sup> It does the reversing work apparently all on its own; and moreover, it leaves of the negative *seemingly* no trace, that is after its complex has been chemically ‘washed’ out in a bleaching process. Similar formations have also been hailed as a ‘direct positive.’<sup>23</sup> This self- or auto-reversing photographic image allowed the photographer, one could say, a more immediate access to the image. The negative no longer *materializes* distinctively. It is no longer required that the photographer turn his face to the negative, let alone dedicate his scientific-creative attention to it.<sup>24</sup> And, finally, the emergence of digital protocols in photography in the late twentieth century has brought about, for some, an age of post-photography. Styled as a techno-historical caesura, its arising discourses and claims made for it like to cut deep into the historiographical flesh of the ‘field’ of photography. However, it is not one of my intentions here to carry out more of these often all too hastily made cuts so as to write, one might say, a history that could thereby also promote itself as being more incisive than others.<sup>25</sup> With the apple’s fall being constrained by the crown of its tree – to tweak a common saying – we should

remind ourselves also of the potential risks of such *post*-operative undertakings. Technologies such as photography help us in writing and representing our histories. Yet, these histories need also to be understood in the materials in which they were not only written but through which their actualities have also been shaped.

And although finding oneself in the aftermath of a ‘photography after photography’ might one help to see photography anew, that is through the lens of the ‘after,’ we should remain alerted enough so as to avoid making an easily credible prey for it.<sup>26</sup> It might appear that digitization has taken the *stilus* out of photography’s working hands. No more holding the writing tools of a celluloid film, a metal plate or a silver gelatin sheet, the digits of this photography do not appear to hold any writing utensils anymore. Digitized photography writes with its digits – directly; and as most of us know, its digits are quick at pointing out the image in digits. The deconstructive slipping – digits shaping digits – that becomes apparent here shall help us in stimulating some further reflection. On the one hand, digitization has worked on shortening the material, temporal and spatial gaps that the image has to pass through between capture and display, that is to say, between the photographer’s authoritative ‘click’ and the image’s appearance and successive release in its envisaged form. The processing of the image has become easier, more immediate. On the other hand, of course, the writing digits persist precisely in the digits upon which the formation of the image depends, that is, the digital architecture of zeros and ones that build this new binary coded space of photography and its technological derivatives.

By entering this photography-in-digitization, the technological apparatus of photography has shed some of its material layers while acquiring other ones. Its digits joining forces, it economizes by compressing previously discrete layers of production and labour processes. The structural techno-logics of image display and capture converge thereby, while the mediating and storing role of (negative) film, for example, has been stripped of its functional relevance. As common marketing speech would state, digitized photography speeds up the ‘workflow.’ It brings the work to flow. We can take this claim in its literal sense. It is not only the workflow that is increased, that is to say, the work being processed more quickly and efficiently by the photographer. It is also the work itself that flows with ease in and out of, and what we must describe here simply for the lack of a less abstract term, as different

technological topoi. Thanks to its structural compatibility, the image, once captured, remains in flow. A true *work-in-process*, it makes itself visible to us wherever and whenever we can avail ourselves of the visualizing interfaces that usher us – working screen technology permitting – through the everyday.

And in returning to the realities of our own ‘everyday’ lives and to the fact that I look at yet another screen so as to produce visually these letters, we are given a plain but firm reminder of technology’s grip on shaping, if not determining, the actualities of our modes of representation. In doing so, these realities continue to produce intricate layers, in which histories and technologies inscribe themselves interdependently just to be historically re-layered through yet another technological re-inscription, such as we have seen not so long ago in the introduction of the digitally versatile disc, or for short, DVD. This brilliant all-rounder of a disc has modified the way in which we access, distribute and watch our films as well as facilitating the possibility of ‘in-house’ productions for the individual consumer. But equally significant is the impact that this new piece of technology has had on remodelling the arena of ‘filmic’ representation, its established modes of spectatorship and their spaces. What, from a media-logical point of view, can be distilled as process of (self-)mediation, that is one medium mediating another medium, has manifold implications on the ‘matter’ that is mediated as well as on the theoretical belief-systems that have attached themselves over time to individual forms of media.<sup>27</sup> Films that used to have their base in celluloid, their images conditioned by the material limitations and the technical abilities of the cinematic apparatus, have had their base relocated by being digitized. Here, the phenomenality of film reaches us through, and is altered by, the digital protocols, allowing for slow-downs and narratives to be stilled. For example, this has challenged any ordering approach of earlier film and photographic theories that have had faith in the influential Peircean semiotic principle of the ‘index’ and the claims of its temporal/spatial epistemologies made for it.<sup>28</sup> The complexity lies in the hybrid nature of this film-on-DVD by offering us images that still speak aesthetically of an indexical causation but need not be, or are only partially so. As Laura Mulvey has argued in her re-evaluation of the temporal and narrative structuring of film in relation to its digitization, ‘[t]he index can now be valued in its relation to time and as a record of a fragment of inscribed reality that may be meaningless or

indecipherable.’<sup>29</sup> As the work of the index shifts, our theoretical conceptions of temporality and spatiality are required to shift too.

The foray we took into the changing status of the index and its visual manifestations accentuates just some of the epistemological complexities that are at stake in the historical faultings of media technology – the representations that it produces and the production of its representations. Thus, we cannot fail to ignore the imprints left on the politics of representation, that is, the ways in which we must continue to rethink our ethical and legal frameworks of viewing, both through the (image-taking) apparatus and the (image-rendering) screens. And as the photographic negative becomes increasingly defunct as an active bearer of images, as fewer and fewer of us transfer their photographic images through the ‘negative,’ we can begin to see, like in the case of celluloid film overtaken by digital means, how particular histories have been encapsulated visually by it. While the negative has shaped the photographer’s work and the spaces of photographic production and archivization, it has also provided a peculiar working ground for our individual and collective memories and fantasies.

And yet, while the production of photographic images *via* the material realm of the negative is about to lose its industrial and socio-economic relevance, its *mode* has already left its unique traces elsewhere. The negative’s mode of rendering things, substituting ‘everywhere light for shade, and *vice versa*’ in representation, has sedimented itself as a standard visual effect in the software repertoire of the likes of *Photoshop* & co.<sup>30</sup> ‘I’ stands there for ‘Invert.’ The command effectuates the required algorithm that will turn your image into its negative twin and, if needed, back again. Reversing the colours and tones of an image into their complementaries, ‘command “I”’ offers us the phenomenon of the negative as we have come to know it through the photographic negative. Here, the negative restores itself right in front of your eyes. Back it is again. But like any work of restoration, we need to be careful to consider what lies behind its restored façade. Could there be more to it than just a ‘surface effect’? We can argue that what we ‘see’ in the surface of this negatively rendered image does not escape our still tangible knowledge of the photographic negative. Indeed, we might say that its employment, as a visual tool, is motivated not just because it makes things differently legible to the eye. It continues to live on as a

critically useful iconographic effect, one might say, also because it calls up a historical aesthetics of photography (a more mainstream example of such a ‘historical aesthetic’ is the simple employment of black-and-white photography – or to deliberately turn colour photographs into black-and-white ones – to conjure up notions of sentimentality or pastness; another one would be the use of deliberately faded images) one that is tied to historical material conditions in which the photographic negative found itself to be a part of it. And thus, sometimes, we might see these conditions more forcefully in the light of the negative.

### **Photography and the Colouring of Race**

This historical force of the photographic negative and the polarizing aspects of its phenomenality come out most dramatically in Gavin Jantjes’ work *A South African Colouring Book*.<sup>31</sup> Consisting of a collection of modest A4 sheets originally based on silkscreen prints, the ephemeral character of the material gives an even stronger ground to the political messages embedded in its text-image space. What we see on one of these sheets, titled ‘COLOUR THESE BLACKS WHITE,’ comes to us in the negative: inverted images that attest to the paranoid state of Apartheid in the South Africa of the twentieth century. (Figure 6) What appears to be photographic documentations of occasional gatherings of celebration and entertainment of unnamed people of black skin, takes a brisk turn through Jantjes’ own intervention in the categorically racialized politics of colour. Indeed, his turning is towards inversion, which, we can say, goes beyond the ‘gesture of subversion’ of much recent visual art as we have come to know it again and again as a standard vehicle of mere flippant artistic commentary with its hollow political echo.<sup>32</sup> Jantjes’ inversion does not turn things around as it were. It does not repair. Things do not open themselves up nor do they add up. And we get trapped with them. Stuck we are.

This is so because the aesthetics of Jantjes’ negative images wedge us into the power structures of racial separation and their political ambitions as they are barefacedly actualized in Apartheid’s state apparatus.<sup>33</sup> Emulating the naïve form of a colouring book for children, Jantjes asks us to negotiate the colours of this world kept so apart. Instructing us to ‘colour these blacks white,’ with arrows identifying them

additionally within the image, we cannot fail to recognize that the images are already inverted, photographically turning ‘blacks’ into ‘whites.’<sup>34</sup> Must we do more colouring work on them? Are they not already white? My questions are innocent indeed, their innocence in play with the design purpose of a colouring book: to allow us to (re-)imagine the world by giving colours to its images – any colour we long for. Yet, this particular page of the colouring book orders us to apply more ‘white’ on its already whitening images. Never quite white enough for the ideologically invested whiteness of racism’s colour scheme. And never quite white enough is this ‘white’ on the photograph either. The intersecting semantics of text and image of Jantjes’ sheet work like a locking device that holds us back, keeping us in its grip. In contradiction to the playful form of the colouring book, the inversion of the photographic images does not offer us the potentiality of symmetrical play so often associated with its modality. There is little scope left for switching imaginatively between negative and positive, inside-out and outside-in, black and white. While those people of black skin who appear in the photographs find themselves representationally turned ‘white’ by the artist so as bitterly to satisfy the eye of racism and to show its ideological demand of a ‘never white enough,’ the very same people will hardly fail to notice how photography fails them representationally too. Disallowed photography’s most intrinsic asset, its mimetic ability, they have become a ‘remarkable,’ inverted image: images to be (re)marked on, bodies to be highlighted.

If racism cannot look into the other’s eye, if it keeps the other outside of its own representational field, as the politically and historically framed negative does in this context, then, crucially, its gambit of exclusive purism contradicts itself in Jantjes’ photographic work. As we shall see, Jantjes’ sheet gives a representational framework to these contradictory forces, tying the spectator into their cracks. Here, the photographic negative renders the black body as the ‘other,’ staying outside the customary photographic image. Indeed, within the wider system of photographic representation I would argue that the negative comes to signify photography’s own ‘other.’ Lacking the intelligibility of perceived immediacy and transparency, as a ‘conventional’ photograph can lay claim to thanks to its *analogical* fitness, the negative image remains an alien organ within the body of photography. The negative is not fit enough to fit our idealizations of photography and the idealizations of our selves expected in its images. As such, Jantjes’ negative reinforces the politico-



cultural construction of the subjects' otherness and, at the same time, renders them photographically unrecognizable. Aptly, a scrap of paper with a textual fragment by Frantz Fanon hangs into the photographic image, the text ending with 'the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man.'<sup>35</sup> Not everybody is granted equal access to the mirror and its gift of identificatory reflection, as Kaja Silverman would remind us in psychoanalytically extrapolating from Fanon's work, and 'only certain subjects have access to a flattering image of self, and [...] others have imposed upon them an image so deidealizing that no one would willingly identify with it.'<sup>36</sup>



Figure 6. Gavin Jantjes, sheet from *A South African Colouring Book* (1978).

Alienation. ‘The black subject described by Fanon is not only in “combat” with the image through which he is “photographed” by the seemingly white gaze, but is also irresistibly drawn to the “mirror” of an ideal “whiteness.”’<sup>37</sup> While we must keep Fanon’s account of alienation within the historical context of colonialism and the specifics of its geo-political landscapes, his words reverberate with Jantjes’ photographic negative insofar as its inversion expresses a specific conditioning of estrangement. The negative bears a resemblance of strangeness that gives those in it their symbolic ‘mask’ of the white gaze, at the same time as imprinting, photographically, an alienating effect that speaks of the incommensurable loss of their cultural identity.<sup>38</sup> The negative’s inversion of the black body, its turning ‘white’ in representation, takes issue with the forces that structure the subject’s psychic work of identification. Let us briefly call to mind that the process of identification, as it has been largely theorized in psychoanalysis, does indeed rely on a differential space, which it seeks to overcome. ‘The one with whom I identify is not me, and that “not being me” is the condition of the identification.’<sup>39</sup> ‘This difference internal to identification is crucial,’ as Judith Butler emphasizes, ‘and, in a way, it shows us that disidentification is part of the common practice of identification itself.’<sup>40</sup> Looking at a photographic image, for example, might just set us off in identifying with its referent. We want to become (or not) what we think the image stands for. Advertisement, of course, aims at generating just that, literally: *advertere* – turn towards to turn us on. Jantjes’ image in the negative, like any image, prompts us to identify or disidentify with it. (Just because it is a photographic negative does not automatically mean that the identificatory process it might trigger will follow a negative path.) However, while we might turn towards or away from it, its inversion speaks of a further turning played out in its framework of representation – identification becomes thereby imaged as a vexed double-act circumscribed by torsional forces that seek to constrain the subject on his path of dis/identification: the racist imperative that interpellates us to identify with an (impossible) ideal of ‘whiteness’ at the same time as making sure that it remains the exclusive space of some. And in Jantjes’ negative we find an echo of this identificatory torsion – white I might identify (with) but I am still not white enough.

## White, by Default

Still, if the photographic negative, structured by the historico-political context of Apartheid as it is, opens up, by way of its aesthetics, the difficult question of how to image one's image within the fissures of the incommensurable demand of racism, then the negative itself and its representing graphics cannot escape this question either. By bringing into relief an image that speaks of the impossibility of imagining identity, that is, an image in which I cannot recognize myself according to photography's imaging norms, the negative reveals also photography's structural implication in articulating a racist order, that is, its proclivity for a certain whiteness.<sup>41</sup> From its beginning, the protocols of photography (instruction guides, lighting standards, exposure criteria, etc.) have ensured that white skin be represented to the 'norm,' having 'naturalized' this particular tone or better, taint, in the design of its apparatus by taking it as its preferred reflective base.<sup>42</sup> It is from the surface of white skin that photographic imaging technology has received an 'orientation' of a Eurocentric kind. White skin has become photography's guiding light from where all other colours seemingly emanate in an orderly fashion so as to assure a measured authenticity in the representation of colours and tones. Richard Dyer has called this a 'technicist ideology' in relation to photographic imaging.<sup>43</sup> Ideology is effectuated not just via technology and the representations that it produces but is also played out in and through the material sphere of technology and the laws that regulate it. An ideology by design so to speak.

'Whiteness,' as the particular socio-historical construction that it is, can be presumed. It grants itself, as it were, to those who have the right taint. Just as I got away, 'unmarked,' with not stating the protagonists' skin colour in my discussion of the film *Ararat* in the previous chapter (which we can also take as an index of the identification of my white self with the white men in the film stills), it has the tendency to paint its own racial dimension invisible. Whiteness, still, hangs on to the field of the assumed. Not because of the fact that I did not show any visuals to support my discussion of the film's scene, leaving the reader in the blank about its racial aspects; rather, precisely because I *did* show visuals of the protagonists it becomes apparent that I could do away with ever referring to their skin colour. I could begin from a point of presumption. Whiteness is a paradoxical 'matter'; indeed,

in the image, it is supposed to appear as having no matter. Disembodied. That is its privileged position. And the historical conditioning of the photographic apparatus reflects this socially constructed ideal back to us, preferring to give white a representational lead so much so that '[w]ithin the aspirational structure of whiteness, photography's translucence could differentiate between races and within the white race, and even show degrees of translucence within the individual white (usually white) subject.'<sup>44</sup>

The negative, as a standardized photographic surface, no doubt, is a part of this ideological formation that lays a foundational claim to a representational immanence of whiteness. The negative, in line with the normatized architectures of the photographic apparatus, attests to this historical *default* position. Re-approaching Jantjes' negative with this understanding twists the messages we were so far teasing out of his work. Colour these blacks white. In the negative, blacks have become white but are not white enough. White needs more white. White needs more white, not solely because it is an ideal that cannot be fulfilled in the never-white-enough vision of racism; white needs more white also because the white that appears on the photographic surface of the negative denotes, materially, the historical legacy of photography's racialized design. The inversion of the image, while playing out on the iconographic level the consequences of an ideology by symbolically excluding those it appears to represent, curiously brings out, at the same time, another ideology hidden inside the photographic apparatus itself. The image in Jantjes' *Colouring Book* instructs us to apply more white. In so doing, it parodies Apartheid's segregational delusions. But the same instruction also brings our attention to the very surface of this image in the negative. Being *inverted*, its whites indeed might need more white. Speaking from photography's normative axis, it is fair to doubt the excellence of the negative's whites – they *really* might not be white enough. Here, the imperative of never-white-enough spills into actual matters of representation. The disembodied ideal of 'whiteness' that bears on the conception of photography and its histories is reproduced in the negative, revealing through its very own representation of 'white' the insufficiency of rendering people whose skin colour might be outside photography's ideological spectrum.<sup>45</sup> There is an ironic layer in Jantjes' negative in that it brings into the image the racially exclusive ordering of Apartheid's whiteness, that is, it actually executes racism's ideal, but to do so, it cannot avoid unearthing

simultaneously another kind of historically structuring ‘order’ inside photographic imaging. In Jantjes’ work the entwinement of the representation of politics and the politics of representation finds itself played out at its best. White vs. white.

‘Where to go out from this?’ is the question arising out of Jantjes’ negative and the contradictory forces that it inflicts to our sense of identity. Here, the negative, we might say, gives form to this identitarian tension of not knowing where to turn next yet it does so without offering an apparent escape route. Keeping the subject representationally disjointed between the political imperative of whiteness and the photographic impossibility to be represented as such, it rather helps us to acknowledge the psychic losses incurred by giving us its own reflective space without replicating the demand of mirroring completion. At this point, the differential gap that underlies the process of identification and its work of reshaping our subjective outlines is not covered over by the image. If what Butler has phrased as the ‘triumphalist image [that] can communicate an impossible overcoming of this difference,’ then, a more cautious image might ‘not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing.’<sup>46</sup> And thus, we can begin to *see*, as unsettling as it might be, rather than to disavow the ongoing struggle for calling forth the positionalities of identity. Not an image that utilizes its aesthetic space as cover to conceal thereby its own failings in what it seeks to represent but an image that acknowledges through its aesthetics the limitations of its frameworks of representation.

### **Looking into the Spectacle of the Inverting Mirrors**

The subject’s course of identification is not as straight as it might appear, and Jantjes’ negative makes us aware – *in spite* of its own formal structures – that is not always a clear-cut matter of black and white. What we believe to recognize in the image might not turn out to be as such. Nonetheless, identification continues to propel us towards more images. And it is around the figure of identity that we might come to stay for a little while in its sheltering space. In a Lacanian scheme of things, it would be the mirror image that stabilizes the not-yet-subject. Identification, Lacan has theorized, can be grasped ‘as the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image.’<sup>47</sup> It is the assumption of an image that enables the infant to benefit from a

sense of an increasingly coherent psychosomatic self. Or rather, not the mirror image *per se* but the fact that the emerging 'I' appears to recognize itself in the specular image and subsequently attributes that image to itself in what Lacan has made famous as the concept of *méconnaissance*. Our subjective scope, we might say in rephrasing Lacan's proposition of the specular image as 'the threshold of the visible,' is circumscribed by images.<sup>48</sup> Scopic beings. Yet, what is at stake for the subject vis-à-vis the image is not simply an issue of taking issue with this image. It is not just a matter of (static) beholding, as a tradition of the connoisseurial spectator would like to think – however painstaking that endeavour might be. More is at stake, and, with Lacan, we can bring this to bear through revisiting another motif where inversion is at work – yet this time to produce the possibility of an image unframed by the dynamics of *subjective* vision: the experiment of the inverted bouquet.

At large, the inverted bouquet (or vase) provides a model for 'illustrating' how the subject hangs in the sticky web woven from the threads of the Symbolic and Imaginary order.<sup>49</sup> Sticky, because this web calls forth the complex psycho-phenomenological realm of the *visual* in which the subject finds himself wrapped up against the non-signifying void of the Real. What the experiment shows, among other things, is the high degree of plasticity of this conceptual web: not a static maze through which the subject moves but an elastic labyrinth whose walls are formed interdependently with the subject – the 'cloth' of visibility, as theorized in this Lacanian model, must be thought of as always being in a relation to the subject's psychic work, that is, his positioning in the Symbolic and Imaginary within the trinitarian structuring of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory that has had such a widespread influence on the way we conceive of subjectivity and representation and hence also of the act of looking at something while finding oneself also being looked at. If Lacan and his post/structuralist fellows have contributed to the disciplinary uprising of a 'visual turn' in the humanities (coming out so prominently in 1970s film theory), then they have done so by providing the supplementary spaces needed for theorizing spectatorship beyond the studious act of looking at pictures, objects, bodies – beyond the learned vision of the 'good eye.'<sup>50</sup>

Yet, one should not confound the theoretical arena of 'visuality' as tackling all things visual or all things through the visual. Not quite so. Visuality, as it is framed here,

rather articulates a theoretical meeting point of the visible and the invisible, of the expressed and repressed, of the spectacle and the spectator, of a body of work and a body at work. The keyword pairings highlight an entwinement of object and (tendentiously self-effacing) subject so as to make legible the subject's corporeal and psychic implication in the act of looking, and conversely, to understand how the object might condition the subject's looking. It is mainly the crossing territories of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, semiotics and gender theories that have given us the tools to, if not to see beyond the confines of our eyeshot, then at least to better understand how those confines might be constructed and how *we* have come to be embedded within the worlds we *envision* to inhabit through our body/mind complex.<sup>51</sup> And accordingly, we can also begin to grasp the plurality of our bodies and thus their irreducible differences (corporeal, racial, sexual, libidinal, generational) alongside the shifting material terrains of history. If I stay with Lacan's inverting mirrors for a little longer, then this is not without purpose. I would like to avail myself of the opportunity of this inverting apparatus (which, in its printed form, has itself become a kind of exemplar of the genre of scientific illustrations) and its didactical metaphor so as to performatively play out in closer detail what is at stake for the 'spectator' in its space.<sup>52</sup> Let's play us out then.

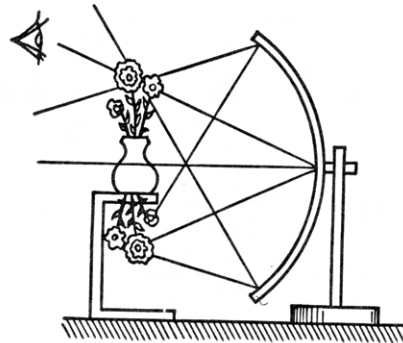
Lacan's theoretical investment in the sciences of optics is well known. What we should stress in our context, once more, is his insight that optics is more than just a field that delivers the dissecting tools of 'objective' analysis – most strikingly evident in the form of the scientific camera as a prevailing trope of the production of objectivity. Lacan, instead, goes on to rescue optics from its own dissecting fate and draws attention to the synthesizing ability of the optical sphere.<sup>53</sup> In 'The Topic of the Imaginary' of 1954 he points to the potentiality of the space of optics – not as something that is solely in the methodologically dissecting hands of science but as something that is also of a potentially synthesizing, imagistic force. And that brings with it the psychosomatic work of embodied subjects that contaminates the precinct of the 'pure' sciences. Put more dramatically, their pureness cannot be thought separately from our psychic projections and bodily desires, unique to each of us. While a photographic camera, as a highly sophisticated techno-optical tool developed and fine-tuned over quite a few centuries of research, helps us to analyze and classify phenomena by visualizing them in a scientific orderly fashion (an 'anatomy') in the

form of images, the very same images are also inscribed and structured by our desires, dreams and imaginations – matters to which psychoanalysis has given a theoretical shape. This is of course one of the great insights of the traditions of psychoanalytic thinking and not just Lacan's merit. However, Lacan's campaigning for the case of optics is significant in that he is able to demonstrate precisely through his fond use of established scientific models (such as the laws of optics) their own systematic porosity. Or, to consider this argument from its reverse side, the analyzing subject (say, spectator) cannot keep himself completely outside of the production of scientific analysis. Somehow I am also a *feature* in it.

Lacan's two-stage experiment of the inverted bouquet exemplifies this.<sup>54</sup> (Figure 7) The hidden, inverted bouquet appears to the viewing subject as being placed rightly in the vase standing on top of the box.<sup>55</sup> Keeping in mind that this in itself functions as an abstracting model, it allows us nonetheless a glimpse of how the subject is drawn into the experiment and, indeed, activates the production of its illusions.<sup>56</sup> To refer to the French *L'expérience du bouquet renversé* is a useful detour in that it makes clear the 'experience' of the 'experiment,' a meaning rather buried in English. One experiences the experiment. What the experiment can show us is how the viewing subject becomes woven into the fabrication of his own doings. Indeed, the experiment, for to be effective or, let us say affective, requires the involvement of the spectator. Otherwise the experimental set-up would just remain an odd assembly of disparate things. Depending on the spectator's position, the spherical mirror produces an appearance of the reflection that sits in correspondence with the physical space of the vase. This image is a real one, as Lacan stresses, reminding us thereby of the imaginary take-up of the specular (self-)image in the mirror stage. In the experiment, the vase and the image of the bouquet take on a forming unit, that is to say, for us (we who – granted that we see ourselves in Lacanian light – stepped already through the mirror image and into language) the experiment makes only sense because the inverted bouquet signifies something that is out of order and which comes to stand, metaphorically, for what is yet outside a signifying sphere. The upside-down bouquet has been corrected and put into a functioning order with the vase through the experiment's illusions. What emerges is a sense of organizing coherence – a prospect of mastery and permanence. The Imaginary takes up its work: things fall into place and begin to take shape. We welcome the ideal ego.



mettre un vase, réel. En dessous, il y a un bouquet de fleurs. Alors, qu'est-ce qui se passe?

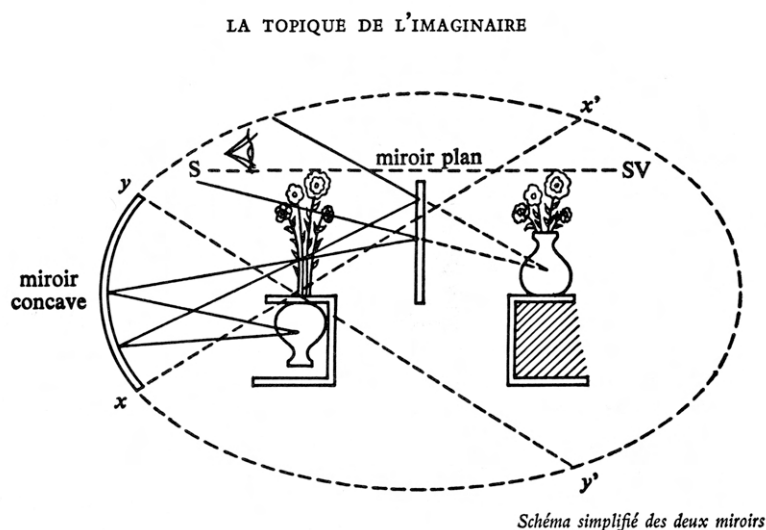


*L'expérience du bouquet renversé*

Le bouquet se réfléchit sur la surface sphérique, pour venir au point lumi-  
Figure 7. Jacques Lacan, 'L'expérience du bouquet renversé' (1975).

Gaining a hold in the mirror image – being nourished by the Imaginary – the world begins to differentiate in front of our eyes and we within. However, this image remains not as certain. It will overturn itself: 'the ideal ego inverts to the ego-ideal.' And now we must also welcome the ego-ideal. Indeed, the confusing slipperiness of ideal ego and ego-ideal (it clearly is slippery!) is at the core of identification. This is exemplified by the experiment's second stage and Lacan's introduction of an additional, and this time, planar mirror that engenders a secondary reflection of both vase and bouquet. (Figure 8) The structuring of the first spectatorial setting is thus partially turned round. Suddenly, the subject finds himself also as an image reflected to an outside from where an 'other' could always potentially look back. The imaginary plenitude of the ideal ego is exposed. It finds itself on a stage. It is the 'moment' when to 'see' means suddenly more than just that, when the look is discovered by the *gaze* – when, to underscore our argument, physical sight looks into subjective *vision*. Here, the ideal ego encounters the ego-ideal. (Or, at least within the psycho/analytical powers of our schematic theory, seeking artificially to disentangle through our words the nettings of subjectification.) If, at the outset, we have provisionally spoken of an initial identification as assuming an image, then the apparatus of the inverted bouquet images identification as a double assumption: first, the assumption of an image ('imaginary identification'), followed by the assumption

of being imaged ('symbolic identification').<sup>57</sup> Yet, crucially, the gaze emanating from the ego-ideal is evasive. We can't locate but 'imagine' it. We see in its place. As if we were to leap from one stage to another while leaving an afterimage on each so that in turn we can see ourselves seeing ourselves.<sup>58</sup>



De quoi s'agit-il? — sinon de voir quelle est la fonction de l'autre, de

Figure 8. Jacques Lacan, 'Schéma simplifié des deux miroirs' (1975).

And it was in borrowing from the vocabulary of photography through which Lacan has constructed the powerful metaphor for the gaze: behind the ego-ideal, there stands, hypothetically, the photographer who gazes at me through the camera's viewfinder but I can never know on what the photographer is focussing. The gaze remains obscure, impenetrable. I am framed as an image – yet the image that might come out of the photographer's camera I cannot see. All I can is to assume that 'I am photo-graphed,' to repeat this Lacanian catchphrase.<sup>59</sup> Note: photo-graphed. Indeed, not the photograph is of importance but that fact that I am *graphed* by some 'thing.' That thing is the gaze. I become marked, imprinted, stained. Indisputably, I slip into the *I*. The marking shows that the gaze is on the side of the Symbolic and the structuring side of the material signifier to which 'I' will have to accede, and indeed, of which 'I' become/s a part. No dispute around that. What is interesting, in tracing out the photographer's doings in Lacan's famous metaphor of the gaze is that our

photographer takes up a position of absence in all this. Indeed, Lacan does not talk of a photographer in 'What is a Picture?' to illustrate his exposition of the gaze. One is only 'photo-graphed.'<sup>60</sup> From the point of view of a textual analysis of this much-cited essay, neither a camera nor an operator is delineated. For Lacan that would be of course a necessary precondition for the gaze. However, we can also remark upon another aspect with regards to the (missing) photographer in this configuration. Lacan's metaphor is effective to his ends because a photographer can, in principle, vacate her working seat at any point yet the imaging can still be done. The photographer is not needed for the taking of the picture. One can walk away from the set/scene but also, potentially, return. The taking of an image can be programmed, pre-set, or simply done by a substitute. Here, photography would figure itself exclusively in its systematicity, as an idealized field of purely automated operations. It is just a click. And our speculatively inserted photographer would come out as a perfidious figure, sharing the drifting ability of the sign that Derrida has traced so intensely in his work. In short, the photographer would be a representative of the Symbolic machine. In this sense, there would be nothing ontologically intrinsic to the photographer as an individual agent and, by way of extension, point to the pointlessness of doing photography as an expressive or imaginative practice – an *aspect* of photography that has been around since its inception. Remember André Bazin claiming that photography would derive an advantage from the absence of the photographer?<sup>61</sup> For some, photography, like the gaze, can do without.

### **Identifying (with) Lacan**

Lacan did not refrain from emphasizing the obscurity of the gaze and its exteriority in many of his essays. 'In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze.'<sup>62</sup> As such, the gaze, like the signifier, precedes and exceeds me; in the optical model, something can always look into the scene via the planar mirror. That acknowledgement corresponds with the passing into the Symbolic, the world of opaque signifiers and the structuring of the Law. Like the imperceptible mirror plane that Lacan needed to introduce in the second stage of the experiment to

make his analogy plausible, the Law will *intervene* into the scene. What we can begin to see now is how our ‘subject’ would be spun across inside Lacan’s optical model. The inverting mirrors disperse us between an ideal ego and an ego-ideal – ‘the ideal ego corresponding to what “he himself was,” and the ego-ideal to what “he himself would like to be,” at the moment at which they can be identified as disjunct.’<sup>63</sup> It is in the differential space that spans between them that ‘images’ of our selves fade in and out. And to do the job of identification would be to juggle either side. Inside, inside ourselves, we could remain straying spectators.

I want us to pause briefly inside Lacan’s reflecting mirrors so as to allow ‘identity’ to fall back upon us; and to fall back upon our identities. I want us to reflect upon this ‘I’ that has been reflected into Lacan’s optical model. I want to catch it in its immediacy to Lacan’s so as to consider the affective refractions left on it. If I come out as a lover of Lacan’s texts and his images, indeed, absorbed as I am in his theoretical universe, then this is also to give a critical space to ‘theory’ as something beyond procedural ‘information’ and to identify its performative and affective dimensions – a practising of theory beyond its mere factual execution. It might be just acceptable for professional critics working in the cultural arena to admit to a kind of partisan favouring of an artwork (or more optimistically seen, a politically necessary step of admission), but it is still less so vis-à-vis ‘theory’ and the body of its signs.<sup>64</sup> This reminds me also of the moment when this project was still in its infancy, when it could not speak itself yet; that tentative period that required putting some/thing into words so as to come out of the uncertainty of mere stumbling and to assert the demanding place of the logos. Here, I have articulated that. And in recollecting that time, there flares up in my memory an image featuring my self reading a book while travelling on a bus through London: it was Lacan’s *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*...

Strangely, it was Lacan himself who engaged so passionately in the performative dimensions of teaching through his seminars, showing such a conscious awareness of it as a live event. The seminars speak of the significance of the experiential – his words in print have reached us rather belatedly. Instead, back then, one had to *attend* to listen to his spoken words and watch his gesticulating body. Yet he could not resist in the end the lure to search for more sophisticated signifiers, working on ever more

abstract topological schemata to prevent us from falling prey to the impressionistic potentialities of his illustrations. His many diagrams, formulae, graphs – and which culminated in his idiosyncratic *mathèmes* – attest to this attempt to avoid being led astray imaginatively like the optical model has made us.<sup>65</sup> It is reported that Lacan remained sceptical of his experiment with the inverted bouquet because it was too literal a representation, too much of an object, in short, too much of a spectacle of mirrors.

### **‘Framing’ the Photographic Negative**

*Séminaires. Écrits. Télévisions.* Lacan’s work is known by these titles, and as only Friedrich Kittler would be able to note, he ‘was the first (and last) writer whose book titles only described positions in the media system.’<sup>66</sup> Lacan’s work speaks of this high moment of structuralist theory through the frivolity of a flower bouquet. If Lacan has unsettled our positions through which we think of the subject of the ‘spectator,’ both as an embodied subject and a subject of study, and with it that of the photographer who is also always a spectator, then I want to turn us now back again to photographic negative and its spectatorial spaces. In coming out of Lacan’s inverting mirrors, we might ask on behalf of the photographic negative the following: ‘am I an image or am I imaged?’ To further open up, we could transmute the same question into a psychoanalytically accentuated doubt: ‘am I contained or am I containing?’ Or: ‘am I signified or am I signifier?’ The polarizing proposition sounds hilarious, if not to say hysterical. But that is the question of the hysteric. And it seems this is also the question of the photographic negative. Which side it should take is not clear because it cannot commit itself to just one. Situated somewhere between a conveyor of ‘content’ and an archival ‘container,’ the negative blurs the boundary of the image-frame complex to which Derrida has sensitized us so strongly. *Ergon* or *parergon*?

To the photographically marked spectator, the negative does not appear as an image because it is inverted. Its image does not signify enough, its inversion leaving a confounding impression on the spectator. The negative contains a photographic image, but that image is not quite there yet. Its ‘image’ remains *ad interim*, keeping through its own body the door open to let other photographs emerge. And yet, we

cannot deny that the negative is not also a photographic image. But we need to take care. If the photographic negative can tell us something, then it will remind us that we cannot understand it by simply isolating it from its surroundings, from that which it seems to oppose through its perceived mimetic otherness. That would just fix it as yet another image of the reifying kind of a *Photoshop* effect. On the one hand, the photographic negative speaks of the processual. Enabling a process, it is dedicated to its role as the means of transfer for the image from capture to official display. The negative does not feature in the 'picture' but it is nevertheless its discreet support. On the other hand, of course, the negative has provided the initial surface of the photograph's inscription. I speak here in the past tense not to highlight its historicity as an artefact, but to be reminiscent that the negative will be usually superseded by another image in the form of a positive likeness. Embedded as it is in the rules of photographic technology, the negative retires quickly. To the photographer/spectator, its active lifespan, one might say, is of a limited period. Having brought forth the positive photograph(s), the negative is left to rest again for indefinite times.

If the photographic negative appears to be superseded, to be left behind and to stay in the shadow of its positive counterpart, then it is a simple matter of fact of photo-technological procedures. Business as usual: after the negative, there comes the positive. The ordinary photographic work cannot be created otherwise. But this approach also indicates our involvement in taking up a certain point of view within the organization of the photographic apparatus from where we can draw these conclusions. Of course, we cannot afford to ignore the pragmatic realities of photography and its accepted forms of photographic images upon which we also place our theoretical understanding of photography and the representations that it produces. However, such an approach would ignore the ideological realities of discourse that also shape the object that it attempts to study – remember the *camera obscura* of Marx and Engels?<sup>67</sup> To view the negative image through the positive where an image's developing journey ends at most times is reasonable but, arguably, also debatable. Any prior stage of the image's release into public light is associated with developmental, experimental or editorial work – mere precursors of the 'real' thing. As such, the negative is considered to be unfinished; like a sketch, it promises more and bigger to come. And in many ways, it is a sketchy working ground for the photographer. Many of us will be familiar with the often anecdotal figure of the loyal

‘photographer’s assistant’ who prints off photographs from the negative working in the darkroom all day long. However, what is also needed is the photographer’s approval, her authorization of what can pass and what cannot, to make a photograph into a ‘work.’ And as we have seen in the previous chapter, the photographer’s identification with her own images will let her invest economically and libidinally in those images that represent the photographer’s work best. To this end, we look, with the photographer, towards her works, anticipating the images to come. And we come to realize that we have just left the negative behind.

Ours is not a question of dragging the negative out of its dark rooms. Nor is it a question of the kind of discursive framing that would just place it as an image in its own right. Such attentive work can be done of course but would potentially foreclose us from what we can call the ‘processual work’ of the negative as a *bearer* of the image.<sup>68</sup> Considering the photographic negative, the object that it is as well as the signifying ‘work’ that it performs, we should be aware of our approach. Surely, we can write a cultural or socio-technological history of the negative, engaging with its various formations and utilizations, and so on. We can write it as a philosophical history, reflecting on its phenomenologies and epistemic values. And no doubt, we can also write it as an art history, assembling and analyzing the work of artists and photographer who have employed imagery based on the negative and its procedures. And, while granting also all these disciplines inventiveness and sensitivities in conducting their explorations, I admit a certain deliberation in putting their methodological work in such basic terms so as to help us along with our own ‘problem’: if we want to stay in tune with the processual and archival work that the photographic negative nourishes, how can we take account of it without simply banning it, let us say, to artistic, formal or social plains of investigation?

### **The Photographic Negative as/in Reproduction**

If the idea of a *catalogue raisonné* of ‘the negative’ is rather off-putting, then this might have something to do with the photographic negative itself. Although producing such a thing is clearly achievable, it seems nevertheless at odds with some of the traits specific to the negative that we are exploring here. Imagine this

catalogue: maybe it centres on an artistic school or a single photographer, maybe it focuses on an archival collection. It would collate information of each negative and reproduce it in fine print. Flicking through this catalogue, we could appreciate the negatives for their informational content, the images that they convey despite their inverted mode. Its reproductions could also give us a sense of them as actual objects, their shapes and materialities. Yet, this imaginary catalogue brings also some of the challenges to the fore. Indeed, most obvious, it brings the negative itself to the fore. Put on display, it features in its own photo-book. This book could well read like a script to a politics of visibility, though at times inevitably needed to make oneself noticed, this visibility also comes at a price. And as we know from a lesson of psychoanalytic economy, gaining something entails giving up something else.

We might say what this catalogue, contrary to its French name, struggles to explain through its form is the negative's peculiar photographic work as a mediating conduit rather than, or better, beyond being just, a photographed 'image' in its own right – for an image we can recognize in it too, although the status of it remains an ambivalent one as we have seen. The photographic negative draws its ambivalence from facilitating a conduit, both literally and figuratively. Literally, it inscribes the photographed event to form an image but is structured to pass on the same subsequently. Figuratively, it forms an archive of back-up copies for (later) consultation but does not lend direct access to its images since they remain what they are: inverted. Not displaying the photographic image that the photographer envisions, that is, the photographer's *photographic vision* of the photograph, the negative's inversion demands to be inverted again. And so, it finds its place somewhere in the in-between, in the spaces of the archive, the albums, the boxes and envelopes. The negative likes to keep itself to itself. Discreet, it is, for sure.

However, discretion does not render it useless. On the contrary, the negative remains of use precisely by being silently restful. As the prototype image, it provides the back-up copies for the photographer in case the representational 'positive' perishes.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, photographers have always taken great care to look after their negatives. They used to be, and to some extent still are, the photographer's lifeblood. After all, the professional photographer's livelihood, his *oeuvre*, depends on them. But also outside the professional circus of photography, the negative provides us with a sense



of security, of never really losing the image one has taken. In the drawer, at home, somewhere, we believe the image to be safe. Yet the safety net that we seem to ‘see’ in the negative, as a holding device for a potentially lost image, is interesting in that it does not hold the image we want to see. Unlike other safety nets of image back-ups such as positive duplicates and digital storage devices, it holds instead, quite visibly so, its inverted twin. But this little difference is what makes the difference, thus let us dwell on it a bit more.

The negative, conceived as an indefinite storage space, keeps the image in a form that does not correspond to what the spectator, conditioned by the logics of photography, would consider as its ‘given’ state. The inverted rendition of the image does not correspond. Again, it does not *correspond*: its phenomenality and spatial orientation do not correspond with what the photographer expected to represent photographically. And following on from this lack of correspondence we also come to apprehend that *we* find it difficult to correspond with this image in the negative. So clearly embedded it is in the photographic surface, and yet, our eyes struggle to ‘see’ it. As Michel Frizot, one of the few photography scholars who have engaged critically with the photographic negative, puts it: ‘Even though our brain might well understand negativity, our eyes can still not “see negatively.”’<sup>70</sup> We might admit that it is quite difficult to establish a direct correspondence with it, since in our vision the ‘positive’ will (always) see it through for us – it will oversee the work of seeing as it were. As such, the space of the photographic negative evokes in the spectator an aesthetic paradox. The negative image is at once there and not there. It appears as removed, withdrawn, absent. But the image’s character of introversion is formed in counterdependence with our inclination to see it through its positive and what have called already in Derridian vein a phallo-photocentrism. And from this point of view, from within the brackets of our ‘positive vision,’ the image in the negative is also already there – the positive superimposing itself imaginatively on the negative.

The photographic negative, then, inhabits a difficult space, phenomenally as well as materially. For the photographer/spectator, its inhabitation is circumscribed by a vacating vision since the negative’s space is created out of a giving-space to other images. In other words, the negative is brought into its specific relief only by supplanting it with further images: the positive, the print, the picture, etc. And it is

this image-laden space that gives the negative's space its outline – an outline that closes the negative off, shutting it away behind another (desired) image. This dynamic that describes our approach to the photograph negative, that is, our making sense of it, resonates with the psychoanalytic concept of disavowal that works at overcoming the threat or imaginary sight of castration. As such, the image, in the photographically negative mode, must also always be overcome within the logics of the photographer to stay in line with the logistics of photography. The photographer relies on the negative but wrestles to legitimize it as a proper image. The negative appears again as an incomplete image to the photographer, potentially curtailing his identity as image-maker. And consequently, to say with André Green, 'disavowal comes into effect in order to ward off the danger of the loss of identity.'<sup>71</sup>

Let us reiterate that our deduction of the photographer's disavowing relation to the photographic negative should not be seen in separation from the difficulties that its space poses to the spectator. As such, a search for the 'image' in the photographic negative brings with it a disavowing dynamic if we are to make that search end positively. By setting out to produce a photographic image, the negative – although an integral part of the photograph's overall production – cannot keep up with the photographer's photographic imagination of mimetic perfectibility. Thence, the photographer is led to gloss over this 'weak' moment disavowingly. The lack of correspondence between the photographer's vision of the image and the one in the negative is thereby bridged. Not yielding the representative image, the negative is perhaps not worth more than a superficial gloss. What is at stake, then, is the issue of how we might theorize *otherwise* our cognitive dimensions vis-à-vis the visual space of photographic negative. And to do so, we could dispose of trying to inscribe in it an 'image' that would be intrinsic only to the negative. The photographic negative holds an image that continues to cling on to its positive twin and thus, we can barely recognize on its own. Indeed, we are about to discover that the negative itself, as soon as we look at it, displaces itself. It makes itself invisible. Or rather, our vision brings the photographic negative immediately back into a (positive) image, while the actual 'negative' itself retreats once more further away from us.<sup>72</sup> Every look another effacement – a thing impossible to behold.

While the spectator might well endeavour to step towards the photographic negative so as to see it, the negative itself moves, simultaneously, one step further away. This is the escaping force of the negative in the photographic. This is also why our *catalogue raisonné* cannot really do justice to the photographic negative. Indeed, it might just mislead us into believing that we have recuperated the photographic negative from its oblivion within the history of materials by re-presenting it while, in fact, we fail to realize that the negative continues to trick us phenomenally, both literally and figuratively: it slips away from where we wish it to appear. This makes the photographic negative a more complex phenomenon when compared, more generally, with that of the notion of negative space. Whereas it is perhaps easier to conceptually ‘grasp’ negative space as that of the spacing between signifiers, as the ‘holes’ surrounding and structuring elements in space, the photographic negative, with its inverted character, can call itself already a negative but is not just so. The photographic negative appears to have the peculiar ability to make those holes into the positive, evacuating thereby the subject that is rendered in positive. But that does not mean that the photographic image is annihilated. Thus, we can say that the photographic negative, by itself, does not wipe out the image. The photographic negative also builds something: it puts forth another image that simultaneously fills the positive’s holes. Enigmatic to our eyes, for sure, the photographic negative is its own kind of image. More specifically, the photographic negative, although already declared a *negative*, remains what it is: an image with the particular quality of providing an inverted representation.

But let us not conclude without the photographic possibility of a ‘negative’ image. Let us try to look at its space once more through Thomas F. Barrow’s work. Barrow has gathered a series of photographs under the heading *Cancellations*.<sup>73</sup> Looking as if taken by accident, the photographs present us visions of American landscape sceneries of all kinds, open fields interspersed with traces of habitation, building structures, signs, roads, sheds, etc. (Figure 9) Yet each view, laid out as it is to our eyes through the toned photographic silver grain, is simultaneously disturbed by rough lines that run diagonally across the image’s surface. For instance, the photographed scene of an unspecified piece of grassland crisscrossed by electricity pylons is overlaid by rough lines that intervene in the image’s surface. Indeed, they intervene so strongly that the image comes to give away its own materiality: scraps

and holes appear on the image surface, interrupting its illusory plane. It is also from this hole where we can begin to unravel the conceptual layering of this work. What intervenes in the photograph's surface is the materiality of the photographic negative. Barrow, in making this bare mark on the negative, renders it useless one could say. This, indeed, refers to a tradition inherent in the work of a next of kin of photography, namely printmaking.<sup>74</sup> Printmakers used to 'cancel out' their plate after having printed off the required number of sheets. This would guarantee an edition and hem in at the same time the open-ended productivity of such technology. Barrow repeats this marking of the plate with the material of the negative *but* allows that mark to enter the representing image. Here, the mark makes the work, binding together negative and positive.



Figure 9. Thomas F. Barrow, *Flight Field*, from *Cancellations* (1974).

It would be tempting to see the semantic unit of this image under the conceptual shadow of Derrida's *sous rature*: the sign of a cross placed above another sign that, by falling under the cross, has also displaced itself thereby. It finds itself, literally, under erasure but that erasure is never totalizing, only displacing. Under erasure, the trace remains. Erasing can only ever be a tracing. As such, the cross in the image would neither be just negatory nor just affirmative. Yet we have reasons to doubt whether a photographic image behaves like a semantic sign at all. Roland Barthes

worked hard on trying to find out whether the photograph belongs to a semantic system. His formulation of the 'photograph is a message without a code' refers to this problematic.<sup>75</sup> Granting for a moment the photograph its indexical link to space and time, then it will also fail to build a semantic system in the sense of Saussure's *langue*. Each photograph would be an irreducible 'thing,' an unnameable entity of utter analogy to the Real – a traumatic impression that remains outside representation. A nothing, and even less so. Lacking a code, it would be, unlike our notion of the sign, irreplaceable and thus not displaceable. Symbolically, the cross in Barrow's photograph might resemble the work of a bar that displaces the sign-image. But if we approach the same problem from within the photograph's material layers, a different reading becomes possible. Photography takes two and makes one we said at the beginning. What we see in a photograph is a positive image handed to us as an imprint of the negative. Indirectly always there, *via inversion*, the negative remains nonetheless completely invisible. Barrow's scratching of the photographic negative intervenes in this erasing phenomenology. The scratch marks the negative's surface; what falls into this scratching path leaves the image erased. Yet turned into a positive, the damages done to the negative appear *as* image: where the photographed image has been erased, the materiality of the photographic negative shines through.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Es ist offensichtlich, daß die Erfindung der Fotografie die "Sichtbarkeit" der Welt im Medium des Bildes in beachtlichem Maße erhöht bzw. diese sogar erst hervorgebracht hat. Dieser Gewinn konnte freilich nur auf dem Umweg über die Negativität des Bildes erfolgen, über ein Artefakt, das zuvor gar nicht vorstellbar war [...].' Michel Frizot, 'Negative Ikonoziät: Das Paradigma der Umkehrung', in *Ordnungen der Sichtbarkeit: Fotografie in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technologie*, ed. and trans. Peter Geimer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp.413-33 (p.415).

<sup>2</sup> 'Le négatif est en lui-même invisible, car quand je le regarde, c'est déjà une photo que je regarde [...].' François Soulages, *Esthétique de la Photographie: La perte et le reste* [1998] (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), p.122.

<sup>3</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge: New York and London, 1993), p.66.

<sup>4</sup> In Talbot's canonical photo-book *The Pencil of Nature* [1846], he outlines the negative-positive process with a photograph of lace and the following words: 'As this is the first example of a *negative* image that has been introduced into this work, it may be necessary to explain, in a few words, what is meant by the expression, and wherein the difference consists. The ordinary effect of light upon white sensitive paper is to *blacken* it. If therefore any object, as a leaf for instance, be laid upon the paper, this, by intercepting the action of the light, preserves the whiteness of the paper beneath it, and accordingly when it is removed there appears the form and shadow of the leaf marked out in white upon the blackened paper; and since shadows are usually dark, and this is the reverse, it is called in the language of photography a *negative* image.' The full text of Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* is rendered in Mike Weaver, ed., *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1992), pp.75-103 (pp.100-01).

<sup>5</sup> The terms 'positive' and 'negative' in relation to photographic discourse stem from the to historians of photography well-known English photo-scientist Sir John Frederick William Herschel.

<sup>6</sup> A good case in point is the catalogue of an exhibition dedicated to the first photographic negatives. While claiming to feature negatives, it actually contains only reproductions of positive prints. D. B. Thomas, *The First Negatives* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Talbot writes: 'In taking views of buildings, statues, portraits, &c. it is necessary to obtain a *positive* image, because the negative images of such objects are hardly intelligible, substituting light for shade, and *vice versa*. But in copying such things as lace or leaves of plants, a negative image is perfectly allowable, black lace being as familiar to the eye as white lace, and the object being only to exhibit the pattern with accuracy.' Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, p.101.

<sup>8</sup> The term '*in camera*' would deserve great attention, as it is a specialist term of legal theory to establish the right to secrecy within the public administrative. This can only remain a simple pointer to which I hope to return to in the future. There is no scholarship on the cross-disciplinary links between photography, aesthetics and law with regards to this term, except perhaps Kofman's *Camera Obscura* touches upon some of the issues of this problematic. For a comparative study of 'secrecy' within the legal frameworks of France and Germany, see Hans von Egidy, *Vorlagepflichten und Geheimhaltungsinteressen im Verwaltungsprozess in Deutschland und Frankreich* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2005).

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Proper’ refers to something that is of ‘one’s own,’ and by way of extension, something that is neat, tidy. It is worth keeping in mind that the French ‘propre,’ sharing the same etymological root, also signifies ‘clean’ to which my use alludes here.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* [1967], trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), p.43.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault points out that, rather than excluding aberrant forms, medical/scientific discourse in the nineteenth century established principles that would allow the inclusion of these aberrant forms as a kind of ‘natural order of disorder’ so that they could be scrutinized and studied.’ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.44.

<sup>12</sup> The trope of inversion is widely employed in Marxian models of ideologies (not least because of the analogy of the inverting *camera obscura* by Marx and Engels as well as the ‘need’ to invert Hegel’s idealism), thereby drawing on inversion’s spatial overturnings to connote the ‘distortions’ of ideology. See, for example, Louis Althusser, *For Marx* [1965], trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 2005). For a critique of the notion of ‘distortions of ideology’ I refer the reader to Stuart Hall’s essay ‘The Problem of Ideology’, in *Marx: A Hundred Years On*, ed. Betty Matthews (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), pp.57-85. The fact that inversion itself relies on a system of orientation ‘against’ which it can turn so as to effectuate its dis- or reorientations, is taken up by Sara Ahmed in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). For a genealogical discussion on ‘inversion’ and its largely negative connotations, see my ‘Envisioning Inversion’, *parallax* 14:2 (2008), pp.1-6.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘A Note on the Unconscious’ [1913], trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.257-66 (p.264).

<sup>14</sup> In articulating this problematic, Griselda Pollock writes: ‘Phallic masculine culture projects onto Woman-as-image its own fear of human singularity, which is nothing more than the dread of being cast adrift from the founding mother. Masculinity denies its own endemic lack vis-à-vis the cultural of both maternal and paternal authorities to which it must accede. What is most grotesque is that masculine culture then projects “Woman,” who as mother was one and two at once, as nothing at all, as void, lack, death-bringer, castrator, the negation of being, only imaginable in an idealized abstraction as Beauty or as abjection – the silenced and forever lost (read banished) Mother of Death, the end of being.’ Griselda Pollock, *Looking Back to the Future: Essays on Art, Life and Death*, intr. Penny Florence (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2001), pp.250-52. For an extended discussion of the attribution of female ‘beauty’ analyzed from within the theoretical frameworks of psychoanalysis, see Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, p.28.

<sup>16</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, p.70.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Photography, insofar as it refuses to valorize the “one,” can be seen as a wedge into the system of representation which elevates the one (the original). This is partially why photography is still regarded as a degraded art form – which is to say, a feminine art form.’ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, p.186.

<sup>18</sup> See Jens Ruchatz, ‘Fotografie und Projektion: Ein perfektes Paar’, *Fotogeschichte* 19:4 (1999), pp.3-12 (p.12).

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<sup>19</sup> Mathew B. Brady (1823-1896) was an American photographer and his work is part of the historical canon of photography. *Portrait of an Unidentified Couple* dates from c.1860.

<sup>20</sup> There is very little scholarly reflection on the photographic negative and its epistemic values (its role in/as archive, as phenomenal image or as expressive form in visual culture) other than a historical charting of its various material forms. Exceptions to this scholarly silence include: Michel Frizot, 'Negative Ikonoziät: Das Paradigma der Umkehrung', in *Ordnungen der Sichtbarkeit: Fotografie in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technologie*, ed. and trans. Peter Geimer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp.413-33, as well as Frizot's related article 'L'image inverse: Le mode négatif et les principes d'inversion en photographie', *Études photographiques* 5 (November 1998), pp.51-71; François Soulages, 'L'objet photographique: la photographeité', in *Esthétique de la Photographie: La perte et le reste* [1998] (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), pp.107-33; Peggy Phelan, 'Developing the Negative', in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge: New York and London, 1993), pp.34-70.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Fox Talbot, 'A Brief Description of the Photogenic Drawings Exhibited at the Meeting of the British Association at Birmingham in August, 1839' [1839], in Mike Weaver, ed., *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1992), pp.57-58 (p.58). In the same text that accompanies this exhibition of Talbot's work, he stresses in capital letters: 'They required the action of light TWICE to be employed.'

<sup>22</sup> The *Collins Photography Workshop* book on film tells us that unlike ordinary colour 'reversal' films, non-substantive materials do not use built-in colour couplers to form a colour image. Instead, non-substantive materials are constructed like black-and-white film, with three colour-sensitized layers. The colours are then added later during a complex processing procedure. Thus, they can be seen as another step towards the progressive dematerialization of photographic processes – of making the image and its processing *leaner*. See Michael Freeman, *Film* [1988] (London: William Collins, 1990), p.108.

<sup>23</sup> 'The reversal process produces a black-and-white positive by developing a negative image on exposed sensitized material, then removing the negative image and developing a positive one.' The direct positive can also identify 'a photographic process that yields a positive image directly from a positive original without the intermediate formation of a negative image,' such as xerographic process for document copying. See 'Reversal Process/Materials' and 'Direct Positive' in *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography*, ed. Leslie Stroebel and Richard Zakia (Boston and London: Focal Press, 1995), pp.699-700 and p.220.

<sup>24</sup> To photographic practitioners, Ansel Adams's book *The Negative* is an iconic representative of a work wholly dedicated to giving creative advice on how to 'treat' the photographic negative successfully from a self-identified 'straight' photographer's point of view. Ansel Adams, *The Negative: Exposure and Development* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1948).

<sup>25</sup> Placing things all too quickly into the theoretical frame of the 'post' risks either an illusion of exactitude, or, as Griselda Pollock underscores, a zone of intellectual comfort: 'Terms such as "post" (post-Feminism, post-Modernism, post-Industrial) can easily lull us into a false sense of historical advance, when no change has fundamentally taken place, and the dominant systems have merely adapted faster than we have to the ever-shifting plays of power and resistance.' Griselda Pollock,



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‘Critical Positions’, in *Looking Back to the Future: Essays on Art, Life and Death*, pp.11-21 (p.17).

<sup>26</sup> So, at least, the claim made in the exhibition catalogue that speaks of this time ‘after’ photography, taking it as its theoretical starting point. Hubertus von Amelunxen, ed., *Photography After Photography* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> I insist on pluralizing the word ‘medium’ as ‘media.’ The plural form ‘mediums’ has become widely accepted in English but, it should be noted, is usually not used with regards to popular formations such as press, TV and the Internet, which are referred to as the ‘media.’ Thus, we can observe a semantic branching out of the word ‘medium’: while the word ‘mediums’ tends to stand for the more abstract mediating space of film, photography, etc., the word ‘media’ is reserved for ‘concrete’ media forms like newspapers, that is, that which we see or read ‘in the (mass) media.’ But the effect of this split is highly problematic in that it allows the term ‘media,’ when applied to forms of mass media, to be disassociated from its connotation of ‘mediating.’

<sup>28</sup> Writers such as Kracauer, Barthes and Bazin have embedded their work on photography in arguments that rely on an indexical theory of photography. Peirce’s economy of signs (index, symbol, icon) is outlined in several of his essays. A good overview give, for example, Charles Sanders Peirce, ‘Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, as Far as They Are Determined’ [1903] and ‘New Elements’ [1904], in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Nathan Houser (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp.289-99 and pp.300-24; and the section ‘Three Kinds of Signs’ [1885], in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan Houser (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp.225-28, therein Peirce writes: ‘The index asserts nothing; it only says “There!” It takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops.’ (p.226). For a revision of Peirce’s theory of the index, see Mary Ann Doane’s introduction ‘Indexicality: Trace and Sign’ to a special issue of the journal *differences* dedicated to the topic of the ‘index.’ Mary Ann Doane, ‘Indexicality: Trace and Sign’, *differences* 18:1 (2007), pp.1-6.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Looking back, the life-span of film and photography as the predominant media of their era has been comparatively short, bounded by a defined beginning, the fixing of the indexical image, and end, the perfect imitation of the indexical image by digital technology. The mechanical, even banal, presence of the photographic image as index takes on a new kind of resonance, touched perhaps by nostalgia, but no longer tied to old debates about the truth of photographic evidence.’ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p.31.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Fox Talbot, ‘A Brief Description of the Photogenic Drawings Exhibited at the Meeting of the British Association at Birmingham in August, 1839’, p.58.

<sup>31</sup> Gavin Jantjes, *A South African Colouring Book* (Geneva: International University Exchange Fund, 1978). Jantjes’ *A South African Colouring Book* consists of eleven silkscreen prints made around 1974/75 which were subsequently distributed in print in an edition of twenty in the unspectacular form of loose A4 sheets held in a simple black file. The sheets play on/out a politics of colour, carrying titles like ‘colour this whites only,’ ‘classify this coloured,’ ‘colour this labour dirt cheap,’ ‘colour these workers sold out,’ ‘colour these people dead.’

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<sup>32</sup> Here I have in mind the solipsistic and self-referential sufficiency of the field of contemporary visual arts, that is, the practice of making work through other artwork, be this a strategy of subversion, parody, ruination, etc., and which shows little effective interaction with the political currents even though it might claim to do otherwise.

<sup>33</sup> Apartheid's emblematic status is linked to the obsessive actualization of its racist ideology in the form of an all-encompassing state structure – which is not to say, however, that those outside of that 'state' and its legal space have not been implicated in its maintenance. Yet, as Derrida points out, '[w]hile all racisms have their basis in culture and in institutions, not all of them give rise to state-controlled structures.' For a reflection on the signifying weight that bears on the word 'apartheid' and the circulating connotations around its signifier, see Jacques Derrida, 'Racism's Last Word' [1983], trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), pp.290-99 (p.294).

<sup>34</sup> 'COLOUR THESE BLACKS WHITE' functions as a kind of instructive caption to the work. Its ambiguity (the colours of races or the materials of colouring?) as well as my own ambiguous use of it in the relating paragraph can neither be ignored nor can it be taken apart: its essentializing face shows us racism's search for an absolute ordering spectrum, its differential face shows us the irreducibility of the construct of racial difference.

<sup>35</sup> 'Having judged, condemned, abandoned his cultural forms, his language, his food habits, his sexual behaviour, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man.'

<sup>36</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.29.

<sup>37</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p.29.

<sup>38</sup> Jantjes' use of the negative conveys, aesthetically, an identificatory gap as enforced by the racist regulations of Apartheid by guarding a process of identification that disallows identity the possibility of ever catching up with what it idealizes on its path of subjective projection: what is to be 'identified' with is a politically sanctioned ideal of 'whiteness' but, at the same time, one remains in a position of 'never white enough.' Thus, for racism, the gap needs to persist. As Silverman puts it: 'The struggle here is not to *close* the distance between visual imago and the proprioceptive body, as in the classic account of identification, but to *maintain* it – to keep the screen of "blackness" at a safe remove from the sensational ego, lest it assume precisely that quality of self-sameness which is synonymous with a coherent ego.' Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p.28.

<sup>39</sup> Judith Butler expands on the work of identification vis-à-vis an ethics of a politically effective image in the light of the violent events associated with the unmistakable figures of 9/11 in her *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* [2004] (London and New York: Verso, 2006), pp.142-47 (p.145).

<sup>40</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.146.

<sup>41</sup> I use the term 'racialist' here to denote the structural implication of photography's design based on a 'racial' imaginary to distinguish it from the term 'racist' which I would identify more closely with the sphere of a politics grounded in a belief in a 'racialized' order.

<sup>42</sup> For an overview of the ideological inscription of 'white' in photographic/filmic representation and a historical analysis of its related material practices, see Richard

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Dyer's chapter 'The Light of the World' in his book *White*. As Dyer eloquently sums it up: 'Photography, as it has been invented, refined and elaborated, and the dominant uses of that technology, as they have become fixed and naturalized, assume and privilege the white subject.' Richard Dyer, *White* [1997] (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.82-144 (p.103).

<sup>43</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* [1993] (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.145.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*, p.115.

<sup>45</sup> A critical warning shall be issued here: it would be dangerously simplistic to claim that photographic imaging (still) cannot 'do' black skin – that would just reiterate the same pattern of racial prejudice. The point being made here is that photography carries with itself a historical legacy of racial preference, which is to stress the link between technology and history and the ideologies that span between them.

<sup>46</sup> This is not to say, however, that we could just resign from our attempts of capturing and visualizing a referent because no image could ever adequately transpire the truth. Drawing on Lévinas, Butler argues: 'The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.' Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.146. For a related discussion on Butler's interpretation of Lévinas's ethics of the face in relation to the politics of media representation of atrocity, see Nicola Foster, 'Photography and the Gaze: The Ethics of Vision Inverted', *parallax* 14:2 (2008), pp.78-92.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' [1949], trans. Bruce Fink, in *Écrits* (New York and London: Norton & Company, 2006), pp.75-81 (p.76).

<sup>48</sup> 'Indeed, for *imagos* [...] the specular image seems to be the threshold of the visible word, if we take into account the mirrored disposition of the *imago of own's own body* in hallucinations and dreams, whether it involves one's individual features, or even one's infirmities or object projections [...].' Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function', p.77.

<sup>49</sup> In its classic version, this optical experiment is set up with the bouquet hidden. Lacan playfully turns it later round (!) so that it becomes the experiment with the inverted vase, favouring to hide the vase so as to make a critical point of the fact that it is the vase (as specular image) that will appear to contain the messy diversity of the flowers thereby reflecting the organizing impetus of the mirror stage as giving the yet incomprehensible body-mass a coherent outline in what is known in psychoanalytic fields as 'imaginary or primary identification.' See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), p.179.

<sup>50</sup> Irit Rogoff, 'Studying Visual Culture', in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.14-26 (p.17).

<sup>51</sup> Laura Mulvey's hypercanonical essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' of 1975 continues to reference this important historical moment and its emerging analyses of subjectivity in relation to spectacle, technology and capitalism against the background of structuralist ideology critique (Althusser) and psychoanalytic theories of vision (Lacan) – more catchily referred to as 'apparatus theory.' Key texts include: Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' [1969], in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121-73; Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the Visible', in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp.121-44; Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological

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Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' [1970], trans. Alan Williams, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp.286-98; Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16:3 (1975), pp.6-18; Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', trans. Ben Brewster, *Screen* 16:2 (1975), pp.14-76; Julia Kristeva, 'Ellipsis on the Dread and the Specular Seduction' [1975], trans. Dolores Burdick, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp.236-43. One may also add the work of Guy Debord and his influential *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995). A good reflection of the then prevailing debates is given in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) and in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: British Film Institute, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> The experiment ties together Lacan's core ideas (the topoi of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the mirror phase and the Gaze, ego formation via imaginary identification (ideal ego) and symbolic identification (ego-ideal)). It is a distinctive feature of many Lacanian books – though usually overshadowed by the triangular schema of the screen.

<sup>53</sup> 'The odd thing is that an entire system of metaphysics has been founded on geometry and mechanics, by looking to them for models of understanding, but up to now it doesn't seem as though optics has been exploited as much as it could have been. Yet it should lend itself to a few dreams, this strange science which sets itself to produce, by means of apparatuses, that peculiar thing called *images*, in contrast to other sciences, which import into nature a cutting up, a dissection, an anatomy.' Jacques Lacan, 'The Topic of the Imaginary' [1954], in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York and London: Norton & Company, 1991), pp.73-88 (p.76).

<sup>54</sup> The 'inverted bouquet' belongs to physics's staple of optical experiments. It is documented in Henri Bouasse, *Bibliothèque scientifique de l'ingénieur et du physicien: Optique et photométrie. Dites géométriques* (Paris: Delagrave, 1934), p.87.

<sup>55</sup> Lacan describes the phenomenological results of the first stage of the experiment as follows: 'At that moment, while you do not see the real bouquet, which is hidden, if you are in the right field, you will see a very peculiar imaginary bouquet appear, taking shape exactly in the neck of the vase. Since your eyes have to move linearly in the same plane, you will have an impression of reality, all the while sensing that something is strange, blurred, because the rays don't quite cross over very well. The further away you are, the more parallax comes into play, and the more complete the illusion will be.' Jacques Lacan, 'The Topic of the Imaginary', p.78.

<sup>56</sup> Lacan's model of subjectification has been critiqued for being of a universalizing nature by reinstating a disembodied eye, that is, the grounding of much of his theories in abstracting geometrical paradigms. Although producing a de-centred notion of subjectivity, he is often considered to be following Enlightenment's path of an 'ocular epistemology' because his formulations such as the 'gaze' and the 'screen' are regarded to favour a 'pure' realm of the visual over other aspects of embodied subjectivity such as haptic or olfactory ones. Yet while other theories emphasize a visuality that cannot be that easily unhooked from corporeality such as Merleau-Ponty's vision of the 'chiasmus,' it should be said that we must not confuse the representation of a theory with the substance of that theory, although, admittedly, there are links. One could argue that Lacan's gaze starts from an abstract dot (the

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representation of the gaze does so in his ‘screen’ model) rather than the particularity of a fleshy eye. That is true but at the same time the representation of a dot (to represent a theoretical model) does not necessarily entail discounting individual embodiment as such. For a critique that makes a claim on Lacan’s disembodied tendencies, see Amelia Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), particularly her chapter ‘Cinematic Self Imaging and the New Televisual Body’, pp.134-62.

<sup>57</sup> On the build-up of the Lacanian theory of identification, see Dylan Evans, ‘Identification’, in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.80-82. Jacqueline Rose’s summary is useful here: ‘The ideal ego would therefore be a projected image with which the subject identifies, and comparable to the imaginary captation of the mirror-phase; the ego-ideal would be a secondary introjection whereby the image returns to the subject invested with those new properties which [...] are necessary for the subject to be able to retain its narcissism while shifting its “perspective.”’ Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p.177.

<sup>58</sup> We could also align imaginary identification with *Vorstellung* and symbolic identification with *Darstellung*.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Jacques Lacan, ‘What is a Picture?’ [1964], in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.105-22 (p.106).

<sup>60</sup> It might be either Lacan’s theoretical virtuosity or the virtuosity of the accident that in ‘What is a Picture?’ the trope of the photographer does not appear. Yet scholarly reflections on this text do not hesitate in extending the discussion to the figure of the photographer, which is of course not the same as just being ‘photo-graphed.’ While my argument can only be sustained if we keep to a textual analysis of this particular essay, it is nonetheless telling, I think, how the ‘other,’ in Lacan’s sense, installs itself via the reader’s projection of the human figure of the photographer into this metaphor. For a discussion of Lacan’s ‘What is a Picture?’ vis-à-vis photography, see Margaret Iversen, ‘What is a Photograph?’, *Art History* 17:3 (September 1994), pp.450-63.

<sup>61</sup> ‘All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.’ André Bazin, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’, p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze’ [1964], in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.67-78 (p.73).

<sup>63</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p.177.

<sup>64</sup> For a consideration of the ‘performative’ in the professional task of art criticism, see Gavin Butt, ed., *After Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> For a critique of Lacan’s privileging of the Symbolic and the subject of the signifier, see Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan* [1973], trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Kittler, ‘Film’, in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* [1986], trans. and intr. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp.115-82 (p.170)

<sup>67</sup> This sound entanglement of material reality and ideological projection is what the famous metaphor of Marx and Engels’ *camera obscura* tries to demonstrate in *The*

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*German Ideology*: ‘If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear as upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the *inversion* of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.’ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* [1845-46], ed. Christopher J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p.47. Here, the camera, with its image-inverting principle in its dark interior, is made to serve as a model through which the workings of ideology could be understood. Closed off from the outside reality, it conceals its distorting operations of ideology in its secretive inside. Their analogy suggests that, just as inversion is inevitable in the camera, ideology is inevitable in real life – it is an inescapable part of it and we need to be aware of that. However, such an interpretation of their ‘camera’ also poses immediately the problem of how one could ever ‘see’ through this totalizing structure if one is to grasp the ideological effects. For a critique of their inconclusive construction of their metaphor – one that relies itself on inversion to align successfully two dissimilar concepts – see Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* [1973], trans. Will Straw (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp.1-20.

<sup>68</sup> We may note that the signification ‘bearer’ emphasizes the relational, its role is that of enabling flow and exchange within a system of signs. This is evident on paper money, for example, in the sentence ‘Promise to Pay the Bearer on Demand the Sum of,’ attesting to the relational indebtedness in which a financial economy is based. See Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp.46-52.

<sup>69</sup> I take the notion of the ‘negative as prototype’ from Vilém Flusser’s *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* [1983], trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> ‘Denn wenn auch unser Gehirn die Negativität begreift, so können unsere Augen doch nicht “negativ sehen.”’ Michel Frizot, ‘Negative Ikonozität: Das Paradigma der Umkehrung’, pp.413-33 (p.433).

<sup>71</sup> André Green’s study on the ‘negative’ in psychoanalytic theory is possibly one of the most comprehensive on this topic. See André Green, *The Work of the Negative*, trans. Andrew Weller (London: Free Association Books, 1999), p.77.

<sup>72</sup> François Soulages reflects on this displacing dynamic of the negative image: every time the spectator looks at a photographic negative, the negative image as such inevitably distances itself from the viewing subject once more, because ‘all’ the spectator can see is another, albeit inverted, image. Thus, every instance of viewing sets off another withdrawal of the negative image, thereby evoking an *aesthetics of distance*. In this way, the negative makes itself unreachable to the spectator. See François Soulages, *Esthétique de la Photographie: La perte et le reste*, pp.112-24.

<sup>73</sup> See the exhibition catalogue *Inventories and Transformations: The Photographs of Thomas Barrow*, ed. Kathleen McCarthy Gauss (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), pp.112-29. The series *Cancellations* was begun in 1974.

<sup>74</sup> Kathleen McCarthy Gauss discusses these aspects of Barrow’s *Cancellations* series in the above-mentioned catalogue. She also points out the photograph’s illusion as if ‘the image [...] were shot through a cracked picture window’ as well as the work’s symbolic combination of the labour of the hand (the scratching) and the labour of the machine (the image-taking).

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<sup>75</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' [1961], in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.15-31 (p.19).

<sup>76</sup> That the photographic negative's visibility links itself up with notions of damage – the negative as tearing things away – cannot be generalized and must be seen in the context of this particular work and my reading of it.

### ***Facing Lacan (Self-portrait with Jacques Lacan)***

2007

Photographic tableau composed of  
54 gelatin silver photographs (unique specimen)  
183.5 x 216.8 cm

*Facing Lacan* is a photographic meditation on the life and work of the celebrated French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The photographic artwork was created with a camera obscura set up opposite Lacan's study in *rue de Lille no. 5* in Paris VII, where he practised from 1941 until his death forty years later.

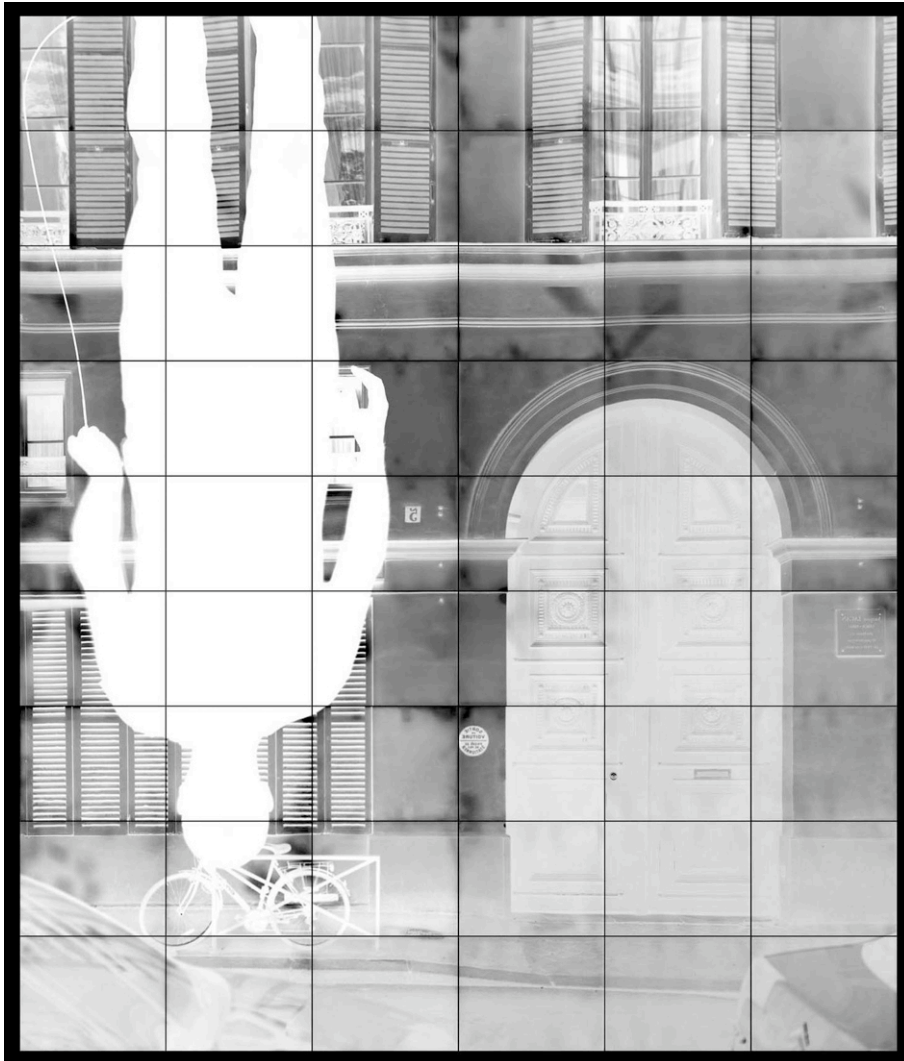
In *Facing Lacan*, the photographer produces an image of Lacan's study, at the same time as creating a self-portrait. He achieves this self-portrait 'with Lacan' by placing himself *inside* the camera obscura, as he takes the image of *rue de Lille*. By placing himself between the image plane and the light opening, the photographer creates his own shadow within the camera obscura. The shadow of his figure falls onto the photographic paper so his form appears as a cut-out within the image of Lacan's study. Since the resulting tableau is a negative photographic image, the 'shadow' is rendered in white.

*Facing Lacan* addresses several conceptual areas: the actual space of the camera (the 'black box') that is necessary to produce the photographic image; the symbolic space of Lacan's psychoanalytic practice that lends the self-portrait its 'backdrop'; the psychic space of the imaginary screen onto which the portrayed self projects its image; the phenomenological space of the developed silver gelatin photograph; the physical space of encounter with the exhibited work, which can be installed either upside down or downside up, thereby referring back to the inverting process within photography through which the image was created.

The play on inversion, on self and shadow, as well as on presence and absence within *Facing Lacan* relates to intellectual concerns within Lacan's own work. For instance, Lacan's model of infantile development, which led him to introduce the concept of the mirror stage, comes to mind in this regard. Jacques Lacan's intellectual work, as a whole, continues to have widespread influence. His persona and his approach to psychoanalysis have become legendary. While Lacan's oeuvre left its mark on psychoanalysis, his concepts of *méconnaissance*, the mirror stage, the screen and the gaze also influenced thinking about the photographic image and its spectator.

In this photographic project, the photographer 'faces' up to the legends of Lacan and the mythic legacy of his famous psychoanalytic practice *rue de Lille no. 5* in Paris.





*Facing Lacan (Self-portrait with Jacques Lacan)*



*Facing Lacan (sheet 8)*



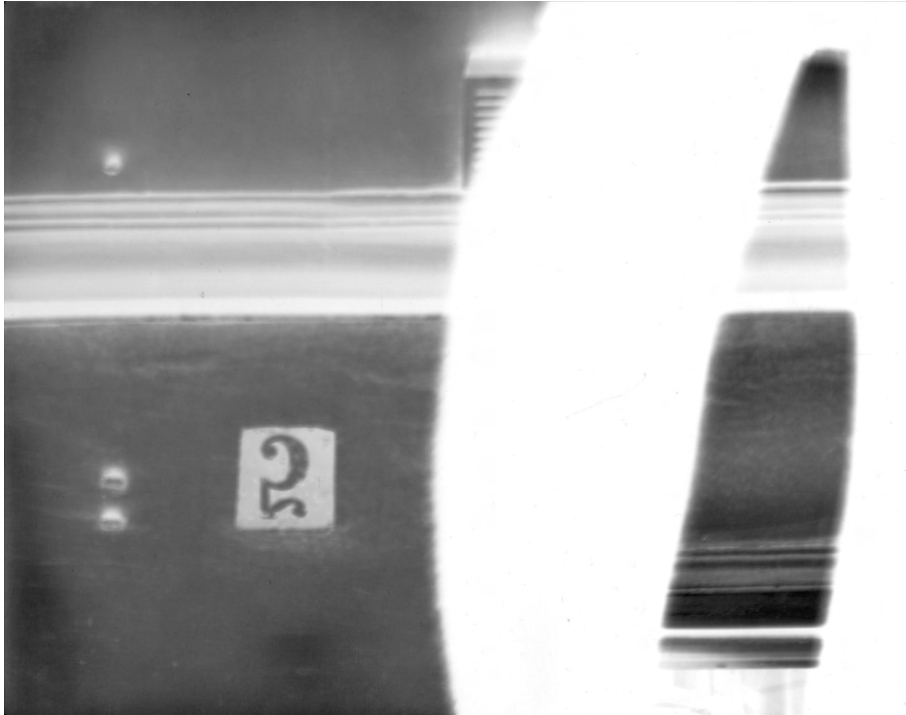
*Facing Lacan (sheet 10)*



*Facing Lacan (sheet 22)*



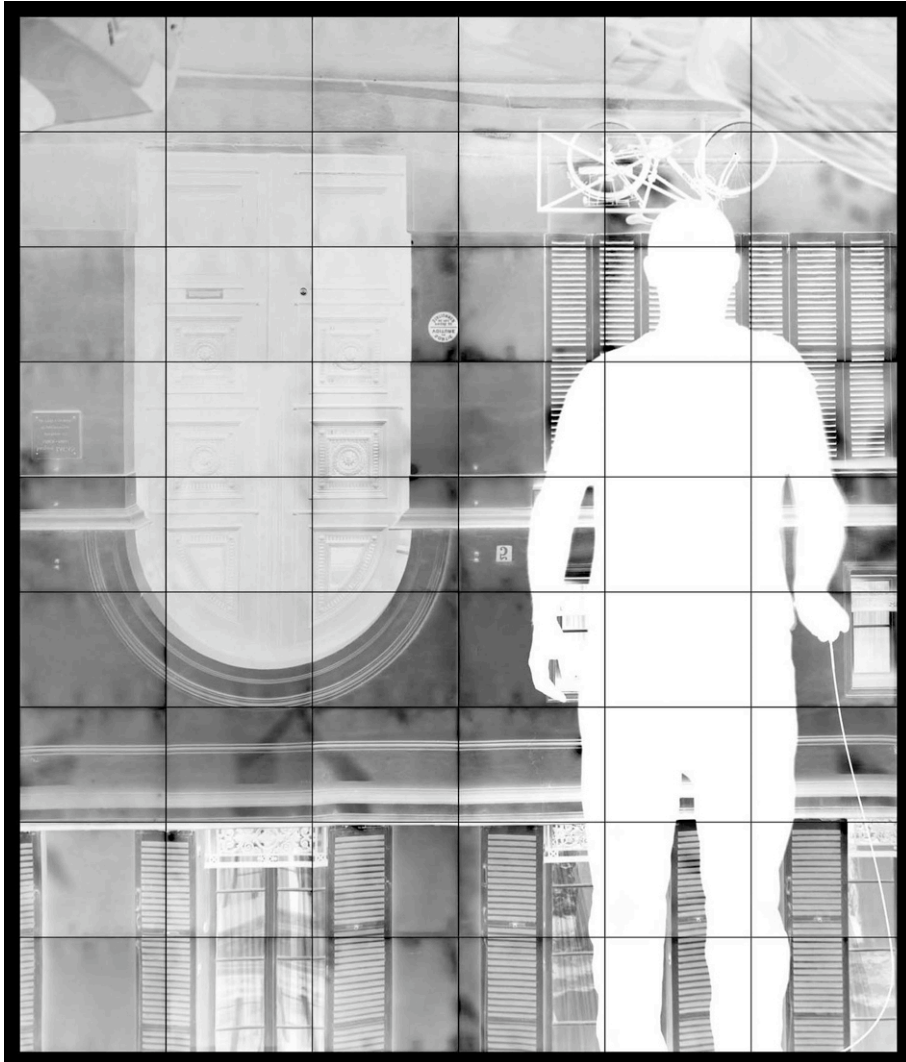
*Facing Lacan (sheet 24)*



*Facing Lacan (sheet 28)*



*Facing Lacan (sheet 47)*



*Facing Lacan (Self-portrait with Jacques Lacan)*

Chapter III  
**Images of Sublation**

*Aufheben, Aufhebung –  
supprimer, suppression; abolir, abolition; sursumer, sursumption;  
assumer, assumption; dépasser, surpasser, abroger, sur-primer,  
mettre en grange; enlever, enlèvement; relève.  
Dictionnaire des intraduisibles<sup>1</sup>*

*Even 'to preserve' includes a negative element, namely, that  
something is removed from its immediacy and so from an existence  
which is open to external influences, in order to preserve it.  
G. W. F. Hegel<sup>2</sup>*

*The archive cannot be described in its totality;  
and in its presence it is unavoidable.  
Michel Foucault<sup>3</sup>*

### **Searching for *Sublation* in Hegel's Archive**

Photographs – latent, inverted, *sublated*. If we have had to wrestle throughout with the work of translation which we can say is also always a work of interpretation, then we cannot avoid returning to it again. Latent images remain invisible and cannot be located. Inverted images are visible but struggle to correspond. So how are we to understand our third image in this proposed chain? We need, once more, the help of the translator. Indeed, in attempting to answer this, we need to resort first to the lexicological treasures of the 'archive' whose preserving space our term under question designates at the same time: what falls under the substantival spell of *sublation* becomes *aufgehoben*, our translator could tell us but not without taking recourse to German so as to grasp the multiple meanings of this word. Whatever falls into the signifying space of *Aufhebung* is preserved but also altered through its preservation. What is *sublated* enters a precinct of preservation, it is taken aside and held in preserve. Kept but altered. And that which has been altered, ceases to be as such but is preserved in, or perhaps, through its alteration. Readers of Hegel's philosophical works will recognize this transformative move as his *Aufhebung*, binding together through its signifying work the antithetical and thus, bringing into oscillation a dialectical movement. The moment of *Aufhebung* is one of theoretical delicacy in so far as it is a moment of becoming but a becoming that is precipitated in the counter-dependent traversing of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be. In his *Science of*

*Logic*, he describes this movement exhaustively but we can take the following as indicative: '[...] we call dialectic the higher movement of reason in which such seemingly utterly separate terms pass over into each other spontaneously, through that which they are, a movement in which the presupposition sublates itself.'<sup>4</sup>

What is in sublation – to return *Aufhebung* to its dedicated English signifier – finds itself in a transformative stance encompassing a cancelling preservation as well as a preserving cancellation.<sup>5</sup> It is the case of a 'double determination,' as Hegel would state. Things in sublation, it appears, lose their signifying borders while reconstituting themselves anew. They pass over into each other but do so by going beyond a mere congruous blend. What has passed through the work of sublation is transformed in such a way that it might not be recognizable in relation to what it was beforehand because it is sublated, or more precisely, because our presupposition has sublated itself. Hegel's sublating moments convey a confident outlook in so far as they manage to integrate and productively overcome difference. They thrive on the relation that difference brings forth. In fact, there is no difference that sublation could not overcome. As such, sublation is the key to unlock Hegel's approach to the work of negation, a negation whose negativity is productive in the sense that it is transformative. If I introduce only now the term of negation – a key word in Hegel's philosophical system – then it is also to posit his 'negation' outside a flattening vision of an all-eradicating nihility. Rather, negativity is becoming, or conversely, becoming comes through negativity. 'To understand this correctly,' Judith Butler writes in recapitulating Hegel's scheme, 'we must not assume that negation is nothingness; on the contrary, as a differentiating relation that mediates the terms that initially counter each other, negation, understood in the sense of *Aufhebung*, cancels, preserves, and transcends the apparent differences it interrelates.'<sup>6</sup>

Hence, one cannot understand Hegel's 'negation' without considering its inflection with 'sublation.' This negation is of a sublating kind. In sublation, then, preservation and cancellation flow into each other and bring forth a transcendence of the differential caused by dyadic opposites. The signifying formation of sublation entails preservation *and* cancellation, two opposites themselves, one can remark, that this word must harness and perform at once if it is to be effective on Hegel's terms. It is sublation that can seemingly cope with these two contradictory terms and bring them



together so as to enable a transcendence of their differences. It is as if their differences, which in this word are not supposed to differentiate themselves anymore, provide the grounds for sublation to launch itself. In spelling out that to sublimate a thing entails transcendence grounded in preservation and cancellation so that both the thing and its opposite survive as moments in the sublated whole, we cannot but return to the German idiom of *Aufhebung* and its polysemic abilities. ‘Elevated,’ as it became thanks to Hegel, to its central role for his philosophical work, *Aufhebung* was also given a special commentary in the *Science of Logic* to stress the significance of this word.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, few other words of western philosophy’s vocabulary have provided such an unruly ground for translators of philosophical texts, a ground that has actually resisted giving in fully to the demand of effortless translation and its ideal of doing things invisibly as it were. Our own indecisive moves, swerving between sublation and *Aufhebung* as we do, attest to this. *Aufhebung* could be seen as an emancipatory gift to the translator. *Aufhebung* allows for a materialization of the work of translation. My choice for the opening epigraph speaks of this fertile field for translation to come into its appearance other than being unremarkably indexed into the translated work. Like many other translations of ‘untranslatables,’ it allows the translator to come to the fore in the textual domain through forewords (the ‘translator’s note’), explanatory remarks, italicized insertions, etc. Of course, Hegel’s treasured word is far from being a unique case in challenging translation. And we hardly need to resort to a dictionary of untranslatables to argue this – even though a translator working into French has indeed many options to choose from. What can or cannot be translated is also always a question of fine-tuning our attention to the particular instance of reading whereby the focus cannot solely be on isolating the word and its implied linguistic layers and etymological chains, but focus must also be placed on an analytical emphasis of the word’s syntagmatic context and its work within the condensing and displacing effects of metaphor and metonymy. Yet, given its complex signified, *Aufhebung* features as a rather special case. If we think of the work of translation as a resolving and, indeed, transcending act, or more eagerly argued, translation’s endeavour of transcending two language systems – the matching up of two differing signifiers so as to allow the signified to slip across – then *Aufhebung* does not do this very well. In the space of translation, *Aufhebung* struggles to do what it signifies. In the alterities of those

languages that are an other to *Aufhebung*, it does not happily find its dedicated signifiers and instead continues to fall back to itself. It holds on to itself and thus, affirms only its own material space that forms the signifier *A u f h e b u n g*.

From within an era coloured by post-structuralism, Hegel's notion of sublation is often looked upon with some suspicion precisely because Hegel's focus on sublation is on an overcoming of difference. Sublation transcends differences. It feeds itself off a differential discrepancy, and in the following sentence Hegel attests boldly to this aspect: '[s]omething is sublated only in so far as it has entered into unity with its opposite.'<sup>8</sup> Even though that unity is not a harmonious unity as we have seen, having inside itself already a negative, destabilizing 'element,' Hegel's sublation is nonetheless built across a differential axis, which it can claim to span. And even though difference remains, and indeed, difference manifests itself as an inexhaustible component because in the moment of sublation alterity is (re-)produced, that is to say once more that what is *aufgehoben* does not remain what it was beforehand, Hegel's sublation nevertheless asserts itself in the very possibility of difference – its bridging logic pronouncing itself in every moment of *Aufhebung*. In sublation, difference persists but the alterity of the other, or one's alterity within oneself, it seems, can be infiltrated. *Aufgehoben*. Sublation mediates and ultimately transcends that space of otherness. Hegel thus writes: 'What is sublated is not thereby reduced to nothing. Nothing is *immediate*; what is sublated, on the other hand, is the result of *mediation*.'<sup>9</sup> Yet, if Hegel's sublation can facilitate the work of mediation between two opposing spheres it is far from evening out the differences of this world because every moment of sublation is a moment that produces new differences.

### ***Aufhebung* after Derrida**

Derrida, however, regards Hegel's sublation with suspicion in that it affirms its signifying position so as to keep *meaning* to itself. From within post-structuralism, from the momentary positions of our textual, and always inevitably displacing positionalities, Hegel's *Aufhebung* reappears as a metaphysical fastener of his philosophical discourse. In the centre of Hegel's vast logos could be *Aufhebung*. Not for nothing has it been said that Hegel's philosophy can be condensed into a question

of *Aufhebung*. For Derrida, then, it is also *Aufhebung* that is the semiotic manager of Hegel's philosophical thought and its signifying structures. While the Hegelian subject is endlessly posited through *Aufhebung*, the very process of its wanderings that have neither a beginning nor an ending are enabled by the reliability of the meaning of this word. What emerges with Derrida's help is the closure of Hegel's signifying framework, that is to say, a framework that implies as its limits the materials of which it is built. For Derrida, Hegel's philosophical discourse is a discourse limited to discursive materials, that is, it remains committed to the signifying sign and the organization of knowledge that opens up with it. Or put differently, it makes sense of itself only through words – words that obey to one word and its signification: *Aufhebung*. While *Aufhebung* engenders a 'subject' in continually changing landscapes of dialectical matter, *Aufhebung* itself remains the constant. Thus, for Derrida, 'the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is produced entirely from within discourse, from within the system or the work of signification. A determination is negated and conserved in another determination which reveals the truth of the former. From infinite indetermination one passes to infinite determination, and this transition, produced by the anxiety of the infinite, continuously links meaning up to itself. The *Aufhebung* is included *within* the circle of absolute knowledge, never exceeds its closure, never suspends the totality of discourse, work, meaning, law, etc.'<sup>10</sup>

The doubts that Derrida brings towards Hegel's *Aufhebung* is founded in his argument that *Aufhebung* is ultimately of a restricting nature, the restriction being the postulation of *Aufhebung* itself through which affirmative negation is brought forth. While the Hegelian subject is so radical that it is no subject at all, composing and decomposing itself dialectically against the labouring backdrop of the negative, Derrida gives us something else to think: while Hegel's achievement was to take the labour of the negative serious, he did it so much so that he did it too seriously – to the letter as it were. The problem with the negative begins right there: 'in giving meaning to its labour.'<sup>11</sup> By calling upon negativity, by drawing upon its signifying reserve, by naming the negative a 'negative,' by bringing it into language and by thinking it through language, by fixing its meaning through the semantic lens of *Aufhebung*, Derrida's Hegel oversees or possibly disregards the radicalness of his meditations on the negative. 'In naming the without-reserve of absolute expenditure "abstract

negativity,” Hegel, through *precipitation*, blinded himself to that which he had laid bare under the rubric of negativity.<sup>12</sup> The impossibility of the negative, as that outside of signification, as an unknown, and what psychoanalytically could be theorized as an unconscious, is undone by Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. Supplied with Derrida’s perceptive remarks, we can thus begin to see how *Aufhebung* would assume a position of concealment within Hegel’s landscapes of meaning-rendering negatives. What *Aufhebung* conceals is its restricting effects on the ‘worlds’ it can claim to evoke and surpass through its sublating work. What appears to be *Aufhebung*’s radically transforming and boundless nature in its assigned role within Hegel’s idealism – its cancelling/preserving/transcending performance – comes to form in fact its own shield of defence behind which *Aufhebung* conceals the limits of its creative powers. In interpreting Derrida’s scepticism, we could say that *Aufhebung* professes itself as staying in flux with and through the world, but the production of that world is ultimately precipitated upon the concept of *Aufhebung*. By shunning not to remain silent even in the face of the ultimately unspeakable negative, *Aufhebung* operates in and relies on what Derrida framed as a ‘restricted economy.’ It oversees what is outside its logos. That is what *Aufhebung* conceals, that is its suppression of itself.

Hence, *Aufhebung* hides well inside its transgressive appearance, an appearance that can never be taken for granted as far we have been able to grasp from its performances in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Those who keep with Hegel’s works, and in particular those who read his *Phenomenology*, are often counselled to practise a reading that excels in continuation so as to read its texts phenomenologically. That is a suggestion seemingly in line with the work and its attributed intentions (one also given by Alexandre Kojève – himself a professionally avid reader of Hegel) albeit also a slightly paradoxical one in the sense that all textual matters can be interpreted against the light of phenomenology and all reading is experiential – so why limit oneself to an ambitious corset of phenomenology?<sup>13</sup> Or more fairly put: what are the consequences of this instruction to ‘read’ phenomenologically? One answer to this would be to say that another category, namely the field of phenomenology, takes care of the Hegelian subject so that we do not lose sight of it in the midst of all these dialectically changing worlds of text. The call to a phenomenological attention is also a call to track the Hegelian subject in reading. And the fulfilment of this task, in keeping to the filament of the text, presupposes some awareness to the teachings of

phenomenology – what enables the appearance of the Hegelian subject is the ‘phenomenological discourse,’ itself a specialist discourse in the shaping hands of language. How would we otherwise keep our readerly focus phenomenologically on track? This is a track that cannot be laid out by the phenomenal world but one that tracks a world brought into phenomeno-logical arrangements by the assuming frameworks of phenomenology. How would we compose this subject otherwise? It was Derrida who has diverged us so vividly from our learned attempts to keep track of the Hegelian subject, running as it does through every single line of the *Phenomenology*, by allowing this subject-on-the-run to be adjoined by another subject. The pages of *Glas* offer a taste of choosing the impossible: their layout organizes multiple narrative threads so that they run concurrently alongside each other and thus invite themselves to be read at the same time. Yet with two or more texts to be watched out *phenomenologically*, which is a watching out for the phenomena of our voice(s), we are also thereby drained of the possibility of reconstituting the (Hegelian) ‘subject’ in the presence of our reading voice.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Aufhebung* – Hegel’s Blind Spot?**

Derrida’s passionate scepticism towards Hegel’s *Aufhebung* is voiced in many of his essays even though he goes on to appropriate its semantic effects by giving his preference to ‘*la relève*’ and ‘*relever*’ so as to allow *Aufhebung* its *différance*. Indeed, as indicated already above, he sees *Aufhebung*, that is to say Hegel’s *Aufhebung*, as restricting itself by foreclosing the (nonsignifying) excesses of meaning that it could produce through its polysemic and/or homonymic bodies. Instead, it promises to purify the logos without leaving behind any residues, there is nothing that could not be put back into the cycles of signification or that could ever fall out. For Derrida, that is *Aufhebung*’s deception, a deception also towards itself – for *Aufhebung* performs *Aufhebung* all too transparently. Not that it would fail to leave things behind but it gives an impression of leaving nothing behind of itself, that is of its own labour. Hegel’s *Aufhebung* preserves and cancels but it cannot see what is wasted during its own performative appearances. Refusing to be infected by its own signification, it does not seem to *sublate* its signified. *Aufhebung* shows no concession to its own idealized work. It does not alter itself in the process of sublation, thereby reinstating

itself effortlessly without getting anything wasted in its course of (re-)emergence. It endures the perfect balance. In voicing *Aufhebung*, its voice proper remains still. How then to think and write this *Aufhebung* differently – through *différance*? Not so surprisingly, that was one of Derrida's concerns.

Derrida encouraged *Aufhebung* to write itself differently, to let go of its inscription into a Hegelian homocentricity. In a deconstructing *différance*, *Aufhebung* also begins to state and reinstate itself in differing moments to itself. As such, he unbuttons *Aufhebung* from its fixed position, a position that, as we have seen, is fixed in such a way that it always *appears* as fleeting. That is the life of *Aufhebung* as denoting the Hegelian subject whose *Schein* or appearance we can set out to follow in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In its pages, *Aufhebung* does not take stock of its own transcending position and of what there is actually needed to sustain that position within an economy of differential relations. In *Aufhebung*, nothing of its own cherished substance is sacrificed; the work of its transcendence – its restlessly creative mediation of opposites – its not weighed in. In fact, its signifying substance does not seem to be dissipated at all, or to dissipate itself. It resists itself but does not recognize the 'cost' of that resistance. This then would also delimit the boundaries of its sphere within which its operations can remain effective in accordance with a Hegelian vision. But the surrender to this kind of *Aufhebung* entails a work of concealment that Derrida brings into relief through his *différance*. Relying on a signifying and nameable negativity, Hegel's subject presupposes the possibility of appropriating its difference to otherness in *Aufhebung* yet ultimately, as Derrida would summarize in a note in *Writing and Difference*, 'alterity, difference, and time are not *suppressed* but *retained* by absolute knowledge in the form of *Aufhebung*.'<sup>15</sup>

The subject of *Aufhebung* is oblivious to its own presence. Supplemented by *différance*, it does indeed become a kind of 'blind spot of Hegelianism, *around* which can be organized the representation of meaning.'<sup>16</sup> But to do that, it has to suppress its own difference within itself. This is not a suppression of a Hegelian sublimating kind (in the way early French translations of Hegel have employed the word '*suppression*' to render *Aufhebung*, one that is more closely linked to a psychoanalytic idea of sublimation) but this suppression of itself becomes a categorically fixed suppression of non-disclosure, of resolute concealment.<sup>17</sup> Thus, within *Aufhebung* there is a

suppression that is not in *Aufhebung*'s interests, a suppression that is no longer in line with Hegel's speculative outline of sublation as mediating transcendence. As such, whatever *Aufhebung* transcends, whatever difference it mediates, it can only do so while at the same time accumulating within itself the weight of its own falsehood because *Aufhebung* cannot achieve what it claims to do. From within our Derridian approach, *Aufhebung* restricts and thus moves actually towards the reverse of what it promises to do. Hence, the signifying work of *Aufhebung* comes to perform, contrary to its claim of '*Aufhebung*' as it were, also a warding off of its own shortcomings.

### *Aufhebung*'s Appearances

Derrida's critical reservations towards Hegel's subject in and of *Aufhebung* are perhaps only matched by Jean-Luc Nancy's emphatic reappraisal of the critical potentialities of the negative in Hegel's thought.<sup>18</sup> What Nancy delivers in his reflective guide to Hegel's insomniac subject is a tour with no beginnings and endings. In exposing the radical openendedness of Hegel's philosophical thinking, Nancy plunges into the productive negativity of this thought-in-motion in which the Hegelian subject moves and which it continues to open up. But this subject is, we need to underscore again, beyond a positionality of 'subjectivity.' The Hegelian subject is, in a way, no subject at all because it cannot be comprehended by its (momentary) outlines. It does not stand on its own because it has no foundations it could call its own. It cannot comprehend itself through itself, that is, by relating itself to its self. Rather, it is always in flux with the world: 'the *subject* is what it *does*, it is its act, and its doing is the experience of consciousness of the negativity of substance.'<sup>19</sup> It has no beginning and no ending. It disperses. Restless, it is and restless it remains in passage. 'It neither seeks itself (as if it were for itself an exterior end) nor finds itself (as if it were a thing here and there), but it effectuates itself: it is the living restlessness of its own concrete effectivity.'<sup>20</sup>

The Hegelian subject is a 'subject' that has no intrinsic core but it also has no extrinsic casing. It is no subject at all in the sense that it would occupy a specific position – though, of course, we now can say, alongside Derrida, that the possibility of this non-specifiable position is secured by *resting* in *Aufhebung* – a sublation that

is built on an assumption of an all-encompassing sphere of knowledge that is ultimately giving itself its own limits: everything changes, *Aufhebung* remains. Sublating subjects. And by the same token we can also say *mediating* subjects, for Hegel's subject has a thirst for difference, a difference that it can and must mediate if it is to survive its dialectical deaths – deaths not just in the sense of the ongoing affirmative negations occurring inside the dialectic, but also deaths provoked by those who have walked out on its systemic logic. As such, it 'ought to realize the negativity, and it realizes itself in and through action.'<sup>21</sup> We cannot 'see' or localize the Hegelian subject because it is of an immanent nature. It is always already in mediation. It is nothing other than mediation. Nancy brings this aspect to bear when he writes that sublation 'is the concept of dialectical mediation, which is nothing other than manifestation considered according to the form of its operation.'<sup>22</sup>

Nancy, ostensibly untouched by Derrida's scepticism in his appreciation of *Aufhebung* and its transcending powers, presents *Aufhebung* in appealing Hegelian dress. However, in pushing *Aufhebung*'s sublating prowess, he brings out the impossibility of bringing out any self-supporting outline of *Aufhebung*. Since *Aufhebung*, or the subject moving in its guise, mediates, it is also never just itself. One could say it cannot rely on its self – for it has none. Always in mediation, indeed, enabling mediation itself, we can also not isolate it, or extract its 'essence' from the circumstances it mediates. Although Hegel's spirit or *Geist* seems to distil itself in every moment of sublation – not unlike in the physical process of distillation – the spirit penned down by a radically interpreted Hegel is not following this analogy. The cycles of *Aufhebung* do not work towards attaining a 100% distillate. That would ultimately lead to a resolution, and to an actualization of spirit as an essence in itself, a perfect solution – a solution in which spirit can only dissolve. As such, the distillate would be just that, a distillate that is evident to itself. But *Aufhebung* is not an 'essencing' for its own ends. Rather, as Stephen Houlgate pledges in reiterating some of Hegel's legacies, there cannot be a spirit for its own sake as 'all things have the "germ of decease" within themselves: "the hour of their birth is the hour of their death." And this is due not to the external relations in which things stand, but to the fact that being as such turns dialectically into non-being *through itself*.'<sup>23</sup>



This then raises also the stakes for thinking *Aufhebung* in our discussion because Hegel's *Aufhebung* would not willingly lend us its own distinct outline. To that, at least, would the *Phenomenology* attest. The 'subject' is always in and of *Aufhebung*, it is that what is in mediation. As such, it does not hold on well to terms like 'discrete' or 'evident' because it is not. What it *is*, is in mediation. It is not at ease by itself. Unhomed, perhaps. And in so far as it can only ever be in mediation, in the space of difference, it is never just itself and never simply for itself. What follows thus is that the work of *Aufhebung*, as Nancy suggests, can never be thought in isolation, or if so, only for the purpose of an unassuming analysis whose 'position' remains inadequate to portray an image of *Aufhebung*. If we give full thrust to Hegel's *Aufhebung*, then it is not isolatable. Being mediation, it cannot explicate itself. It has nothing to say to itself. Instead, it can only carry on as mediating sublation. Thus, what *Aufhebung* invites us to think, perhaps instead of its (unpresentable) self, 'is to think the impossibility of keeping determinacies isolated.'<sup>24</sup> Hence, a presentation of *Aufhebung* would be of a purely notional gesture, because we are always in it; any attempt to distance ourselves from it is a mere academic exercise (in the pejorative sense). The difficulty that *Aufhebung* poses to us when we state *Aufhebung*, when *Aufhebung* is meant to pose for us, brings actually into relief the impossibility of doing so because, being mediation, it 'should not be isolated, nor can it be.'<sup>25</sup>

'Mediation: we cannot pronounce it at a distance, as one would enunciate a law of things. We cannot because we are ourselves in it.'<sup>26</sup> Nancy's declaratory words emphasize the inherently problematic nature of 'delineating' *Aufhebung*, and with it, the subject that drifts in its shadow. Insofar as our sublating subject works in mediation, the 'given always gives itself *as something other* than simply given.'<sup>27</sup> As such, *Aufhebung* continues to reveal by revelling in difference – not the given as self-determined given but the given as an other to itself. If *Aufhebung* reveals, then it can only do so by othering on its course of revelation. It mediates (only) in transforming. Or, conversely, it is in transforming that it can effect mediation. That is indeed what carries the mark of Hegel's *Aufhebung*: an alteration that is brought forth in *Aufhebung*'s abilities of preservation and cancellation. However, given these parameters, we cannot but fail to find *Aufhebung* revealing itself. It is never for itself

(bracketing off in this instance Derrida's critique of *Aufhebung*'s concealed 'self-suppression').

If *Aufhebung* could deliver us an ethics of mediation, then it would not settle for an account of the agreement in the middle. That would be, in any case, a naïve impression of mediation of any kind (as compromise, negotiation, settlement, etc.) for there can be no productive outcome that would not in turn impact on either side. But Hegel's *Aufhebung* – if we allow ourselves to take up the challenge of its seriously optimistic outlook of idealism – can help us to appreciate its 'mediating work' in that it does not shy away from the differential that constitutes a disagreement. And moreover, the transformative impact, inevitable to any successful outcome of mediation, would not be seen as a defeat. In fact, the reverse is the case. The transformative is not a disfiguring defacement but can only give rise to further revelation. Its tone is affirmative but never plainly evident. As such, it embraces the alteration that comes about in mediation. At the same time, it would also remind us that whatever manifests itself to us, including the manifestation of our selves, is always already a manifestation brought about by dialectical mediation, which, let us stress again with Nancy's words, 'is nothing other than manifestation according to the form of its operation.'<sup>28</sup> Hence, mediation is not of an arbitrating kind, or of an additional layer of intervention. Rather, *Aufhebung*'s mediation is always already an instance (or Hegel would possibly opt for saying 'moment') of a particular manifestation – of what we already appear to be to ourselves. And therefore, it can only ever lead to further revelation. Nancy, again: 'it is simply the step out of the in-itself: self is relieved of its function of being in-itself. Being does not remain in itself: it liberates itself.'<sup>29</sup>

### **Revealing, Lifting, Translating: *Aufheben***

The at times arduous business of translating *Aufhebung* has left a hefty trail of cross-lingual philosophical debates, particularly in French-speaking circles.<sup>30</sup> While Hegel appreciated this word for its double signification of preservation and cancellation, of the conserving and the annulling, it has also a third meaning close to describing an action of lifting or picking up, of raising things, in short, of elevation. Although

Hegel was seemingly uninterested in that aspect of the word (in his remark on *Aufhebung* he does not mention it, claiming only that it has a ‘*gedoppelten Sinn*,’ a twofold sense) this extra layer of implicit signification was a practical amplifier of Hegel’s well-spirited idealism and its receptive discipleship.<sup>31</sup> Through *Aufhebung*, as elevation, the dialectical movement becomes also imbued with a sense of verticality, underscoring indirectly the inherent optimism of his philosophical approach. The inclination of *Aufhebung* to lean towards the vertical then brings with it the hard to avoid connotations (in Barthes’ terms) that ‘verticality’ is always able to gather. Any *Aufhebung* is another actualization of Spirit, which simply entails another revelation, but that revelation-in-verticality intensifies the highlighting of its own movement – it highlights a sense of clear improvement, of ever improving clarity, of gaining an overview. Any *Aufhebung* would seem to render itself therefore also as a self-correcting act that gives an appearance of approximating the vertical and its signifying lines of stepping up, of bettering, of advancing purposefully along the lines (pre-)conditioned by verticality. *Aufhebung*’s verticalizing inclinations move us into higher spheres that can be readily read as morally healthier. Vertical self-help.

Hegelian lexicographer Michael Inwood also endorses the fact of Hegel’s indifference to *Aufhebung*’s elevating attitude, confirming Hegel’s theoretical keenness on *Aufhebung* as preservation and cancellation. However, he is able to draw the conclusion that *Aufhebung*’s additional signifying value does no harm to Hegel’s wider intentions, or let us rather say to the intentions that we claim Hegel is supposed to have for his work. ‘Thus, despite Hegel’s silence on the matter, it is reasonable to see [...] “elevation,” as an ingredient in its Hegelian meaning.’<sup>32</sup> This is sensible to the extent that it is a part of *Aufhebung*’s signification and in the sense that Hegel’s dialectics are of a revelatory nature – Spirit can only get to know itself better, its movement is the ongoing realization of itself. Still, the lifting of *Aufhebung* does not necessarily have to be interpreted as an unwaveringly making higher, bringing with itself the values that we attach whenever we believe to be in need of putting things on a pedestal – the category of art a very apposite contender in this respect, both with regards to art’s privileged treatment on the platform of art historical writing as well as the preserving practices of display that its status as ‘encased object’ necessitates, or indeed the pedestal that art, for to be art, claims for itself.<sup>33</sup> Yet, accepting the lift of *Aufhebung* does not have to be such an imposing stance of self-importance. Nor is

there a need to think *Aufhebung*'s lifting so that its progressing manifestations would reach higher levels in the sense that they could build themselves up as a matter of a compressing or suppressing solidification.

Likewise, to conceive of *Aufhebung* as pulling itself vertically along into ever-higher spheres, from the soiled earth to the pristine heaven as it were, would be a one-dimensional approach to things. A line – simply. The subject of *Aufhebung* may lift itself, but its sublating work cannot just put forth a ground that would be more stable so that it could also stabilize itself thereby. It is only a matter of bringing to fruition an abstraction in the moment of becoming an other to oneself but even then Hegel would have inserted us in a totality by deeming that ‘the *abstract* is already *posited* as infected with a negation.’<sup>34</sup> *Aufhebung* has within itself always already a negative element, yet its implicit ‘lifting’ puts in jeopardy *Aufhebung*'s complex design. In making an effort to think *Aufhebung*'s elevation beyond this self-straightening body of thought as a kind of enduringly self-erecting logic, we should take the risk of thinking the lift of *Aufhebung* as a more banal event of everyday life, of life itself. Taking a step back from the determined Hegel of teleological idealism, *Aufhebung* reappears indeed as a necessary and tiny gesture of the everyday: the *Aufheben* or picking (up) of a thing. And of being picked up. Done so habitually that we do not take account of it anymore. Regardless of our intention, regardless of whether this is done deliberately or not, whatever is *aufgehoben*, calls thereby also briefly for our attention. This lifting *Aufhebung* as picking up, by taking place, speaks of a momentary reshuffling encounter. Even if we pick up a thing just to get it out of our way, to throw it away again, to destroy or of being destroyed, this encounter remains of a picking up kind but does not predictably stabilize. In *Aufhebung*, things can only dissolve again. Mulling it over out of this ordinary angle, we take away some of the principled polish of Hegel's teleological finish so as to untie *Aufhebung* from its raising duties. The thing, after its moment of *Aufhebung*, may fall back into the periphery of our vision, becoming yet an other to itself by becoming irrelevant to us. At the same time, to make this argument feasible, we might just have moved closer to Derrida's position, one that entails the opening up of ourselves to an opened economy to allow the dispersal and loss of meaning outside the capturing economics of the logos. As such, *Aufhebung*'s connotations of verticality and enhancement are slowed down and begin to lose their ideological orientations towards advancement

and unrestrained improvement. This *Aufhebung* does not reach out to a stable advancement – which brings us back into the eliding space of Derrida's *différance*.

Despite Derrida's questioning hesitance towards the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, his own circumscription of *différance* remains a close neighbour. Like *Aufhebung*, Derrida's *différance* is also often called an untranslatable. However, its difference is apparent: the decisive resistance of its own nontranslatability. We can only reiterate. *Différance*. As such, it is already more than an operation of systemically organizing meaning. More than a belief in an unfailing system of *langue*. But also less so. On the other hand, *Aufhebung*, notwithstanding the quandaries surrounding the viability of *Aufhebung*'s translation, has eventually become a citizen more or less well enough integrated in other languages: an English *sublation*, a French *relève*, a Russian *snyatie*.<sup>35</sup> Thus, while Hegel's *Aufhebung* has undertaken, somehow, and against its own odds, its adventurous journey from German into other tongues, *différance* remains the genuine foreigner among us. Not only in this English text, but also in the environs of what we would call its French homeland. This is a significant foreigner, its 'signification' (a truly paradoxical thing to say) precisely being the reminder of its inability to fulfil the duties of signification, of securing the signified. No quick fix here. Just another secret in the temporary installations of meaning. As such, it cannot be translated if it is to retain its 'work' along- or inside the logos, a work that accompanies us in *signifiance* and which could always transpire as the unlikely probability of an undoing of the logos. The critical difference of *différance* (its phonetic 'a') is thus also neither a word nor a concept, as we have learned, and hence beyond the technological grasp of translation.<sup>36</sup> Hegel, on the other hand, had to occupy himself with combining *Aufhebung*'s plural semantics, bundling up the severality of its signifying operations. As such, *Aufhebung* is firmly embedded in (its) logics. *Différance*, while appearing closely related, depletes the repletion of the logos and with it also *Aufhebung*'s sense of its own logical operations.

In Derrida's appropriation, then, *Aufhebung* becomes designated as '*la relève*.' Through this translating interference, akin to an act of copying out, Derrida tries to shake up *Aufhebung*'s Hegelian solid core with some *différance*. While '*relève*' indicates a 'lifting up,' just like *Aufhebung*, as Derrida's translator Alan Bass notes, 'it also means to relay, to relieve, as when one soldier on duty relieves another. Thus

the conserving-and-negating lift has become *la relève*, a “lift” in which is inscribed an effect of substitution and difference’ – which is to say all those uncontainable and non-meaningful effects that continue to dis/appear in *différance*.<sup>37</sup> Hence, Derrida achieves thereby his articulation of *Aufhebung* in deconstructive terms, infusing it with his own theoretical innovations. At the same time, and strangely indeed, in so doing he also put it through a thorough translation regime. What the signifier *différance* must never do, namely to pass through translation so as to keep its functionality to tell us about its theoretical purpose, has had to happen to *Aufhebung* so as to be instilled with *différance*.<sup>38</sup> Having become ‘*la relève*’ in French, he achieves to let *Aufhebung* write itself in French – otherwise. ‘The *Aufhebung* – *la relève* – is constrained into writing itself otherwise. Or perhaps simply into writing itself. Or, better, into taking account of its consumption of writing.’<sup>39</sup>

Quite clearly then, both Derrida and Hegel share a passionate taste for the difference. Difference not as an obstacle, of an engulfing burdensome kind, but a difference that is to be worked with. A difference that will keep us busy. A difference that is to be embraced even though it cannot be held. But if Hegel’s *Aufhebung* could be said to make sense only *through* difference, then Derrida’s *relève* could be said to bring about its sense *in* difference. *Aufhebung* bridges the difference. It finds its way through the difference, surpassing it. *Relève* must remain in difference. It sets itself up in the waxing and waning of differentiation. Remaining indifferent to the difference, it does not seek to overcome it and instead allows itself to be carried away by it so as to give space to another. Thus, in asking ‘*Qu’est-ce qu’une traduction “relevante”?*’ Derrida inserts his *relève* in a text with the same question as title and in which *la relève* comes to labour in terms that would have been unheard of for *Aufhebung*.<sup>40</sup> In this contemplation on the work of translation – or more precisely, of the question of the ‘*relevant* translation’ – Derrida puts this signifier to use in his allegorical elaborations on the space of translation but he does so not by problematizing translation through another untranslatable (to which we are used to bear witness through *Aufhebung*) so as to help us see its irreducibility but through a signifier that has passed through translation without translation’s detection. ‘*Relevant*,’ a word that is in French, English or German equally effective, eludes the work of translation. Indeed, confronted with this word, translation is rather thrown back to itself by inevitably having to ask ‘*à quelle langue appartient le mot*

“*relevante*”?’<sup>41</sup> As such, this signifier becomes a splicer of different languages as well as of their differences while eliding the manipulating hands of translation. The space of translation, if conceived as the working means through which to mediate the difference, has thus become *une traduction ‘relevante.’* Facing up to the relevant signifier, translation might lose in it its self-image of what it considered to be relevant for itself. *La relève* – a translation of a relieving relevance. *Aufhebung relevée.*

Relieving *Aufhebung* of its attachment to its signifier, Derrida’s translation has transferred its signified into a new body at the same time as releasing it from its intractable Hegelian multitasking of simultaneously cancelling, preserving and lifting. If the intent of Hegel’s *Aufhebung* is confined, in every one of its performing acts, to always accomplish a double task (preserving, cancelling), and, arguably, at times even a triple task (preserving, cancelling, lifting), so as to effectuate successfully its model undertaking of transcending difference, then it can never just single out one of these things: just preserve, just cancel, just lift. The debates whether *Aufhebung* is supposed to operate within the two meanings Hegel decided to focus on, or whether it should also lift itself up at the same time, attests already to the difficulties of this imposed integrating procedure. Whereas Derrida’s *relève* becomes the cipher for an *Aufhebung* resounding in *différance*, Hegel’s *Aufhebung* must continue its engagement in the double-act of its *gedoppelten Sinn*. It can only make sense in its double sense. And it is in its double sense that it makes sense of itself.<sup>42</sup> That is the brief that Hegel gave to this word. As such, it must reach beyond its singularly identified self, always amalgamating all two or three of its possible meanings – and all that at once. Let us do it now: *aufheben*. In this instance, it must overcome its own internal differences that open themselves up between preserving, cancelling, lifting. Its semantic layers united in unison, *Aufhebung* conceals its multilayered potentiality by positing its invisible differences as a *co*-incidence. And yet, according to Hegel, *Aufhebung* carries on falling back into singing its songs discordantly. In spite of this momentary insistence on an all-at-once *Aufhebung*, its crucial asset is that it fails to keep its differences united, spreading them out again in itself so that in turn we can state, with Hegel, that ‘even “to preserve” includes a negative element.’<sup>43</sup>

## Sublation as Archival Mode

Against this multifaceted complex built out of the crossings of philosophical, semiotic and linguistic debates that have given *Aufhebung* its (provisional) residence, we are going to piggyback *Aufhebung*'s corpus so as to consider through it the modality of the archive. *Aufhebung*, it will have become clear by now, ushers us into the spaces of the archive. On the one hand, as a predicate, it engenders an archival space. What we declare to be in need of *Aufhebung*, what we decide to keep [*aufheben*] also immediately claims for itself an archival space of preservation. It inaugurates an archive whose space we need to respect. On the other hand, as a subject, what comes to find itself in *Aufhebung*, what can be described as preserved [*aufgehoben*] is also thereby inscribed in space of difference, of archival difference. Hence, if we are attempting to think of images of sublation as images in archivization, which is the task we set ourselves in this chapter, then we cannot do so without keeping *Aufhebung* ready to hand. Our exegesis through the multifarious territories of this word should have prepared us well enough for this particular complication.

*Aufhebung*: its modality preserves and cancels. What is *aufgehoben*, is altered. *Aufhebung*, then, provides us also with a loose itinerary for theorizing the modality of the archive. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how the operating mode of the archive can be regarded as one of *Aufhebung*, this unremarkable word of the German language which served Hegel so perfectly to set his philosophical thought in ongoing motion. In servicing our argument of the archive as a space of *Aufhebung* and archiving as a sublating act, we need to separate out momentarily – against *Aufhebung*'s signifying will – its semantic layers so as to align them alongside the operating layers of the archive – an archive that we must keep in mind as that what Derrida has outlined as the 'privileged topology' of the archive, that is to say an archive that is at the 'intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation [that] becomes at once visible and invisible.'<sup>44</sup>

The archive *hebt auf*, its pursuit could be described as *aufhebend* [preserving or keeping]. In the topological sense, the archive is a delimiting place, a space of



storage, a space that also needs to be defended if it is to guarantee the wellbeing of the things it archives. Yet every act of archivization is also an act of nomination, of designation. No archive without an archiving principle, or put differently, there is always a law that underpins the work of the archive and, indeed, through which the archive in itself is established in the first place. In this nomological sense, the archive governs the things it archives by nominating them. The nomological aspect of the archive need not be restricted to a notion of a formally instituted archive such as a library or museum but should also be thought of as discipline or any other structuring discourse. For example, the history of art, as a disciplinary formation, is a prominent candidate in this regard by working out a set of discursive, one might more clearly say, ideological forces that ultimately orbit around the shaping of the epistemological formations of a canon. Moreover, and more significantly perhaps, is the fact that a discipline such as the history of art is allowed to legitimize itself as the legitimizing authority – or is accepted as a legitimizing arbiter – over the things it attempts to study. In this sense it also acts in accordance with the authority of the archive, establishing itself as an ‘archontic principle of legitimization.’<sup>45</sup>

Michel Foucault cannot remain silent here. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault posits ‘the archive’ also as a privileged site (‘a region’) but he does so by drawing attention to the dynamics that are played out between the archived and the non-archived. Thus, the archival site provokes a dynamics of epistemological differentiation and places us and our presences in a differentiating relation to the archive. In the archive we find that what we are no longer. Or conversely, to recognize something in need of archivization is also to recognize that what we have ceased to be. The designation of something as archival, and hence as *aufgehoben*, marks that altering step. What is archived is no longer part of our present-day fabric and discourse. The archive, for Foucault, is ‘at once close to us, and different from our existence, it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us.’<sup>46</sup> As a topology, the archive comes to signify an other, an outside, an enclosure in relation to our selves whose shapes are impressed by it nonetheless. The Foucauldian archive positions us (that is, the positions of our subjectivities) differentially, that is to say, ‘its locus is the gap between our own discursive practices.’<sup>47</sup> And here we can align *Aufhebung* again, but this time in its cancelling signification. What is archived

is *aufgehoben* [cancelled] and therefore represents an epistemological discontinuity but that is at the same time its critical value, a value that is productive *in absentia* by invisibly supporting other visible layers. Although Foucault speaks largely of discursive ontologies (making thereby his critical intervention to the *a priori* horizontal vision of ‘history’ with its levelling effects) and their drifting layers of which this present one right in front of you, my reader, forms also a part, it is not farfetched to think the concrete contents of institutional archives along these lines, be this a public, semi-public, familial or personal archive. Whatever falls into the shadow of the archival space, whatever has been declared as archival must also be read and understood from within the structuring rules of this archive, even if it is just a box of old photographs and even if these photographs have found their way into this box by mere accident.

### **The Photograph’s Archive**

Indeed, what could be closer to our familiar understanding of the archive than a box of photographs? And what could better preserve and embalm the presence of the present (‘the moment’) than a photograph? Archives are full of photographs. They are bursting with images so much so that we cannot avoid asking: who depends on whom? And who institutes whom? Do photographs actually establish archives? Or more poignantly, does the photographic camera by itself, does photography through its potentiality of a relentless image production, always already work towards an archive? Is it the enduring stream of images – or what John Tagg has called the ‘troubling productivity’ of photography – that provokes a disciplinary archive so as to contain and organize the images photography never ceases to produce?<sup>48</sup> And further, would this mean that the photograph, as a materially signifying unit, could bestow upon itself the designation of the ‘archive’? Indeed, is the photograph not already an archive in its own right? If the image of a box of old photographs is a well-known and memorable one in cultures practising so-called ‘familial’ photography, conjuring up, as it does, a sense of archivality at the same time, then we can conversely also ask what photography would do without an archival space for its ongoing floods of images.<sup>49</sup> Or, we might indeed ask what kind of archontic principle is engendered in the doings of and by photography itself, thus raising the stakes not only for thinking

how photography would work as an archival system unto itself but also for thinking as to how photography would always already organize itself, that is to say, be its own archive that remains ultimately unaffected by our attempts of restructuring its photographs according to timely priorities.

The archive posits its materials as irreplaceable. And inversely, in starting up an archive, in framing something as archival, that something becomes original.<sup>50</sup> That would be the law of the archive. After all, we also visit archives in search of the original thing, of the one and only, of the irreplaceable. Do we not always enter an archive to find materials we would not find anywhere else? Archival treasures. But the archive, to call itself a respectable archive, must be originary in itself. It must be built on originary foundations that inaugurate it. Somehow, it contains itself, by the *nomos* that the archive as archive declares to itself and to which it turns its gaze. The archive is a function of the law to which it must abide if it is not to fall apart and lose its foundation. Derrida rightly asks whether ‘one [can] imagine an archive without foundation, without substrate, without substance, without subjectile?’<sup>51</sup> This would challenge our very notion of the archive: how would it organize itself? What would its purpose be? We can take issue with this question by thinking the photograph as archive.

Photographs are *aufhebend* (they keep an instant) and photographs themselves are *aufgehoben* (we keep the photograph to keep the instant).<sup>52</sup> As conceptual domains, the photograph and the archive form a couple with strong ties between them, both in terms of providing much critical terrain for shaping each other’s theoretical paradigms as well as in terms of intersecting in their material dimensions. Spurred on by deconstruction as well as by the interrogating work of feminism and postcolonial critiques which has made us pay so much critical attention not only to the archival politics – who enters into whose archive – but also the working modes and materialities of the archive and its own structuring inscription on the things it archives, we could propose more drastically the view that photographic practice might simply equal archival practice and *vice versa*.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, working in the midst of this ‘archival consciousness’ we could say that to photograph is to archive. (Are we not also taking photographs of ourselves to archive our selves?) But could we just select a single photograph to sustain the same thesis? Is one photograph already an

archive in itself? One is advised to answer this question with a ‘yes and no.’ On the one hand, every photograph attests to an originary photographic impression for which we simply have no language at hand. This is Barthes’ *punctum*. This is an irreplaceable stratum that clings on to each photograph or, at least, to the theoretical space that circumscribes our dealings with the photographic image. Every photograph bears out an origin that is the origin of its self. Irreducible. Therefore, one could say that it establishes thereby a nomological axis of a truly archival kind – because it *is* originary.

That we indeed consult the archive in search of the ‘unique’ reflects the law of the archive to which we subject ourselves. In the case of the photograph, this founding law is embedded in the work of inscription, calling forth an image uniquely tied to the photographic event. At the level of impression, every single photograph, if we isolate it as image, would thus remain incomparable to anything else, even though its mode of inscription – photographic – is not so. The entity of the photograph becomes the keeper of some thing, an impression that is unique in its structure. It could thus lay down a nomos for an archive yet at the same time it cannot because it cannot articulate that nomos. It cannot stretch beyond itself and tell us what this nomological principle would be. Thus, how could we make sense of this inward-looking, self-preoccupied, narcissistic thing? If each photograph could call upon itself its own archontic domain, establish through itself its own archival autarky, then this would also come to represent a total archive that cannot be operated anymore. It would become dysfunctional. Hence, it remains silent. It does so, admittedly, because our assumption rests on overlaying the indexical of the photograph with the nomological of the archive. Barthes can say that the photographic sign is a message without a code, because, as a sign, each photographic image constitutes a singular entity and, thus, does not contribute to a syntax. Or again, because each of them cannot be comprehended within a concept of a sign system as conceived by semiotics.<sup>54</sup> Photographs are not clear-cut signs belonging to a semiotic system that we could call photography. Rather, each of them attests to, or makes possible, a different sign *system* whereby, of course, it is illogical to speak of a system in this context because we cannot establish any systemic principle if each photograph forms a system unto itself. Instead, it gives us, every photograph anew, its ‘analogical plenitude.’<sup>55</sup> In other words, it finds no equivalent in anything but itself. That this evokes a sense of

stubborn behaviour, a plain thing impossible to move and seemingly content with itself, indicates a kind of resistance to our attempts of making sense of it so as to integrate it more effortlessly in our signifying systems and to put it to use in the work of communication. In this sense, we are dealing with a noumenal thing that gives us just itself, remaining indifferent to our presence and our attempts of deciphering it.

Therefore, what we could call the photograph's archive – imagined as the space where the photograph's originary impression is kept – transpires as a properly closed container that cannot tell us what it actually keeps inside its space. We cannot gain access so as to decode it meaningfully. And yet, the photograph shows off its image so blatantly that we cannot ignore it and believe instead to have accessed it already. Indeed, at most times, we are only concerned with its *impressing* image, forgetting about the wider photographic structures of support, reproduction, display and rendering. Thus, if we have set out to answer the question of whether the photograph in itself could put forth an archival principle with a speculative 'yes,' then it is about time to add our 'no' on the grounds of photography's notorious reproducibility. Even though the photograph may contain an indexical impression that the photograph can claim uniquely for itself, the very same impression can be replicated endlessly, thus, paradoxically, multiplying the originary space of the impression. Photography, therefore, produces in every photographic impression an original entity, yet, at the same time, counteracts that production by distributing the original content in indefinite copies. Original copies.

### **Documents, Disciplines, Histories**

In the photograph, the two constituents of an archive, the file and the record, are brought together. More generally, in an archive, a record denotes the actual archived content whereas the file denotes the fact of the content's archivization, that is, the archive's work of administrative containment and legal organization.<sup>56</sup> The photograph, then, produces an impression (record) at the same time as providing an archival space (file) for the record it has created. Moreover, the photograph represents also the structural unit that enables the indefinite dissemination of the record. In this sense, then, the photograph is a peculiar archival space: its unique 'content' laid bare

for us to see in an open file. At the same time, we can rest assured that we do not lose any of the records because the photographic apparatus, in principle, can also be understood as being a filing system in itself, allowing thereby the tracking of all its 'documents.' What has been photographed is also already recorded: it is a record in the archival sense. Thus, and here I follow Derrida's footsteps, one can say that the photograph joins in its space the work of 'copy, archive and signature.'<sup>57</sup> The handling – theoretically as well as manually – of the photograph becomes less than a straightforward matter. It attains particularly complex dimensions once we start considering the interrelations between the photograph and its subsequent insertion in other archives. One archival record writing itself on another, and so on... Perhaps we are then in a situation where we are far from knowing what this photographic thing then actually is that we hold in our hands when visiting an archive.

The doubts evoked in the above lines suggest an encounter with the archival space, photographic or otherwise, that is affected by suspicion, evoking an odd distancing in its proximity. The archive, quite contrary to its accustomed promotional self-image, is less stable than it conveys at first impression – at least under the probing eyes of a poststructuralist critique. Not that the archive would not continue working on demarcating a space of unyielding steadiness according to its archontic principle, but it is also more than that, or rather, it cannot achieve the full realization of its archival drive because, if it is to remain functional, it must keep itself open to an outside – an outside that is of a potentially disturbing force. If we are to invoke images of archives, then they give themselves quickly away as static spaces, enduring volumes filled with inertia. Vaults of stillness. They give a sense of permanence and protection. Nothing that could disturb them. Archives ask for respect – is not one of the duties of the archivist to enforce this space of respectability? On the other hand, *Aufhebung* would remind us that it keeps an archival content but it does so not without keeping it in motion at the same time. But no archive could work in total closure. Unbreakable walls may well surround it but they cannot fully close it if it is to remain of some use. This is the impossible logic of the archive. It wants to preserve, slow down, freeze. Yet, at the same time, it needs to signify. We need it to signify, and thus need access to it. But that in turn unsettles the ideality of its preserving function. Working against itself, it is founded upon a contradiction. Thick walls (built in stone, words or encrypted data) may well guarantee the preservation of the things it

archives to keep their ‘status quo,’ (a ‘status quo,’ however, as laid down by the law of the archive) but they may equally take it out of the signifying chain. If the drive of the archive is to work centrifugally around its own nomos, then it must also accept the possibility of ending up in the non-signifying eye of its proper storm that accumulates all the things coming under its purview.

The path that this archival storm takes depends on the instituting of the archive, which is not just a matter of what it accumulates but also how the accumulation takes place. ‘The first archivist institutes the archive as it should be, that is to say, not only in exhibiting the document, but in *establishing* it.’<sup>58</sup> Therefore, when Derrida in *Archive Fever* asks what would psychoanalysis be if Freud, who also established the nomological aspects of the psychoanalytic archive, had had access to the media technologies that evolved hundred years on after Freud’s writing, then he opens up the issue of production of this archive *and* its signifying substance.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, we cannot strictly disentangle the signifying contents of this archive from the materials with which they were laid down. On the other hand, Freud was a successful archivist because he instituted a discourse called psychoanalysis by laying down a mode of reading, ordering, treating – so successful that we still recognize his name as being foundational to the archive of psychoanalysis, which in turn can only confirm the gravitational force of the Freudian archive and shows, by way of extension, the archival pull of any disciplinary discourse. As such, we must resort again to Foucault to help us change this disciplinary impulse and its self-affirming tendencies. The archive, he writes, ‘deprives us of our continuities; it dissipates that temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves when we wish to exorcise the discontinuities of history; it breaks the thread of transcendental teleologies.’<sup>60</sup>

Although it is not so difficult to see how a discipline might have its nomological aspects and how it might treasure its works (texts, narratives, theories, tropes, etc.) to which we are asked to return so as to work with them, in the poststructuralist light of things, however, the discipline’s request for taking part in its discursive archive becomes a possible step into discontinuity – even though the very existence of a discipline and its practice in the here and now speaks of the work of the present. Thus, in thinking a discipline as archive, the discipline becomes a critical faulting of differentiation. A discipline such as the history of art is invested in its laws because it

is the force of the law that keeps it as discipline. No collection without a keeper. Yet, while a discipline claims its own discourse, which is also the substance of its archive, entering this archive with Foucault would bring with it an experience that is of a differentiating force. What is at stake, then, is to work *with* this differentiation. That would be the task that the archive prompts us to recognize in its space.<sup>61</sup> Foucault's archaeological metaphor is of good service here because, as archaeologists should know all too well, any archaeological dig immediately changes the things it uncovers. It cannot avoid the contaminating bearings of its excavating work. And even if archaeology itself, as a discipline, ends up at most times presenting us its own found objects in a 'historically authentic fashion,' the same objects cannot remain the same. They need to be preserved, immediately, not only to keep them but also to bring them in accordance with the archaeologist's method. What begins to emerge, then, as disciplinary archive, is an intricate interlacing of presenting and absencing. The historian discovers and uncovers things but must build them into the disciplinary discourse that is relevant to the *now*. And thereby he preserves them but has also altered them, which is to say they have ceased to be what they were before the historian's work. *Aufgehoben*.

### **An Epilogue as After-effect**

'The Hegelian *ground* is neither fundament nor foundation, neither groundwork nor substrate. It is the depth in which one is submerged, into which one sinks and goes to the bottom. More precisely, this ground founds only to the extent that it sinks in itself: for foundation should be a hollowing out. Thus thought is not grasped in its depth without such a hollowing out. [...] It hollows out the point of passage, and the point itself is such a hollowing out: work of the negative, but right at the surface.'<sup>62</sup>

The subject of *Aufhebung* is an uneasy sitter for an image. It cannot sit still. The task of being imaged is senseless, for what it is, is in sublation. It cannot present itself but is rather sense itself. Never for itself, it cannot be fixed.



In 1993, a film was released.<sup>63</sup> (Figure 10) It had the name of a colour. *Blue*. The same colour filled its projected image – an image as long as the film. A film without frames. And a moving image. Appearing still.

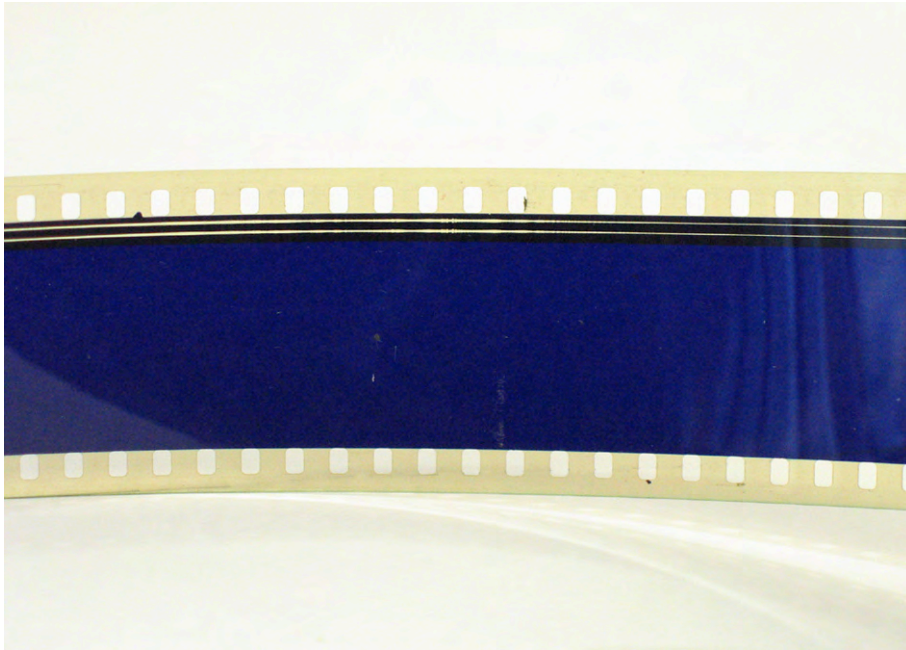


Figure 10. Derek Jarman, filmstrip of *Blue*.

<sup>1</sup> *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil/Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2004), p.152.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic* [1812/13], trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p.107.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p.130.

<sup>4</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, p.105.

<sup>5</sup> The language sphere of English has come to settle for the term 'sublation.' It claims its philosophical purpose from the Latin *tollere* which means 'to raise up' and 'to take up from its place, to destroy, remove,' though the Latin root lacks, as Hegel himself remarks in the *Science of Logic*, the important reference to *Aufhebung's* preserving aspects in its signification. For an overview, see 'sublation', in Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.283-85.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* [1987] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.41.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel underscores: 'To sublata, and the *sublated* (that which exists ideally as a moment), constitute one of the most important notions in philosophy. It is a fundamental determination which repeatedly occurs throughout the whole of philosophy, the meaning of which is to be clearly grasped and especially distinguished from *nothing*. Nothing is *immediate*; what is sublated, on the other hand, is the result of *mediation*; it is a non-being but as a *result* which had its origin in a being. It still has, therefore, *in itself* the *determinateness from which it originates*.' See Hegel's 'Remark: The Expression "To Sublate"', in *Science of Logic*, pp.106-8.

And given the untranslatability of *Aufhebung*, we render the same in Hegel's original words: 'Aufheben und das Aufgehobene ist einer der wichtigsten Begriffe der Philosophie, eine Grundbestimmung, die schlechthin allenthalben wiederkehrt, deren Sinn bestimmt aufzufassen, und besonders vom Nichts zu unterscheiden ist. – Was sich aufhebt, wird dadurch zu Nichts. Nichts ist das Unmittelbare; ein Aufgehobenes dagegen ist ein Vermitteltes, es ist das Nichtseyende, aber als Resultat, das von einem Seyn ausgegangen ist. Es hat daher die Bestimmung, aus der es herkommt, noch an sich.' Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke: Band 11. Wissenschaft der Logik* [1812/13], ed. Friedrich Hogemann and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978), p.58.

<sup>8</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, p.107.

<sup>9</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, p.107.

<sup>10</sup> In the essay 'From Restricted to General Economy' of 1967 Derrida, taking Georges Bataille's readings of Hegel as a base for his own reflective discussion, critiques Hegel's trusting approach to the speculative figure of *Aufhebung*. While Hegel's thought shows no reservation towards the productivity of negativity and its sublating subject – a subject that loses and finds itself through *Aufhebung* – Hegel achieves this 'unreservedness' towards the negative only through *Aufhebung* which, at the same time, delimits the negative as a signifying reserve. This, then, would also foreclose us of any experiential potentiality that is outside the *system* of language such as the sacred or of language as poesis. In Derrida's words: 'The notion of *Aufhebung* (the speculative concept par excellence, says Hegel, the concept whose untranslatable privilege is wielded by the German language) is laughable in that it signified the *busying* of a discourse losing its breath as it reappropriates all negativity for itself, as it works the "putting at stake" into an *investment*, as it *amortizes* absolute

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expenditure; and as it gives meaning to death, thereby simultaneously also blinding itself to the baselessness of the nonmeaning from which the basis of meaning is drawn, and in which this basis of meaning is exhausted. To be indifferent to the comedy of the *Aufhebung*, as was Hegel, is to blind oneself to the experience of the sacred, to the heedless sacrifice of presence and meaning.’ Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’ [1967], trans. Alan Bass, in *Writing and Difference* [1967] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.251-77 (p.275).

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’, p.259.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’, p.259.

<sup>13</sup> ‘The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a *phenomenological* description of the human existence. That is to say that the human existence is described there as it “appears” (*erscheint*) or manifests itself to those themselves who live it.’ [‘La PhG est une description *phenomenologique* de l’existence humaine. C’est dire que l’existence humaine y est décrite telle qu’elle “apparaît” (*erscheint*) ou se “manifeste” à celui-là même qui la vit.] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p.576.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974).

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [1967], trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.316. For a selection of essays reflecting on Hegelian thought and its influences on Derridian deconstruction, see Stuart Barnett, ed., *Hegel After Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’, p.259.

<sup>17</sup> ‘[...] je dois au moins rappeler que ce mouvement d’*Aufhebung*, ce processus relevant est toujours chez Hegel un mouvement dialectique d’intériorisation, de mémoire intériorisante (*Erinnerung*) et de spiritualisation sublimante.’ Jacques Derrida, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une traduction “relevante”?’ in *Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: Éditions de l’Herne, 2004), pp.561-76 (p.573).

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* [1997], trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Il faut réaliser la Négativité, et elle se réalise dans et par l’Action [...].’ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p.52.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.51.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Houlgate, ‘General Introduction’ [1998], in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.1-21 (p.16).

<sup>24</sup> Nancy describes our problematic of ‘finding’ *Aufhebung* in the dialectic: ‘The mediating *Aufhebung* is therefore not at all a mysterious power, and the dialectic is not an obscure machination of nature and history. Actually, the dialectic is only an operation, and sublation is only this strange autosuppressive category, to the extent that one isolates in analysis the formal or operative moment.’ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.52.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.52.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.52.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.52 [Emphasis modified].

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, pp.51.

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<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, pp.51-2.

<sup>30</sup> Miglena Nikolchina gives a good account of the troubles that Hegel's *Aufhebung* gave to translators and philosophers alike. Particularly in the francophone arena, *Aufhebung* was rendered in very contradictory ways, either stressing the downwards movement or keeping down (e.g. 'suppression,' 'abolition') or the upwards movement or release (e.g. 'assumption,' 'dépasser,' 'relève'). See Miglena Nikolchina, 'Between Irony and Revolution: Sexual Difference and the Case of *Aufhebung*', *parallax* 14:2 (2008), pp.53-67.

<sup>31</sup> 'Aufheben hat in der Sprache den gedoppelten Sinn, daß es so viel als aufbewahren, erhalten bedeutet, und so viel als aufhören lassen, ein Ende machen.' Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke: Band 11. Wissenschaft der Logik* [1812/13], ed. Friedrich Hogemann and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978), p.58.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Inwood, 'Sublation', p.284.

<sup>33</sup> Howard Caygill, grounding his point of departure in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, takes issue with this aspect of the artwork as something 'poised or lingering between creation and destruction' so as to ask the 'aesthetic question of how it is preserved in existence and the ethical question of why care is taken to do so.' See Howard Caygill, 'The Destruction of Art', in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), pp.162-73.

<sup>34</sup> 'Even the abstract universal as such, considered in its Notion, that is in its truth, is not merely the *simple*, but as *abstract* is already *posited* as infected with a negation.' G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, p.829.

<sup>35</sup> '*Snyatie*,' serving as *Aufhebung*'s alter ego in Russian, is particularly interesting in that its broad meaning of 'bringing or taking down' 'presupposes the downward transfer of something from its lofty or fixed position and an ensuing dramatic change in its state: the crops from the fields, a picture from the wall, a minister from his post, a death mask from a face, things into a concept [...].' Furthermore, there is a relation to filmic recording: 'you shoot a film in English but *snyat*' is what you do to it in Russian.' Miglena Nikolchina, 'Between Irony and Revolution: Sexual Difference and the Case of *Aufhebung*', p.54.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Différance' [1968], trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy* [1972] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.1-27.

<sup>37</sup> Alan Bass, quoted from Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', p.20.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy also makes the case for employing Derrida's '*relève*' in French. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.118.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', p.19.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante"?', pp.561-76.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante"?', p.565.

<sup>42</sup> *Aufhebung*'s performance of simultaneity is the precondition for its sense – but it must stick to its synchronization if it is to retain its Hegelian sense. Nancy draws out this point. 'The word *Aufhebung* permits, by happy chance, of playing out right on this word the *conjoined* suppression of its two possible significations, the sublation or up-heaval of the one by the other. In short, this word offers the exact counterpoint to the word *Sinn*, which permits of playing out the simultaneous presentation of its two significations. The sense of up-heaval is the upheaval of sense; or one might say, more playfully, that the sense of upheaval takes leave of sense or takes up where

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sense leaves off.’ See Jean-Luc Nancy’s section ‘Sense’ in his *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, pp.46-54 (p.52) [Emphasis modified].

<sup>43</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, p.107.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* [1994], trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.3.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p.40.

<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p.130.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.130.

<sup>48</sup> John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> On photography and its interplays with respect to memory and identity in the familial space see Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> The reasons for this can best explained by considering the institution of the library. A library is, strictly speaking, not an archive. Its books could be found in another library that could be identical to the former. In this sense it operates like a system based in syntax. But as soon as we consider the library as archive, its books, as material objects, become irreplaceable, original items unique to this particular archive and its governing laws.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, pp.26-7.

<sup>52</sup> This depends, of course, whether we continue believing in the photograph as a slice of time though, for the sake of customary simplicity, it seems, this perception still persists. For example, the main arguments put forward by Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* (such as the photograph as emanating from the referent or the other way round) would be hard to justify outside this theoretical framework. As soon as we free the photograph of this exacting feature, it becomes less credible as ‘document’ and opens itself up to the arena of ‘art.’ Painting, for instance, is not considered to be as forcefully indexical (definitely not in relation to time) and lacks thus the epistemic credibility as document. As Derrida writes: ‘Once one considers the calculability of time in perception as a photographic take, once one does not see time as a sequence of irreducible and atomistic moments but as a more or less calculable differential duration, a duration that is correlative to a technology, then the issue of the reference, and subsequently the question of art, of photography as *techné*, becomes complicated.’ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Photograph as Copy, Archive and Signature’ [1993], no translator given, in David Company, ed., *Art and Photography* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2003), p.220.

<sup>53</sup> Here we could introduce a whole range of artworks and texts that have investigated the modes and materialities of the archive as they emerged loosely with conceptual art, artistic strategies such as interventionist work done in actual archives or the employment of archivist aesthetics, the consideration of the institutional frameworks of artworks’ ideological placement, but also the reflection on and reconfiguration of personal archives and their role in ‘the everyday.’ See, for example, the exhibition catalogue *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Göttingen and New York: Steidl and International Centre of Photography, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> As Barthes writes: ‘Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at a generality) except by assuming a

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mask.’ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* [1980], trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p.34.

<sup>55</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Photographic Message’ [1961], in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.15-31 (p.18).

<sup>56</sup> See Cornelia Vismann’s chapter ‘Law’s Writing Lessons’ on the generative ability of files by adding ‘more’ content to the record they are actually supposed to preserve. ‘Law’s Writing Lessons’, in *Files: Law and Media Technology* [2000], trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp.1-38.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Photograph as Copy, Archive and Signature’, p.220.

<sup>58</sup> ‘The first, the *arch-example*, shows us the desire of an admirable historian who wants in sum to be the first archivist, the first to discover the archive, the archaeologist and perhaps the archon of the archive. The first archivist institutes the archive as it should be, that is to say, not only in exhibiting the document but in *establishing* it. He reads, interprets it, classes it.’ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p.55.

<sup>59</sup> ‘This is another way of saying that the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypemnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. The means that, *in the past*, psychoanalysis would not have been what it was (any more than so many other things) if E-mail, for example, had existed.’ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, pp.16-17.

<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.131.

<sup>61</sup> It is the space of the archive that enables differentiation by withdrawing signs from reality. As Groys argues: ‘A system of differences can only be established within the archive. Of the things of reality we cannot know whether they are differentiated firstly because their number is endless and secondly because they are all equally transitory. The fact that we can always take certain things from reality and connect them to the network of the archive does not yet mean that these things have been somehow “always already” a part of this network. Rather, an exchange takes place between archive and reality, that is to say, between the differentiated and the undifferentiated.’ [‘Ein System der Differenzen lässt sich ausschließlich innerhalb des Archivs etablieren. Von den Dingen der Realität können wir nicht wissen, ob sie differenziert sind, weil sie erstens unendlich an der Zahl sind und zweitens alle gleich vergänglich sind. Die Tatsache, dass wir immer wieder bestimmte Dinge der Wirklichkeit entnehmen und sie an das Netz des Archivs anschließen können, bedeutet also noch lange nicht, dass diese Dinge irgendwie “immer schon” Teil dieses Netzes gewesen sind. Vielmehr findet zwischen Archiv und Wirklichkeit, d. h. zwischen Differenziertem und Undifferenziertem, ein Austausch statt.’] Boris Groys, *Under Verdacht: Eine Phänomenologie der Medien* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2000), p.43.

<sup>62</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.15.

<sup>63</sup> Derek Jarman, *Blue*, prod. James Mackay (United Kingdom: Basilisk Communications, 1993), 75 mins; Derek Jarman, *Blue: Text of a Film by Derek Jarman*, ed. Rod Stoneman and Karen Brown (London: Channel 4 Television and BBC Radio 3, 1993). *Blue* was the penultimate film of British filmmaker Derek

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Jarman and was released in 1993, shortly before his AIDS-related death in 1994. The feature-length film undoes the concept of cinematographic film – the photographic sequence of 24 images per second upon which cinematic illusion rests – by consisting, in principle, of only one continuous, non-figurative image of blue that is as long as the entire film strip. The film deals with Jarman's deteriorating sight and possible blindness as a consequence of his HIV infection. The film's voiceover comprises an eclectic mix of short autobiographical accounts and poetic memoirs, spoken by Jarman and three other narrators. A meditation of the faculty of vision, the film shows and narrates through the colour blue and its symbolic spaces and tropes, whereby the various mutations of the figure Blue are central to the changing dynamics of the film's narrative. *Blue* opens up a conceptual space that is located between the still and moving image, defying conventional categorization. Moving, but no visible movement is graspable as such. Still in appearance, but nevertheless time-based.

As for the colour blue, one may note that the human eye perceives colour before fixing the image of an object and identifying its form. An image of an object can only be perceived once the fovea, the centre of our field of vision and that part of our eyes where visual acuity is highest (the retina's cones), is developed fully at the age of sixteen months – the period of the mirror stage. But before that developmental stage, the eye can perceive colour through peripheral vision (the retina's rods). The colours with short wavelength such as blue enter visual perception first. Julia Kristeva demonstrates this in her study of the blue in Giotto's frescoes at Padua's Arena Chapel whereby its blue is perceived first in the darkness of the church. Thus, for her, all colours, but blue in particular would have a noncentred or decentring effect, lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation. Julia Kristeva, 'Giotto's Joy', in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.27-52 (p.41).

## ***Fields***

2006

Black-and-white negative with gelatin silver contact print  
10 x 8 inch (framed 14 x 12 inch)

The series *Fields* explores the ability of black-and-white photography to 're-present'. Working on English landscape, the series brings together a variety of panoramic shots as well as motifs of its topographical features. Using a large format camera, each image is carefully composed as a scenic view onto the picturesque landscape, underscoring the depictive potential of photographic technology in general, and that of large format photography in particular.

Each photographic artwork in *Fields* consists of a 10 x 8 inch negative placed over its positive contact print. By superimposing the negative on the positive, the photographic image becomes 'negated' and appears to be black. The photographic detail retreats into a monochromatic field of black. The outlines and contours of the image are discernable only from close view.

In a way, one could say that the image becomes suspended between the black fields produced by the negative and the positive. As each image is formed, the ability to reproduce each image, typical of photography, is brought to a halt. The role of the camera to record is stalled, just as the photographer's purpose, to select and frame the scene, is troubled. The work also counteracts the picturesque quality of each view by turning it into a dark field. The depicted motifs disappear into the blackness of the photographic grain. Landscape rendered black.

Creative and 'degenerative' at the same time, the joining together of negative and positive in *Fields* causes the image to collapse into its own shadow. Rather than being confined to a photographic album or to an archive to be later employed as the prototype image for an infinite number of prints, in *Fields* the photographic negative together with its positive leads to a new artwork based on an unexpected visual convergence.





View of exhibition *Declining Images*, South Square Gallery, Bradford (2008).

*Field #1*



*Field #2*



*Field #3*



*Field #4*



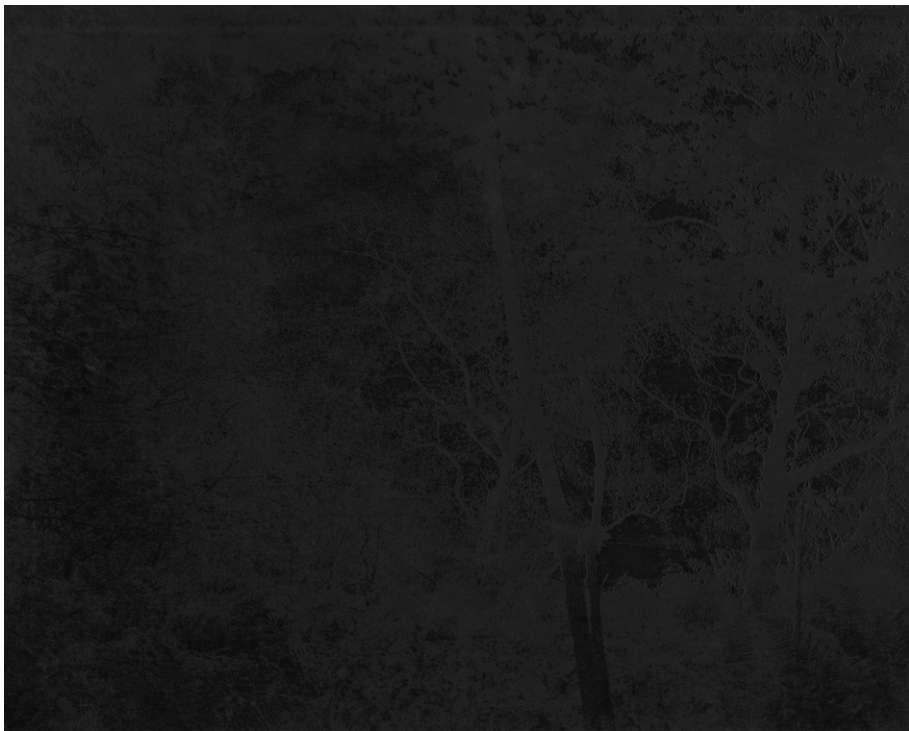
*Field #5*



*Field #6*



*Field #7*



*Field #8*



*Field #9*



*Field #10*

Postscript  
**Towards a Criticality in the Now**



*Almost every artist I know wants to be critical.  
So what should an art critic do if the art itself is critical?*  
Boris Groys<sup>1</sup>

*A theorist is one who has been undone by theory.*  
Irit Rogoff<sup>2</sup>

*Art, in its transhistorical quality, and bourgeois society,  
work from diverging ontologies so that its appropriate  
specificity must go unrecognized.*  
Adrian Rifkin<sup>3</sup>

### **The Rhetorics of Practice**

Much has been said about the term ‘practice’ in the last decade or so: a large amount of thinking went into all sorts of terrains pertaining to the doings of practice as well as to the operational fields of those who call themselves practitioners. And much has been thought out as practice, including the academic model of ‘practice-led’ research. Notions of ‘practice’ have also inflected themselves in this project in different contexts and to differing ends: in tracing the *Bahnen* of deconstruction; in framing the activities of an artist; in thinking about the ethical conducts of research; in catching up with the performative moments of the live act; in pursuing the roles of a cultural practitioner, photographer, theorist; in adhering to professional models of academia; in working suitably to disciplinary ideals... The actualities of ‘practice’ are many, its signifying space polysemic. On the one hand, the presence of practice in this thesis – and my responsiveness to its manifestations – maps out the critical attention given to this term in the institutions of academic research and cultural production. As such, this project cannot deny that it is also a child of its time. On the other hand, the present inevitability of this term for anyone working in the humanities must invite serious questioning as to why it has achieved such a prominent and, for some, critically acclaimed status in the arena of research. In these concluding remarks I want to challenge, by way of a postscript, some of the claims, concerns and confusions relating to the spaces of art practice as I have encountered them throughout the four years of this project.



One cannot avoid hearing it: the artist *practises*. In the books and journals of art history and theory, in the course outlines and programmes of art education, on the websites and CVs of artists, etc., ‘practice’ is a term very much in need nowadays. Of course, this might simply confirm our custom of describing the actions of an artist as practice. It is a fact of banality: artists practise. That they indeed practise is reproduced in a myriad of institutional and disciplinary forms: the organizational clarity of the North American education system and its distinctions of ‘studio practice’; the continuing emergence of centres for so-called ‘practice-led’ research in mainly UK higher education; symposia and conferences seeking to evaluate the spaces of practice and the activities of practitioners of all kinds whereby the artist is conveniently thrown into a larger crowd of practitioners ranging from the psychoanalyst to the documentary film maker; an expanding list of publications around the topic of practice including its viability as research method; and, again in the UK, all those little appearances of practice in universities’ regulations of student admission and degree structures (applicants in ‘creative’ subjects are usually required to show evidence of being ‘practitioners’), public relations materials of museums, arts councils and other lobbying groups (practice is emphasized by referring to artists as being ‘practising’ artists), as well as in strategic papers of funding bodies that have set an agenda for practice.

Practice flourishes, certainly institutionally, and especially on the British Isles.<sup>4</sup> One could see its current notoriety as an ungainly backlash to the bodies of poststructuralist knowledge that one associates with Theory. Yet in this revisionist framing we would just give rise to the simplistic formula of the theory/practice opposition and its stale ideologies. Surely, if there is a point to Theory, then it is its assertion of itself as a practice, that is, the assertion of its own workings as *happening* from within the things it addresses. Ideas have materials. And the ideas put forward by textuality, deconstruction, performativity and, to some extent, psychoanalysis too, theorize by doing. They are examples of intellectual projects wherein *theory is practised*, and indeed, where the ideological divisions of theorizing and practising become untenable: theorizing is not oppositional to but *inseparable* from practising – gaining critical thrust precisely by thriving on the moments that enable the undoing of the positions upon which theory rest.<sup>5</sup> Theory gives space to an articulation of the *positionalities* of theory so that it brings into relief how its ideas are always already

entangled in and conditioned by a set of formats, conventions, materials, temporalities, geographies, genealogies, histories. Even the signified needs a signifier in the *signified*. Derrida recognized philosophy's practices in the spaces of the technologies of writing, in philosophies' historical tropes and rhetorics. We may only think of his signal book *Of Grammatology* published in 1967.<sup>6</sup> And yet, with the beginning institutionalization of art practice in the moulds of research three decades later, the 'new subject' of art justifies itself with a practice-led agenda that – one cannot help but think – is particularly attached to its own idea of practice as uniquely to itself.

No doubt, the current availability of all things 'practical' in academia is an easy route for those who regard theory as extraneous or even think it is antagonistic to their work.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, these academic 'practitioners' can wear the robes of theoretical appeal because of the status that practice has lately attained in the institutional spaces and discourses at this particular historical moment that integrates certain dominant forms of art practice in the nomenclatures of a twenty-first century research scheme. Yet, what could bring about a crucial paradigm shift that would help us move away from an individualistically expressive approach in the arts, let alone help us recover from the ongoing hangovers of romantic interiority, is more often than not just a swapping of terms and a redistribution of economic resources in a changing political landscape: the art school becomes a university, artworks become research outputs, artists become researchers. And practice, it seems, has thereby become the favourite pastime of the newly born artist-researcher. One is persuaded to consider this current inevitability of practice from within the critical frameworks with which the social history of art has intervened several decades ago. Practice could thereby be brought into focus as a leftover of the ideological fictions of artistic creation, which has gained another lease of life in the name of research. Instead of reflecting upon the concrete procedures and materials that surround the production of work and lend its making *meaning*, 'practice' comes in handy, giving the artist-researcher's work a pseudo-appearance of critical rigour.

One of the challenges of setting out to combine the terms and conditions of research with those of art practice is the need to recognize that such a merger ultimately remains unsound if it is not thought in *historical* terms just as it requires an awareness

of how the wider apparatus of art history and criticism produces its objects of art – and practice is one these objects. On the one hand, practice is a term that is repeatedly problematized in, and is indeed central to, modern art theory. Thus, practice is an already disciplinary sanctioned object of investigation and research in itself. On the other hand, the claim to a practice is a convenient tool for the artist-researcher to lend his work analytical and methodological credibility so as to qualify it as research and to conform to its technical terminology. It is needless to say that this short-sighted approach to things falls short of its supposedly critical purpose of ‘researching through practising,’ not the least because, as indicated earlier, practice is such a loose term that could not possibly cover the diverging forms of cultural production. Rather we end up with a practice for the sake of practice that gives us nothing but its own academically reified version.

The twenty-first century marriage of art and research – as understood in their current political and institutional forms of their respective traditions and conventions – is not critically served if we think we can close the case by institutionally legitimizing a certain genealogy of art practice as research. Not only does this remain a superficial enterprise as long as we are not considering art’s historical conditioning, but it also cannot work if one party claims priority over the other.<sup>8</sup> This is the trouble with endorsing practice-*led* research. The risk of relying on the lead of practice is one of decontextualizing practice from the political and ethical arguments that bear their *specific* weights on it. Such an art practice, as sophisticatedly argued as it might be, might not be able to contribute much original knowledge other than the pretty forms it has produced, in fact, for itself. This state of affairs is reminiscent of the purifying terrains of High Modernism and its aesthetic regimes. Thus, instead of engendering effective practices of reflection and analysis that also *do* something, the efforts made in ensuring that practice could be some kind of auto-powered vehicle of research leads us into a space of empty rhetorics – politically correct but hardly political.

### **Desiring the Lead of Practice**

The wish for practice-led research might, at best, echo the real need for thinking up alternative models for conducting and disseminating research, which is an issue of

relevance to all fields of research, encompassing both the humanities and the sciences – models that do not solely constrict us in analytical hardness but models wherein the performative can take place, models that bring into play the transparent and obscure, the articulable and the inarticulable, the accidental and the deliberate, models that can cope with the personal inside the political, models that recognize the desires and sexual interests that permeate the work, models that entrust themselves to the poetic alongside the analytical. *Models that practise theory*. Yet little of this can be gained if practice is severed from the ideological spaces that regulate and operate it. These include the discourses of art history and museology, art criticism, media theory, etc., but also the institutional geographies of cultural industries, mass media, education, exhibition and conservation.

Likewise, given that modern research asks for the production of original knowledge, we cannot simply assume that whatever happens in art practice can lay claim to originality – certainly not in the space of research where the creation of work is not required to respond (which is not to say that it can escape) to a bourgeois framework of artistic creativity upon which the trope of originality is established in the first place and kept alive, with all sorts of tricks, as a particular value within a capitalist state of affairs. Such an assumption is only available to those who work in certain traditions of art history by keeping their focus on writing the historical events as they refract in the figure of the artist and his work. This, however, also necessitates a realization of how the figure of the artist is projected into its historical and societal position, including the art historian's own (re-)projecting of the artist.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the artist can double as a historian and conceptualize his practice against the theoretical background of history – a kind of seismographic work of the present in respect of the genealogies of art's histories, which is also one of the main lines of reasoning when explaining what a 'practitioner' can actually research with his 'practice' or as to how it can produce meaning. Nonetheless, in order to keep this model in its signifying place, one needs some conviction to not see how it still supports itself on the privileged spaces of art as ideologically already secured, which it thereby also reinscribes in its own doings.

However, as soon as an art practice is *not* conceived within these parameters, then the claim to contributing new forms of knowledge – which is, after all, the aim of

research as conceived within a scientific culture – is harder to sustain. (And perhaps, for the strict art theorist, the meaning of art would be equally endangered.) Practice becomes then more comparable to any professional's practice: in medicine, when a general practitioner (GP) practises, then it is a matter of execution, of evaluating phenomena against existing records, of applying protocols, of adhering to ethical standards. This practice does not set out to research so as to produce new forms of knowledge but relies on the results that have come out of research. Still, we would be rushing our case if we were not to see that even in the GP's wider medical world and its divisions of labour the researching bit is organized around its own set of practices: all the procedures that might not feature directly in the research output but which have nonetheless shaped its forms – even though the clear division of medical research on the one hand and practice on the other might easily mislead us into thinking in absolute terms. The same, then, could also be said about the GP's regular duties carried out in practice: although its stated goal is not directed towards researching novel phenomena but towards applying consistently the established orders of medicine – indeed, he would be in trouble not to do so – the pursuit of research need not be excluded from the scopes of the GP's practice. But the foci of this research will be necessarily restricted as they are embedded within medicine's professional structures that regulate how medical practice ought to function, which is to say that such 'practice-led' research can attain useful results only if it concerns itself with itself – with addressing and researching practice itself such as its ethical frameworks, its economic efficiencies, its spaces of interaction and communication, etc. Otherwise the broad distinction between the spaces of *practice* on the one hand, and those of *research* on the other, would be useless as there would be no need to establish such a division of labour in the first place.

Regarding the model of practice-led research in the arts and its speculation of granting art practice a lead in the work of research, we might be cautious in making too direct a comparison with the practices of medicine or, for the matter, any other practice of a liberal profession in whose spaces of activity an overarching notion of practice is perhaps most profoundly visible: medics, architects, lawyers, etc. They all practise, just as they all like to have a practice. And one can add to this list, even though not professionally regulated as such, the contemporary figure of the artist in all its modern shades.<sup>10</sup> The artist of avant-garde modernism, as brought into relief by

modern art theory, is not regulated anymore like an academician used to be once with regards to subject treatment, style, tradition, etc. The *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in Paris, inaugurated in 1648, is hailed as the forerunner of the modern art school, ensuring that its 'students' would not only 'make' but would do so with intellectual sensibility towards their subject matter, which is to say towards the idealized representations of the classes they were required to work with. The Academy did so by ensuring a discursive framework of ideological positions. But most crucially, the Academy in itself was the best device to ensure that its outputs achieve consistency. Today one would call its strategy a politics of regulation and professionalization. The practice of the academic artist, tightly networked and rigidly taught by his Academy, compares well with any other liberal profession whose procedures and standards are safeguarded by a guild, association or other types of professional bodies. If the quality of an academician's output was largely guaranteed by a clearly identifiable institution that, at the same time, also helped secure the academician's reputation, then the artist of today is unbound from such centralized quality assurance.

The postmodern artists of a globalizing twenty-first century, as we are all too upsettingly aware of, can do what they like and their practices are not subjected to a regulatory system of accreditation the way academicians used to be. The higher education system, from where most of today's art professionals are emitted, awards the student of art various degrees and different shades of prestige depending on the esteem of the institution and the standing of its teachers. A university may have its own artistic lineage and intellectual outlook – both of which may impact on the student and possibly come to bear on her work *should* she develop a career as professional artist with all the conventional decorum (a representing gallery, a string of publications, international exposure, work in relevant collections, etc.) that is required to go with it. Nonetheless, this type of artist cannot guarantee you any standards with regards to her work because there is no single dominating framework that would be checking on the artist's practice. All there is, we could argue in stressing our argument, is an artist and her practice. Sure, there are the appropriate spaces where art ought to happen and be received, as an institutional theory of art would have it.<sup>11</sup> And there is of course the critic to help us interpreting the artist's practice. Just as there are social conventions and historical representations exerting

pressures on the artist's practice. Yet that does not prevent the contemporary artist from doing, potentially, what and how she pleases to do. In this complex network of manifold institutional forces and individual players, overall resembling more an exploded view of the academician's centralized world, we fall back on the artist's 'practice' from where things are supposed to take their critical beginning. This practice can be well cultivated in idiosyncrasy – the signature of the artist – at the same time as promising to be, to paraphrase Barthes, the artist's 'search of his "truth,"' forming 'an order in itself [...] whose readability feeds on a sort of totality of the artist.'<sup>12</sup> With less romantic charge, however, practice can emerge as an intellectual enquiry and art as a discursive, or what one otherwise would call a *theoretical*, subject – attributes that enabled art practice to meet the criteria as an academic subject just as academia argued for integrating it into its subject spectrum.<sup>13</sup> And in the context of this practice, any sign-object is useful. Just as any sign-object can be qualified as art.<sup>14</sup> Anything.

That anything can become meaningful in this matrix of art practice is made possible by a configuration of an 'artist' who bears the marks of modern art scholarship and its theories of the avant-garde, and in particular that stinging mark of the Duchampian moment of 1917 that continues to be of so much concern to art historiography. Or rather, perhaps, art historiography cannot let go of this moment because it concerns the work of art scholarship itself and its institutions of evaluation. And it is thanks to the story of the avant-garde that we can no longer be certain about the whereabouts of art – not even art's space *par excellence*, the museum, can convince us that what it displays is 'art,' colouring our experience in, to borrow from Groys, a 'phenomenology of suspicion.'<sup>15</sup> What we all know, however tentatively, is that we do not know where or what art might be. We could call this awkward mode – a certain uncertain certainty – a professionalized form of the historico-theoretical concept of avant-garde practice, which serves, by way of proxy, as a ghostly structure around which the mainstream of contemporary art practice and its teachings has found its purposeful bearings. Indeed, the critique of the avant-garde has been absorbed so well that it is now possible to rely on the name of Duchamp in advising us about the strategies of practice-led research.<sup>16</sup> Duchamp's coming of age as an emblem of avant-gardism-cum-innovation is a reminder of historical change but also a reminder that what is now valued as 'innovative' in the practice of the avant-garde

cannot be interpreted without its specific context. If Duchamp is supposed to be our guiding light in today's art practice, then this name comes to represent the opposite of what made the message of the avant-garde so radical, a message grounded in the refusal of regulatory frameworks through which academic art was suspended in aesthetic autonomy. In this particular socio-historical state of affairs – the constellation of a bourgeois society – the radical avant-garde artist might well not obey any longer to any professionally accepted framework but he does so, according to Bürger's theory of art, to 'demand that art become practical once again.' The practice of this artist breaks through the forms of academic aestheticism so as to critique thereby 'the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.'<sup>17</sup> In other words, the avant-garde stands for an overcoming or sublation of the separation of 'art' and 'life' so as to achieve an integration of art into the praxis of life.<sup>18</sup>

If there is something in the model of the avant-garde that can still be rescued for our times, then, I think, it is the need to look for the site of an *actuality* before one sets out to practice if practice is supposed to be a critical one, rendering impractical the formal notion of 'practice-led' as an a priori defined practising. Otherwise those cases made for practice which argue its importance to lie in the experiential will not move us closer to *praxis*, a term to which practice is obviously linked – in other words, to the phenomenological sphere of experiencing in the now, reminding us of practice as residing inside the live act and as taking place in the performative event. Psychoanalysis has developed a particular sensitivity to these issues, since it relies on speech as a means of doing its work. Or, alternatively, one could say that psychoanalysis has chosen to pay attention to the embodied dimensions of speech, which inevitably will make them the subject of psychoanalytic research and it therefore also has to face up to this particular material.<sup>19</sup> Lacan's definition of praxis is useful here; for him, praxis designates 'a concerted human action, whatever it may be, which places man in a position to treat the real by the symbolic.'<sup>20</sup> For Lacan, the symbolic would thus pass through the sphere of praxis so as to touch on the real. Leaving aside the distinctively Lacanian tone of being reigned by the symbolic, praxis would be the sphere of treatment – *but* with the symbolic. This helps us to conceptualize one possible axis that could be spanned between art practice and research so as to develop a more formally articulated purpose of their alliance. On the



one hand, it shows us that for to work within the paradigms of research, the sphere of art must be still treated symbolically, which means historically, theoretically, empirically, etc. On the other hand, the space of art practice, *if* more formally conceived as a culturally specific conduit of creation, helps us relativize the hardness of scientific research by not expecting full symbolization. Still, the current academic fixation on the ‘lead of practice’ and its institutional formations provokes a rather different picture which, I suggest, should be read as a symptom of its own paradoxical doings: if the role of practice (in the widest sense) is an ethical one that allows *poiesis* to emerge within the work of research, as deconstruction continues to show us, then a privileging of ‘practice’ *per se* fails what it sets out to do: instead of relativizing the analytical hardness of science, it finds itself hung up engendering its own hardening.

In this light, then, one could also comprehend the motivations of people who hold out the torch of practice-led research by making claims for research-by-making-art as the ‘enactment of thinking,’ thereby enlarging our notions of the spaces of thinking by emphasizing their embodied or performed dimensions.<sup>21</sup> But, a direct reply to this proposition must be that thinking the research conducted by art as the enactment of thinking is seriously essentializing. Should the artist-researcher really be better equipped for enacting thinking than another researcher? Surely, any researcher, from the archaeologist to the zoologist, enacts thinking in their individual practices. Every professional research field constructs, consciously or not, a set of practices for itself, which enables the researcher to work methodologically at the same time as defining the forms the research takes. And while there speaks nothing against conceiving practice-led research as, say, a phenomenologically or hermeneutically driven reflection on thinking and on the means such thinking employs – in this case the signifiers associated with art – it would be naïve to believe that such an expertise would be specific to the artist-researcher. Such an assumption of practice-led research leaves an unpleasant aftertaste of the privileged tropes of artistic individuality. After all, no research field will take practice lightly because it is good practice that sustains the work of the researcher – not to mention the financial risks that working without one would entail.

## Uncoupling

The networks invested in art will continue to develop art's own institutions just as they will be made to adapt to changing social and political circumstances. The territorialization (in the Deleuzian sense) of largely individualistically conceived forms of art practice by the regulating protocols of research of a scientific culture, which we have been witnessing since the 1990s in the UK and beyond, ought to be seen within the politics and possibilities of an advanced capitalist system and an information-driven economy. As such, art's diverse producers have been given a structural overhaul in this transformation instigated by top-down policies. Academia's institutional outgrowths of so-called 'centres for practice-led research' and the establishment of practice-led research paths demarcate this particular historical moment.<sup>22</sup> Yet thinking that art practice could be simply cast into a research method of its own, in other words, a practice that does not consider the epistemological grounds upon which it rests, remains a frail enterprise if one is to take the institutional offer of research earnestly and wants to work with its critical frameworks – instead of practitioners who rest content with, and are limited to, an institutional critique that is served by fulfilling the diverting role of the semi-intellectual. Therefore, let us ask again: why should practice lead research? Research that is led by practice, if we take it to the letter, seeks to put the methods of a certain model of 'practice' first, accepting its regulatory framework as a method of research in itself. Advocates of practice-led research have taken pains to argue for 'practice' and its spearheading role, producing a remarkable array of incisively argued publications in support of their intended cause.<sup>23</sup> Yet while their campaigning work might well satisfy the acronymic spaces of RAE, AHRC and NESTA, presuming a practice as one of its own – as terminologically secured as it might be – will only satisfy itself if it does not put theoretically into question not just the need for practice but also the spaces that engender its existence.<sup>24</sup>

The result is a conflation of practices: of the researcher on the one side; of the professionally working artist on the other; and, between the two, of those posited by the theories and histories of art – all of which give rise to much confusion. It is a confusion that takes its roots precisely in the assumption that one could research (solely) by leading a practice of art. This is replicated in the conceptualization of most

research programmes which demand that applicants be practitioners; or, at least, formulate some vision of a practice. This coming together of two roles of labour (researcher/artists) and their historically specific frameworks of operations is complex. It attains a particular complexity of an easily deceiving kind if the research project expects of itself to house the category of 'art' or to be inhabited by a an 'artist' – which should not be taken as a given. This manifests itself also in the not infrequently posed question whether work produced in a research project makes good art, a query that is thrown up, remarkably, by the teaching staff themselves.<sup>25</sup> But the question is badly put: it should not ask for art but it should ask why it asks for art. The answer to this, I suggest, directs us back to the institutional conception of practice-led research and its suggestive fixing of practice as a self-reliant corpus. However, a way out of this loop is to accept the difficult answer that a research project of this sort is not centred on making or addressing art but equally that there is no need to exclude that as a possibility either.<sup>26</sup> A research project concerns itself with a problem. It has to look to this problem and establish a critical context for it so as to see its complexity more fully. Unless the research concerns itself with the category of art, there is no need to be preoccupied with the issue of whether the work would interrogate or entertain a discourse with the ideational images of bourgeois art production. Again, the assumption that there is some 'art' coming out of all this research, an 'art' that is deemed to satisfy the criteria of prevailing modalities of art in a particular time and place, reveals itself as a potential red-herring for the kind of critical work that does not want to abstain from engaging actively – as a *practice* – with contemporary issues in the wider fields of the humanities as well as with their diversifying means of research production and representation which has enabled us to work beyond the domain of words and the conventions of academic writing styles – a diversification that, arguably, has also been stimulated by taking a closer look at the practices of art. What this attests to, then, is a new mode of contemporary practice that is in the process of peeling itself out of the institutions and histories of art, but which *no* longer pursues its work within the paradigms of art or artist.

If we assume, for apparent reasons perhaps, that in order to do research in the academic subject of art one practises art, then what I propose will stand as a contradiction by not taking at face value the formula that art practice leads research. Or, again, as I argued above, this equation is only sensible if it poses the problem of

art and its practice (its institutions, ethics, histories, etc.), examining through its means the conditions and qualities of its self – a field of research that is, by the way, not exclusive to art practice and is equally carried out, albeit with different means, in art history, sociology, anthropology and philosophy. Still, this set of problems must be considered within the wider historical development of post-war art practices and their repertoire of art forms variously framed by art historians and artists themselves, which have moved art from being a formal, aesthetic object of autonomy that is the subject of evaluation in the space of art criticism and under the discerning eye of the figure of the critic – rendered so brilliantly by Greenberg – to analytically and discursively sustained practices of art that have shifted our focus from aesthetic contemplation to an institutional critique of art concerned with art’s values, functions and spaces. The way we largely understand and teach art today derives its critical vigour from this legacy that enabled the ‘making of art’ to become an intellectual practice as well as an academic subject. At the same time, the aesthetic autonomy of the art object has been worn out, although I have no illusions about it simultaneously living on. Inextricably related to this historical development is a refiguring of the professions and the softening of their profiles so that we do no longer have to think of the artist as running steadily side by side an art practice, let alone coincide with it, as a more humanist outlook might encourage us to think. We can broadly associate this with the postmodern moment that took issue with art’s institutions by putting forth a critique engendered in the very practice of art and its spaces. It seems, practice-led research would anticipate doing so too if it wants to entertain critical work with ‘art’ and ‘research’ through ‘practice.’ However, we should not forget that the practices of ‘institutional critique’ were critically effective *because* of their specific historical context. The continuation of such practices without an appreciation of the dialectics that nourished art’s critical productivity leads us into the well-oiled art machine of what Rainer Rochlitz aptly called the art of ‘subversion and subsidy.’<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the materials sustaining a critical practice of intellectual enquiry acting in and upon contemporaneity should be thought in the light of this historical trajectory, which Irit Rogoff has convincingly outlined as having moved from the appraising work of *criticism* and its theories of art to the self-consciously exerted *critique* directed to its own institutions to a space she calls *criticality*: a space wherein work unfolds in the performative moment of meaning ‘taking place’ and which, at the same

time, is critically productive precisely because, knowing that our subjectivities constitute themselves *in* difference, such a practice avails itself of the possibility of not predetermining its locus or mode of operation.<sup>28</sup> This, however, entails accepting that what is at stake in practice is not inherently an occupation with ‘art’ but finding the spaces for a performing of critical practice for which neither the subject nor its site can be taken as an already given. This is also what the critic Craig Owens proposed already in 1987: ‘A radical critical practice presumably would work through whatever channels are available both within and without the specific institutions and align itself with the position that these other practices represent vis-à-vis them.’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, 'First Roundtable', in *The State of Art Criticism*, ed. James Elkins and Michael Newman (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp.129-79 (p.162).

<sup>2</sup> Irit Rogoff, 'What is a Theorist?' [2004], in *The State of Art Criticism*, ed. James Elkins and Michael Newman (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp.97-109 (p.97).

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Rifkin, *Ingres Then, and Now* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.127.

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, the determined formalization of 'practice' is an issue of particular visibility in the landscapes of UK academia where 'practice' has come to be employed as a shielding term through which to substantiate the viability of doing research through practising art. It is equally palpable in the proclivity of academic members to distinguish their research project as 'practice-led' as if practice could be packaged into a subject in its own right. This should be seen as a despairing attempt to meet the terms of the educational reforms that turned art colleges into research-active institutions, whereby artist-academics offers us now their expertise in 'practice.' For a to the point overview of the evolution of art education in post-war England and its entry into Higher Education, see Charles Harrison's and Fred Orton's section 'The Modernization of English Art', in *A Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: Fabre, 1982), pp.5-13.

<sup>5</sup> For a poststructuralist elaboration on a 'practising of theory,' see Irit Rogoff's essay 'What is a Theorist?', cited above, and Martin McQuillan, 'Karl Marx and the Philosopher's Stone, or, On Theory and Practice', in *The Politics of Deconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Other of Philosophy*, ed. Martin McQuillan (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007), pp.235-53.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967], trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). For an expansion on Derridian deconstruction in the light of the format of 'practice-led research,' see James Williams, 'Poststructuralism, Theory and Practice', in *Reflections on Creativity: Exploring the Role of Theory in Creative Practices*, ed. Hamid van Koten (Dundee: Duncan of Jordanstone College, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> A useful collection of essays indexing the moment of Theory's rise in art education is Jody Berland, Will Straw, David Thomas, eds., *Theory Rules: Art as Theory/Theory and Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Of relevance is also John Tagg and Joanne Lukitsh, 'Practising Theories', in John Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute: Art History, Cultural Politics and the Discursive Field* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.62-96.

<sup>8</sup> This applies to 'research' as well as 'art.' The formats of research, despite their striving for scientific objectivity and disseminatory clarity, are not immune to subjective colouring, historical change or administrative standardization. Research has its own practices – our poststructuralist selves will remind us of this in case we think we could escape this difficulty. Nonetheless, that art practice is a historically determined concept is happily swept under the carpet in the name of a scientific model of research wherein practice risks becoming fossilized. For an overview on the evolution of the PhD system in the UK, see Renate Simpson, *How the PhD came to Britain: A Century of Struggle for Postgraduate Education* (Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> The project of the social history of art has offered a momentous critique of art history's writing of the artist as being a part of the wider ideological investments that

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carry both the figure of the artist and meanings of art. I let Pollock's words stand in for this critical stance: 'The attempt to place the artist as a representative of a class outlook registers the need to recognize point of view and position in class society as a determination of the production of art.' However, I would argue that while such a critique unravels the ideologies that hold art in its place within a society's network of production – including the productions of art history – we cannot but take the artist as a point of accentuated reference, which entails the reinstallation of an, albeit altered, artist. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* [1988] (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.39.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Burgin provides an incisive delineation of modernism's conception of the figure of the 'artist' – and its postmodern remnants – alongside the historical proliferation of the liberal professions. See Victor Burgin, 'The End of Art Theory', in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 1986), pp.140-204.

<sup>11</sup> As with regards to the 'limitations' of an institutional approach to the theorization of art, Richard Wollheim's differentiating account, although specifically dealing with the tradition of painting, can be our guiding point here: 'Another way of putting the [institutional] theory is to say that for a painting to be a work of art the representatives of the art-world must recognize it to be one: and with the theory put this way, the trick is to grasp how we are supposed to understand "recognition". What "recognition" does not mean in this context is that, before the representatives of the art-world appear on the scene, the painting already is a work of art and this fact about it leads them, being so knowledgeable or so discriminating or both, to see it, and think of it, as one. On the contrary: what the theory tells us is that, first, the representatives of the art-world must think of the painting as a work of art, and then, in consequence of this fact – this fact about them – the painting becomes a work of art. [...] For what the theory manifestly does is that, by laying upon them legendary powers, it grossly enlarges the self-esteem of those tempted to think of themselves as representatives of the art-world. Painters make paintings, but it takes a representative of the art-world to make a work of art.' Richard Wollheim, 'What the Artist does', in *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp.13-42 (p.14).

<sup>12</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Musica Practica' [1970], in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.149-54 (p.151).

<sup>13</sup> Declarations attesting to this educational shift in support of an academic place for the subject of art include: Herbert Read, 'The Place of Art in a University' [1931], in *Education Through Art* (London: Faber, 1958), pp.256-64; Harold Rosenberg, 'Educating Artists', in *The De-definition of Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp.39-48.

<sup>14</sup> I have dealt with this issue in my essay 'How to use Parasites: Notes on Contemporary Art, Curating and the Work of the Context', *parallax* 14:4 (2008), pp.30-41.

<sup>15</sup> Boris Groys, *Unter Verdacht: Eine Phänomenologie der Medien* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> I allude to a paper on practice-led research issued by the Arts and Humanities Research Council where Duchamp's legacy features as a point of reference in the opening epigraph. Chris Rust, Judith Mottram, Jeremy Till, 'AHRC Research Review: Practice-Led Research in Art, Design and Architecture' (2007), p.4.

<[http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Documents/Practice-Led\\_Review\\_Nov07.pdf](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Documents/Practice-Led_Review_Nov07.pdf)> [20/05/2009].

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1974], trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p.49.

<sup>18</sup> While the avant-garde's aim of integrating art into the praxis of life entails that the aesthetically secured autonomy of art will be overcome, we also can no longer assume art's purpose in this convergence of art and life. As Bürger writes: 'In Aestheticism, the social functionlessness of art becomes manifest. The avant-gardiste artists counter such functionlessness not by an art that would have consequences within the existing society, but rather by the principle of the sublation of art in the praxis of life. But such a conception makes it impossible to define the intended purpose of art. For an art that has been integrated into the praxis of life, not even the absence of a social purpose can be indicated, as was still possible in Aestheticism. When art and the praxis of life are one, when the praxis is aesthetic and art is practical, art's purpose can no longer be discovered, because the existence of two distinct spheres (art and the praxis of life) that is constitutive of the concept of purpose or intended use has come to an end.' Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p.50.

<sup>19</sup> Psychoanalysis is an interesting case with regards to its organization as practice. While fiercely regulated vis-à-vis the formats of its therapeutic work (lengths and number of sessions, for example) and its divisions into schools and associations, the practising of psychoanalysis between the analyst and the analysand takes place *in practice* – in the dialogical spaces of speech and the animations of free association as they subjectively unfold in a session. However, even as a session provides fresh 'material' for research, both through its transference traces on the analyst and the newly accumulated chain of signifiers, the analyst works in accordance with already approved and 'tested' protocols of analysis, which he ought to respect. As such, the psychoanalyst's practice is, like the general practitioner's, also one of applying already existing knowledge so as to have the skills of interpretation, and does not, just by itself, generate new knowledge. To do so, the session needs to be turned into a clinical study and subjected, for instance, to comparative analysis itself.

<sup>20</sup> Lacan makes it clear that he is not really interested in the imaginary by adding: 'The fact that in doing so he encounters the imaginary to a greater or lesser degree is only of secondary importance here.' Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* [1973], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), p.6.

<sup>21</sup> Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge, 'The Enactment of Thinking: Creative Practice Research Degrees', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 2:1/2 (2002), pp.5-11.

<sup>22</sup> In 2009, there exist for example: 'Centre for Practice as Research in the Arts', University of Chester; 'Centre for Practice-led Research in the Arts', University of Leeds; 'Centre for Research into Practice', University of Hertfordshire; 'The Centre for Practice-led Research in the Arts', University of Northampton; 'Practice-led Research – Centre for Research and Development', University of Brighton.

<sup>23</sup> In designating art practice as research various terms have been created, whereby I find 'artistic research' the least helpful with its suggestive use of 'artistic.' Publications that engage with institutional debates around the structures of doctoral programmes, the 'new' professionalization of the 'artist' and the viability of assessing 'artistic' work within the paradigms of research include: Satu Kiljunen and Mika Hannula, eds., *Artistic Research* (Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts, 2002); Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager, eds., *Artistic Research* (Amsterdam: Lier en Boog, 2004); Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and*



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*Practice* (Helsinki and Gothenburg: Academy of Fine Arts and University of Gothenburg, 2005); Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge, eds., *Thinking through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); James Elkins, ed., *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art* (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> These are the acronyms of three key organizations, channelling funding and evaluating research in UK higher education: Research Assessment Exercise (RAE); Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC); National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

<sup>25</sup> This conflation of the researcher and the professionally working artist manifests itself in the doubts whether 'research art' makes 'good art,' voiced for example by the academically teaching artist Phyllida Barlow who states in an interview: 'A PhD does not mean better art. In fact, it is often the opposite.' This nagging quest by artist-academics whether art has happened in the space of research reproduces thereby art's ideational qualities of aesthetic autonomy and transhistorical framing. Phyllida Barlow and Mark Godfrey, 'Learning Experience', *Frieze* 101 (September 2006), pp.169-73.

<sup>26</sup> Another explanation for this conflation would be to say that universities have not made up their mind whether the subject of art should be a vocational subject that produces professional artists or whether it should be a humanities-oriented subject that teaches critical thinking. This would be appallingly reactionary if interpreted as diktat for a stringent segregation into two modes but not so if we see it as a problem of *articulation*.

<sup>27</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *Subversion and Subsidy: Contemporary Art and Aesthetics* [1994], trans. Dafydd Roberts (Greenford: Seagull, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> See Irit Rogoff, 'Academy as Potentiality', in *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, ed. Angelika Nollert, Irit Rogoff, Bart de Baere, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006), pp.13-20.

<sup>29</sup> Craig Owens and Anders Stephanson, 'Interview with Craig Owens' [1987], in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), pp.298-315 (p.311).

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